

Adjectives and comparatives in modern English

An adjective is a word which acts to modify a noun in a sentence. While adjectives play a large role in many languages - such as English - many other languages have no adjectives at all. In English the set of adjectives is fairly well understood, though some people include other parts of speech - such as articles like the - in the class of adjectives.

There are two main roles an adjective may take in a sentence, and with a few exceptions each adjective is able to take either role just as easily. The first role is to act as a predicative adjective, in which the adjective modifies a preceding noun as a predicate, linked by a verb. An example of a predicative adjective can be found in the sentence: A zebra is striped, in which the adjective striped is linked the subject of the sentence, zebra, by use of the copula verb to be in the "is" form.

The second role an adjective may take is as an attributive adjective, in which it modifies a noun by being linked directly to the noun as part of the noun phrase. An example of an attributive adjective may be seen in the sentence: 'The striped zebra pranced.' in which the adjective striped is directly connected to the subject of the sentence, zebra. In English, most attributive adjectives precede the noun they are going to modify, while in many Romance languages the adjective comes after the noun. So while in English we might say 'The beautiful woman.' in French we would say 'Le femme jolie.' which may be literally translated as 'The woman beautiful.'[1]

While most adjectives in English are able to be used just as easily either in an attributive or a predicative sense, there are some which are restricted to one role or the other. For example, the adjective sole can be used grammatically only as an attributive adjective, as can be seen in the sentence: This is the sole survivor. On the other hand, trying to use the adjective sole in the predicative role would result in the ungrammatical sentence: This survivor is sole. Other English adjectives, such as alone, may be used only as a predicative adjective, while attempts to use them attributively result in ungrammatical sentences.

¹Adjectives may be modified by adverbs or adverbial clauses, but not by other adjectives. Many adjectives, however, can easily translate into corresponding adverbs simply by adding the ending to them. This can be seen in pairs such as quick/quickly and happy/happily.

In English and many other languages, adjectives also have a correct and incorrect order, depending on the type of adjectives used. Most native speakers learn this order instinctively, and related mistakes are one of the most obvious signs of a non-native speaker. For example, using the adjectives red, little, and two with the noun books, most native English speakers would intuitively order the adjectives to form the sentence 'The two little red books.' To non-native speakers, however, it might seem just as intuitive to say 'The two red little books.' or even 'The red two little books.' both of which are immediately obvious as incorrect to a native English speaker.

Usually *the modifying adverb is an intensifier* (very, rather, awfully, so, terribly, extremely, most, utterly, unusually, delightfully, unbelievably, amazingly, strikingly, highly, that, etc.) The same applies to composite adverbs, such as (kind of, sort of, a good bit of, a lot of, a hell of, a great deal of, etc.):

It is terribly important for parents to be consistent [1].

This new program is unbelievably good.

It made me feel kind of awkward.

Some adverbs - still, yet, far, much, any combine with comparative adjectives (much worse, not any better, still greater, etc.)

Adverbs of degree can modify certain kinds of prepositional phrases:

They lived nearly on the top of the hill.

His remarks were not quite to the point.

Comparative adverbs are used in clauses of proportional agreement, that is, parallel clauses in which qualities or actions denoted in them increase or decrease at an equal rate:

The longer I think about it the less I understand your reasons.

¹ The Cambridge grammar of the English language. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. (2009).

To express the idea that a quality or action decreases or increases at an even rate the comparative may be repeated, the two identical forms being connected by and:

He cried louder and louder.

There are some adverbs which may modify nouns or words of nominal character, functioning as attribute, as in: the way ahead, the trip abroad, the journey home, his return home, the sentence above (below), the day before. A few adverbs can premodify nouns without losing their adverbial character: the then president, in after years, the above sentence, the now generation.

As adverbs modify words of different classes, they accordingly occupy different positions in the sentence. In comparison with other words, adverbs may be considered as the most movable words. However, adverbs are not identical in their ability to be moved to another position in the structure. There are generally four possible positions for adverbs in the sentence:

- 1) at the head of the sentence;
- 2) between the subject and predicate or, if the predicate is a complicated form, the adverb appears after the first auxiliary verb, link-verb or a modal verb;
- 3) before the word the adverb modifies;
- 4) at the end of the sentence.

