

SAN ANTONIO TALK

OK. Here's the situation. Your favorite domestic cook has just served the perfect dessert, prompting you to say, "That was _____ good pie." Now. Fill in the blank.

Assuming that none of you swear (I know; I know!), native speakers of San Antonio Talk have three options for these (blank) conversational intensifiers: *plumb*, *purely*, and *really*.

Easily, the majority of us use *really*--ninety-two percent of us, in fact. Seven percent of us use *plumb*; only one percent use *purely*. On the surface, San Antonio usage of the intensifier *really* fits the basic pattern of southern Gulf Coast speakers--all the way around the Gulf, from Brownsville to Miami. Overall, *really* is preferred by ninety-three percent (one percent more than our ninety-two) of native Gulf Coast speakers of English.

San Antonio shows a movement away from that southern influence, however, in our usage of the two less-preferred terms. San Antonians use a strong seven percent *plumb* choice, contrasted with the Gulf southern four-percent *plumb*; and San Antonians use *purely* only one percent of the time, while other Gulf southerners use *purely* three percent of the time.

This slight difference suggests, however, a similar movement away from Gulf southern usage in the variants of the intensifier *really*. Four such variants exist. Throughout the Gulf region folks favor the variant *rilly* thirty-four percent of the time; the variants *rill* and *reel* twenty-six percent of the each (combined fifty-two percent); the textbook, standard-English favorite *really* only

thirteen percent of the time.

Let me rephrase that usage pattern. About one third of the time throughout the Gulf region, people prefer to say "That was *rilly* good pie." About one-fourth of the time people say "That was *rill* good pie"; another fourth of the time they say "That was *reel* good pie"; and one-eighth of the time we do use school-book English "That was *really* good pie."

Here in San Antonio our preferences change enough to split us, again, away from the Gulf Coast norm. About one third of the time we talk about "*rilly* dry weather," about one third of the time "*reel* dry weather," about one-fourth of the time "*rill* dry weather," and the rest of the time (small percent) "*really* dry weather."

Social demographics, however, remain the same here in San Antonio as throughout the southern Gulf region. Middle and Upper class folk show a preference for *rilly*; lower class folk *reel*. Women prefer *rilly*; men prefer *rill*. (Gosh! Does that mean that all women are middle and upper class--both showing a preference for *rilly*?)

People between the ages of thirteen and sixty-five prefer *reel*; older speakers prefer either *rilly* or *rill*, with *rilly* gaining preference the older one gets.

Education? You ask about education? Don't. College graduates and grade-school dropouts all hover around *rilly*. Really.

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