

Focus and degree modifiers in the Welsh of young children

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This study provides a descriptive account of modifiers in the Welsh of children in the age range of three to seven years and for whom Welsh is their first language. The account also provides statistical frequencies and charts. Jones (2025) looks at modifiers in adult Welsh and references given there are relevant here.

All observations about modifiers in this study are based on a database of young children in the age range given above. Details about the database, including transcriptional conventions used in examples, are available at https://users.aber.ac.uk/bmj/abercld/cronfa3_7/sae/intro.html.

1 Introduction

The modifiers which are used by the children in the database are listed in table 1. Examples of the children's use of these modifiers are given in following sections.

Table 1. Modifiers

<i>jyst</i>	‘just’	337
<i>dim+ond</i>	‘only’	249
<i>reit</i>	‘right’	99
<i>rhy</i>	‘too’	87
<i>iawn</i>	‘very’	77
<i>bron</i>	‘nearly’	52
<i>go</i>	‘fairly’	41
<i>amboutu</i>	‘about’	21
<i>mor</i>	‘so’	12
<i>hyd+yn+oed</i>	‘even’	6
<i>eithaf</i>	‘extremely’	5
<i>rili</i>	‘really’	5
<i>tua</i>	‘about’	3
<i>gweddol</i>	‘fairly’	1
		<hr/> 995
<i>even</i>		2
<i>only</i>		2
<i>very</i>		1
		<hr/> 1000

Some of the modifiers are established English borrowings: *jyst* ‘just’, *reit* ‘right’, and *rili* ‘really’. Listed separately in the table are English words for which there are Welsh words which are also included in the table: *even* for *hyd+yn+oed* ‘even’, *only* for *dim+ond* ‘only’ and *very* for *iawn* ‘very’. The table shows that *jyst* ‘just’ especially and *dim+ond* ‘only’ are the most frequent modifiers, together accounting for 58.60% of all occurrences of modifiers. Later discussion shows that *jyst* ‘just’ can be used similar to *dim+ond* ‘only’ or *bron* ‘nearly’, which in part underlies its high frequency. The modifiers are presented as their lexeme forms but in the examples they occur as a variety of word forms: *jyst*, for example, occurs as *jyst*, *jys’*, *jest*, *jes’* and *jesd*.

The phrases which are variously qualified by these modifiers are listed in table 2.

Table 2. Phrases qualified by modifiers

Noun phrase	255
Adjective phrase	204
Verb phrase plain	145
Prepositional phrase	116
Aspect phrase	55
Modifier	29
Predicative phrase	27
Post-position	22
Finite clause	17
Adverb	14
<i>I</i> -clause	11
<i>Eisiau</i> 'want' phrase	8
Deictic locative	7
'To'-verb phrase	4
Negative (<i>d</i>) <i>dim</i>	3
English phrase	2
Verb phrase with conjunction	2
Single-phrase utterance	2
<i>Wh</i> -word clause	1
Possessive Prepositional phrase	1
'To'-copula phrase	1
Co-ordinator	1
Copula	1
	<hr/>
	928
Missing data	72
	<hr/>
	1000

This table shows that noun phrases are the most frequent of the phrases which are modified. The modifiers which qualify these various phrases are given in the following sections.

Jyst 'just' is a challenge to describe in performance data. It has three uses. It can be used as a focus modifier (section 2); it can be used as an approximator (section 4); and it can also be used to convey recency (section 6). The syntactic types of phrases which *jyst* 'just' can modify can help to indicate the use of *jyst* 'just'. However, the lexical content of the modified phrase can also indicate how *jyst*

‘just’ is being used. As an approximator, *jyst* ‘just’ can only be used with situations or entities which are scalar. It is, of course, the child speaker who decides which use is intended and an analyst has no access to the speaker’s intent. All this makes the analysis of *jyst* ‘just’ in performance data quite challenging and the following account is based on the best interpretations which the utterances containing *jyst* ‘just’ allow. A closer examination of the discourse context may help to determine the intended use but that has not been attempted in this account. Of considerable help to the analysis is the variety of expressions in which *jyst* ‘just’ can occur, namely:

- *jyst*
- *jyst a:*
- *jyst a: bod*
- *jyst iawn*

iawn ‘very’ can also occur with *jyst a:* and *jyst a: bod*, giving *jyst iawn a:* and *jyst iawn a: bod*, but the presence of *iawn* ‘very’ in these expressions is not crucial. We shall see that *jyst* ‘just’ alone can be used as a focus modifier or approximator but the other expressions which include *jyst* are used as an approximation modifier.

2 Degree Modifiers

There are modifiers which qualify only or mainly adjectives. Adjectives which are qualified by degree modifiers are scalar, that is, they describe qualities which can be measured on a scale of intensity or, in other words, in degrees of intensity. The degree modifiers in the database are illustrated in the examples in (1).

- 1 a. **eitha** clou.
‘extremely quick.’
- b. te **go** iawn ‘wan.
tea fairly right now
‘fairly proper tea now.’
- c. a ti’ ‘n2 **weddol** bach.
and be.PRES.2SG PRED fairly small
and you are fairly small.’
- d. da **iawn!**
good very
‘very good.’

- e. *ma'* Dad *yn* *dod* **mor** *hwyr* *adre*.
 be.PRES.3SG Dad PROG come so late home
 'Dad comes so late home.'
- g. **rhy** *drwm* *i'* *fi*.
 too heavy for I
 'too heavy for me,'
- i. *un* **very** *mawr*?
 one big
 'one very big.'

Table 1 gives the frequencies of these modifiers but they are also listed in table 3 for convenience.

Table 3. Degree modifiers

<i>rhy</i>	'too'	87	38.84%
<i>iawn</i>	'very'	77	34.37%
<i>go</i>	'fairly'	41	18.30%
<i>mor</i>	'so'	12	5.36%
<i>eithaf</i>	'extremely'	5	2.23%
<i>very</i>		1	0.45%
<i>gweddol</i>	'fairly'	1	0.45%
		<hr/> 224	

One of the lexemes is an English borrowing, *very*. This is not an established borrowing in Welsh. It has the same meaning as *iawn* 'very'. The table shows that *rhy* 'too' is the most frequent, followed by *iawn* 'very' and *go* 'fairly'. The latter, however, is confined to occurring with either *iawn* 'right, proper' as in (1b) or *gwir* 'true' as in the following example.

- 2 *ag* *union* *fel* *un* **go** *wir*.
 and precise like one fairly true
 'and precisely like one fairly proper.'

That the lexemes in table 3 are degree modifiers is indicated by the fact that they either solely or mainly qualify scalar adjectives. Table 4 lists the categories of words or expressions that are qualified by the degree modifiers.

Table 4. Categories of words which are modified by degree modifiers

	<i>eihaf</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>gweddol</i>	<i>iawn</i>	<i>mor</i>	<i>rhy</i>	<i>very</i>	Totals
Adjective	3	41	1	48	10	80	1	184
Modifier				28				28
Adverb				1				1
	3	41	1	77	10	80	1	213
Missing data	2				2	7		11
	5	41	1	77	12	87	1	224

Only *iawn* ‘very’ modifies categories other than adjectives and examples are given in (3) and (4).

