Intensifying Adverbs in English and Romanian

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1. Preliminaries

As Partington notes (1993: 178), "the importance of intensification in the communicative process is that it is a vehicle for impressing, praising, persuading, insulting, and generally influencing the listener's reception of the language". The linguistic elements that most clearly signal intensification both in English and Romanian, as well as in other languages, fall into a syntactically defined class whose members primarily modify adjectives and adverbs. Upgrading and downgrading modifiers, such as *very*, *too*, *so*, *extremely*, *awfully*, *absolutely*, *terribly*, *slightly*, *a bit*, *not at all* are generally referred to under different umbrella terms: *intensifiers* (Bolinger 1972; Allerton 1987; Athanasiadou 2007; Cacchiani 2009), *degree modifiers* (Paradis 1997; Kennedy, McNally 2005), *intensives* (Stoffel 1901), *intensive qualifiers*/*intensifying elements* (Bezinger 1971), *adverbs of degree* (Bäcklund 1973), *intensifying adverbs* (Vermeire 1979; Anderson 2006), *intensifier adverbs* (Alexiadou 1994), *adverbial intensifiers* (Protopopescu 2012).

In this paper, we have adopted the term *intensifying adverb* for the following reasons: first, from a morpho-syntactic point of view, we find it important to discriminate *-ly* derivational adverbs which form an open class, from "lite elements" (Protopopescu 2012: 24–25) such as *very*, *too*, *so*, *that*, which belong to "a limited set of adverbs, namely, the set of *degree words*" (Cornilescu 1995: 237–239); secondly, we oppose *intensifying* (*upgrading*) modifiers to *downtoning (downgrading)* ones; thirdly, given that both adverbs and adjectives may fulfil an intensifying function[1], cover terms like *intensifiers*, *intensifying elements*, *intensives* etc., which do not indicate the morphological class, may be misleading, too.

In order to figure out a number of semantic and syntactic traits that govern the use and interpretation of intensifying adverbs a syntactic restriction has been placed on our study: since gradability is mainly associated with adjectives and with adverbs

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[1]Grossmann and Tutin (2005), Morzycki (2009, 2012), Schnedecker (2010) are some of the linguists who have studied the question of noun intensification: "*real*/*true* disaster", "*utter*/*absolute* idiot" (examples from Morzycki 2012); "joie *profonde*", "*affreuse* tristesse", "challeur *suffocante*" (examples from Grossmann and Tutin 2005).

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derived from adjectives, intensifying adverbs are examined as modifiers of gradable adjectives only, in both their attributive and predicative use.

2. Maximizers vs. boosters

As Paradis (1997: 41) observes, "it is possible to say '*absolutely* amazing', while '*absolutely* nice' is strange". In an attempt to answer the question whether such a constraint is predictable or not, Paradis (1997:50) suggests a set of four criteria according to which gradable adjectives should be examined:

1. The possibility to occur in the comparative and the superlative;
2. The possibility to fill the *x* slot in *How x is it?*;
3. The possibility to fill the *x* slot in *How x!*;
4. The type of oppositeness involved (antonymy).

By applying these four criteria, Paradis (1997: 50–59) distinguishes three types of gradable adjectives – scalar, extreme and limit adjectives – which are opposed to the class of "nongradables"; we have summarized these aspects in the table below:

	Gradables			Nongradables
criterion	Scalar adjectives *good, bad, long, difficult*	Extreme adjectives *excellent, huge, terrific*	Limit adjectives *true, false, identical*	*classical* *daily* *Russian* *symphonic*
1	✓	implicit superlatives	*	
2	✓	*	*	
3	✓	✓	*	
4	antonymy	antonymy	complementarity	

Table 1. Semantic division of adjectives

On the basis of the above systematization, intensifying adverbs may be classified into *maximizers* and *boosters* (Paradis 1997: 77–78). Maximizers are associated with *totality* and combine with adjectives which involve a boundary (an either-or conception), more precisely, with extreme and limit adjectives: "*absolutely* brilliant", "*completely* full", "*totally* unsuited", "*entirely* blameless", "*utterly* disgraceful", "*fully* deductible"; the members of the maximizer paradigm cannot, therefore, specify scalar adjectives (e.g. *"*entirely* good", *"*completely* fast"). Boosters, on the other hand, are associated with *scalarity* (they are conceptualized against a mode of *more-or-less*) and they modify an unbounded gradable property of the adjective they apply to: "*terribly* sad", "*extremely* rare", "*incredibly* thin", "*deeply* indebted", "*highly* flammable", "*enormously* proud".

