ACTUALLY: THE CONCEALED LEVER

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Abstract. This article aims at identifying the role of *actually* in documentaries broadcast on television in terms of the types of contrast this procedural linguistic item points to and at assessing its rendition/omission in the Romanian subtitles. In its medial position in the clause, typical of this film genre, *actually* embeds the propositional content under its scope under a higher-level explicature which can vary according to the communicative situation at issue and the characteristics of the two elements that form the contrast. Therefore, *actually* encodes procedural information on how to compute the conceptual information it embeds.

However, since these higher-level explicatures are not truth-conditional, they are not usually recovered in the Romanian subtitling, a type of translation which, under spatial and temporal constraints, focuses on the recovery of factual information at the expense of the interpersonal function of language.

Keywords: procedural meaning, higher-level explicatures, subtitling, documentaries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Actually is a complex linguistic item whose encoded meanings, in spite of displaying a high degree of elusiveness, constrain the inferential processes at work in utterance interpretation, narrowing down the range of reasoning possibilities.

Language users have internalized certain concepts and procedures and upon hearing or reading a particular linguistic item, either a concept or a procedure is activated, facilitating comprehension. Within the Relevance Theory framework, *actually* has a procedural meaning and although it is difficult to identify a procedure that can account for all its usage meanings, it can however be assumed, according to the line of thinking taken by Diane Blakemore (1987, 2002), that *actually* automatically informs the receptor to follow the inferential route of contradiction and elimination of an existing assumption. Such a contextual effect belongs, in my analysis, to the larger category of Contrast. The examples retrieved from documentaries lead me to assert that by guiding the receptor to identify a type of contrast between two elements, *actually* also provides information regarding the speaker's propositional attitude, therefore imposing constraints on what Sperber and Wilson (1993) and Wilson (2016) call 'higher-level explicatures' or 'higher-order explicatures' (Wilson 2011). Differently from basic explicatures, they do not modify the truth of the proposition under their scope (Carston 2004: 15, Sperber and Wilson 1993:18, Wilson 2011), a characteristic which can be considered a justification for the fact that *actually* is not generally recovered in the subtitling of documentaries. Out of the two elements

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involved in this opposition, one can be implicit, this linguistic item indicating how to interpret either the interrelation between two verbally expressed propositions or that between explicit propositional content and an assumption which the speaker/writer presumes the receptor makes. However, before carrying out a contextual analysis, it is important to highlight the fact that within the Relevance Theory framework, it is clearly shown that accurate communicative intentions cannot be recovered, the receptor can only construct an assumption about what the communicator intended to convey (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 65).

Although the examples provided in this article are retrieved from a small number of documentaries, the conclusions concerning the behaviour of *actually* rely on a thorough analysis of this type of audiovisual material.

2. TARGET LANGUAGE TYPE OF TEXT

As far as interlingual subtitling is concerned, this type of translation focuses on the recovery in the target language of those elements that influence the truth value of an utterance, at the expense of those linguistic items that do not. Thus, the elements most susceptible to be omitted are repetitions, phatic words and expressions, interjections, cleft sentences, discourse markers that are not syntactically integrated. The necessity of making such compromises arises from the spatial and temporal constraints typical of audiovisual translation and the target language text will virtually always be a shortened form of the oral message. This is achieved by means of condensation, reformulation and omissions. The exact manner in which a text undergoes such transformations cannot be dictated, the subtitler having to make decisions according to specific context-dependent situations. The current contrastive analysis relies entirely on documentaries broadcast on well-known TV channels (Viasat History, Viasat Nature, Discovery Science) and their official subtitling, performed by professionals, not amateur translators. In this type of interlingual communication, which aims at interpretive resemblance only in those aspects that are the most relevant, omissions are an acknowledged strategy. The ensuing style changes do not occur as a result of the subtitler's superficiality, they are triggered by the characteristics of audiovisual translation and, in the case of *actually*, also by the weakening of the content meaning of this linguistic item. However, what needs to be emphasized is that the Romanian text is different from the English discourse in terms of interpersonal implication, while both achieving relevance in legitimate ways.

