A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE INTENSIFIER *UTTERLY*[1]

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This paper is an initial approach to the study of the intensifier *utterly* in the history of English. The intensifier *utterly* developed in Middle English from a spatial adverb (itself derived from the adjective *utter + -ly*), and was used as a maximizer, like other *out*-intensifiers (e.g. *outright*, *out-and-out*). Here I pay attention to: (i) the syntactic function of *utterly* (spatial adjunct, degree adjunct, and degree modifier); (ii) the characteristics of the heads with which it collocates in its intensifier use, in particular in terms of their semantic prosody; and (iii) its distribution across text-types. The study is based on data retrieved from the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts and ARCHER, thus covering the entire history of English.

Keywords: intensifiers, grammaticalization, *utterly*, French influence

1. Introduction

Intensifiers, understood as degree adverbs indicating the degree or the exact value of the quality expressed by the item they modify upwards from an established norm, constitute a particularly rewarding area of linguistic research due to their tendency to renew constantly. Intensifiers originate in items with full lexical meaning, but tend to become delexicalized over time, taking on more abstract, grammatical functions, the codification of degree. They can be therefore seen as examples of grammaticalization (Lorenz 2002; Méndez-Naya 2003).

This paper approaches the history of the intensifier *utterly*, which developed from a spatial adverb into a degree word. The word's history is described using as a starting point the information provided by standard historical dictionaries and data retrieved from two historical corpora covering the history of the English language: the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (HC), comprising data from Old English to 1710, and *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers*, (ARCHER) for the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After briefly commenting on the origin of *utterly*, I study the distribution of this adverb paying attention to (i) its syntactic function; (ii) the characteristics of its collocates, in particular in terms of their semantic prosody; and (iii) its distribution across text-types.

2. Origin

2.1. Lexical sources of intensifiers

The abundant literature on intensification has identified a number of lexical sources for degree adverbs, evaluative adverbs (Lorenz 2002: 149) being perhaps the most salient. Within this group we can further distinguish adverbs that refer to extremes in quantity, size or depth (e.g. *full(y), extremely, deeply*), in strength (the OE adverbs *swíþe* 'strongly' and *þearle* 'severely' could be listed here), or those denoting positive

or negative emotions (e.g. *wonderfully, terribly*). In all these cases, the effect of the adverb can be paraphrased as follows: 'happy/sad/hot … to a degree that I (the speaker) evaluate as full/terrible/wonderful …', that is, they express degree in terms of the speaker's evaluation. Another possible source of intensifiers includes adverbs which convey the idea of veracity (e.g. *very*, originally 'true', and *really*). And yet another group of adverbs used to express degree notions are spatial adverbs such as *far* (*far better*) and *way* (*way difficult*) (see, e.g. Fettig 1934: 60; Peters 1992: 537). *Utterly* belongs into this latter group.

Over time, these adverbs undergo semantic change, initially of a metaphorical nature (concrete > abstract, see Peters 1994: 269-70) and develop degree meanings, thus becoming what Lorenz (2002: 147) labels 'scalar' adverbs, that is, adverbs which simply scale a quality and are devoid of additional propositional content, as is the case with *very* (see also Paradis 1997: 64).

2.2. Origin of utterly

Utterly is derived from the originally spatial adjective *utter*, the comparative of superiority of the adverb *ūt* 'out', by means of the adverb-forming suffix *-ly*. The dictionaries consulted regard it a Middle English formation. Its original meaning was 'outwardly' (MED s.v. *ŏutrelī* (adv.) 1.a), though this spatial meaning took on a more figurative sense ('openly', 'publicly').

