# *PECULIARITIES OF ADVERBS OF DEGREE AND ADVERBIAL COMPARISON*[1]

***Abstract:*** *Heterogeneity of the adverb class has generated a number of confusing ideas. This heterogeneity is best reflected in the relation between the adverb and other parts of speech. The present study is a thorough analysis of adverbial class elements falling under the grammatical category of comparison. Although the number of adverbs is small in the old language, contemporary language has a large number of adverbs of manner derived from adjectives, whose compatibility with the degrees of comparison is increasingly high.*

***Key words:*** *heterogeneity, comparison, compatibility*

***Résumé:*** *L'hétérogénéité de la classe de l'adverbe en anglais ne cesse de générer des idées confuses.*

*Cette hétérogénéité se réflète le mieux dans la relation de l'adverbe avec d'autres classes grammaticales. Cette étude tente de faire une analyse des éléments adverbiaux de comparaison. Bien que le nombre d'adverbes soit assez réduit en anglais ancien, la langue contemporaine présente un beaucoup d'adverbes de manière ayant à la base des adjectifs dont la compatibilité avec les degrés de comparaison est elevée.*

***Mots-clés*** *: hétérogénéité, comparaison, compatiblité.*

Adverbs of degree provide a quantitative evaluation in which the subjective element has an important role. The speaker can evaluate differently in relation to the extralinguistic context and a reference point standing for its standard measure. Modifiers expressing exact quantification include a series of constructions such as *destul de (fairly), suficient de (sufficiently)* as well as most intensifiers *enorm (enormously)*, *grozav (greatly), teribil (terribly)* etc. "The term defined does not convey the idea of definiteness, but the quantitative evaluation made by the speaker's subjective point of view" ( Tokasky, 1949: 19).

Modifiers expressing non-exact quantification comprise such forms as *atât de, așa de, cât de, oricât de.* For structures in which modifiers express exact quantification *destul de eficientă, îndeajuns de puternic, suficient de mult* etc., the quality or quantity of the object is sufficient or satisfactory in relation to a certain standard.

*Destul de* synonymous with *suficient de, îndeajuns de* convey a relation of equality with a reference point or "express the idea of lowering the positive or negative quality of the adjective or adverb they associate with" (G. Pană Dindelegan, *Teorie și analiză gramaticală*, 1992, p. 92). Adverbs of degree in this category are incompatible with a centre that integrates semes of degree (**destul de teribil, *destul de major*), whereas at the syntactic level they combine with a

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modifier of manner or approximation (*din păcate nu suficient de pregătit, aproape suficient de pregătit*).

The series of constructions conveying a superlative evaluation is made up of structures such as *enorm de, imens de, fabulos de, extrem de, peste măsură de* etc. These include both semes of degree indicating the maximum degree and semes of quality: *extraordinar de, formidabil de, cumplit de oribil de*, *groaznic de* and their role is "to place determiners in the stylistic register of affection, or sensibility" (Pană Dindelegan, *op.cit.*, 1992, p. 92). Structures expressing non-exact quantification have a semantic feature similar to that of exact quantifiers with the observation that quantitative evaluation is not exact (*oricât de, atât de, cât de, așa de*).

They have either an intrinsic qualitative or degree feature, or can be used in other contexts to indicate various stylistic nuances.

*Oricât de* is used in contexts without a reference point and expresses a non-exact quantification considered by the speaker to exceed a certain limit. At the syntactic level, it is present in concessive (*Oricât de mult ar dormi, tot obosit de simte*) or non-concessive clauses (*A băut vin oricât de mult a vrut*).

Although *atât* originally marks the coincidence of degree limits (Manoliu-Manea, 1968:121) in exclamatory contexts it exceeds the reference point (*Atât de frumos s-a comportat!*). *Cât* requires a separate discussion due to its differences in status and values. *Cât* followed by the preposition *de* acts as a modifier of manner in interrogative and exclamatory main clauses (*Cât de interesant a fost cursul!*); it can be interrogative, relative or indefinite pronoun showing quantity, number, price, things and processes: *Cât ai vândut?* (what quantity), *Cât crezi că poți rezista?*(how long), *Câți ai văzut?* (how many); it is part of prepositional, conjunction or adverbial phrases, in which it does no longer act as a modifier (*Cât despre mine, nu am multe să-ți spun, A învățat cât de cât să înoate, Am auzit câte și mai câte despre el*).

In terms of non-exact quantifiers *mult / puțin*, there was a lot of debate on their classification in one grammatical class or another, due to their interference with several parts of speech. Their role as adverbs of degree was also discussed in the specialized works, due to ambiguity of such constructions as: *Bea mult / puțin, Se cere mult/ puțin*.

Therefore, the utterances whose main clauses are either transitive verbs, accepting both direct object and modifiers of degree or intransitive-passive verbs accepting both subject and modifiers of degree are considered ambiguous. In *Bea mult / puțin vin, Se cere multă muncă*), *mult / puțin* have pronominal value, compared to structures missing the head of the nominal group (*Bea mult / puțin* Ø), where grammar recommends the analysis of *mult / puțin* as adverbs of degree.



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The status of the adverbial forms *mult / puțin* is clarified only in the context of intransitive verbs, with the subject position occupied (*Geanta cântărește mult / puțin*).

Adverbs of degree are compatible with the degrees of comparison and intensity (*mult, mai mult, tot atât de puțin, foarte puțin, din ce în ce mai puțin*). The modifiers *mult / puțin* in the comparative of superiority and in disjunctive relation form the fixed phrase *mai mult sau mai puțin*.