- 3 a. dan ni 'di bod yn l Sir+fo:n ers+dalwm <**iawn**> .

be.PRES.1PL we PERF be in Anglesey long+time very

‘we have been in Anglesey a very long time.’

- b. ma' 'wnna 'n2 scaring **iawn** xxx .

be.PRES.3SG that.M PRED scaring very xxx.’

‘that is very scaring xxx.’

In (3a) *iawn* ‘very’ modifies an adverb and in (3b) it modifies an English *-ing* verb form which is being used adjectively. Both these expressions can be given scalar interpretations and this allows the use of a degree modifier.

The modifier which is qualified by *iawn* ‘very’ is either *bron* ‘nearly’ or *jyst* ‘just’.

- 4 a. ti' bron **iawn** wedi neud y gwaith i+gyd,, yn' do?

you.PRES.2SG nearly very PERF do the work all, Q yes

‘you have very nearly done all the work, haven’t you?’

- b. ma' jest **iawn** a: mynd 'wan.

be.PRES.2SG just very with go now

‘it is very about to go.’

Bron ‘nearly’ is discussed in section 4 and *jyst* ‘just’ is discussed in sections 3, 4, and 6. They are being used in the examples in (4) as approximators, which are scalar and thus allow the use of a degree modifier.

The degree modifiers are mainly positioned before the word which they qualify but *iawn* ‘very’ is positioned after the word which it qualifies.

3 Focus modifiers

Focus modifiers indicate that the phrase which they qualify is singled out as one of several implied possibilities. In focussing on one of a number of possibilities, the use of a focus modifier can imply a reductive effect which can lower the significance of a situation or reduce the difficulty of an action or, alternatively, focus can highlight the significance of a situation.

Focus modifiers are illustrated in the following examples.

- 5 a. ond **dim+ond** y pobl drwg oedd yn twlu bom.
 but only the people bad be.IMPF.3SG PROG throw bomb
 ‘but only the bad people were throwing a bomb.’
- b. 'dy <hy'+n+o> mochyn yn mynd yna wedyn.
 be.PRES.3SG even pig PROG go there after
 ‘even a pig goes there after.’ / ‘even a pig doesn’t go there after.’
- c. s'o i 'di **even** dechrau unl fi.
 be.PRES.NEG I PERF even begin one I
 ‘I haven’t even started mine.’
- d. **only** dau.
 ‘only two.’
- e. **jyst** ti a fi,, yntefe?
 just you.SG and I isn’t+it
 ‘just you and me, isn’t it?’

As example (5e) shows, *jyst* ‘just’ can occur as a focus modifier but it is more complex to describe as it can also convey approximation (see section 4) and recency (see section 6). It helps to account for *jyst* ‘just’ by listing the phrases which it can qualify clearly as a focus modifier, namely, a noun phrase, a finite imperative, an infinitive verb in clause-initial position which has imperative force, a fronted verb phrase from a canonical predicate position, a *wh*-word clause, the modifier *tra2* ‘extremely’, the adverbial negator *ddim* ‘not’, an *eisiau* ‘want, need’ phrase, a *bod* ‘be’ clause, and an *i* ‘to’ verb phrase.

The examples of *jyst* ‘just’ qualifying a noun phrase allow possible substitution with *dim+ond* ‘only’, which shows that *jyst* ‘just’ is being used a focus modifier.

- 6 a. **jyst** ceffyle ti' isie,, yfe?
 just horses be.PRES.2SG want Q
 ‘just horses you want, yes?’

- b. ne'st ti ddeud **jyst** y t'wod.
do.PERF.2SG you.SG say just the sand.'
'you said just the sand.'
- c. jocan **jyst** ci bach yw hwn.
joke just dog small be.PRES.2SG this.M
'joking / pretend that this is just a little dog.'

There are examples of *jyst* 'just' as a focus modifier preceding a finite imperative.

- 7 a. **jys'** cana.
just sing.IMPV.2SG
'just sing.'
- b. **jys'** cer a: unl glas nawr!
just go.IMPV.2SG with one blue now
'just take a blue one now.'
- c. oo **jyst** <gad 'o>[>].
oh just leave.IMPV.2SG it
'oh just leave it.'
- d. **jyst** doro fo 'n1 y cwpan yna #fanna.
just put.IMPV.2SG it in the cup there there
'just put it in that cup there.'

In these examples, as a focus modifier *jyst* 'just' downplays the significance of the commanded action. But *dim+ond* 'only' is not a reasonable replacement. This can be attributed to the extent of the reductive implication which *jyst* 'just' can convey.

Jyst 'just' occurs before infinitive verbs and, in particular, it occurs in clause-initial position. Such examples are non-finite in form but have imperative force.

- 8 a. jes' **gafal**, 'de.
just hold then
'just hold, then.'
- b. **jest** gadal 'o fynd 'ben 'i+hun 'wan.
just leave it go head itself now
'just leave it on its own now,'
- c. **jyst** tynnu fo o 'na.
just pull it from there
'just pull it from there.'

d. **jyst** neud hyn.

just do this
'just do this.'

e. **jyst** codi dipyn bach.

just lift bit little
'just lift a little bit.'

Jyst 'just' is a focus modifier in such examples but, as with finite imperative examples, it is not reasonable to substitute *dim+ond* 'only' for *jyst* 'just', again indicating that *jyst* 'just' as a focus modifier is different to *dim+ond* 'only'. We can again attribute the difference to the reductive implication which *jyst* 'just' can convey. We can include here *jyst* 'just' in an ill-formed example.

9 **jyst** llawn hwn nawr,, nei di?
just full this.M now do.FUT.2SG you.SG
'just fill this now, will you?'

On the basis of the tag, the adjective *llawn* 'full' is being used as a verb (which would be *llenwi* 'fill'). The utterance has imperative force and *jyst* 'just' is used as a focus modifier.

There are also examples of *jyst* 'just' before verb phrases in clause-initial position but in which the verb phrases are fronted from a predicate phrase position.

10 a. **jest** reidio neith 'o,, 'de.
just ride DO.FUT.3SG he isn't+it
'just ride he'll do, isn't it.'
b. **jyst** smalio dan ni,, 'te?
just pretend be.PRES.1SG we isn't+it
'just pretending we are, isn't it?'

In these examples, *jyst* 'just' is a focus modifier.

Jyst 'just' can occur before a *wh*-word clause.

11 oo **jyst** beth o'n1 i isie.
oh just what be.IMPF.1SG I want
'oh just what I want.'

Jyst 'just' in such examples can be interpreted as a focus modifier. It cannot convincingly be substituted with *dim+ond* 'only', which can again be attributed to the reductive implication which *jyst* 'just' can convey.

The following examples contains *jyst* 'just' occurring before another modifier, namely, *tra2* 'extremely'.

- 12 **jest** tra2 dipyn dw i 'sio.
 just extremely bit be.PRES.1SG I want
 'just an exceeding bit I want.'

A reasonable interpretation is that *jyst* 'just' in this example is a focus modifier which singles out the extent of the quantity needed.

The following examples show *jyst* 'just' before negative *ddim* 'not'.

- 13 a. ti' **jyst** dim yn gadel hwnna.
 be.PRES.2SG just NEG PROG leave that.M
 'you just leave that.'
- b. dw i **jyst** 'im yn cofio nw pan dw i ddim yn gallu gwel' nw.
 be.PRES.1SG I just NEG PROG remember they when be.PRES.1SG I NEG PROG can see they
 'I just don't remember them when I can't see them.'

