

Absolutely Amazing Adverbs: A Contrastive and Parallel Study of *Absolutely*, *Absolument* and *Absoluut*

Introduction

Dictionaries and grammars list the adverbs *absolutely*, *absoluut* and *absolument* as:

- **Adverbs of degree** (*It is absolutely amazing.*);
- **Interjections** (*Absolutely!*);
- **Adverbs of manner** (*Leaders ruled absolutely.*).

However, they also mention that some of these adverbs have **subtle semantic differences**. Yet, two of these adverbs, *absolument* and *absoluut*, have not been extensively studied and **lack detailed scientific exploration**.

Objectives of the MA thesis

The aim of this **qualitative research** is twofold.

Observe the **difficulties encountered by translators** when they render *absolument*, *absolutely* or *absoluut*.

Describe the use of these adverbs in **spoken language** from a **semantic, syntactic and pragmatic** perspective.

Methodology

Contrastive analysis

100-hit samples from 3 **informal**, comparable corpora
Orféo (FR) – BNC (EN) – SoNaR (DU)

Parallel analysis

100-hit samples from 6 **formal**, parallel subcorpora of Europarl

Translation strategy

e.g. omission, synonym, etc.

Element modified

e.g. adjectives, verbs, (negative) adverbs, nouns, modal auxiliaries

Type of modality in the modified element

Deontic obligation/strong necessity (*absolutely necessary*) – **Epistemic** certainty (*absolutely right*) – **Boulique** volition (*I absolutely want.*)

Type of adverb

degree adverb – adverb of manner – interjection

Polarity of the modified adjective

Positive (*absolutely wonderful*) – Negative (*absolutely stupid*) – Neutral (*absolutely red*)

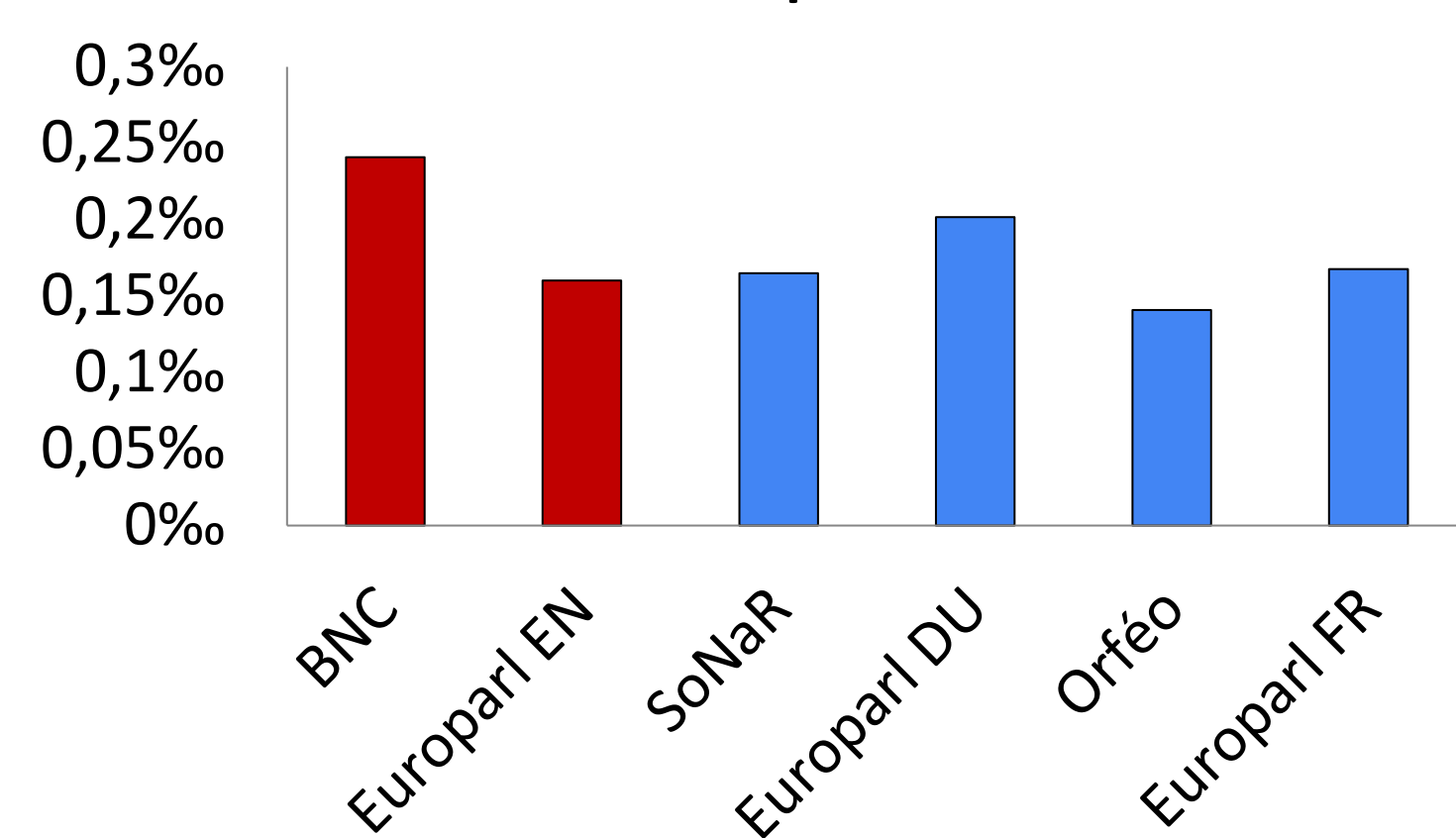
Discourse function (in independent use)