As early as Old English, the adverb *out* was used to convey the notion of completeness (BT s.v. *ūt* I.2.a, e.g. *utcwealm* 'utter destruction'; MED s.v. *out(e* 8; OED s.v. *out* adv. 7c), of expansion to a limit (Lindner 1981: 99), a meaning which is still current in PDE (cf. phrasal verbs with *out*, in which the particle encodes the aspectual meaning of completion, or full temporal extension, see e.g. Lindner 1981: 102-3; De Smet 2010: 85-8). This is undoubtedly a metaphorical change, from the spatial sense of the adverb 'up to a limit' > to the temporal 'up to a limit in time', that is, completion, and from there > 'up to a limit in degree'. It is therefore not surprising that a number of expressions encoding the meaning 'out', and hence 'complete' have been recruited as intensifiers throughout the history of English, more specifically as maximizers expressing the upper extreme on a scale, with the meaning 'completely' (Quirk et al. 1985: 590; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 721). In addition to *out*, other similar expressions used as intensifiers comprise *all out*, *out and out*, *throughout* (OED s.v. *throughout* B.3), *thwert-out*, *outright* and the adverb *utterly* (Fettig 1934: 60).

3. Distribution of *utterly* in the material

3.1. According to time and syntactic function

Let us now take a look at the evidence for *utterly* provided by the corpora analysed for this study. Table 1 provides information about the time-span and the word-count of the corpus and the distribution of *utterly* in the material, with the examples classified according to their syntactic function.

Even though the MED provides some 13th century examples of *utterly*, the corpus yields no tokens for M1 (1150-1250) and M2 (1250-1350). The earliest instances (five examples; NF 2.71) crop up in the period M3 of the HC (1350-1420). The adverb becomes far more frequent in M4 (1420-1500), with 13 examples (NF 6.07), which is in line with Fettig's observations of a clear increase in frequency in the 15th century (1934: 176-7).

Period (time span) (corpus)	ME (1150-1500) (HC)	EModE (1500-1710) (HC)	LModE-BrE (1700-1900) (ARCHER)	20th c.-BrE (1900-1990) (ARCHER)	Total
Nº of words	608,570	551,000	718,220	355,148	2,232,938
Utterly	18	25	15	13	71
	NF 2.9	NF 4.5	NF 2	NF 3.8	NF 3.17
Adjunct	14	17	4	4	39
Modifier	4	8	11	9	32

Table 1: *Utterly* and its syntactic functions in the corpus tokens/normalized frequencies per 100,000 words

As reflected in table 1, *utterly* is found in two different syntactic functions, as an adjunct and as a degree modifier. Most of the examples of *utterly* in adjunct function recorded in the material illustrate the degree reading of the item, as in (1), with only two exceptions, where the relevant meaning is 'publicly', much closer to the original spatial sense, as in (2). Note that in (1) *utterly* is premodified by the intensifier *all*, in what seems to have been a common collocation (see Fettig 1934: 176; Mustanoja 1960: 326).

(1)   that they with alle the (processe circumstance)   #
And dependance mowen alle *vtterly* ben repeled and adnulled for
honor and profyt of the kyng and for ese and remedie to hise
forseid fre tenentZ: (QM3_XX_DOC_PET3)

(2)   some sayde #he fell in Lombarde Strete, some sayde in Buklarsbury. And
whan it was *utterly* knowe he was fallen in every strete (QM4_IR_SERM_INNOC)

The data from the corpus suggest that the degree adjunct comes earlier than the degree modifier, as examples of this function outnumber those of modifier in the Middle English material. As a modifier, *utterly* typically co-occurs with adjectival heads, although it may also modify prepositional phrases (3) and negative expressions (4). (3) is the first example of *utterly* in modifier function recorded in the data. Here the adverb modifies a PP:

(3)   And as we hope for alle: alle suche wronges han ben # vnwytyng. to vs.
or ells *outerlich ayeins owre wille*. (QM3_XX_DOC_PET3)

(4)   is there, (sayeth he) *vtterlye* amonge you *no wyse manne*, to be an
arbitratoure in matters of iudgement? (QE1_IR_SERM_LATIMER)

M4 yields the first example of *utterly* with an adjectival head. This is (5), with the adjective *void*. This adjective, used mainly in its legal sense 'legally null or invalid' (see OED s.v. *void* a. and n. 1, 7.a.), is also the one occurring most frequently in the material (seven examples).