A focus interpretation is reasonable for *jyst* 'just' in these examples.

Jyst 'just' occurs before an *eisiau* 'want, need' clause.

- 14 a. dw i **jest** isio.
 be.PRES.1SG I just want
 'I just want.'
- b. **jes'** isio swig mae 'o,, 'de.
 just want swig be.PRES.3SG he isn't+it
 'just want a swig he does, isn't it.'
- c. ni' **jyst** isio rhoid tipyn bach lan gynta.
 be.PRES.1PL just want pot bit little up first
 'we just want to put a little bit up first.'
- d. ni' **jyst** isio pethe fel cwpane,, ynde.
 be.PRES.1PL just want things like cups, isn't it.
 'we just want things like cups, isn't it.'

In these examples, *jyst* 'just' is a focus modifier with an implication which downplays the need.

There is an example of *jyst* 'just' before the copula form *bod* 'be'.

- 15 **jyst** bod xxx [= 3 sill] cwmpo.
 just be xxx fall
 ‘just be xxx fall.’

There is missing data in this example but it could be a *bod* clause, that is, a ‘that’ clause. In which case, *jyst* ‘just’ is a focus modifier in this example.

Jyst ‘just’ can precede an *i* ‘to’ verb phrase.

- 16 **jyst** i' dorri 'i# fysedd e.
 just to break CL.3SG.M fingers he
 ‘just to break his fingers.’

Jyst ‘just’ is a focus modifier in this example.

There are a number of other phrases which *jyst* ‘just’ can precede but it is more of a challenge to distinguish the focus use of *jyst* and the approximation use of *jyst*: deictic locatives, temporal adverbs, progressive aspect phrase, prepositional phrase or directional locative and verb phrases. But it is judged that the use is the more likely.

There are examples in which *jyst* ‘just’ precedes a deictic locative.

- 17 a. **jest** yna.
 ‘just there.’
 b. a ge's e bwrw <**jyst** fanna> [?]+...
 and have.PERF.3SG he hit just there
 ‘and he was hit just there.’
 c. <**jyst** fama>[>].
 ‘just here.’
 d. Mair,, <**jyst** fan+'yn,, dy:n> [?].
 Mair just here man
 ‘Mair, just here, man.’

It is possible to interpret *jyst* ‘just’ as an approximator — that is, it indicates approximation to a place in the sense of nearby. However, the focus interpretation, which singles out these locations from other implied possible locations, is adopted here.

The examples of *jyst* ‘just’ preceding an adverb containing temporal words or expressions, namely, *nawr* ‘now’ and its synonym *rwan* ‘now’, *unwaith eto* ‘once again’, *gynnau* ‘earlier’ and *neithiwr* ‘last night’.

- 18 a. beth o'dd fi 'n dweud **jyst** nawr.
 what be.IMPF.3SG I prog say just now
 'what I was saying just now.'
- b. na,,, **jest** unwaith 'to.
 no just once again
 'no, just once again.'
- c. ne'sh i bangio by:s fi **jysd** rwan.
 do.PERF.1SG I bang finger I just now
 'I banged my finger just now.'
- d. o'n1 i 'n torri caws **jyst** gynne.
 be.impf.1sg I prog cut cheese just earlier
 'I was cutting cheese just earlier.'
- e. **jyst** neithiwr.
 'just last night.'

In terms of focus, these times are being singled out as temporal locations. Neither *bron* 'nearly' nor *dim+ond* 'only' can readily act as a substitute for *jyst* 'just' in these examples.

Interpretations of *jyst* 'just' before a progressive aspect phrase are influenced by the lexical content of the infinitive verb which occurs in such phrases. The following examples most likely contain focus *jyst* 'just'.

- 19 a. **jyst** yn hoffi darllen.
 just PROG like read
- b. ond o'dd e **jyst** yn canu i'# ymm #fe.
 but be.IMPF.3SG he just PROG sing for uhm he
 'but he was just singing for uhm him.'
- c. ie,,, ti' **jyst** yn neud pei bach.
 yes be.PRES.2SG just PROG make pie small
 'yes, you just make a small pie.'
- d. dw i **jys'** yn wagio hwn,, Darryl.
 be.PRES.1SG I just PROG emptyt his.M Darryl
 'I'm just emptying this, Darryl.'

Examples like these can be appropriately interpreted such that *jyst* 'just' singles out and downplays the significance of the situation or the effort needed to undertake the situation. It is possible to use *dim+ond* 'only' in such examples.

In contrast there are other examples of *jyst* 'just' before the progressive aspect which may also allow a focus interpretation but which can also allow an approximation interpretation.

- 20 a. o'n ni **jyst** yn mynd arno si+so.
 be.IMPF.1PL we just PROG go on.3SG.M see-saw
 'we were just going on the see-saw.'
- b. oedd hwnna **jyst** yn parco fanna.
 be.IMPF.3SG that.m just PROG park there
 'he was just parking there.'
- c. mae **jyst** yn stopo.
 be.PRES.3SG just PROG stop
 'it is just stopping.'

A focus interpretation is adopted here.

The following examples show *jyst* 'just' preceding a propositional phrase or a directional locative.

- 21 a. **jyst** yn1 fanna.
 'just in there.'
- b. **jyst** ar+hyd fel 'a,, ynde?
 just along like that isn't+it
 'just along like that, isn't it.'
- c. **jyst** i+lawr y lo:n.
 just down the lane
 'just down the lane.'
- d. **jys'** fel 'a.
 just like that
 'just like that,'
- e. **jest** am funud bach.
 just for minute little
 'just for a minute,'
- f. **jest** am tan p'nawn dydd+sul.
 just for until afternoon Sunday
 'just until Sunday afternoon.'

Again, a focus interpretation, which singles out places, times or manner, is adopted here. It is, however, possible to consider an approximation interpretation. We can include here an example of *jyst* 'just' in a possessive clause in which *jyst* 'just' precedes a *gan* 'with' prepositional phrase

- 22 a camel **jyst** gyda digon o 'nnal.
 and camel just with enough of that.M
 'and a camel just with enough of that.'

It can again be said that *jyst* 'just' i can be a focus modifier with a reductive implication.

We have encountered *jyst* 'just' before infinitive verbs which are used with imperative force and fronted verb phrases. There are also examples of *jyst* 'just' before other verb phrases which are predicate phrases.

- 23 a. galla' i **jyst** rhoi hwnna arno.
 can.PRES.1SG I just put that.M on.3SG.M
 'I can just put that on.'
- b. ma' 'n <**jyst** dod mas o hwnna> [?].
 be.PRES.3SG PROG just come out of that.M
 'It is just coming out of that.'
- c. ti' **jyst** mynd ffordd yma a dod i+fyny.
 be.PRES.2SG just go way here and come up
 'you just go that way and come up.'
- d. hwn **jyst** myn' mas.
 this.M just go out
 'this just going out.'

In these examples, a focus interpretation is adopted (but where a verb of movement is involved an approximation interpretation is possible).

Unlike degree modifiers, focus modifiers are not confined to scalar entities and can qualify a far greater number of phrases, which are listed in table 5.