e.g. emphasis, agreement, rejection (*absolutely not*)

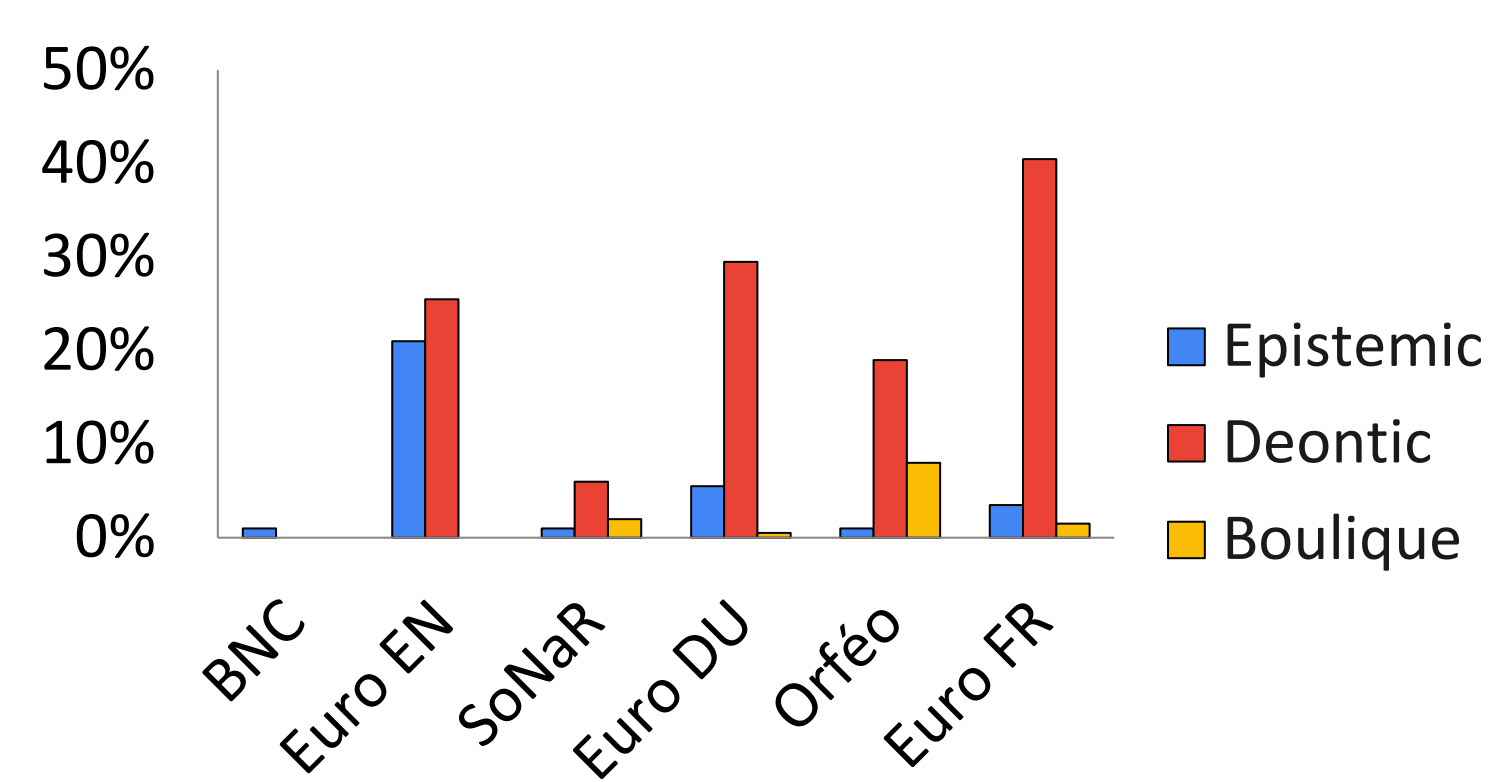
Relative frequency (%)

