# MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE ADJECTIVE IN ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH

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*Abstract: This paper aims to be a contrastive study which analyses the main morphological features of the adjective, both in Romanian and in English. There are to be discussed the issues regarding the forms and classification of the adjectives and their degrees of comparison in the two languages.*

*It should be noted that, depending on the type of the adjectives, proper adjectives or adjectives that come from another part of speech, they show similarities or differences in terms of the formation of the degrees of comparison.*

*The Romanian grammatical system differs from the English one, but there are also common elements, the differences and the similarities representing the basis of such a study.*

***Keywords**: **adjective, form, classification, comparison, language.***

1. The adjective is that part of speech which qualifies or determines a noun or a noun equivalent, assigning different features to the objects, "transferring them from one sphere to another, from one object to another or from a certain level of generality to another."[1]

From a morphological point of view, the English adjective does not agree in gender, number or case with the noun which it qualifies or determines as it is the case of the Romanian adjective.

For example, the English adjective *intelligent* has the same forms for all the nouns that it determines: *an intelligent boy/ girl- intelligent boys/ girls- the teacher of an intelligent boy/ of two intelligent girls*.

The Romanian adjective has different morphological features because it agrees in gender, number or case with the noun that it qualifies or determines. Thus, it also has different forms: *un băiat inteligent/ o fată inteligentă – băieţi inteligenţi/ fete inteligente- profesoara unui băiat inteligent/ a două fete inteligente.*

It is to be mentioned the fact that also in Romanian language, there are the so-called invariable adjectives which do not have different forms for the oppositions of gender, number or case. The names of colours are usually used as invariable adjectives: *bej, bleu, crem, gri, roz, oranj, turcoaz, vernil, bordo, grena, maro* etc.. But, the names of colours tend to adapt

[1] Găitănaru, 2013: 37



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themselves to the variable adjectives which have four different forms by using such terms as: *rochie mov*ă*, fa*ţă *roz*ă etc..

A series of Romanian invariable adjectives is represented by the words: *asemenea, anume, aşa, atare, cumsecade* etc. which are not usually articulated when determining a noun, no matter if they are placed in front of the noun or after it: *asemenea fete, aşa oameni, îmbrăcăminte aparte.*

The old Romanian invariable adjectives of the type: *coşcogea, ditai, doldora, sadea* etc. are used only in the colloquial Romanian language nowadays. But, there is a series of invariable adjectives which is represented by the borrowed words that has gathered more and more elements lately. This consists of the adjectives which end in *–e*: a*troce, eficace, perspicace, propice, rapace, vivace* etc., words that have recently entered in the Romanian vocabulary.

In English, the adjective usually precedes the noun or noun equivalent that it determines: *a clever boy, the old man, the young woman*, while in Romanian, the place of the adjective is not fixed: *copil deştept, omul bătrân, tânăra femeie, prieten bun*.

However, there are some exceptions in English, too: *knight errant, court martial, attorney general* etc. and especially in poetical style, when the adjective is sometimes placed after the respective noun for stylistic effect: *Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not/ Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither/ Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,/ Looking into the heart of light, the silence.* (T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*)

2. Adjectives can be classified according to their form and content or grammatical regimen.

2.1. According to their form, adjectives fall into: simple adjectives and compound adjectives.

2.1.1. In their turn, both in English and in Romanian, simple adjectives are derived (with prefixes or suffixes) and nonderived.

The most productive suffixes of the simple derived adjectives in English are:

- -able ( also –ible): *capable, flexible, loveable, memorable, readable, unbreakable, washable* etc.;
- -ed: *bearded, experienced, paved, travelled, wanted, windowed* etc.;
- -ful: *beautiful, eventful, meaningful, painful, plentiful, restful* etc.;
- -ish: *British, childish, foolish, reddish, snobbish, tallish, whitish, youngish* etc.;
- -less: *careless, countless, faultless, limitless, merciless, powerless, tasteless, tireless* etc.;
- -ly: *friendly, motherly, orderly, queenly* etc.;
- -ous: *cantankerous, dangerous, disastrous, famous, illustrious, piteous, spacious* etc.;
- -y: *chilly, curly, furry, hairy, messy, sandy, stony* etc..

The most productive suffixes of the simple derived adjectives in Romanian are:

- -an, -ean, -ian: *ardelean, australian, balzacian, consătean, poporan, şoiman* etc.;
- -ar: *aurar, cireşar, fugar, inelar, pădurar, şcolar, umbrar* etc.;
- -aş: *codas, golaş, nevoiaş, poznaş, puşcăriaş, ucigaş* etc.;



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- -al, -ial, -ual: *arhetipal, catastrofal, diminutival, epocal, pietonal, principal, temperamental* etc.;
- -esc, -icesc: *armenesc, bulgăresc, catolicesc, duhovnicesc, dumnezeiesc, haiducesc, nebunesc, omenesc, românesc* etc..