Table 5. Phrases which focus modifiers precede

	<i>dim+ond</i>	<i>jyst</i>	<i>hyd+yn+oed</i>	<i>even</i>	<i>only</i>	Totals
Noun phrase	170	69	1	0	1	241
Verb phrase	24	61	1	2	0	88
Prepositional phrase	11	21	0	0	1	33
Progressive aspect phrase	4	23	1	0	0	28
Adverb	1	12	0	0	0	13
Finite clause	9	0	1	0	0	10
Imperative	0	7	0	0	0	7
<i>Eisiau</i> 'want' phrase	3	4	0	0	0	7
Deictic locative	0	4	0	0	0	4
'To'-verb phrase	3	1	0	0	0	4
Predicative phrase	3	0	0	0	0	3
Negative	1	2	0	0	0	3
Adjective phrase	2	1	0	0	0	3
Verb phrase with conjunction	1	0	1	0	0	2
<i>I</i> -clause	2	0	0	0	0	2
<i>Wh</i> -word clause	0	1	0	0	0	1
Single-phrase utterance	1	0	0	0	0	1
Post-position	0	0	1	0	0	1
Possessive prep. phrase	0	1	0	0	0	1
Modifier	0	1	0	0	0	1
Copula	0	1	0	0	0	1
Co-ordinator	1	0	0	0	0	1
	236	209	6	2	2	455
Missing data	13	34	0	0	0	47
	249	243	6	2	2	502

A noun phrase is by far the most frequent phrase which is qualified by focus modifiers, accounting for 52.97% of all phrases (excluding missing data), mainly due to occurrences of *dim+ond* 'only'.

4 Approximation modifiers

Approximation modifiers indicate that a situation comes near to occurring or existing, illustrated in the following examples.

- 24 a. dw i **bron** yn2 saith.
 be.PRES.1SG I nearly PRED seven
 ‘I’m nearly seven.’
- b. a o'dd rhein **boitu** marw.
 and be,IMPF.3SG these about die
 ‘and these were about to die.’
- c. oo **tua** chwarter.
 oh about quarter
 ‘oh about a quarter.’
- d. fu **jyst** mi ddisgyn.
 be.PERF.3SG just I fall
 ‘I nearly fell.’

The form *boitu* indicates the lexeme *amboutu* ‘about’, which also occurs as other forms in the database.

The frequencies of the lexemes which are approximation modifiers in the examples in (24) are given in table 6.

Table 6. Approximation modifiers

<i>bron</i> ‘nearly’	52
<i>amboutu</i> ‘about’	21
<i>tua</i> ‘about’	3
<i>jyst</i> ‘just’	79
Total	<hr/> 155

Jyst ‘just’ is the most frequent lexeme in this table. There is more to the occurrences of *bron* ‘nearly’ and *jyst* ‘just’ than than table 6 indicates and details follow.

When *bron* ‘nearly’ qualifies a verb phrase, the form *a:* occurs between the modifier and the verb phrase.

- 25 a. *ma'* David **bron** **a:** *dod* 'n+o:l.
 be.PRES.3SG David nearly with come back
 'David has nearly come back.'
- b. *hwn* **bron** **a:** *llenwi*.
 this.M nearly with fill
 'this (has) nearly filled.'
- c. **bron** **a:** *gorffen*.
 nearly with finish
 'nearly finished.'

There are no examples of *bron* 'nearly' before a verb phrase in which *a:* does not occur.

It is also the case that *bron a: bod* occurs, in which the copula is added.

- 26 a. *o'dd* *e* **bron** **a:** **bod** yn2 *barod* +...
 be.IMPF.3SG it nearly with be PRED ready
 'it is nearly ready +...'
- b. *Elfyn* **bron** **a:** **bod** yn2 *chwech*.
 Elfyn nearly with be PRED six
 'Elfyn is nearly six.'

The copula is used when the phrase which it qualifies is a phrase which can occur as the complement in a copular clause. The example in (26a) compares *o'dd e bron yn2 barod* 'he was nearly ready.'

There are two examples in which *bron bod* occurs, produced by the omission of *a:*.

- 27 a. *a* *ma'* *un* *ferch* *bach* *yn* *byw* # **bron** **bod** *drws* *nesa* *i'* *mi*.
 and be.PRES.3SG one girl little PROG live nearly be door next to I
 'and one girl lives nearly next door to me.'
- b. *w* *i* **bron** [!] **bod** yn2 *barod*.
 be.PRES.1SG I nearly be PRED ready
 'I am nearly ready.'

Amboutu not only occurs by itself as *amboutu* 'about' but it also occurs, similar to *bron* 'nearly', in the expression *amboutu bod*.

- 28 a. *a* *fe'* **bytu** **bod** *lawr* *naw'*.
 and be.PRES.1SG about be down now
 'and he is about down now.'

- b. achos ma' bin ni **boitu bod** yn2 llawn.
 because be.PRES.3SG bin we about be PRED full
 'because our bin is about full.'

- c. **bytu fod.**
 about be
 'about.'

We see in section 3 that *jyst* 'just' can occur as a focus modifier.

Like *bron* 'nearly', *jyst* can occur as *jyst a:* or *jyst a: bod*. These expressions can be clearly identified as approximators. The following examples illustrate *jyst a:*.

- 29 a. fi' **jyst a:** cwpla!
 be.PRES.1SG just with finish
 'I have just finished.'
- b. o'n1 i **jest a:** boddi.
 be.IMPF.1SG I just with drown
 'I was just about to drown.'
- c. dw i **jyst a:** marw isio mynd i' toilet.
 be.PRES.1SG I just with die want go to toilet
 'I am just about to die wanting to go to the toilet.'
- 30 a. tad fi **jyst a:** marw.
 father I just with die
 'my father (is) just about to die.'
- b. 'wn **jyst a:** sinco.
 this.M just with sink
 'this (has) just sink'
- 31 a. **jyst a:** mendio fo 'wan!
 just with mend it now
 'just about to mend it now.'
- b. **jyst a:** cwpla 'r tywod,, <on" ydy fe> ?
 just with finish 'the sand Q+N be.PRES.3SG it
 'just about to finish the sand, isn't it?'

The following examples illustrate *jyst a: bod* before predicational phrases which can occur as complements in copular clauses.

- 32 a. *dw i jyst a: bod yn2 bedwar hefyd.*
 be.PRES.1SG I just with be PRED four also
 ‘I am just about to be six.’
- b. *mae jyst a: bod yn2 llawn 'to,, Rhod'.*
 be.PRES.3SG just with be PRED full again Rhod'
 ‘it’s nearly full, Rhod’.
- c. *Wyn,, mae e jyst a: bod lan i' 'r top.*
 Wyn be.PRES.3SG it just with be up to the top
 ‘Wyn, it is nearly up to the top.’

The example in (32a) compares with *dw i'n2 bedwar hefyd* ‘I’m four also’.

Examples of *jyst iawn* can also be interpreted as an approximator. Examples are as follows.

- 33 a. *a jys' iawn i' fi farw.*
 and just very for I die
 ‘and I very nearly died.’
- b. *'s 'a 'm sand ar+o:l jyst iawn,, yn' nag oes.*
 be.PRES.3SG there NEG sand after just very NEG.Q NEG be.PRES.3SG
 ‘there’s no sand left very nearly.’
- c. *dw i 'm 'n cal <sand jyst iawn> [?].*
 be.PRES.1SG I NEG PROG have sand just very
 ‘I’m not getting sand very nearly.’
- d. *a fuo jyst iawn i' fi fod yn2 sa:l neithiwr.*
 and be.PERF.3SG just very for I be PRED ill last+night
 ‘and I was very nearly ill last night.’