While maximizers form a relatively restricted set (*absolutely*, *completely*, *entirely*, *fully*, *perfectly*, *totally*, *utterly* and *wholly*), the ability of rapid change and recycling of different forms is a typical feature of boosters. Actually, as Bolinger

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(1972: 23) remarks, any inventory of intensifying adverbs should be viewed as "a sampling rather than a catalog, not because the set of intensifiers is too big to do more than a sample, but because it is too open-ended"[2].

3. From expressivity to delexicalization and grammaticalization

Intensification is a lexical-grammatical category that is mainly used to achieve expressivity. Thus, "it thrives on novelty, i.e. on innovation and semantic change" (Lorenz 2002: 143). The linguistic mechanism through which intensifying adverbs undergo constant change is the general process of grammaticalization, namely delexicalization. The stages which adverbs go through during the process of delexicalization are visually represented by Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005: 285) as follows (Figure 1):

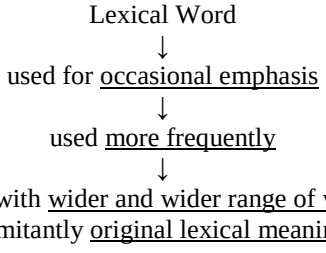


Figure1. Stages of delexicalization of intensifiers

A correlation can, therefore, be established between delexicalization and collocational behaviour: "Once a submodifier begins to collocate more and more widely, it automatically loses the independent lexical content it once had" (Partington 1993: 183). Lorenz (2002: 144), for example, illustrates the link between the degree of delexicalization of boosters and their frequency by opposing *terribly* to *horrifically*: both adverbs are potential boosters of adjectives; both of them have associations of "shock, fright, disgust"; however, *horrifically* is, by far, less frequent than *terribly* (10 vs. 1253 hits in the British National Corpus), which shows that a lower frequency of an intensifying adverb involves a higher level of emphasis and expressivity. With respect to the parallel between *terribly* and *horrifically*, we would add that, in terms of implicit grading, *horrifically* is inherently stronger, i.e. "more intense", than *terribly*.

According to Bolinger (1972), *-ly* intensifying adverbs are "relatively ungrammaticized" elements, while degree words are "relatively grammaticized". Bolinger does not explicitly mention the criteria used for establishing this distinction; yet, two criteria seem to have been taken into account: (i) frequency and (ii) semantic content. Cacchiani (2009: 234) refines Bolinger's (1972) classification

[2] Following Borst (1902) and Kirchner (1955), Bolinger (1972: 306–308) lines up about 270 English intensifying adverbs; Lüder (1995: 109–113) lists 242 Romanian adverbs which enter the booster-equivalent structure "adverb + preposition *de* + adjective/adverb" (e.g. *incredibly*: "incredibil(de)", *surprisingly*: "surprinzător(de)", *remarkably*: "remarcabil(de)", *terribly*: "teribil(de)", etc.).

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and identifies four levels of grammaticalization/delexicalization of intensifying adverbs depending on width of collocation, as well as on style and register restrictions: (i) highly grammaticalized intensifiers like *highly* (synonym of *very* – the intensifier *par excellence*), which collocates widely but is still subject to register restrictions; (ii) relatively less grammaticalized intensifiers (e.g. "*fabulously* wealthy"); (iii) co-lexicalized intensifiers, which typically occur in strong collocations (semantic-feature-copying intensifiers like "*doggedly* determined"); (iv) lexicalized intensifiers, which still retain their original meaning (e.g. "*shockingly* underpaid").

In our opinion, the main criteria which may be considered when evaluating the degree of grammaticalization of the intensifying adverbs are: semantic modification, syntactic specialization and frequency. Thus, we may say that the more established the intensifier is, the lower the semantic content of the intensifier is, and the more restricted the syntactic environment in which it might occur[3]. This means that the less meaning the intensifier carries on its own, the more it will require from its surrounding context (Greenbaum 1974: 80–82).