There is not much to be said about the English adjective from the grammatical point of view. As is well known, it has neither number, nor case, nor gender distinctions. Some adjectives have, however, degrees of comparison, which make part of the morphological system of a language. Thus, the English adjective differs materially not only from such highly inflected languages as Russian, Latin, and German, where the adjectives have a rather complicated system of forms, but even from Modern French, which has preserved number and gender distinctions to the present day (cf. masculine singular *grand*, masculine plural *grands*, feminine singular *grande*, feminine plural *grandes* 'large').

By what signs do we then, recognize an adjective as such in Modern English? In most cases this can be done only by taking into account semantic and syntactical phenomena. But in some cases, that is for certain adjectives, derivative suffixes are significant, too. Among these are the suffix -less (as in *useless*), the suffix -like (as in *ghostlike*), and a few others.

Occasionally, however, though a suffix often appears in adjectives, it cannot be taken as a certain proof of the word being an adjective, because the suffix may also make part of a word belonging to another part of speech. Thus, the suffix - full would seem to be typically adjectival, as is its antonym - less. In fact we find the suffix - full in adjectives often enough, as in beautiful, useful, purposeful, meaningful, etc. But alongside of these we also find spoonful, mouthful, handful, etc., which are nouns. [2]

On the whole, the number of adjectives which can be recognized, as such by their suffix seems to be insignificant as compared with the mass of English adjectives. B. Ilyish, the Structure of Modern English, p.58 all the adjectives are traditionally divided into two large subclasses: qualitative and relative.

Relative adjectives express such properties of a substance as are determined by the direct relation of the substance to some other substance.

E.g.: *wood* - a wooden hut; mathematics - mathematical precision; history - a historical event; table - tabular presentation; colors - colored postcards; surgery - surgical treatment; the Middle Ages - mediaeval rites.

The nature of this «relationship» in adjectives is best revealed by definitional correlations. Cf.: a wooden hut – a hut made of wood; a historical event – an event referring to a certain period of history; surgical treatment – treatment consisting in the implementation of surgery; etc.

Qualitative adjectives denote various qualities of substances which admit of a quantitative estimation, i.e. of establishing their correlative quantitative measure. The measure of a quality can be estimated as high or low, adequate or inadequate, sufficient or insufficient, optimal or excessive. Cf.: an awkward situation – a very awkward situation; a difficult task – too difficult a task; an enthusiastic reception – rather an enthusiastic reception; a hearty welcome – not a very hearty welcome.

In this connection, the ability of an adjective to form degrees of comparison is usually taken as a formal sign of its qualitative character, in opposition to a relative adjective which is understood as incapable of forming degrees of comparison by definition. Cf.: a pretty girl – a prettier girl; a quick look – a quicker look; a hearty welcome – the heartiest of welcomes.²

²Cohesion in English. London: Longman. Huddleston, R. D. (1988).

However, in actual speech the described principle of distinction is not at all strictly observed, which is noted in the very grammar treatises putting it forward. Two typical cases of contradiction should be pointed out here. [3]

In the first place, substances can possess such qualities as are incompatible with the idea of degrees of comparison. Accordingly, adjectives denoting these qualities, while belonging to the qualitative subclass, are in the ordinary use incapable of forming degrees of comparison. Here refer adjectives like extinct, immobile, deaf, final, fixed, etc.

In the second place, many adjectives considered under the heading of relative still can form degrees of comparison, thereby, as it was transforming the denoted relative property of a substance into such as can be graded quantitatively. Cf.: a mediaeval approach-rather a mediaeval approach - a far more mediaeval approach; of a military design - of a less military design - of a more military design; a grammatical topic ~ a purely grammatical topic - the most grammatical of the suggested topics.

Comparative constructions in English and other languages are well studied in degree semantics. We mostly focus on English but crosslinguistic variation is very interesting in this domain.

There are two main types of comparative sentences in English:

(1)

a. *Nathan is taller than Daniel.* (Phrasal comparative)

b. *Nathan is taller than Daniel is.* (Clausal comparative)

A phrasal comparative involves a DP (or some other non-clausal material) as the complement of *than*, while a clausal comparative involves something that looks like a clause. Notice that (1b) has a missing item after *is* in the *than*-clause. In this example, this seems to be (almost) obligatory.

(2) *Nathan is taller than Daniel is tall. But the following is fine:*

³ Comparing semantic theories of comparison. *Journal of Semantics* 3(1–2). 1–77. doi:10.1093/jos/3.1-2.1. Sudo, Yasutada. 2014.