As an approximator, *jyst* ‘just’ alone occurs before an *i*-clause, a predicative phrase and in post-position. The examples in (34) show *jyst* ‘just’ preceding an *i*-clause and allow an interpretation of *jyst* ‘just’ as an approximator.

- 34 a. *jyst i' ni neud 'o.*
 just for we do it
 ‘we nearly did it.’
- b. *jysd i' mi neud.*
 just for I do
 ‘I nearly did (it).’

- c. fu **jyst** mi ddisgyn.
 be.PERF.3SG just I fall
 'I nearly fell.'
- d. Tad+cu wedi marw <**jyst** ar+o:l iddo fe digwydd> [>].
 Grandfather PERF die just after for.3SG.M it happen
 'Grandad died just after it happened.'

There are examples of *dim+ond* 'only' preceding an *i*-clause, in which examples *dim+ond* is a focus modifier.

- 35 a. **dim+ond** iddo peidio a: xxx [= 2 sill].
 only for.3SG.M NEG with xxx
 'only for it not xxx.'
- b. 's **'im+ond i'** ti dod # i' wlad fi.
 be.PRES.3SG only for you.SG come to country I
 'it's only for you to come to my country.'

But the most obvious interpretation of *jyst* 'just' in examples (34) is that it is used as an approximator. *Bron* 'nearly' can readily be used in place of *jyst* 'just' in such examples.

Jyst 'just' is used to qualify a predicative phrase.

- 36 a. dw i **jest** yn2 pedwar.
 be.PRES.1SG I just PRED four
 'I am nearly four.'
- b. a fi' **jyst** yn2 <a:>[?]> # ymm # <bod # ymm> [>]+...
 and be.PRES.1SG just PRED with uhm be uhm
 'and I am nearly +...'
- c. mae **jyst** yn2 amser cinio.
 be.PRES.3SG just PRED time dinner
 'it's nearly dinner time.'
- d. ti' **jyst** yn2 barod?
 be.PRES.1SG just PRED ready
 'are you nearly ready.'
- e. mae 'o **jyst** yn2 llawn.
 be.PRES.3SG it just PRED full
 'it's nearly full.'

In such examples, *jyst* 'just' is an approximator (although there is a possible interpretation of *jyst* 'just' as a focus modifier in (36a)).

Jyst 'just' occurs in a post-position, that is, it occurs later in the clause and not before the phrase which it qualifies.

- 37 a. a genno fi ddim **jysd**.
 and with.1SG I NEG just
 'and I've got nothing just.'
- b. iawn **jyst**.
 right just
 'right just.'
- c. dw i 'nx xxx [= 3 sill] 'r ty: a 'r lo:n **jyst**.
 be.PRES.1SG I qq xxx the house and the lane just
 'I am qq xxxx the house and the lane just.'
- d. \$watsia\$ ti' cymy' dwy **jes'** \$s' di\$.
 watch.IMPV.2SG be.PRES.2SG take two just know.PRES.2SG you.SG
 'watch, you are taking two just, you know.'
- e. na'th # pethl o 'r tywod yna 'n mynd i' fy lygaid **jyst**.
 do.PERF.3SG some of the sand there PROG go to CL.1SG eyes just
 'some of that sand went into my eyes just.'
- f. dyn' nw i+gyd wedi mynd **jyst**?
 be.PRES.3PL they all PERF go just
 'have they all gone just.'

In such examples, *jyst* 'just' is used as an approximator.

Table 7 gives the frequencies for the sorts of phrases which approximation modifiers qualify. For the sake of simplicity of presentation, the more complex expressions involving *bron* 'nearly' and *jyst* 'just' have all been considered as one lexeme respectively.

Table 7. Phrases qualified by approximation modifiers

	<i>amboutu</i>	<i>bron</i>	<i>jyst</i>	<i>tua</i>	totals
Verb phrase	10	13	34	0	57
Predicative phrase	4	11	8	0	23
Noun phrase	3	5	2	3	13
Post-position	0	6	14	0	20
Aspect phrase, perfect	1	7	1	0	9
<i>I</i> -clause	0	1	8	0	9
Prepositional phrase	1	0	4	0	5
Aspect phrase, progressive	0	2	0	0	2
'To'- copula phrase	0	1	0	0	1
Single-phrase utterance	1	0	0	0	1
English expression	0	1	0	0	1
	20	47	71	3	141
Missing data	1	5	8	0	11
	21	52	79	3	155

A verb phrase is the main phrase which is modified by approximators, but that is mainly due to *jyst* 'just'. Table 8 gives further details about the various phrases which contain *bron* 'nearly' and *jyst* 'just'.

Table 8. Further about the expressions in which *bron* ‘nearly’ and *jyst* ‘just’ occur

	<i>bron</i>	<i>bron a:</i>	<i>bron a: bod</i>	<i>bron bod</i>	<i>jyst</i>	<i>jyst iawn</i>	<i>jyst a:</i>	<i>jyst a: bod</i>	totals
Verb phrase	0	13	0	0	0	0	28	0	41
Predicative phrase	8	0	2	1	5	0	0	2	18
Post-position	6	0	0	0	4	8	0	0	18
Aspect phrase, perfect	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
Noun phrase	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	6
<i>I</i> -clause	1	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	9
Prepositional phrase	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Aspect phrase, progressive	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
‘To’- copula phrase	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
English expression	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Single-phrase utterance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	29	14	2	2	13	12	28	8	108
Missing data	2	2	1	0	0	2	5	1	13
	31	16	3	2	13	14	33	9	121

The simple phrase *bron* ‘nearly’ is used proportionally more than the simple phrase *jyst* ‘just’ but *jyst a:* is used proportionally more than *bron a:*.

5 Degree modifiers again

There are two modifiers in the database which have an intensifying function like degree modifiers but which are not confined to qualifying adjectives.

38 a. **reit** fanna.

‘right there.’

b. s'o ti **rili** wedi.

be.PRES.NEG you.SG really PERF

‘you haven’t really.’

The lexeme *rili* is a borrowing of English ‘really’. The distribution of these forms is given in table 9.

Table 9. *reit* 'right' and *rili* 'really' and the phrases which they modify

	<i>reit</i>	<i>rili</i>	Totals
Prepositional phrase	78	0	94
Adjective phrase	16	1	18
Deictic locative	3	0	3
English phrase	1	0	1
Predicative phrase	1	0	1
Aspect phrase	0	1	1
Post-position	0	1	1
Noun phrase	0	1	1
<i>Eisiau</i> 'want' phrase	0	1	1
	99	5	104

It can be seen that *reit* 'right' is much more frequent than *rili* 'really' and that it mainly qualifies prepositional phrases. These and other phrases are given in the examples in (39).