4. From predicational to intensifying adverbs: a semantic and syntactic shift

Virtually, any adverb modifying an adjective tends to have or to develop an intensifying meaning:

> It is a simple matter to invent. For instance, if the word "burgeoningly" has ever been used as an intensifier I am unaware of it, but if one were to hear "She's a *burgeoningly* healthy girl", it would be taken as a normal hyperbolic intensifier (Bolinger 1972: 23).

However, as shown below, only certain types of adverbs can change their syntactic status and acquire an intensifying role. Our attempt of describing such a semantic and syntactic shift is based on Ernst's (2000: 80, 2002: 96) classification of adverbs into functional (quantitative) vs. predicational (lexical/qualitative) adverbs.

According to Ernst (2000: 84–96), most English predicational adverbs have the following properties:

a. they come from open classes[4];
b. they are composed of an adjective stem and *-ly*;
c. they take a proposition, fact, or event as one of their arguments;
d. they show the clausal/manner pattern of homonymous readings (1a/b, 2a/b)[5]:

(1) a. *Frankly*, they won't speak to her.
    b. They won't speak to her *frankly*.
(2) a. *Strangely*, Nikki was holding it.
    b. Nikki was holding it *strangely*.

[3] «À l'échelle diachronique […], on peut distinguer deux mouvements en directions opposées selon que la distribution d'un adverbe tend à s'étendre ou à se restreindre : la déplétion sémantique de certains adverbes, et le figement de certains syntagmes. Dans les deux cas, le processus est plus ou moins avancé» (Romero 2001: 113).

[4] Modal adverbs belong to a closed class (Ernst 2000: 87).

[5] Modal and pure-manner do not show such a split (Ernst 2000: 84).

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(examples from Ernst 2000: 84);

e. they are lexical (i.e. not functional);
i. they are subjective[6].

As regards the interrelation predicational adverbs – intensifying adverbs, we would underline the following aspects: (i) boosters form an open class as they "rely" on the open class of predicational adverbs; (ii) the expressivity of boosters depends on the lexical content of the predicational adverbs which they have been derived from; (iii) the clausal/manner pattern of homonymous readings (1a/b, 2a/b) can be easily extended to an intensifying meaning, as in "*frankly* hostile", "*strangely* clamorous". Of great importance for the analysis of intensifying adverbs is, in our opinion, Ernst's (2000: 96) conclusion on the distribution of adverbs:

> Thus, to conclude, I have proposed that we can correlate one aspect of the distribution of adverbs with a particular semantic property. The property is that of being a "subjective" adverb, one which maps an event or proposition onto a scale with a degree of indeterminacy and context-dependence.

5. Romanian contra English intensifying adverbs

All English maximizers have formal equivalents (i.e. one-to-one/word-for-word corresponding forms)[7] in Romanian: adverbs obtained through conversion from adjectives indicating the idea of completeness/totality: *absolutely* quiet/ "*absolut* liniştit", *completely* independent/ "*complet* independent", *perfectly* clear/ "*perfect* clar", *wholly* irresponsible/ "*total* iresponsabil".

On the other hand, only few Romanian adverbs may function as boosters of adjectives (adverbs) in an identical syntactic structure to the English one. It is the case of some semantically related gradual-quantitative adverbs like "grav" (*severely*), "serios" (*seriously*), "rău/greu" (*badly*), "intens" (*intensely*), "profund" (*profoundly*), "adânc" (*deeply*), "accentuat" (*emphatically*), etc.:

(1) "un fragment de viaţă *intens* semnificativ"/an *intensely* significant life fragment
(2) "este *profund* autohtonă"/it is *profoundly* aboriginal
(3) "versuri *accentuat* parodistice"/*emphatically* parodistic verse

(examples from Pană Dindelegan 1992: 93)

Some Romanian adverbs in *-mente*[8], such as "realmente" (*really*), "literalmente" (*literally*), "eminamente" (*eminently*) may function in a similar way, too: *really* dangerous/ "*realmente* periculos"; *literally* crazy/ "*literalmente* nebun"; *eminently* preferable/ "*eminamente* preferabil". We would also note that the adverbs "*completamente*" and "*totalmente*" are used as variants of maximizers "complet" and "total", respectively.

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[6] Mental-attitude adverbs are the only non-subjective predicationals (Ernst 2000: 94).
[7] See Nida (1964) and Newmark (1981).
[8] "The suffix was not as productive in Romanian as opposed to other Romance languages and few of them are actually actively used" (Protopopescu 2008: 189).