(3) This desk is wider than the bed is long. One way to understand (1b) is that it is underlyingly (2) but undergoes obligatory ellipsis of the adjective

According to this analysis, (2) and (3) are structurally isomorphic.

There is a lot of debate in the literature about whether phrasal and clausal comparative are syntactically related.

- Phrasal comparatives are underlyingly clausal but just have more missing parts
- Phrasal comparatives cannot be reduced to phrasal comparatives.

Some arguments for the existence of phrasal comparatives:

- Accusative case:

(4)

a. *Nathan is taller than her.*

b. **Nathan is taller than her is.* – *Anaphor binding:*

(5)

a. *No one is taller than himself.*

b. *No one is taller than himself is*

(6)

a. *Who is Nathan taller than t?*

b. *Who is Nathan taller than t is?* – *Scopal difference:*

(7)

a. *Nathan is taller than nobody.*

b. *Nathan is taller than nobody is.* (Why (7b) is bad is an interesting question. We'll come back to this next week.)

– There are languages that seem to only have phrasal comparatives. These differences between phrasal and clausal comparatives are unexpected if phrasal comparatives are underlyingly clausal.

Although the debate is not settled completely yet, we'll develop separate analyses for phrasal and clausal comparatives.

Digression: The following type of sentence can be used to talk about comparisons but they need not involve comparative forms of the gradable adjectives (and the comparative version degrades somewhat).

(8)

a. *Compared to Andrew, Nathan is tall.*

b. Compared to Andrew, Nathan is taller. This construction is different from canonical comparatives in that it exhibits vagueness, as illustrated by the following example from Kennedy (2010) cited in Nouwen (2011) (Some facts: the radius of Uranus is 25,362 km, the radius of Venus is 6,052 km, and the radius of Neptune is 24,622 km).

(9)

a. *Uranus is big, compared to Venus.*

b. *Uranus is bigger than Venus.*

(10)

a. *Uranus is big, compared to Neptune.*

b. Uranus is bigger than Neptune. For the semantics of this construction, see Beck, Oda & Sugisaki (2004), Kennedy (2010) and Fults (2006, 2010).

Lexical paradigm of nomination forms the basis for the formation of corporate syntagmatic paradigms of the various parts of speech. On the syntactic level of correlation function in which the degrees of comparison of adjectives or adverbs with other significant parts of speech, such as nouns or verbs. At the same nouns and verbs are involved in syntagmatic correlations degrees of comparison of adjectives and adverbs, although no morphological categories of degrees of comparison. Comparative juxtaposition in which the degrees of comparison of adjectives or adverbs in one dicteme occur with nouns or verbs belong "far" the periphery of the field. Depending on the context, many nouns and verbs can enter into comparative correlation with other parts of speech, if the act of the evaluation functions.

In addition to the instrumental and genitive comparative value may be expressed form the accusative with the preposition in (bent in an arc, each board). The form of the accusative with the preposition with the name as a means of expression of the comparative values (with nail, a mile Kolomna). Lexica means of expression of the comparative figures are the words of the semantics of comparison, a similar (like) like (similar to), such as recalls, like in compared with, in the form, and others. The lexical component indicates not only the fact of the comparison, but at the same time on the result.

The only pattern of morphological change for adverbs is the same as for adjectives, the degrees of comparison. With regard to the category of the degrees of comparison adverbs (like adjectives) fall into comparables and non-comparables. The number of non-comparables is much greater among adverbs than among adjectives. Only adverbs of manner and certain adverbs of time and place can form degrees of comparison. The three grades are called positive, comparative, and superlative degrees.

Adverbs vary in their structure. In accord with their word-building structure adverbs may be simple, derived, compound and composite.

Simple adverbs are rather few, and nearly all of them display functional semantics, mostly of pronominal character: here, there, now, then, so, quite, why, how, where, when.

Practical consciousness, says Nicholas Ryabtsev, uses less precise digital data as, in some way, their estimated counterparts: the number of "objectified" and not counted, estimated, not measured. As a result of the quantitative parameters being developed through the formation of human attitudes toward them and based on the following procedures:

- 1) a comparison between subjects and quantitative grading;
- 2) a comparison with its own dimensions (Wed grass foot bush with my height) and their use in the measurement (elbow, yards, feet, inches);
- 3) Measurement of available tools (a cup of sugar, a bucket of water);
- 4) isolating particularly significant points: the rules "as many as" the minimum and maximum, which are the most emotionally evocative, because they form the limits, and limit the things of the world, especially in terms of space allocated.