3. TYPES OF CONTRAST

Studying the functioning of *actually* in documentaries, I have identified four patterns which include this linguistic item, according to the type of elements that form this opposition. When referring to *actually* and *in fact*, Traugott and Dasher (2001: 168) explain that they "are used to contrast possible expectations readers might have with regard to the subject-matter".

Although *actually* can occur in initial, final and medial position, in documentaries it is generally restricted to the medial position.

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A. Contrast between presumed shared knowledge/expectations/what is considered the norm (all of which not being verbally expressed) and the reality which is presented explicitly in the segment following or including *actually*.

Language users have expectations based on prior experience about events, states of affairs, people, objects, there are some patterns of knowledge speakers have internalised by constant exposure to recurrent situations. We all have a special type of knowledge which functions as a prerequisite for correctly grasping the meaning of a particular communicative situation. As Blakemore (1987: 75) explains, "a proper understanding of the non-truth conditional role of linguistic meaning hinges on the appreciation of the distinction between the roles of linguistic knowledge and of non-linguistic knowledge in utterance interpretation, or, more particularly, on the understanding of the general psychological constraints on the use of non-linguistic information".

Although documentaries are not an argumentative practice characterised by a high frequency of the discourse marker *actually*, there are certain arguers whose verbal patterns include it quite often. *Actually* does not appear in the neutral background discourse of the narrator, it is the journalists and the scientists who are carrying out the research at issue that use it. In fragment (1) below, removed from *Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla* (2014, Viasat History), the fact that the journalist Kim Mance uses it 4 times in less than a minute could be indicative of her passion for the personality of this physicist. And all four instances occur in medial position, which is typical of documentaries.

The presumed shared knowledge or the implicated contextual assumption which functions as an implicated premise is that people do not **normally** live and die in hotel rooms and *actually* indicates a contrast between what people tend to consider normal and what happened in this particular case. It also instructs the hearer to abandon the assumption that Tesla was like any other ordinary person. As I have mentioned before, it encodes a further sort of procedural constraint, more exactly on the construction of higher-level explicatures. The propositional content *He died here too in the New Yorker Hotel* is embedded under the higher-order explicature [The speaker strongly believes that, contrary to expectations, *Nikola Tesla died here too in the New Yorker Hotel*]. The fact that the arguer expects some sort of doubt from the implicit interlocutor is reinforced by the use of the clause *it's not unusual* when referring to the scientist's dying conditions. The necessity the speaker feels to insert *actually* in all these four cases arises therefore from her automatic assumption that what she is about to say will come in contradiction with how the receptor would normally perceive the situation at issue, it is a means of reinforcing the idea that although the viewer is entitled to feel surprised, the explanations are trustworthy.

The last two occurrences also function as signals to let the viewer know that, in order to correctly process the upcoming segment, more attention needs to be paid to the explanations and information that follow, since they have to do with more serious state and security issues.

As for the Romanian version, *actually* is never recovered. The subtitler's decision probably relies on the fact that this linguistic item does not contribute to the truth value of the proposition containing it and neither does it influence the information load. As a result, in some cases, its omission is a compromise the subtitler makes in order not to lose communicative clues that carry factual information, but in others its omission is part of the global interpersonal change strategy that is being used. The propositional attitude conveyed by the higher-order explicature [The speaker knows for sure that, contrary to what the audience might expect, *all of his documents got seized by the FBI*] is entirely lost, the

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Romanian viewer receiving a plain, colourless variant of the source message. Although *de fapt* could be the most frequent translation solution, there are cases, like the fourth instance here, where the insertion of *chiar* would be appropriate provided the number of characters per line did not exceed the imposed limit.

In an attempt to save space and as part of the time-consuming transcription process I have undertaken, I use a slash after the first subtitle in a pair and a double slash to mark the end of the second subtitle or of the only subtitle on the screen.