- 39 a. *fel ddisgynodd e reit i' ganol y dw:r mawr.*
 pt fall.PERF.3SG he right to middle the water big
 'he fell right into the big water.'
- b. *hwn reit yn2 llawn 'wan,, ia.*
 this.M right PRED full now yes
 'this right full now, yes.'
- c. *dw i 'n myn' 'n+o:l at y tywod reit sydyn..*
 be.PRES.1SG I PROG go back to the sand right sudden
 'I'm going back to the sand right suddenly.'
- d. *ti' 'm rili isio fo 'fo hwnna,, 'r twmffat.*
 be.PRES.2SG neg really want it with.that.M the funnel
 'you don't really want it with that, silly.'
- e. *ma' fanna 'n2 <rili llawn> [?] wedyn.*
 be.PRES.3SG there PRED really full after
 'there is really full after.'

6 Recency

In examples which contain *jyst* ‘just’ occurring before a perfect aspect phrase, *jyst* ‘just’ can be interpreted as conveying recency.

- 40 a. a ma' **jest** 'di marw.
 and be.PRES.3SG just PERF die
 ‘and he has just died.’
- b. y'n ni **jyst** wedi neud e.
 be.PRES.1PL we just PERF do it
 ‘and we have just done it.’
- c. ceir **jyst** 'di mynd.
 cars just PERF go
 ‘cars just gone.’

Recency is also conveyed by *newydd* ‘new’ in the position of an aspect marker.

- 41 a. dw i **newydd** fod <'da Gari>.
 be.PRES.1SG I new be with Gary
 ‘I’ve just been with Gary.’
- b. ti' **newydd** dod a: 'il i' ty: fi,, Aled.
 you.2SG new come with she to house I Aled
 ‘you’ve just taken her to mu house, Aled.’
- c. dw i **newydd** gal 'o nadolig yma.
 be.PRES.1SG I new have it Christmas here
 ‘I’ve just had it this Christmas.’

It must be added that a focus interpretation is not impossible in the examples of *jyst* in (40). It can also be considered whether recency can be interpreted as approximation. that is, approximate to the completion of an event or action. If such an interpretation were adopted, it would simplify the semantic analysis of *jyst* ‘just’.

7 Post-position

The modifiers *bron* ‘nearly,, *hyd+yn+oed* ‘even’, *jyst* ‘just’, *jyst iawn* ‘(very) just’ and *rili* ‘really’ have been illustrated in previous examples in a position which precedes the phrase which they qualify.

There are also examples in which these modifiers are positioned later in the clause. With the exception of *rili* ‘really’, it is approximators which occur in a post-position.

- 42 a. ma' 'di gorlenwi **bron**.
 be.PRES.3SG PERF overfill nearly
 ‘it has overfilled nearly.’
- b. ma' Anti+gwenda yn nabod nw **hyd+'n+oed**.
 be.PRES.3SG Auntie+Gwendaa PROG know they even
 ‘Auntie Gwenda knows them even.’
- c a genno fi ddim **jysd**.
 and with.1SG I NEG just
 ‘and I have nothing just.’
- d. 's 'a 'm sand ar+o:l **jyst** iawn,, yn' nag oes.
 be.PRES.3SG there NEG sand after just very Q+N NEG be.PRES.3SG
 ‘there’s no sand left (very) just, is there.’
- e. ni' fod i' fyn' i' weld teledu **rili**.
 be.PRES.1PL be to go to see television really
 ‘we are supposed to go to see the television really.’

The modifiers which are post-positioned and their frequencies are given in table 10.

Table 10. Modifiers which occur in post-position

<i>bron</i> ‘nearly’	6
<i>hyd+yn+oed</i> ‘even’	1
<i>jyst</i> ‘just’	6
<i>jyst iawn</i> ‘(very) just’	8
<i>rili</i> ‘really’	1
	<hr/>
	22

It can be seen that *jyst* ‘just’ is the most frequent post-modifier, occurring as *jyst* or *jyst iawn*.

8 Longitudinal matters

Table 11 gives details about the major types of modifiers in the database. Focus modifiers are the most frequent. For the sake of simplicity, the more complex expressions involving *bron* ‘nearly’ and *jyst* ‘just’ have all been considered as one lexeme respectively.

Table 11. Semantic classes: lexemes and frequencies

Degree2 = *reit* 'right' and *rili* 'really'

	Lexemes	Frequencies
Focus	5	455
Degree	7	213
Approximation	4	149
Degree2	2	104
Recency	1	15
		<hr/> 936
Missing data		64
		<hr/> 1000

The English words *only* and *very* occur respectively in the focus class and the degree class, and there may be grounds for grouping them with the focus modifier *dim+ond* 'only' and the degree modifier *iawn* 'very', thus reducing the number of lexemes by one in these two classes.

Table 12 gives details about actual users of modifiers and total users in each age group (actual/total), and the frequencies of each class of modifier.

Table 12. Actual users of modifiers / total potential users, and the frequencies of the modifiers

	Three			Four			Five			Six			Seven		
Focus	14	/ 38	25	27	/ 63	53	74	/ 143	146	47	/ 75	107	54	/ 74	137
Degree	7	/ 38	11	14	/ 63	25	45	/ 143	78	29	/ 75	57	32	/ 74	53
Approximation	7	/ 38	8	7	/ 63	12	36	/ 143	54	22	/ 75	41	29	/ 74	40
Degree2	4	/ 38	6	5	/ 63	8	13	/ 143	18	20	/ 75	32	18	/ 74	40
Recency	1	/ 38	1	0	/ 63	0	4	/ 143	5	3	/ 75	5	4	/ 74	4

Chart 1 looks at the numbers of children who actually use a modifier, expressed as percentage of the total number of all children in the age group. For example, in the case of the three year olds there is a total of 38 children and 14 of them use a focus modifier – which is 37%. Examples of *jyst* 'just' which are ambiguous to an analyst have been excluded.