(5)   … not as for the saide # murdre and Roborie to hym in no wise
auaillable but *vtterly voide* and noght in lawe. (QM4_XX_DOC_PET4)

Even though the modifier starts out as a secondary function of *utterly*, it gradually gains ground, and finally becomes the default function of the adverb. The findings here suggest that this change-over took place in the second half of the 19th century (in this period the ratio adjunct/modifier is 2:6).

3.2. According to characteristics of the collocates

The dictionaries and some of the relevant references on intensifiers mention the tendency for *utterly* to combine with negative heads (OED s.v. *utterly* adv. 2b, 2c; Bolinger 1972: 246; Bäcklund 1973: 214-6; Paradis 1997: 81, 168 for a list of collocates). Thus, in the material analysed 35 out of the 37[2] examples of *utterly* in degree adjunct function accompany verbs with a negative load. The same tendency is observed for the modifier function, with 26 negative heads out of a total of 32. Moreover, even with neutral heads the example is sometimes contextually negative. Thus, for instance, in (6) the author uses the adjective *utopian*, in principle neutral, as a criticism:

> (6)   It is to me an *utterly Utopian* statement that every case of puerperal septicaemia is preventable; doubtless it is a high ideal to set before one, but to the experienced practical mind quite outside the wildest dreams of fancy. (ARCHER, 1905haul.m7b)

In the corpus examined here the only two positive collocates with which *utterly* occurs are *beautiful,* in (7), and *certain*. It is worth mentioning that these two examples appear in the 20th century material.

Example (7) is also interesting because it shows that *utterly* can not only modify bounded adjectives, such as *impossible*, as expected in a maximizer, but also adjectives which allow a scalar reading, as in the case of *beautiful*,[3] even though bounded heads clearly predominate in the data (out of 27 adjectival heads, the proportion of bounded: unbounded is 23:4). In fact, Paradis mentions that in her 20th century data *utterly* combines with adjectives of an "indeterminate character" (e.g. between limit and extreme or between extreme and scalar interpretation), which might indicate that "*utterly* may be on the way to losing some of its maximizer bias and becoming more booster-like" (1997: 81).

> (7)   "My pleasures are utterly beautiful Balthazar" (1968donl.f8b)

Bearing in mind that intensifiers with negative semantic prosody tend to originate in originally negative lexical items (e.g. *terribly*, cf. Lorenz 2002) or contain elements evoking a negative meaning (cf. *downright*, Méndez-Naya 2008; DOWN is bad), although not in spatial adverbs, and also bearing in mind that such a strong tendency to occur with negative heads is not found in other intensifiers emerging from 'out'-sources, such as *out and out* or *outright*, the heavily marked negative character of *utterly* is certainly intriguing. According to Mustanoja (1960: 326) the intensifier use of *utterly* was "under a strong influence"of the French adverb *outre(e)ment* 'excessively, completely' (see also the related adverb *oultrely*, a formation based on French *oultre*. OED s.v.), perhaps this influence may also explain the preference of *utterly* for negative collocates. The adverb *outre(e)ment* (ultimately deriving from Latin *ultra* 'beyond, on the far side of', thus also conveying a spatial meaning) came to express a degree that goes beyond bounds of measure. In Godefroy (1881: s.v.) *outreement* is glossed as 'excessivement, extraordinairement, violemment, absolutment, tout á fait', some of the senses with a clear implication of an undesirable excess. The same association seems to