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The Romanian adverbial counterparts of the English boosters are normally linked to the adjective (or to another adverb) by means of the preposition "de" (Fr. *de*; En. *of*), in a syntactic structure of the type: "adverb + preposition *de* + adjective/adverb".

From a morphological point of view, most adverbial determiners which appear in the structure "adverb + *de* + adjective" are conversions of adjectives. Actually, as Mihai (1963) notes[9], such words function primarily as adjectives but may occur as adverbs as well: "adânc" (*deep/deeply*), "cumplit/teribil" (*terrible/terribly*), "dureros" (*painful/painfully*), "groaznic" (*horrible/horribly*), "brutal" (*brutal/brutally*), "extraordinar" (*extraordinary/extraordinarily*), "minunat" (*wonderful/wonderfully*), "surprinzător" (*surprising/surprisingly*), etc. Some other adverbial determiners are supine forms containing the negative prefix *ne-*: "neaşteptat" (*unexpectedly*), "neînchipuit" (*unimaginably*), "nesperat" (*unhopefully*), "nesuferit" (*insufferably*).

These adverbs are semantically heterogeneous. According to Pană Dindelegan (1992: 91–111), they can be grouped into four classes: (i) gradual-quantitative/qualitative adverbs, (ii) non-gradual adverbs, (iii) evaluative adverbs derived from subjective verbs, and (iv) adverbs acquiring doxastic epistemic meanings. We would remark that the constructions (ii)-(iv) convey a gradual reading indirectly: semantically, the adverbial determiner becomes a consequence/result of the degree to which an object possesses a certain quality/characteristic (Pană Dindelegan 1992: 94–100)[10]. The intensive sense may, consequently, be decomposed by means of the adverbial correlative "atât de" (*so*):

(1) "ochi *fascinant de* adânci" (*fascinatingly* deep eyes)
"Ochii ei sunt *atât de* adânci, încât ma fascinează".
Her eyes are *so* deep, that they fascinate me.
(example from Pană Dindelegan 1992: 96)

(i) Gradual-quantitative adverbs usually indicate: the maximum degree of a quantity (e.g. *colossally* unwise/ "*colosal de* neînţelept"; *infinitely* irritating/ "*infinit de* iritant"; *immensely* successful/ "*imens de* prosper"), exceeding a certain limit (e.g. *excessively* polite/ "*excesiv de* politicos"; *exaggeratedly* timid/ "*exagerat de* timid") or the maximum distance towards a reference point (e.g. *extremely* powerful/ "*extrem de* puternic").

Some adverbs suggest a gradual-qualitative assessment – either positive: "desăvârşit de" (*utterly*), "extraordinar de" (*extraordinarily*), "reamarcabil de" (*remarkably*), "fantastic de" (*fantastically*), "formidabil de" (*formidably*), "uimitor de" (*astonishingly*), "minunat de" (*wondefully*), "considerabil de" (*considerably*) – or negative: "cumplit de" (*awfully*), "groaznic/grozav de" (*terribly*), "tulburător de"

[9] See, also, Protopopescu 2012: 69–70.

[10] «Un moyen d'exprimer de l'intensité est de la donner à inférer de l'expression de sa conséquence ou de sa cause (réelle ou hypothétique). Il s'agissait de deux cas d'expression de l'intensité dite par inférence; nous verrons maintenant que ce procédé est très productif» (Romero 2001: 151).

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(*disturbingly*), "şocant de" (*shockingly*), "infernal de" (*infernally*), "oribil de" (*horribly*), "brutal de" (*brutally*), "terific de" (*terrifically*), "ciudat de" (*oddly*):

(1) *astonishingly* simple way ("cale *uimitor de* simplă")
(2) *disturbingly* accurate ("*tulburător de* precis")

(examples from CCELD)

Gradual-qualitative determiners introduce the idea of an implicit comparison "anormal de" (*abnormally*), "nefiresc de (*unnaturally*)", "neobişnuit de" (*unusually*), "nemaipomenit de" (*uncommonly*), "deosebit de" (*particularly*):

(3) *unusually* harsh winter ("iarnă *neobişnuit de* grea")

(example from CCELD)