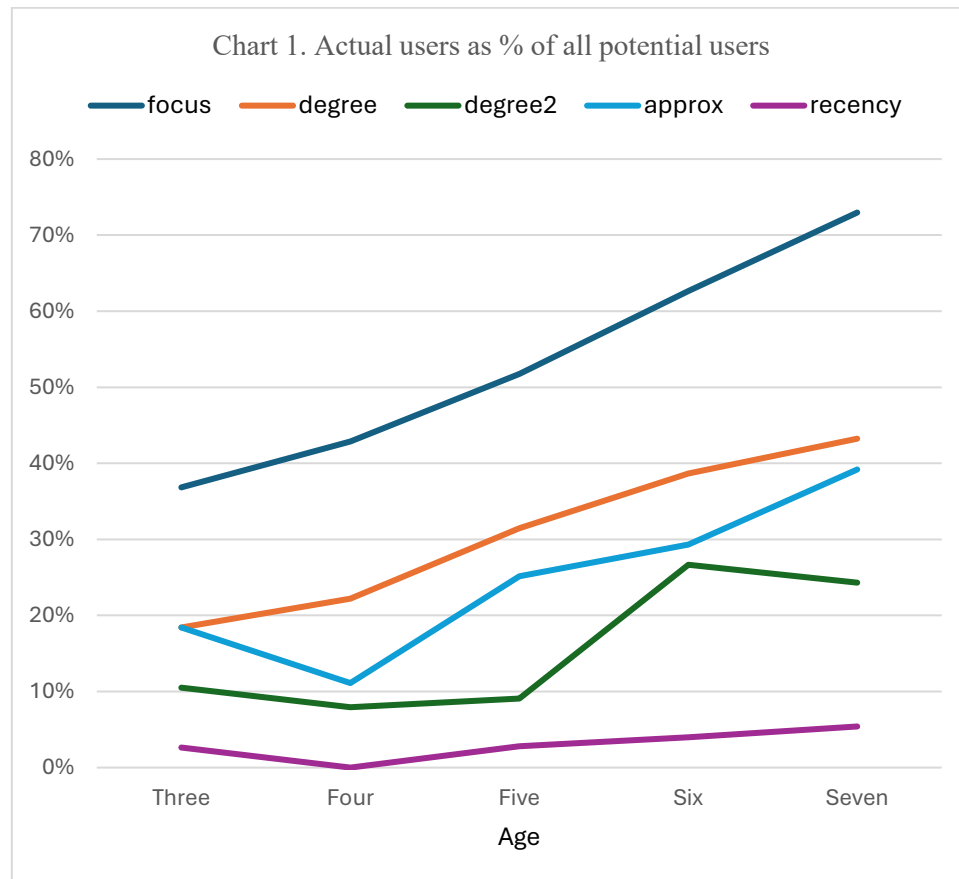
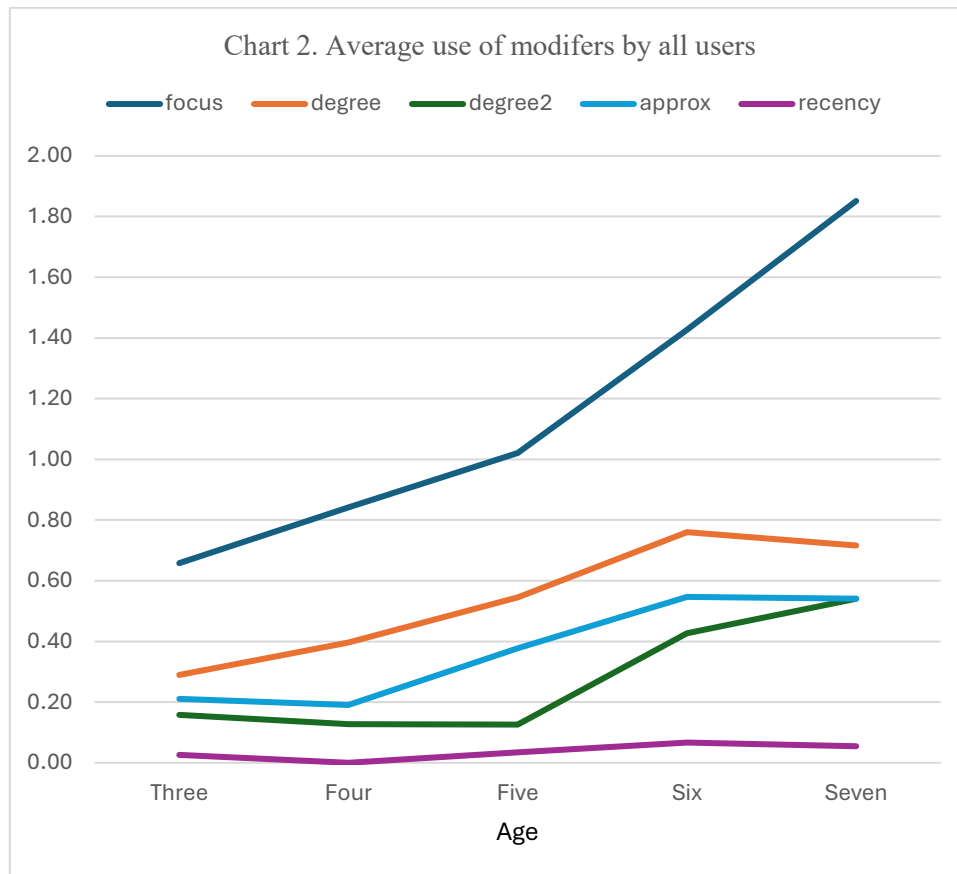
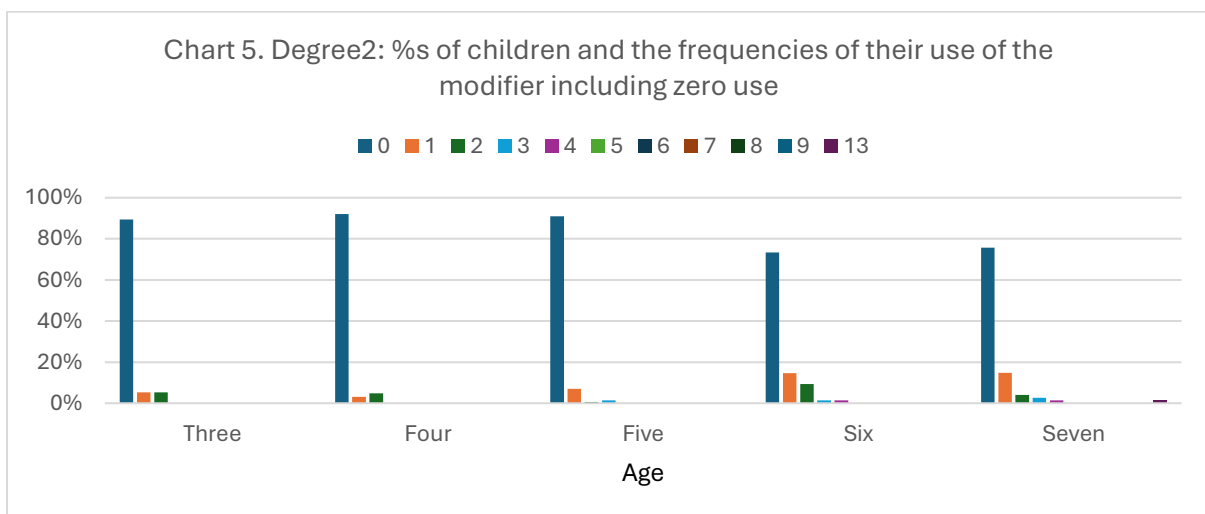
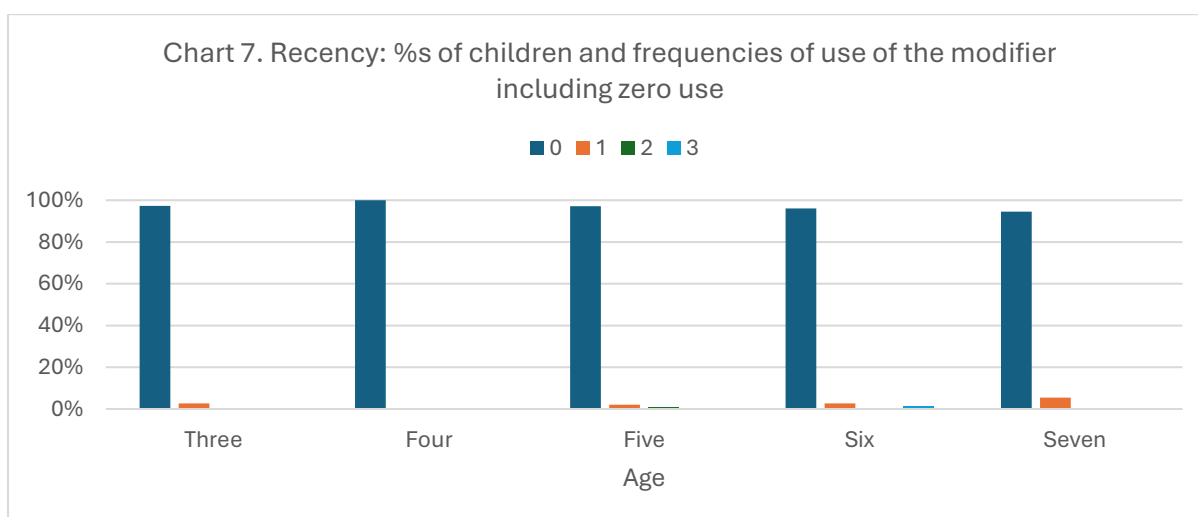
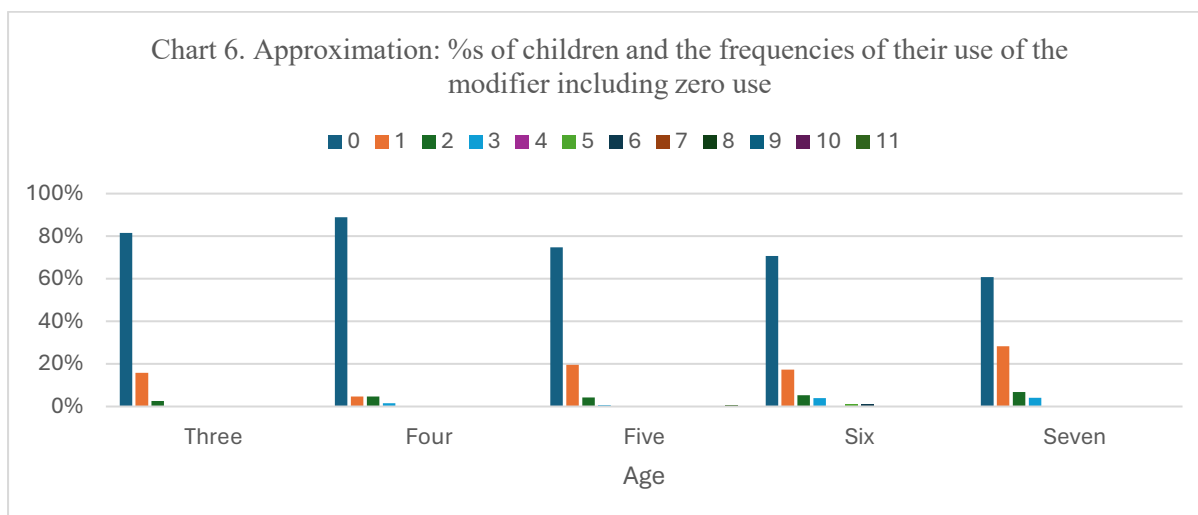