be present in the related adjective *outrier* 'excessif' (DMF s.v. *outrier* a.), the adverb *outre* 'avec idée de dépassement, d'excès … plus qu'il n'est raisonnable, de façon immodérée' (DMF s.v. *outre* adv., prep. II.C.1), the verb *outrer* (DMF s.v. *outrer* v. especially A.3.c 'dépasser, détruire, anéantir qqn ou qqc.'), and the noun *outrage* 'transgression, insult' (DMF s.v. *outrage* n. B), which was borrowed into English in the 14th century, precisely when *utterly* came to be used as an intensifier (OED s.v. *outrage* n.). Thus, it could well be the case that the negative flavour of *utterly* is due to French influence. If this speculation is right, two possibilities arise, either (i) *utterly* is a calque of French *outre(e)ment*, as indeed Mustanoja suggests for the combination *al outerly* (OF *tot outreement*, 1960: 326); or, (ii) if the intensifier use is a native development, the acquisition of its marked negative prosody could be a case of analogy, in which the perceived similarity of two unrelated forms (a French form and a native adverb) would influence their linguistic development (see De Smet 2010 for analogy between unrelated forms). The ideas of violence and destruction are present in the aforementioned French words. If *outre(e)ment* played a role in the development of *utterly*, this would explain why *utterly* is frequently found with "verbs of perishing, refusal, etc." (OED s.v. *utterly* 2.b.c., where verbs suchs as *perish*, *destroy*, *die* and *annihilate* are mentioned), and with negative adjectives.

If this were indeed a case of French influence, we should expect the first instances of *utterly* to occur in translations from French or in text-types with a dependency on French. This leads us into the next section, which is concerned with the distribution of *utterly* across text-types in the HC material.

3.3. Across text-types

In order to study the distribution of the intensifier *utterly* across text-types I have followed the COCOA codes of the HC, in particular T (text-type). I have also paid attention to whether or not the texts are translations.

Text-type	ME	EModE
LAW	2	5
DOCUM	5	
HANDB	1	4
REL TREAT	3	
SERM	4	2
RULE (religious instr.)	1	
BIBLE		1
PHIL		2
EDUC TREAT		3
HISTORY		3
FICTION		1
DRAMA		3
DIARY		1

Table 2: Distribution of *utterly* according to text-type in the HC

Utterly does not once occur in any translation from French, which seems to discount a direct French influence. However, it is worth mentioning that the earliest examples of *utterly* in the corpus crop up in legal texts and in documents (petitions etc.), which might be considered almost legal in nature. In fact, this accounts for four out of the five examples of *utterly* in M3 (1350-1420). French was the usual language of law, negotiations and petitions (Baugh and Cable 2002: 135-6), and continued to be the

language of law until as late as the 17th century. It should also be born in mind that writers in the Middle English period were generally fluent in French. It is therefore plausible that French might have had an influence on the development of the intensifier use of *utterly*.

In any case, what seems clear from the evidence here is that *utterly* is, at the beginning, an intensifier associated with formal registers. It is only in the Early Modern English period, that the corpus begins to yield some examples from informal texts with a high degree of speechlikeness, such as comedy, as in example (8). The data from ARCHER testify to the extension of *utterly* to more informal registers, with Fiction as the prevalent text-type.

(8)   (^R. Royster.^) I am *vtterly* dead vnlesse I haue my desire.
        (QE1_XX_COME_UDALL)

4. Concluding remarks

Utterly reflects a common path of development for intensifiers, from a spatial to a degree adverb. Since the original meaning of its base, the adjective *utter*, is 'up to a limit', the function is that of a maximizer. In the earliest periods *utterly* is more common in adjunct than in modifier function, which suggests that the latter is a more recent development. *Utterly* typically collocates with negative heads. It has been suggested here that this could be to a certain extent due to the analogical influence of the French adverb *outre(e)ment*, which certainly had a negative flavour. The occurrence of the earliest examples of *utterly* in petitions and legal texts, which are heavily influenced by French, lends some support to that speculation.

Notes

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2. The two examples in which *utterly* means 'publicly' are excluded from the tally.
3. Paradis (1997) distinguishes between bounded adjectives (extreme adjectives representing the upper end on a scale, e.g. *brilliant*; and limit, conceptualized in terms of either/or, e.g. *dead*), and unbounded (scalar) adjectives, which are conceptualized in terms of more or less, e.g. *hot*.

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