(1) Kim Mance, journalist: So it's in these two joining rooms that Nicola Tesla lived the last 10 years of his life, *he **actually** died here too in the New Yorker Hotel*, and it's not unusual because *he **actually** lived out his entire adult life in New York city hotel rooms* so it was a kind of interesting existence but he did lots of experiments and crazy things in there and also *had a big man-sized safe full of all of his documents that **actually** got seized by the FBI when he died* because they wanted to make sure that the nation would stay secure with whatever secrets he was coming up with so *they **actually** went through all his stuff here and brought it out.*
'Kim Mance, jurnalist: În aceste două camera şi-a trăit/ Tesla ultimii zece ani din viaţă.// Aici a şi murit [de fapt], în hotelul New/ Yorker, lucru deloc neobişnuit,// fiindcă [de fapt] şi-a trăit toată viaţa/ de adult în hotelurile din oraş.// A dus o viaţă interesantă. A făcut/ multe experimente ciudate aici.// Avea şi un seif plin cu documente, /confiscate de FBI la moartea lui.// Voiau să se asigure că nu inventase/ ceva ce ar pune în pericol ţara.// Aşa că [ei chiar] i-au analizat toate lucrurile,/ apoi le-au confiscat.//' (*Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla*, 2014, Viasat History, broadcast on 7 June 2019)

In the second example below, retrieved from *How the universe works, First second of Big Bang* (2014, Discovery Science), the default knowledge is that not too many things can happen in one second, as it is an extremely short unit of time. Communication is built on common ground and the presumption of this shared knowledge is a starting point for the understanding of the other types of meaning. We involuntarily share this cognitive pattern and we instantaneously make use of it when something triggers its activation. In order to make people accept the idea that more elements took shape in the very first second of the universe than in its entire subsequent history, the arguer mechanically uses *actually* as a means of marking two different aspects: on the one hand her awareness of the audience's disbelief regarding the information which is being presented and on the other hand her assurance that her arguments are reliable and scientifically proven.

(2) Lawrence Krauss, cosmologist: *One way of understanding how much **actually** happened in the first second,* is to think in units of the Planck time, the Planck time being 10 at the minus 43 seconds. There's a billion billion billion billion billion Planck times in one second. There're only a billion billion seconds in the entire history of the universe. That's far fewer seconds in all history since one second to today than there were from the Planck time to the first second.
'Lawrence Krauss, cosmolog: Pentru a înţelege câte s-au întâmplat [de fapt]/ în prima secundă,// trebuie să ne gândim în unităţi Planck,//acestea măsurând/ 10 la puterea –43 secunde.// Sunt miliarde de miliarde de miliarde/ de unităţi Planck într-o secundă.// Întreaga istorie a universului măsoară/ doar un miliard de miliard

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de secunde.// Sunt mult mai puține secunde/ în întreaga existență a universului// decât unități Planck în prima secundă.//' (*How the Universe Works, First second of Big Bang,* 2014, Discovery Science, broadcast on 14 October 2018)

Therefore, the excerpts analysed above are indicative of how the hearer automatically makes use of what Carston and Hall (2012) call "readily available assumptions" about where people usually die, about how much can happen in one second, for example. As thoughts display a propositional form, they can contradict each other and hold a wide range of relationships with each other. *Actually* first assists the hearer to understand the propositional attitude of the speaker, but it also triggers other cognitive mechanisms responsible for determining the audience whether to believe it or not. The dialogical character it provides to the discourse shows that the arguer constantly tries to anticipate any possible doubt or objection the viewer might have, the discourse also benefiting a highly persuasive force.

B. Contrast between *the assumptions* the receptor is likely to derive from explicit propositional content previously introduced and the explicit content of the segment including *actually*

The first segment I have selected is from *Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla*, where an a priori possible assumption is ruled out by the explicature *actually* has scope over.