Provisional results

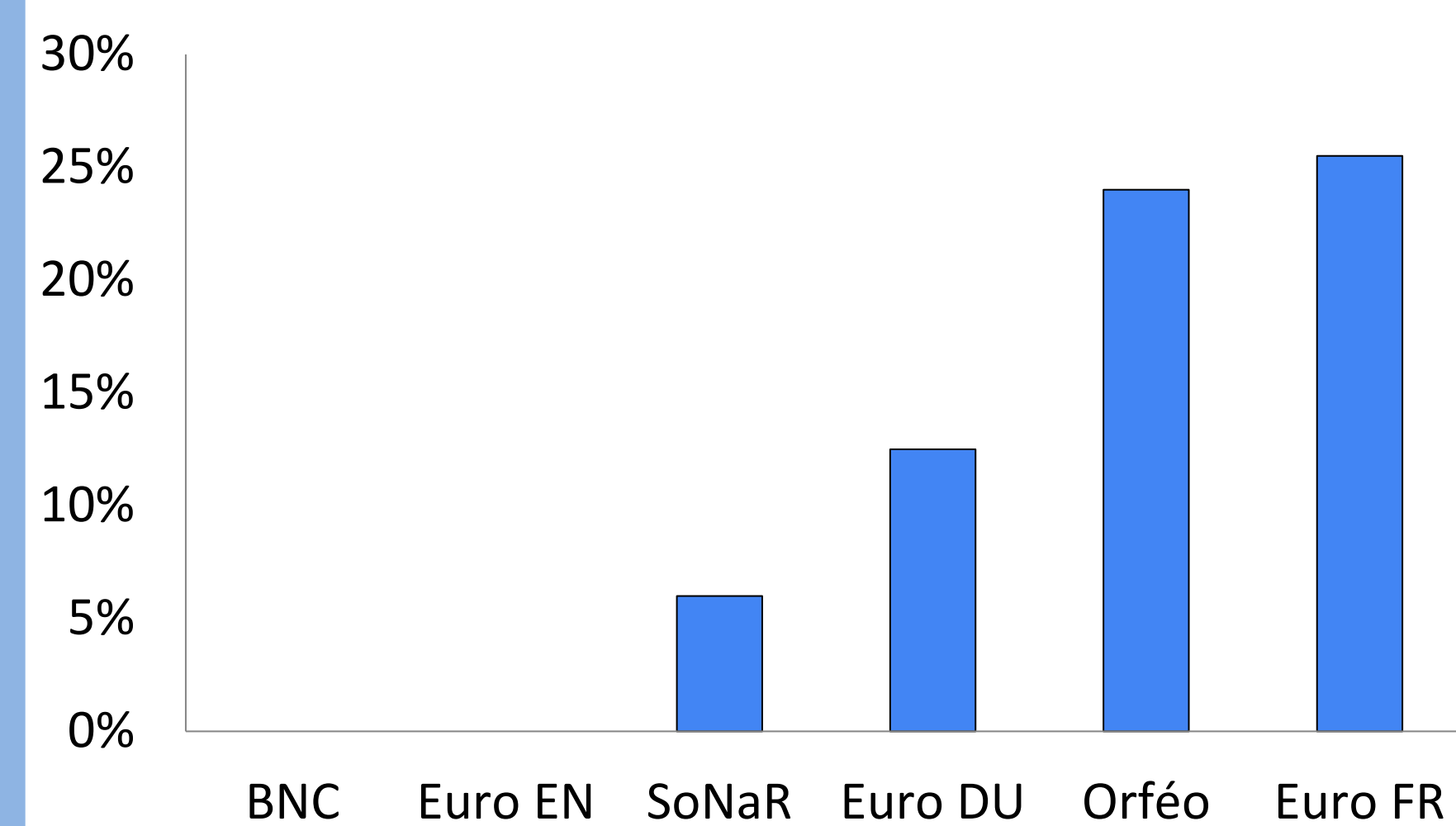
Relative frequencies