The most productive adjective- forming prefixes in English are:

- im-: *immortal, impossible, impure, impulsive* etc.;
- in-: *inactive, incestuous, informal, insensitive* etc.;
- non-: *non-British, non- cyclic, nonexistent, non*-specific etc.;
- ultra-: *ultraconservative, ultra-light, ultra-modern, ultraviolet* etc..

The most frequently used Romanian adjectival prefixes are:

- ne-: *neajutorat, nebun, necioplit, nefericit, neinstruit, neîndemânatic, nemilos, neruşinat* etc.;
- in-, i-, im-: *ilegal, ilogic, imaterial, inegal, infinit, imoral, imperfect, insolvabil, insuficient, intratabil* etc.;
- de-, des-, dez-: *decolorat, demachiat, demoralizat, deplasat, despletit, despicat, dezagreabil, dezgheţat* etc.;
- răs-, răz: *răscopt, răscumpărat, răsfăţat, răsplătit, răstălmăcit, răzgândit* etc.;
- stră-: *străbun, strălucitor, strămoşesc, străvechi* etc..

The simple nonderived adjectives have special forms that exist as such in the dictionary both in English: *good, bad, long, short, tall, small* etc. and in Romanian: *bun, rău, lung, scurt, mic, mare* etc..

2.1.2. The compound adjectives are made up of two or more words or parts of speech which are written together, joined by a hyphen or separate.

Among the most common possible combinations that are used to form a compound adjective in English, there can be mentioned:

- adjective + noun + -ed: long- legged, blue-eyed, dark- haired, long- sleeved, dark-coloured etc.;
- adverb + past participle: *above- mentioned, so-called, short-lived, well-meant* etc.;
- noun + past participle: *snow- bound, home-made* etc.;
- noun + indefinite participle: *law- abiding, heart- breaking, frost- resisting* etc.;
- noun + adjective: *manlike, snow-white, colour- blind* etc.;
- adjective + adjective: *light blue, dark blue, Anglo- Saxon* etc.;
- adjective + indefinite participle: *slow-moving, good- looking* etc.;
- adverb + adjective: *all-powerful, downright* etc.;
- adjective + the adverb *most*: *innermost, farthermost, uppermost* etc..

There are the following possible combinations in Romanian:

- noun + noun: *binefăcător, binevoitor, nord- american, sud- african* etc.;
- preposition + pronoun + noun: *atotbiruitor, atotprezent, atotputernic, atotştiutor* etc.;
- preposition + noun: *cuminte, fără- de – lege* etc.;



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- adverb + adjective: *aşa-zis, binecrescut, binevenit, drept- credincios, nou- apărut, sus-numit* etc.;
- adjective + adjective: *alb- verde, dulce- amar, galben- auriu, instructiv- educativ, social-economic* etc..

2.1.3. The Romanian adjective has also been classified according to its inflexion into:

- adjectives with four inflected forms: *bun, -ă,-i, -e; clar, direct, frumos, harnic, iubit, înalt, obosit, sălbatic, sărat, simplu, tânăr, trist, veşnic, viteaz* etc.;
- adjectives with three inflected forms: *adânc, larg, mic, englezesc, omenesc, românesc, sufletesc, creator, gânditor, nerăbdător, fumuriu, timpuriu, nou* etc.;
- adjectives with two inflected forms: *cuminte, mare, rece, verde, vechi, precoce, greoi, bălai, stângaci* etc.
- invariable adjectives: *cloş, cumsecade, eficace, kaki, oliv* etc..

2.2. According to their content or grammatical regimen, English adjectives fall into: modifying adjectives and determinative or pronominal adjectives.

In their turn, modifying adjectives are qualifying adjectives: *good, bad, fine, beautiful* etc. and relative adjectives: *a wooden table, a flying object, an iron fist, a singing bird, a walking stick* etc.. It is to be noted that the qualifying adjectives have degrees of comparison, while the relative adjectives have no degrees of comparison.

The determinative adjectives fall into: demonstrative (*this, these*), possessive (*my, your, his, her, ...*), interrogative ( *what…? which…? whose…? how many…?* ) exclamatory ( *what…! such…!* ), adverbial ( *ashore, ajar, abed, alive*,…), numeral ( *a hundred years, the third class*,…) indefinite ( *some , any, every, each, all*) , negative ( *no, neither*). They do not modify the meaning of the nouns they refer to, but only define them more accurately in different senses.