In any human language, there are various means of expressing comparison between entities (or properties), and structures traditionally referred to as comparatives constitute only a subset of these possibilities. Consider the following examples: (1) a. Mary was indeed furious when she saw that you had broken her vase. But you should have seen her mother! b. Mary is tall but Susan is very tall. c. Mary is faster than Susan. In (1a), comparison is only implied: the first sentence makes it explicit that Mary was furious to a certain degree but the second sentence contains no explicit reference to such a degree, yet it implies that the degree to which Mary's mother was furious exceeds the degree to which Mary was furious. In (1b), both the degree to which Mary is tall and the degree to which Susan is tall are explicitly

referred to: without any further specification, it is understood that on a scale of height, the degree to which Mary is tall is greater than what is contextually taken to be average and that the degree to which Susan is tall is considerably greater than the average. Hence the degrees of tallness are explicitly referred to, even if they remain vague; however, the comparison between the two degrees is not made explicit, but the relation of the two degrees can be inferred. Finally, (1c) exhibits a true comparative structure, which expresses that the degree to which Mary is fast exceeds the degree to which Susan is fast. [5]

The sentence in (1c) shows the most important elements of comparative constructions: in this case, the degrees of speed of two entities are compared. The reference value of comparison is expressed by faster in the matrix clause (Mary is faster) and it consists of a gradable predicate (fast) and a comparative degree marker (-er). The standard value of comparison (that is, to which something else is compared) is expressed by the subordinate clause (than Susan) and is introduced by the complementiser than, which also serves as the standard marker. There are some important remarks to be made here. In (1c), the comparative degree marker is a bound morpheme that is attached to the gradable predicate; however, this is not an available option for all adjectives in English and very often the periphrastic structure is used, when the -er is present in the form of more: (2) Mary is more pretentious than Susan. Languages differ in terms of whether they allow both kinds of comparative degree marking and some languages (such as German) allow only the morphological way of comparative adjective formation, while others (such as Italian) have the periphrastic way by default. Second, in (1c) the standard value of comparison is introduced by the complementiser than and the string than Susan is a clause. This is explicitly shown by examples that contain a finite verb as well: (3) Mary is faster than Susan is. However, many issues, especially pertaining to use and meaning, suggest that the grammatical category of comparison is far more complex than the systematic descriptions. In order to teach this content, we should be exposed to the rules and tendencies of comparative forms, their functions, their meanings, and the corresponding types and constructions of

³ English grammar: An outline. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Huddleston, R. D. & Pullum, G. K. (2002).

clauses and phrases where comparison occurs. One implication for teaching comparison is that attention should be given to all of the above and also to the use tendencies exhibited in everyday language.

Ամալյա Գևորգյան (Հայաստան, Լոռու մարզ,
Վանաձորի պետական համալսարան, օտար լեզուների ամբիոն)

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Ժամանակակից անգլերենի ածականները և նրանց համեմատության աստիճանները

Ածական են կոչվում առարկայի որպիսություն կամ վերաբերություն ցույց տվող բառերը: Թեև ածականները մեծ դեր են խաղում բազմաթիվ լեզուներում, սակայն շատ լեզուներ ածական ընդհանրապես չունեն: Ինչպես հայերենում, այնպես էլ անգլերենում ածականները լինում են որակական և հարաբերական: Անգլերենի ածականներն ըստ կազմության լինում են պարզ, ածանցավոր, բարդ: Հոդվածում ներկայացված է ժամանակակից անգլերենի ածականների տարատեսակներ, համեմատության աստիճանները:

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Современные английские прилагательные и степени сравнения имен прилагательных

Имя прилагательное — самостоятельная часть речи, обозначающая не процессуальный признак предмета. Хотя прилагательные играют важную роль в многих языках, но многие языки вообще не имеют имя прилагательное. Английские прилагательные бывают разные (не только описывающие цвета «синие, белые, красные»). Одни помогают выразить эмоции, чувства и настроения или изменения статуса (не того, что в социальных сетях). Другие описательно раскрывают способности человека, знают счет времени, характеризуют нормы морали и поведения в социуме. В статье представлены разновидности современных английские прилагательные и степени сравнения имен прилагательных.