(3) Keith Tutt, historian: At Colorado Springs, Tesla felt he had the opportunity to really develop the magnifying transmitter, the equipment to produce huge voltage high frequency electricity. This was all the development he expected to take forward into the wireless transmission of electricity and *he carried out experiments there that did enable the wireless transmission of electricity, he set up a field of light bulbs, just light bulbs not connected to anything, just stuck in the ground* and *the power of the induction that was coming out of its coils* ***actually*** *lit these lights in the darkness.*
'Keith Tutt, istoric: Tesla a simțit că poate îmbunătăți/ transmițătorul de mare putere//pentru a produce înaltă tensiune/ şi electricitate de înaltă frecvență.// Scopul acestora era avansarea la/ transmisia electricității fără fir.// Iar experimentele sale de acolo/ i-au ajutat să facă acest lucru.// A înfipt în pământ o grămadă/ de becuri, neconectate la nimic,// iar energia eliberată/ de bobinele sale [chiar] a aprins becurile.//' *(Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla*, 2014, Viasat History, broadcast on 7 June 2019)

The explicit propositional content I refer to is "He set up a field of light bulbs, just light bulbs not connected to anything, just stuck in the ground." It is a basic explicature and the assumption likely to be derived from it is that it is hard to believe that electricity can be produced using such a method. *Actually* is a means of signalling that the segment containing it is in fact the salient information and guides the addressee to abandon the conclusion he must have previously drawn. The propositional content following *actually* comes as a response to some sort of doubt the viewer is presumed to have. The higher-order explicature can be spelled out like this: [The speaker is aware that the viewers will find the upcoming information surprising and assures them that in contrast to the conclusion they

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must have drawn from the previous segment, *the power of the induction that was coming out of its coils lit these lights in the darkness*].

Both from a cognitive and argumentative point of view, by using *actually,* the arguer creates a strong bond with the viewers, which represents in fact a means of facilitating comprehension of the message and leading to persuasion.

In *The Last Days of Pompeii*, (2018, episode 2, Viasat History), archaeologist Raksha Dave has access to a storeroom in Pompeii which is not open to ordinary visitors. Looking around the room, she is excited to find all those old objects, feeling which is conveyed to the viewer by her intonation but also by the interjection *oh*, both of which encoding procedural information that facilitates the manipulation of the embedded conceptual load. It has been proven within the Relevance Theory framework that interjections and intonation enable the receptor to derive higher-order explicatures and they represent a means of making propositional attitude more accessible (Sperber and Wilson 1993, Wilson 2000). Moreover, the presence of the verb *like* and the repetition 'beautiful, beautiful pot' make explicit the same propositional attitude. All these elements of explicit excitement lead the audience to believe that she has found what she has been looking for. A new interpretive angle is introduced by the repetition of the discourse marker 'OK, OK' and reinforced by *actually*, which, despite being integrated in the structure of the verbal phrase, marks the shift in perspective. Wilson (1998: 15) argues that "languages may develop coded means for manipulating saliencies of information". In this excerpt *actually* triggers instantaneous cognitive processing, the viewer being therefore guided to focus his/her attention on what is to be disclosed, the segment following this linguistic item carrying the more salient information. The higher-level explicature is: [Contrary to the conclusion likely to have been drawn so far, I can assure you that the upcoming information is more important]. A host of indexicals co-occur: the demonstrative pronoun *this*, the demonstrative determiner *this*, the demonstrative adverb *here*, all these context sensitive items reinforcing the idea of contrast, of contrastive shift in perspective but also the contradiction and elimination of an existing assumption. It becomes obvious that in this multimodal type of discourse, not only the verbal ostensive stimuli, but also the non-verbal ostensive stimuli are instrumental in making the viewer understand and subsequently believe the message. It is one of the very few examples in which *actually* is recovered in Romanian, the subtitler resorting to *de fapt.*

(4) Raksha Dave, archaeologist: I've always wanted to come in here but I've never been allowed before. Oh, I love it because this is where are all sorts of orphans from Pompeii. *It's a beautiful, beautiful pot! OK, OK, so this is what I'm a**ctually** looking for. This thing down here on the floor that looks very like an exhaust pipe…this is **actually** part of a very complex system of lead pipes that was used to give water to Pompeii.*