The traditional Romanian grammar divides the adjectives into:

- proper adjectives: *bun, rău, frumos, urât, viteaz, tânăr, simplu, trist* etc.;
- participial adjectives: *citit, scris, desenat, semnat* etc.;
- pronominal adjectives: emphatic (*însumi, însămi, înşine, însene*,…), possessive (*meu, mea, mei, mele*,…), demonstrative ( *acest, această, aceşti, acestea*,…), indefinite (*un, alt, vreun, o, altă, vreo…*), negative (*niciun, nicio*,…) interrogative (*care, ce, cât*,….), relative (*care, ce, cât*,…);
- adjectives which come from a gerund form: *aburind, crescând, murmurând, suferind, trenurând*;
- adjectives which come from an adverb: *asemenea, aşa, gata, repede*.

The new Romanian Grammar (2008) divides the adjectives into qualifying and categorical adjectives. However, it is to be noted that " there are numerous adjectives which have a double behavior, functioning from one context to another (with a change in meaning), either as qualifying or as categorical."[2]

3. The traditional classification of the degrees of comparison divides them into: the positive degree, which represents the dictionary form of the respective adjective that actually

[2] GBLR, 2010: 219



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implies no real comparison; the comparative degree which expresses the idea of superiority, equality and inferiority of a quality in comparison to another quality and the superlative degree that expresses either a quality in its highest degree possible, where the idea of comparison only refers to the extreme quality which is the case of the absolute superlative.

The contemporary English language has two types of regular comparison and an irregular comparison. The regular comparison refers both to the one-syllable adjectives and to the adjectives of three or more syllables, while the irregular comparison restricts itself to only the following adjectives: *bad, ill, far, good, little, many, much, old*.

The positive degree represents the basic forms that the adjectives have in the dictionary. For example: *fast- rapid, happy- fericit, clever- inteligent, gentle- delicat, profound- profund, good- bun, superior- superior, exceptional- exceptional*.

In English, the comparative degree has three types, namely: the comparative of superiority, the comparative of equality, the comparative of inferiority.

One syllable adjectives (except *right, wrong, real, just*) form the comparative degree of superiority by adding the suffix *–er* to their positive degree form, being followed by the conjunction- preposition *than* when the other object of comparison is mentioned: *tall- taller (than*), *fast- faster(than*), *pretty – prettier (than)*.

The disyllabic adjectives ending *in –er, -y, -ly, -ow,* as well as disyllabic adjectives with the stress on the second syllable usually form their comparative degree of superiority with the help of the suffix *–er: bitter- bitterer, happy- happier, humble- humbler, friendly- friendlier, narrow- narrower* etc..

Multisyllable adjectives and compound adjectives form their comparative of superiority by putting *more* in front of their positive form, being followed by the conjunction- preposition *than*: *beautiful –more beautiful (than), difficult- more difficult (than), nerve-racking – more nerve- racking*.

It is to be noted that a number of compound adjectives have only their first part one-syllable adjective or adverb compared, while the second part of the compound stays unchanged: *good- looking – better- looking, long- lasting – longer- lasting, well-known – better- k*nown etc..

The comparative of equality is expressed for all types of adjectives, short adjectives or long adjectives, with the help of the structure *as + short / long adjective + as* and is used in order to show a similar degree of the same quality: *as tall as, as clever as, as interesting as* etc..

The comparative of inferiority is used to say that someone or something has a smaller amount of a quality. In order to form the comparative of inferiority, it is used *less + short/ long adjective* followed by the conjunction *than*: *less tall (than), less fast (than), less beautiful (than), less difficult (than)* etc..

In spoken English, people do not usually use *less* in front of the adjective, but they use a negative form of the comparative degree of equality in connection with the conjunctional phrase *not as/ so… as*.

The superlative degree falls into the relative superlative and the absolute superlative.



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The relative superlative makes an implied comparison between one member of a group and the rest of the members of that group, while the absolute superlative presents a characteristic or quality in its highest degree possible with no idea of comparison implied.

One- syllable adjectives as well as the above mentioned disyllabic ones form their relative superlative of superiority by adding the –est ending to their positive degree form. They are usually preceded by the definite article *the*: *the tallest, the fastest, the prettiest* etc..

Multisyllable adjectives form their relative superlative of superiority with the help of *most* which is preceded by the definite article *the*: *the most beautiful, the most interesting*.

The relative superlative of inferiority is formed with the help of *least* preceded by the definite article *the*, followed by a short or long adjective: *the least tall (of them), the least interesting*.

The absolute superlative is built with the help of the adverb *very* placed in front of the short or long adjectives which are in their positive degree: *very tall, very beautiful*.

