

SUMMARY OF Macaulay (2006)

REVIEWED BY P. A. PAPPAS

1. SUMMARY

This article is about the emergence of *pure*, as a new intensifier (i.e. *he's pure lovely*) in Glasgow English. The analysis is based on a corpus of 150,000 words collected in three periods, 1997, 2003 and 2004. The last collection was a follow up on the one from 2003. The adolescents interviewed were 10-15 years old, and the recordings were conducted with no adults present, just a two adolescents of the same sex.

An analysis of frequency of use of this intensifier per 1,000 words shows that there is a big increase in use from 1997 to 2003. In 2004 we see a drop but that may be due to the fact that the participants who were repeating the task were not as engaged. The analysis also shows a difference in gender, as girls use the neologism more than boys. —What does the correlation statement mean?—

Macaulay dedicates most of the article in describing the usage of *pure*. He relates its use to the general absence of inflected adverbs in YGE and of other intensifiers, noting only three, *pure*, *dead*, and *so*. The first is already established in the 1997 data but by 2003 we see a steep decline in the usage of *dead*. Another change that has occurred in time is that *pure* is used in negative contexts in the 1997 recordings but in the 2003 corpus it is found in positive contexts as well.

Other characteristics of *pure* usage are

- It is mostly used with adjectival heads.
- It is used “mainly for evaluative purposes, either positive or, more often, negative.”
- Most adjectives are predicative (89%), not attributive
- It does also occur with nouns and adverbs (in the latter case it is used as *very*)
- It can also modify verbs where its meaning depends on the nature of the verb (activity vs. achievement) and in the latter there is a negative effect again
- More marginal uses are with prepositional phrases (*it's pure into the wood*), as a quotative, and at the beginning or end of the utterance

Thus in many ways the use of *pure* is reminiscent of *just* and *really*

Macaulay sees the development of *pure* as an intensifier as an instance of grammaticalization in which this new form comes in to fill the gap in a system that does not have enough (or any) intensifiers. It probably started off as a modifier of adjectives with negative affect and then expanded into the domain of *dead* which was positive. Its use with verbs may have been modelled on the usage of *just*. His only evidence for this proposal is that girls use *pure* with verbs in 1997 but boys do not.

2. ASSESSMENT

Although the work has some methodological weaknesses (small corpus, less than enthusiastic participants in 2004 and just a few tokens for some of the constructions), it presents a plausible

explanation about the emergence and spread of this new intensifier. It's true that we know very little about adolescent language and so it makes a small but important contribution.

REFERENCES

Macaulay, Ronald. 2006. Pure grammaticalization: The development of a teenage intensifier. *Language Variation and Change* 18:267–283.