'Raksha Dave, arheolog: Mereu mi-am dorit să vin aici./ Nu am mai avut acces niciodată.// Îmi place mult! Aici ajung diverse/ obiecte desperecheate din Pompei// Priviți! Un vas superb!// Iată ce căutam **de fapt.//** Aceste obiecte de pe podea,/ care par țevi de eșapament,// fac parte **de fapt** dintr-un sistem/ foarte complex de țevi de plumb// folosit pentru a alimenta Pompeii/ cu apă.//' *(The Last Days of Pompeii*, 2018, Viasat History, broadcast on 22 July 2019)

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C. Contrast between two semantically contrastive pairs

In the documentary *Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla*, Keith Tutt, author and historian, gives the following explanations, while being interviewed about the genius of Nicola Tesla:

(5) Keith Tutt, historian: *I guess he felt he could not just make his fortune* ***actually,*** because he was more of an idealistic person, *he wanted to transform the world.* He wanted to bring electricity to the world and America was a place where it was happening.
'Keith Tutt, istoric: Cred că a simțit [de fapt]/ nu doar că se poate îmbogăți,/ fiindcă era oarecum idealist,/ **ci** că poate schimba lumea.// Voia să ducă electricitatea în lume/ şi putea face asta din America.//' (*Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla*, 2014, Viasat History, broadcast on 7 June 2019)

Actually occurs in clause-peripheral but sentence-internal position and it introduces semantic contrast, the two semantically contrastive pairs being 'make his fortune' and 'transform the world'. However, at a close look, it becomes clear that *actually* has also taken on the characteristics of 'correction but', the typical negation in the segment prefacing *actually* being an argument in favour of this idea. Moreover, the Romanian translation includes the adversative conjunction *ci*, which is the equivalent of the 'correction but', which is procedural, automatically guiding the receptor to make the correct inferences and to find relevance. The target language text also contains a negative form in the first segment, which is a compulsory property of this contrastive meaning of *but.* What Tesla wanted to do was to transform the world, idea supported by the information that he was the idealistic type of person. That is the information which is being emphasized.

Actually does not bring any contribution to the semantic meaning of the proposition it occurs in, but it carries seminal information about how to interpret the semantic relationship holding between the content of the segments prefacing and following it. Upon hearing/reading this item, the listener instantaneously looks back 'anaphorically' to the preceding segment and forward 'cataphorically' to the following segment. Therefore, in the absence of *but*, it is *actually* which activates the function of correction.

Hopper and Traugott (2003: 94–98) explain that items that undergo semantic bleaching gain indexical and pragmatic meaning and it seems to me that this is what happened in the case of *actually.*

D. Contrast between non-marked and marked content

In this category the main role of *actually* is to put an emphasis on the lexeme following it and the whole conceptual information load carried by it, therefore the contrast it points to is between the neutral tone used by the arguer before the inclusion of this inherently ostensive item and the markedness of the information to be exposed. Therefore, if we removed *actually* from such discourse units, ceteris paribus, the result would be a reduction of the interpersonal function of the message.

Wild Tube (season 1, episode 6, 2018, Viasat Nature) is a documentary with a high frequency of the linguistic item *actually*. A PhD conservation biologist comments on a situation in which a safari tourist let a leopard touch and smell his shoe while he was sitting in the car.

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(6) Conservation biologist: My opinion on this situation is that as soon as that leopard started approaching the car, at that point the engine should have been turned on, the leopard may or probably would have stopped and the point where it's ***actually*** *on the car* and touching the tourist, at that point they should have driven away, because you are at very high risk, then you don't know what the outcome was gonna be. And you've got no way of defending yourself against an incredibly agile, fast and powerful predator. But even by just looking at that, just that one little scratch that he did, he just released his claws and it created that level of damage on that chap's leg, well, if *it was* ***actually*** *properly* attacking you, you can see, the difference would be huge and *they're* ***actually*** *incredibly strong*, they can pin you down.