This type of construction is highly productive in both literary and colloquial registers, being more often used in spoken language. However, there is a number of gradual adverbs which cannot enter it "out of reasons that the internal history of language would not reveal" (Pană Dindelegan 1992: 93). For instance, some gradual quantitative determiners indicating the maximum degree of a quantity (e.g. "uriaş"/*hugely*,"titanic"/*titanically*, "masiv"/*massively*, "gigantic"/*gigantically*, "vast"/*vastly*, etc.), do not admit an adjectival or adverbial head:

(4) * "*uriaş de* mare" (*hugely* large)

(example from Pană Dindelegan 1992: 93)

In order to render such English adverbial modifiers into Romanian, any synonymic adverb which is able to appear in the structure "adverb + preposition *de* + adjective/adverb" can be used. The degree word "foarte" (*very*), as well as its expressive synonyms – "tare" and "foarte" – may represent alternative solutions. In the following examples we shall indicate the equivalents proposed in Levițchi (2005):

(5) *hugely* vulnerable
"*enorm de*/*extraordinar de*/*foarte* vulnerabil" (* *uriaş de* vulnerabil)
(6) *vastly* different
"*considerabil de*/*enorm de*/*grozav de*/*foarte* diferit" (* *vast de* diferit)

(examples from CCELD)

We would also remark that most *English-Romanian* dictionaries do not contain entries such as *gigantically* ("gigantic"), *titanically* ("titanic"), or *massively* ("masiv"), which may demonstrate the low incidence of the Romanian corresponding forms:

(7) *gigantically* violent
extrem de violent (* *gigantic de* violent)
(8) *massively* popular
extrem de popular (**masiv de* popular)

(examples from CCELD)

(ii) Non-gradual adverbs are purely qualitative adverbs, such as "bolnăvicios" (*sickly*), "idiot" (*idiotically*), "incomod" (*uncomfortably*), "inuman" (*inhumanely*),

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"morbid" (*morbidly*), "stânjenitor" (*embarrassingly*), "periculos" (*dangerously*), "ridicol" (*ridiculously*), "suspect" (*suspectedly*).

(9) *embarrassingly* easy questions/ "întrebări *stânjenitor de* simple"
(10) *dangerously* low water level/ "nivel al apei *periculos de* scăzut"
(examples from CCELD)

(iii) Evaluative adverbs derived from subjective verbs: semantically, the stem verbs express a subjective evaluation; syntactically, the selectional restriction [+Human] is placed on their objects.Two suffixes are generally used: *-tor* and *-ant*: "dezgustă*tor*" (*disgustingly*), "îngrozi*tor*" (*terrifyingly*), "surprinză*tor*" (*surprisingly*), "uluit*or*" (*amazingly*), "exasper*ant*" (*exasperatingly*), "alarm*ant*" (*alarmingly*), "dezarm*ant*" (*disarmingly*), etc.

(11) "*dezgustător de* abstract"/*disgustingly* abstract
"atât de abstractă, *încât* ma dezgustă"/so abstract, *that* it disgusts me
(12) "*enervant de* delicat"/*annoyingly* delicate
"atât de delicat, *încât* ma enervează"/so delicate, *that* it annoys me
(examples from Pană Dindelegan 1992: 98)

(iv) Adverbs acquiring doxastic epistemic meanings are described by two types of modal operators: (1) epistemic operators ("possibility" and "negated possibility" within a doxastic modal attitude) and (2) evaluative operators (involving the subject's appraisal).This category comprises the situations below, the constructions in (b) and (c) being semantically equivalent (examples 17–22, from CCELD):

a. determiners derived from verbs, with the suffix *-bil*:

(13) an *admirably* clear discourse/ "un discurs *admirabil de* clar"
(14) *regrettably* disgusting symptoms/ "simptome *regretabil de* neplăcute"

b. determiners derived from verbs, with the suffix *-bil* and the negative prefix *in*:

(15) *incalculably* large impact/ "impact *incalculabil de* mare"
(16) *incredibly* hard work/ "muncă *incredibil de* grea"
(17) *unbearably* hot weather/ "vreme *insuportabil* de caldă"

c. supines with the negative prefix *ne-*:

(18) *unimaginably* outrageous behaviour/ "comportament *neînchipuit de* brutal"
(19) *unutterably* beautiful image/ "imagine *nespus de* frumoasă"
(20) *unexpectedly* shrewd look/ "privire neaşteptat *de* pătrunzătoare"
(21) *insufferably* well-pleased person/ "om *insuportabil* de plin de sine"

6. Conclusions

The findings of this paper can be summarized as follows.