Chart 2 gives the average number of modifiers which are used by the total number of children in each age group. For example, for the three years old children, there are a total of 38 children and a total of 25 frequencies for focus modifiers, giving an average use of 0.66.



These charts allow three observations to be made. First, both charts confirm the hierarchy which is indicated in table 12: the modifier which is used the most in each year is a focus modifier; the second most used is a degree modifier; then an approximation modifier; and a degree2 modifier is the least used. Second, both charts show that there is an increase in the use of modifiers over the years both in terms of numbers of users and average use. Third, chart 2 shows that the average number of modifiers used by all children (including zero use) is very small. Charts 3-6 give more detailed pictures of the numbers of children in relation frequencies. It can be seen that in the case of each modifier in each age group there are more children who do not use a modifier than children who use a modifier, with the exception of focus modifiers at age seven — and only by a very narrow margin. There are individual children who are different: chart 3 shows that one child at seven years of age has used a focus modifier 13 times and chart 5 shows that one child at seven years of age has used a degree2 modifier 13 times.





Charts 1 to 7, then, show that there is longitudinal development but the charts also indicate that it is slow in terms of numbers of users and average use. Taking all these considerations into account, modifiers do not figure prominently in the performance data of young children.

Without a comparison with adult performance data, it is difficult to determine whether the children's usage is a maturational matter or whether modifiers are generally low frequency lexemes in performance. Jones (2025) provides a description of modifiers in adult Welsh. But it is of limited scale and gives the Welsh of adults mainly in interaction with very young children who are in the period of language acquisition. Further, It does not supply statistics which can be compared with the statistics given in this study apart from tables of frequencies of lexemes. That is, table 1 in Jones (2025), given here as table 13, allows a comparison with table 1 in this study.

Table 13. The modifiers [in adult Welsh], in descending order of frequencies

<i>iawn</i> ‘very’	312
<i>rhy</i> ‘too’	174
<i>jyst</i> ‘just’	68
<i>dim+ond</i> ‘only’	54
<i>bron</i> ‘nearly’	20
<i>go</i> ‘fairly’	13
<i>reit</i> ‘right’	12
<i>mor</i> ‘so’	10
<i>braidd</i> ‘rather’	9
<i>hyd+yn+oed</i> ‘even’	4
<i>hollol</i> ‘completely’	3
<i>eithaf</i> ‘quite’	2
<i>byth</i> ‘still’	2
<i>amboutu</i> ‘about’	1
	<hr/> 682

A comparison of table 13 with table 1 shows that the children share 11 modifiers with the adults. This suggests that the children’s use of modifiers is well-developed. Differences arise in that the children use *rili* ‘really’, *tua* ‘about’ and *gweddol* ‘fairly’ (which are not found in the adults’ performance data) while the adults use *braidd* ‘rather’, *hollol* ‘completely’ and *byth* ‘still’ (which are not found in the children’s performance data). More significantly, the most frequent modifiers in the adult Welsh are degree modifiers *iawn* ‘very’ and *rhy* ‘too’ while in the children’s data they are focus modifiers (allowing for the ambiguity of *jyst* ‘just’).

We can also compare the phrases which are modified in the children’s data, given in table 2 in this study, with the adult’s data which is given in table 6 in Jones (2025), presented here as table 14.

Table 14. Phrases [in adult data] which modifiers qualify, in descending order of frequencies

Adjective Phrases	509
Noun Phrases	60
Verb Phrases	34
Prepositional Phrases	16
Predicative Phrases	12
Aspect Phrases	10
<i>Bron</i> 'nearly'	8
Complement Clauses	6
Zero	6
Adverbs	5
Imperatives	5
Deictic Locatives	3
Missing data	3
<i>Wh</i> - Words	2
<i>I</i> -clauses	2
<i>Eisiau</i> 'want' Phrases	1
	<hr/> 682

In the adult Welsh, adjective phrases are the most frequent phrase which is modified while in the children's Welsh noun phrases are the most frequent. This difference follows from the difference in the hierarchy of modifiers: in adult Welsh the most frequent modifier, namely a degree modifier, qualify adjectives while in the children's Welsh, the most frequent modifier, namely a focus modifier, qualifies noun phrases.

Finally, we can tentatively mention a possible explanation for the dominance of focus modifiers. Their reductive effect weakens the significance or arduousness of a situation or entity, which may go some way to justifying its implementation. The speaker is suggesting 'this is all you have to do' or 'this is all I am doing' — 'nothing to worry about'.

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