'Biolog: Părerea mea este că,/ imediat ce s-a apropiat de maşină,// motorul trebuia pornit.// Leopardul s-ar fi oprit.// Când a ajuns pe maşină/ şi atingea turistul,// maşina trebuia să plece,/ situația fiind riscantă.// Nu se ştie ce se poate întâmpla/ şi nu se poate apăra// de un predator extrem de agil,/ rapid şi puternic.//Dar priviți ce zgârietură a provocat/ prin simpla scoatere a ghearelor,// uitați ce i-a făcut pe picior.// Dacă ar ataca cu adevărat,/ diferența ar fi uriaşă.// Sunt puternici/ şi te pot pune la pământ.//' (*Wild Tube*, 2018, Viasat Nature, broadcast on 22 July 2019)

In less than one minute, the conservation biologist uses *actually* three times, all of which functioning as emphasisers and co-occurring with the verb *to be* which appears, in turn, as a main verb, an auxiliary and a copular verb. The insertion of *actually* in the clause is indicative of the fact that the speaker guarantees the truth, the genuineness of the message it is part of, but it is also a means of establishing a connection with the viewer. The clause 'split' by *actually* has a strong argumentative force as well as it prepares the viewer to properly concentrate on what follows.

Actually contributes to higher-level explicatures of the utterance containing them. For example, the higher-level explicature that can be derived from the segment "They're actually incredibly strong" is [The speaker strongly believes that differently from what the tourist might have believed, they (leopards) are incredibly strong]. As a higher-level explicature, it depends on a basic explicature ("They're incredibly strong") and what is added is the propositional attitude of the arguer, which thus becomes more accessible to the receptor.

Since higher-level explicatures do not bring any contribution to the truth conditions of the utterance they belong to, the subtitler easily disposes of *actually* in the Romanian version. However, it is clear that there is a tendency to omit it irrespective of the number of characters per line. In this example it is not the spatial hindrance that prevented the subtitler from recovering it, since we can count only fourteen characters in the subtitle where the translation of this discourse marker could have been included. The interpersonal function of the original message could have been rendered by the addition of the lexeme 'chiar', which functions as an emphasizer in Romanian. Therefore, the loss of affective meaning is gratuitous. It is true that audiovisual translation is more of an adaptation and such items can be omitted, but such a decision should be made only in those cases in which the omission of *actually* comes as a necessity, in order to avoid the loss of more relevant information.

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4. CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that there are certain patterns containing *actually*, typical of the documentary film genre. In this argumentative practice, *actually* is not syntactically peripheral to the clause, it generally occurs in medial position, either in pre-verbal position or in the vicinity of the verb 'to be' and it signals that the upcoming segment contains information that is instrumental in the achieving of relevance. This discourse marker has a triggering role, guiding the hearer to grasp a shift in the interpretive angle. As it constrains the computations to be performed, it has a procedural meaning and it has been shown what inferential processes are triggered in order to facilitate utterance comprehension and the derivation of higher-level explicatures, enhancing at the same time the argumentative value of the discourse. More to the point, *actually* encodes a procedure that guides the receptor to process the upcoming information as containing some sort of contrast with what has been previously revealed, contrast which imposes constraints on the recovery of higher-order explicatures. *Contrast* has been used here to encompass correction and elimination of an existing assumption, correction, semantic contrast and the emphatic/neutral distinction.

Also, since *actually* does not have any influence upon the truth-conditionality of the discourse unit it belongs to, its recovery in the Romanian version is not considered a priority, no matter if the discourse is fast-paced or slow-paced and thus the subtitles become more objective and deprived of the emotional charge of the source text. However, the subtitler should exhibit a greater degree of adaptability to the context-specific situations and find a means of translating it in those cases in which its recovery does not trigger the loss of more relevant information.

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Forbidden History: Nikola Tesla, 2014, Viasat History, broadcast on 7 June 2019
How the Universe Works, First second of Big Bang, 2014, Discovery Science, broadcast on 14 October 2018
The Last Days of Pompeii, 2018, Viasat History, broadcast on 22 July 2019
Wild Tube, 2018, Viasat Nature, broadcast on 22 July 2019

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