The class of maximizers includes a limited number of items, which form a morphologically and syntactically homogenous group: they are obtained from adjectives which denote the idea of 'totality', either by means of derivational suffixes (En. *completely*, *totally*) or through conversion (Ro. "complet", "total" etc). Maximizers have a relatively narrow lexical- semantic scope, modifying only 'limit'

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("either-or") and 'extreme' (implicit superlatives) adjectives: En. *perfectly true*, *absolutely huge*; Ro. "perfect adevărat", "absolute uriaş". Besides the literal rendition of English maximizers, a number of synonymic adverbial phrases can be used in Romanian: "în întregime", "cu totul", "întrutotul", "pe deplin", "cum nu se poate mai". Such transpositions are generally used as alternatives to functional equivalents in order to highlight the expressive function of maximizers.

Boosters belong to a semantically heterogeneous, very productive class. From a morphological point of view, Romanian adverbial boosters are derived directly from adjectives having the same form (masculine singular) as the qualifying adjectives. Since English is an *adverbial* language while Romanian is *a partly adverbial* language[11], only few Romanian adverbs – like "grav" (*severely*), "serios" (*seriously*), "rău/greu" (*badly*), "intens" (*intensely*), "profund" (*profoundly*), "adânc" (*deeply*), "accentuat" (*emphatically*) – can be used as "complete" word-for-word renditions of the English intensifying adverbs in a syntactically identical structure: [intensifying adverb + adjective] (e.g., *seriously* damaged – "*serios* afectat"); such Romanian intensifiers belong, to a large extent, to the class of words which qualify as *both adjectives and adverbs*. Some other Romanian intensifying adverbs in –*mente* like "*realmente*" (*really*), "*literalmente*" (*literally*), "*eminamente*" (*eminently*) can function in a similar syntactic way, too (e.g., En. *literally* crazy – Ro. "*literalmente* nebun").On the other hand, a considerable number of Romanian adjectives *which may also occur as adverbs* are converted in intensifying adverbs in a structure of the type [adverb + linker *de* + adjective/adverb]. This latter structure is very productive and it represents the largest booster-equivalent class in Romanian (e.g., *extremely* happy – "*extrem de* fericit", *unimaginably* beautiful view – "vedere *neînchipuit de* frumoasă").

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[11] See, for instance, Protopopescu's (2012: 77) classification of languages according to their behaviour with respect to adverb formation: on the one hand, Romanian – unlike English – has a quite limited number of evaluative adverbs, which implicitly means a smaller number of intensifying adverbs; on the other hand, Romanian prefers using adverbs derived directly from adjectives having the same form (masculine, singular) as the qualifying adjectives.

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Abstract

This article sets out to provide an analysis of English intensifying adverbs and their Romanian (formal) equivalents. Since gradability is mainly associated with adjectives and with adverbs derived from adjectives, we examine intensifying adverbs as specifiers of gradable adjectives only, in both their attributive and predicative use. In line with Paradis (1997), we classify them into maximizers and boosters according to their lexical-semantic scope: *totality* versus *scalarity* (e.g. "absolutely", "completely", "totally", etc. versus "enormously", "extremely", "highly", "awfully", "amazingly", "terribly", etc.). A special focus is set on the semantic and syntactic shift undergone by certain types of predicational adverbs when developing an intensifying function. At the same time, the process is discussed in terms of expressivity versus delexicalization/grammaticalization. Following Nida (1964) and Newmark (1981) we distinguish between formal equivalents (i.e. one-to-one/word-for-word corresponding forms) and functional equivalents (i.e. other translational procedures, such as transpositions, modulations etc.). Thus, we would conclude that: (i) all English maximizers have one-to-one equivalents in Romanian (adverbs obtained through conversion from adjectives indicating the idea of *completeness*/*totality*: e.g. *absolutely* quiet/ "*absolute* liniștit", *completely* independent/ "*complet* independent", *perfectly* clear/ "*perfect* clar", *wholly* irresponsible/ "*total* iresponsabil"); (ii) normally, the Romanian equivalents of English boosters are linked to the adjective they intensify by means of preposition "de" (En. *of*), in a highly cohesive syntactic structure of the type: "adverb + preposition *de* + adjective/adverb" (e.g. *unimaginably* beautiful view/ "vedere *neînchipuit de* frumoasă").

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