

GRADABLE ADJECTIVES IN LANGUAGE AND SPEECH

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The article shows correlation between different types of English gradable adjectives in language, pays special attention to the emotional aspect of adjectives in speech, examines the role of the context in amplifying the emotive component of gradable adjectives. We believe that some adjectives like **beautiful**, **shocking** may be treated as both scale and limit adjectives. They refer to the group of scale adjectives because they are used in comparative and superlative forms and are modified by adverbs which express a high degree (extremely beautiful/shocking, very beautiful/shocking), a medium degree (quite beautiful/shocking, rather beautiful/shocking) and a small degree (slightly shocking). **Beautiful** means “extremely nice”, **shocking** has a meaning of “very bad, very upsetting”, thus they can be modified by “highest degree” adverbs (absolutely beautiful, utterly beautiful, extremely beautiful/shocking) and by “closeness to the highest degree” adverbs (almost beautiful). This clearly demonstrates that these adjectives also refer to the group of limit adjectives. If we take pure limit adjectives, we can see that they are modified only by “highest degree” and “closeness to the highest degree” adverbs.

While conducting our research, we found out some specific speech means of expressing the highest degree of adjectives whose meaning already contains the idea of an absolute degree in language. The adjective **ridiculous** belongs to the class of causative emotional adjectives, which describe psychological states caused, stimulated by something. **Ridiculous** means “extremely stupid” and is negative. The use of comparative **worse than ridiculous** makes the meaning even stronger. The context has the ability to highlight a particular meaning element of gradable extreme adjectives.

Key words: adjectives, emotions, context, speech.

Полонська І. П. Градуальні прикметники в мові та мовленні. У статті продемонстровано кореляцію між різними видами англійських градуальних прикметників в мові, особливу увагу приділено емоційному аспекту прикметників в мовленні, досліджено роль контексту в посиленні емотивного компонента градуальних прикметників.

Ключові слова: прикметники, емоції, контекст, мовлення.

Полонская И. П. Градуальные прилагательные в языке и речи. В статье продемонстрирована корреляция между различными видами английских градуальных прилагательных в языке, особое внимание уделено эмоциональному аспекту прилагательных в речи, исследована роль контекста в усилении эмотивного компонента градуальных прилагательных.

Ключевые слова: прилагательные, эмоции, контекст, речь.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Adjectives are one of the largest word classes in the English language, possessors of different abilities and carriers of diverse meanings. Overall, adjectives are highly complex and significantly less studied than other major lexical categories. At the present time they are an area of research of such linguists as Thomas Berg, Adrian Brasoveanu, Anna Goy, Chris Kennedy, Richard Larson, Marcin Morzycki, Loise McNally, Jessica Rett, Gina Taranto, Adam Zachary Wyner and others. In recent research, the main effort has been made to study various semantic classes of adjectives and their syntactic distribution. Researchers in the field of syntax and semantics of adjectives address such questions as the internal and external syntax of adjectives, attributive vs. predicative adjectives, prenominal vs. postnominal adjectives, structure-meaning correlations etc.

Defining the problem and argumentation of the topicality of its consideration. Language can be looked at as a means of giving and receiving information. But language is more than this: it is communication between people. It often expresses the emotions and attitudes of the speaker and he or she often uses it to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the hearer [1, 117]. Emotionality used to be regarded as a pure psychological phenomenon. Nowadays the problem of

emotivity of the word is actively studied by linguistics. Nevertheless, most researchers focus mainly on the emotive component in the semantic structure of words. No study has so far dealt in a comprehensive way with emotive words in speech. Studying such words from both language and speech perspective will provide linguists with a better insight into their nature.

The aim of this study is to look at adjectives as words whose function is to express emotions and to find out how speech affects their emotive component. The scope of the present analysis is limited to one subclass of adjectives – to gradable adjectives.