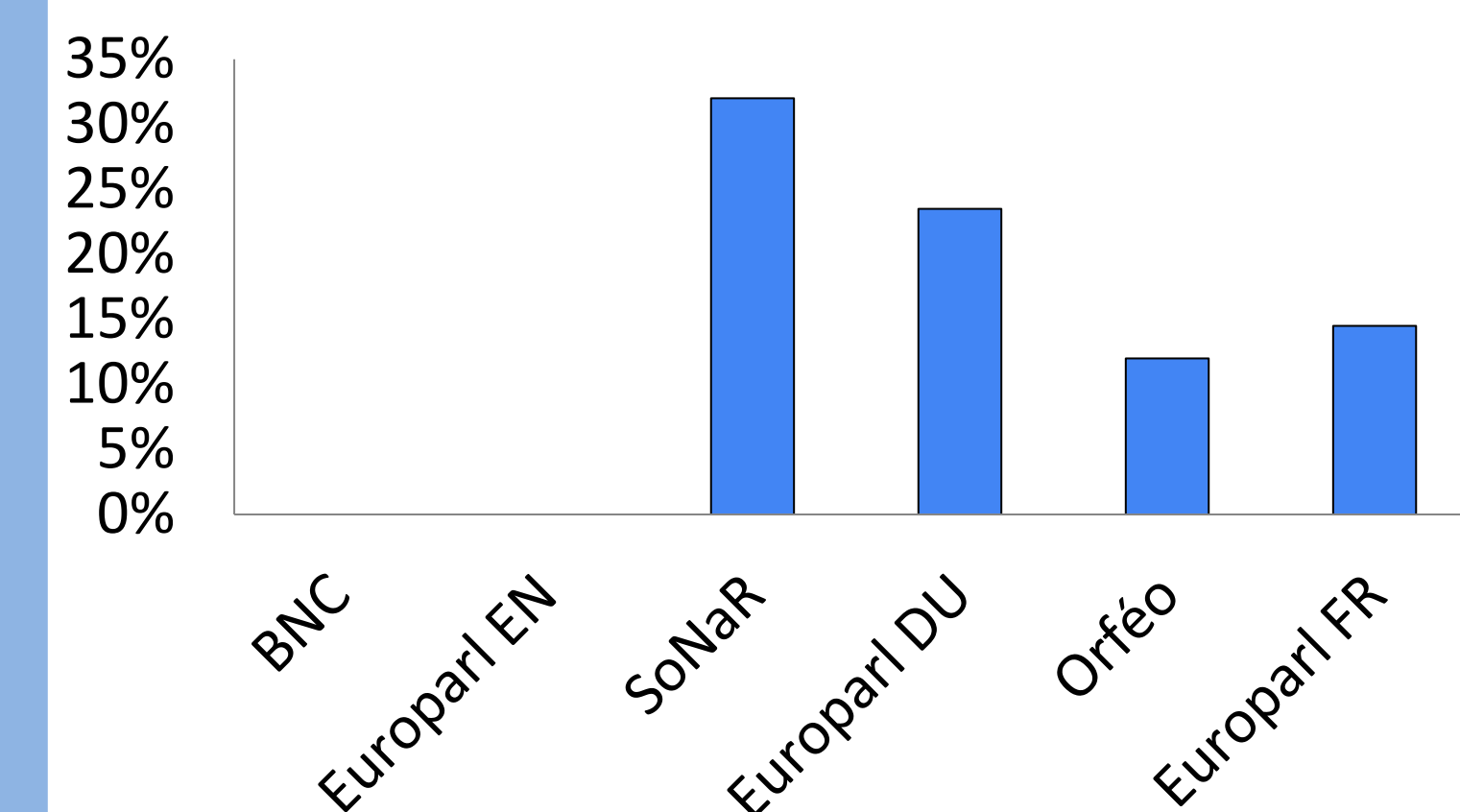
Expression of modality in the modified word