Some adjectives that already describe an extreme quality such as: *awful, brilliant, excellent, perfect, splendid, wonderful* etc. are not used in connection with *very*.

Some prefixes such as: *ultra-, super-, over-* as well as a number of intensifying adverbs: *awfully, highly, greatly, deeply, extraordinary, extremely, terribly* are also used to form the absolute superlative: *greatly encouraged, awfully clever, extremely efficient, ultramodern*.

The Romanian Grammar (2008) denominates the comparative of superiority and the comparative of inferiority as the comparative of inequality. The mark of superiority is considered to be the word *mai*, while for inferiority the words used are *mai puţin*. The object of comparison is introduced with the help of the words *decât* or *ca:mai înalt decât/ ca, mai rapid decât/ ca, mai frumos decât/ ca, mai puţin dificil decât/ ca* etc..

The Romanian comparative of equality is formed with the phrases: l*a fel de, tot aşa de, tot atât de, deopotrivă de* followed by the adjective in its positive degree. The other term of the comparison is introduced by: *ca, ca şi, cât, cât şi*. For example: *e la fel de frumoasă ca, e tot aşa de bun ca şi, e tot atât de dificil ca* etc.. The comparative of equality can be expressed by an elliptical comparison such as: *siropul este dulce ca mierea, este uşor ca un fulg*.

The Romanian superlative degree is similar to the English one. It is divided into the relative superlative and the absolute superlative.

The relative superlative of superiority is formed with *cel, cea, cei, cele + mai + adjective + din (sg.)/ dintre (pl.)*: *cel mai bun din grupă, cel mai înalt dintre student*.

The relative superlative, as in the case of the comparative degree, can be used without mentioning the other term of comparison: *este cea mai frumoasă de aici*.

The relative superlative of inferiority is formed with *cel, cea, cei, cele + mai +puţin + adjective + din (sg.)/ dintre (pl.)*: *cel mai puţin bun din grupă, cel mai puţin înalt dintre studenţi*.

The absolute superlative of superiority is formed with *foarte* followed by the adjective, while the absolute superlative of inferiority is formed with *foarte puţin + adjective: foarte bun, foarte puţin politicos*. It is to be noted the fact that the absolute superlative of inferiority is rarely



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used and is usually replaced by the antonym of the respective adjective in its positive degree: *el este foarte puţin politicos- el este nepoliticos*.

In Romanian, the absolute superlative may be expressed also by using different procedures:

- grammatical procedure: *teribil de, excesiv de, extraordinar de, grozav de* etc.;
- derivation with prefixes: *arhiplin, extrafin, preacuvios, răscopt, străvechi, supradotat* etc.;
- derivation with suffixes*: rarisim, simplisim, clarisim* etc.;
- sound extension*: buuuun!, rrrău!, luuuuung!;*
- repetitions: *bătrână- bătână, mică- mică, singurică- singurică*;
- determinations: *frumoasa frumoaselor, voinicul voinicilor*;
- exclamations and interjections: *Vai, ce deşteaptă mai e! Ce frumos e*!
- simple conversions: *sănătos tun, îndrăgostit lulea, adormit buştean, beat criţă;*
- periphrastical conversions: *nervos la culme, prost din cale- afară*.

It is to be mentioned the fact that certain adjectives have no degrees of comparison, "they are incompatible with the degrees of intensity."[3] They "can not receive the category of comparison just because of their notional content."[4]

The following types of adjectives are considered to be incompatible with the degrees of intensity:

- adjectives which denominate an ungradable feature: *absolut, etern, final, mort, unic, veşnic*;
- categorical adjectives: *acetic, endemic, geografic, metalic, pulmonar, vizual, dulce-acrişor, roşu- închis*;
- adjectives which, etymologically, represent the forms of the Latin comparative and superlative: *anterior, posterior, ulterior, superior, inferior, exterior, interior, maxim, minim, proxim, ultim, infim, extrem, supreme*;
- adjectives which already have the meaning of a superlative*: admirabil, eminent, enorm, excellent, extraordinary, irezistibil, perfect, splendid, sublim, superb*;
- adjectives which are derived with some diminutival suffixes: *dulcişor, frumuşel, slăbuţ*;
- invariable adjectives which come from adverbs: *asemenea, aşa, atare, gata*.

In conclusion, the English adjective has common elements with the Romanian one, but there are also some differences.

The common characteristics refer to the form of the adjectives which are obtained either by derivation or by composition both in English and in Romanian. The differences consist of the elements which contribute to their formation.

[3] GALR I, 2008: 165
[4] Constantinescu- Dobridor, 2001: 70



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