The outline of the main research material. Gradability has been the object of a fair amount of research. In spite of the fact that gradability does not characterise adjectives as a class, it is an important semantic property of a large subset of adjectives in many languages. Adjectives can be classified into two subgroups: non-gradable and gradable. Adjectives are non-gradable if their meaning cannot have different degrees. For instance, the adjective *chemical* belongs to the group of non-gradable adjectives because things (reactions, symbols, solutions, weapons, science, engineering, etc.) are either chemical or not chemical, there are no degrees in between. This group mostly includes “technical adjectives” (*atomic*,

nuclear) and adjectives denoting origin (*Chinese, Danish*). Other examples of non-gradable adjectives are "*classical ballet*", "*daily newspaper*", "*pictorial atlas*" etc. They are resistant to the main criterion of gradability, i.e. they do not combine with degree modifiers.

Most adjectives in the English language are gradable. That is, their meaning can have different possible degrees of strength. They can therefore be used with adverbs which express these different degrees. Gradable adjectives can be divided into two types: scale adjectives and limit adjectives.

Scale adjectives, which constitute the biggest group of adjectives in the English language, can have many different degrees and can be used in comparative and superlative forms. Scale adjectives are modified by such adverbs as *extremely, incredibly, very* etc., *quite* (American English) to express a high degree; *fairly, pretty* (informal), *quite, rather* to express a medium degree, *slightly, a little, a bit* (informal) to express a small degree. For example, the weather can be *very hot, extremely hot, incredibly hot, rather hot, a little hot*, etc. It is interesting to note that in American English *quite* is used with scale adjectives to express a high degree, while in British English it is used with scale adjectives to express only a medium degree. An American person, for instance, would be pleased to be told that a new suit was quite nice, but a British person might think that the speaker did not really like it very much.

Let us illustrate the use of scale adjectives with modifiers in the context.

"(...) Now, this puts a **very powerful** weapon into our hands (...)" (5, 742)

"Yes, it's **pretty clear** what happened," assented the detective" (2, 473)

Limit adjectives are adjectives whose meaning already contains the idea of an absolute degree. These adjectives can be used with such adverbs as *absolutely, completely, utterly*, etc. to express the "highest" degree (*That was absolutely impossible*) or *almost, nearly, practically, virtually* to express "closeness to the highest" degree (*It is almost impossible to say*). Limit adjectives usually do not form comparison. The study shows that all limit adjectives have a high correlation with scale adjectives.

The list given above is open and therefore can be added with other descriptive words. We believe that some adjectives like *beautiful, shocking* may be treated as both scale and limit adjectives. They refer to the group of scale adjectives because they are used in comparative and superlative forms (*beautiful – more beautiful – most beautiful, shocking – more shocking – most shocking*) and are modified by adverbs which express a high degree (*extremely beautiful/shocking, very beautiful/shocking*), a medium degree (*quite beautiful/shocking, rather beautiful/shocking*) and a small degree (*slightly shocking*). *Beautiful* means "extremely nice", *shocking* has a meaning of "very bad, very upsetting", thus they can be modified by "highest degree" adverbs (*absolutely beautiful, utterly beautiful, extremely beautiful/shocking*) and by "closeness to the highest degree" adverbs (*almost beautiful*). This clearly demonstrates that these adjectives also refer to the group of limit adjectives. If we take pure limit adjectives, we can see that they are modified only by "highest degree" and "closeness to the highest degree" adverbs. So it is incorrect to say "*I was very delighted with the present*", we must say "*I was absolutely delighted with the present*".

Gradable Adjectives

Scale Adjectives	Limit Adjectives
angry	furious/livid
annoyed	exasperated
bad/unpleasant	abysmal/awful/deplorable/ dreadful/ ghastly/horrible/terrible
beautiful	gorgeous/ravishing
big	enormous/giant/gigantic/massive
clean	immaculate/spotless
cold	freezing
cruel	atrocious
different	disparate
dirty	filthy
disappointed	gutted
exciting	thrilling
frightened/scared	terrified/petrified
funny	hilarious
generous	lavish
good	brilliant/excellent/fabulous/ fantastic/ great/marvellous
hot	blistering/boiling
hungry	famished/starving
important	crucial/vital
impressive	spectacular
interesting	fascinating
loud	deafening/ear-splitting/resounding
painful	excruciating
pleasant	delightful/enchanting
pleased	delighted
poor	destitute/impoverish/penurious
shocking	outrageous/staggering
silly/foolish	fatuous/ludicrous/ridiculous
small	diminutive/fractional/infinitesimal/ minuscule(miniscule)/tiny
strange	bizarre/weird
surprising	amazing/astonishing/astounding/ unbelievable
tasty	delicious/scrumptious
thin	emaciated
tired	exhausted/fatigued
thirsty	parched
ugly	hideous/repulsive
unhappy	wretched
unusual	freak
weak	feeble