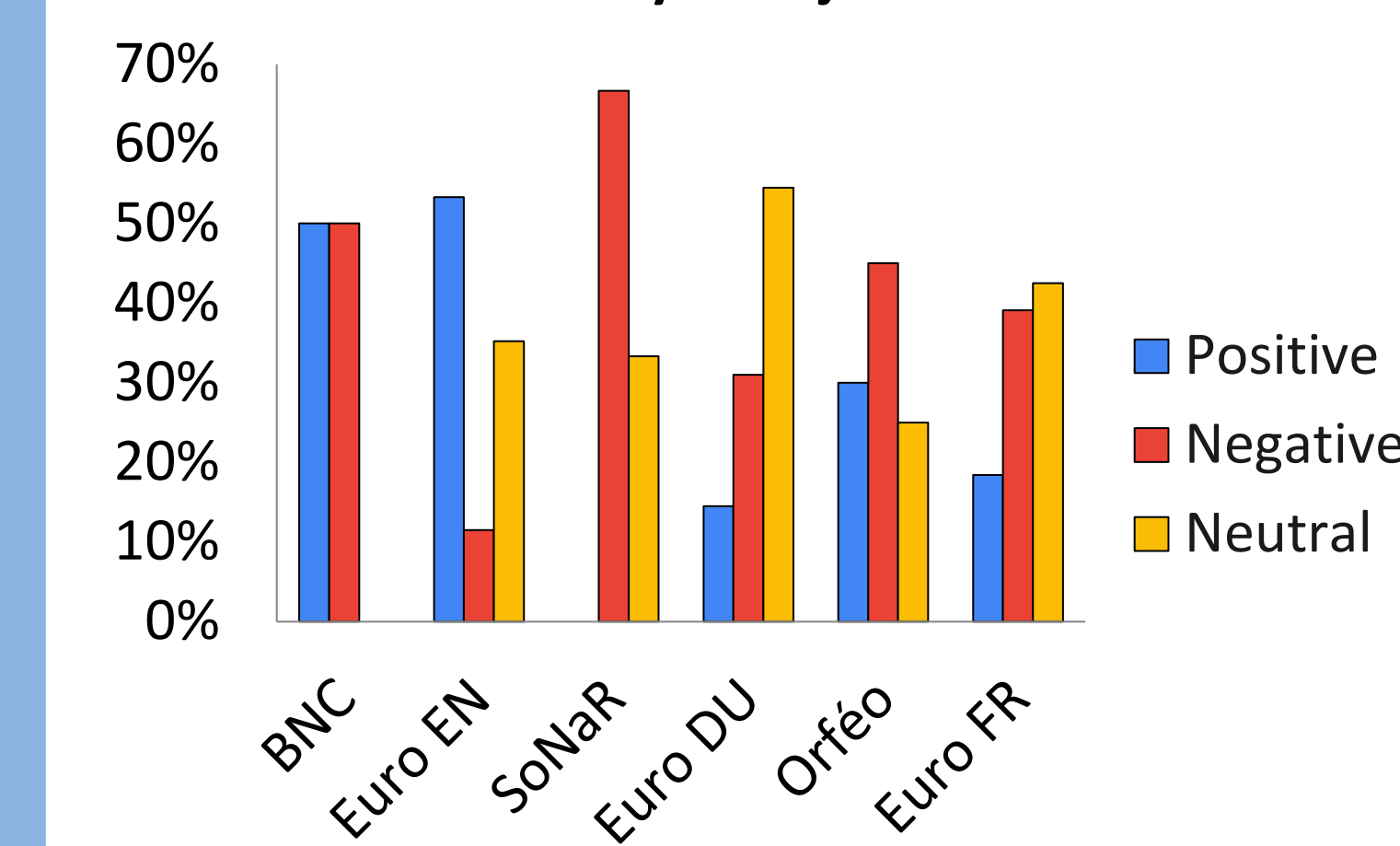
Modal auxiliaries modified



Negative adverbs modified



Polarity of adjectives



Discussion

Some of the findings of this study raise questions. This qualitative research offers a useful approach to analysing the distinct behaviours of the three adverbs in terms of **semantics, syntax, and pragmatics**. However, in some cases, such as polarity, it is rather difficult to draw conclusions due to the size of the samples.

Conclusion

This study showed that the use of *absolument*, *absolutely* and *absoluut* is **influenced by register**. These adverbs have different preferences concerning the syntactic categories they modify. For example, *absolutely* never modifies *not* or modal auxiliaries such as *must*. This research also revealed that these three adverbs modify words expressing modality, but not always the same type of modality and in different proportions.

Future work:

- 1) A diachronic investigation of *absolument* and *absoluut* to enhance understanding of their different uses.
- 2) A study using the same methodology on written corpora to determine whether degree modification is more frequent in spoken than in written language.

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