Scale adjectives	Limit adjectives
nice	beautiful
beautiful	gorgeous/ravishing
bad/upsetting	shocking
shocking	outrageous/staggering

Within the group of limit adjectives there is the subgroup of adjectives which have extreme meanings and are called extreme adjectives. They are usually used with “highest degree” adverbs (*absolutely, completely, utterly*), which give additional emphasis to extreme adjectives, intensify the meaning of the words they modify. These adverbs have the effect of underlining or “pushing” an emotion which is already high up on a scale. They further emphasize that a situation is unusual, that emotions are very strong. It is important to note, however, that extreme adjectives are not usually used with “closeness to the highest degree” adverbs mentioned above.

Gradability includes comparison. But, as we have already mentioned, limit adjectives do not usually have comparative and superlative forms. As far as extreme adjectives are concerned, they can be described as implicit superlatives, since they express a superlative degree of a feature [2, 216]. The word *boiling* itself automatically means “extremely hot”, *destitute* – “extremely poor”, *exhausted* – “extremely tired”, *famished* – “extremely hungry”, *feeble* – “extremely weak”, *freezing* – “extremely cold”, *hideous* – “extremely ugly”, *hilarious* – “extremely funny”, *infinitesimal* – “extremely small”, etc. Here are some examples of extreme adjectives in the context.

“Ah, Mr. Holmes,” said he heartily as my friend entered, “I am **delighted** to see you” (4, 431)

“You appear to be **astonished**,” he said, smiling at my expression of surprise (3, 21).

“Isn’t it **gorgeous!**” said Holmes, grinning over his coffee cup (7, 126).

Extreme adjectives are extensive not only in characters’ speech, they are widely used by the narrator to show different emotions.

Hawkins is **furious** because they have distracted him (9, 561).

So **thrilling** had the man’s narrative been and his manner was so impressive that we had sat silent and absorbed (3, 82).

I was much **astounded** by this programme, though I remembered that Holmes had said to Stapleton on the night before that his visit would terminate next day (5, 751).

While conducting our research, we found out some specific speech means of expressing the highest degree of adjectives whose meaning already contains the idea of an absolute degree in language. Let us look at the following example.

“We have done something **worse than ridiculous** already,” the second officer said (8, 177).

The adjective *ridiculous* belongs to the class of causative emotional adjectives, which describe psychological states caused, stimulated by something. The emotional component of English adjectival lexemes directly actualizes the subject’s positive or negative attitude to the object which he or she perceives. Emotions appear in two main categories. That is why a certain kind of emotion has either positive or negative colouring. *Ridiculous* means “extremely stupid” and is negative. The use of comparative *worse than ridiculous* makes the meaning even stronger. The context has the ability to highlight a particular meaning element of gradable extreme adjectives.

In speech, some extreme adjectives are only emotionally coloured, they retain very little meaning and are simply emphatic equivalents of *good*.

“**Wonderful!** Cried Hopkins. “**Wonderful!**” (6, 571)

“Oh, **splendid**,” cried Ruby. “Oh, I wish you’d do it to this company” (1, 57).

Conclusions and perspectives of further research in this field. In this article, we have attempted to show the relationship between different types of gradable adjectives and have illustrated that some adjectives can function as both limit and scale. Meanings are considered to be dynamic and sensitive to contextual demands, rather than fixed and stable. We have tried to demonstrate that speech, the context are able to significantly impact strong adjectives, with contrary effects. On the one hand, they can add force to certain already very strong adjectives. Conversely, in speech some extreme adjectives have little meaning apart from their emotive force. In the future an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of emotional aspects of gradable adjectives can be adopted, which may push the knowledge about these adjectives in new directions. The emotion vocabulary of a language is influenced by linguistic, psychological and cultural factors [3, 348]. The universality versus specificity of emotions across cultures and languages can also be a topic for further investigations.

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