Heterogeneity of the adverb class has brought about a number of confusing ideas, as best stated by Viggo Brondal "since the Greeks, the adverb has represented the most heterogeneous and most confusing of all classes, by far the most difficult to delimit and classify" (Brondal, 1948:52). This is best reflected in the relation between adverb and other parts of speech.

**Adverbial comparison**

Although invariable, the adverb can be attached morphemes of comparison and intensification. "Intensification is the only grammatical category affecting the adverb class. The adverbial particularity related to this grammatical category consists in the heterogeneous behavior of elements towards morphemes of intensification" (GALR, 2008: 602). Not all the class elements accept degree variations; some of them are incompatible with comparison, while others are semantically restricted to comparison values. Semantic peculiarities coordinate adverb analysis in relation to comparison category. Failure of adverbs to combine with morphemes of comparison aims either at larger groups of elements that have a common feature, or individual units of the class.

Lack of semantic and syntactic autonomy, and the abstract meaning of such forms as: *nici, mai, tocmai, prea, cât, măcar* etc., lead to their incompatibility with morphemes of comparison.

On the other hand, pronominal adverbs (negative, relative, interrogative, demonstrative): *unde, când, cum, oricum, oriunde, nicicum, acolo, aici, atunci, cumva* etc., do not fall into the category of comparison either. In the adverbial system, such elements are called "general full words with virtual meaning" (Ciompec, 1985: 147).

- adverbial derivatives in *-is, -este, -mente*: *crucis, morțiș, furiș, bărbătește, nemțește, idealmente, fatalmente* etc., have either a noun or an adjective as derivative basis and, by their intrinsic nature, express or "concentrate" a comparison (*Ibidem*).
- adverbs of time or manner derived from nouns: *miercurea, iarna, ziua…*, whose meanings are incompatible with the category of comparison.
- adverbial phrases: *de aceea, drept aceea, de ajuns, de asemenea, cât de cât, așa și așa, în van, pe apucate, pe rupte* etc.



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The semantic content of these structures imposes restrictions on morphemes' combination with degrees of comparison. The series of individual units comprises adverbs that cannot be used in the comparative: *aievea, anevoie, mereu, diseară* etc.

The inventory of adverbs accepting comparison is rather small compared to the total units. Adverbs of manner (*bine, frumos, greu*), adverbs of degree (*mult, puțin, tare*) and adverbs of time and space (*aproape, departe, sus, jos, devreme, târziu*) accept full comparison, while others achieve only partial comparison; some occur in the comparative of superiority (*mai apoi, mai încolo, mai departe, mai târziu*) or absolute superlative (*foarte aproape, foarte departe*).

As regards adverbial comparison, the old language records the comparative of superiority and relative superlative, derived from Vulgar Latin, leading to the idea that the comparison system still maintains the Latin aspect. Although the number of adverbs in the old language is quite small, contemporary language has a large number of adverbs of manner derived from adjectives, whose compatibility with the degrees of comparison is increasingly high.

This is explained by semantic similarity between comparable adverbs of manner and adjectives expressing quality. Language evolution has led to the enrichment of comparison with a series of values. Adverbs of manner, place and time form degrees of comparison similar to adjectives, except for the morpheme *cel* which remains invariable in the relative superlative.

The comparative of equality is built with: *la fel de, tot așa de, deopotrivă de* etc. These forms "provide the comparative of equality with a clear morphological expression and autonomy at the same time" (Ciompec, *op.cit.,* p. 176).

The comparative of inferiority is formed with *mai puțin* (*Se comportă mai puțin frumos decât colegul lui*). Absolute inferiority is rendered by *cel mai puțin* (*A vorbit cel mai puțin înțelept*). Forms expressing inferiority are considered obsolete and tend to be replaced by opposite variants (*mai puțin bun – mai rău, mai puțin aproape – mai departe*).

**Peculiarities of adverbial comparison**

**Comparative of inferiority**

Formally, there is no difference between an adverb and an adjective. They are both formed analytically with the morpheme *mai*. Differences occur in terms of content. If the adjective modifies a predicator, the adverb deals with the degree of manner, time and space. Depending on the three coordinates, there are several types of degrees: prime actant type which shows the characteristic of an object in comparison with another object *(Ion mănâncă mai repede decât Maria)*, adverbial type shows the characteristic of the same object in different circumstances – time (*El se simte mai bine azi decât ieri),* space *(El se simte mai bine aici decât acolo)*,



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manner *(El vorbește mai bine franțuzește decât englezește)*, and verbal type *(Mai bine să întrebi decât să nu știi)*. The second term of comparison may be missing when action is intensified gradually. Some adverbs are only used in the comparative of superiority. The adverb *well* expresses a range of values which can be enriched contextually:

*mai bine – Abia acum mă simt mai bine.*
*mai uşor – Bea apă ca să se ducă pastila mai bine pe gât.*
*mai scump – A vândut maşina mai bine.*
*mai mult – Au trecut mai bine de doi ani de când nu te-am văzut.*

In such structures, *well* acquires a degree or time value.

**Relative superlative**

At the level of expression, the difference between adjective and adverb comparison consists in invariability of the morpheme *cel* for the adverb and its variability depending on gender, number and case for the adjective (*El se comportă cel mai bine, Ei aleargă cel mai repede*). Sometimes, *cel* varies depending on gender, number and case of the noun (*cărțile cele mai de jos, persoanei celei mai aproape*).

Authors argue that in such cases, the structures *cele mai de jos* and *celei mai aproape,* "no longer act as adverbs but as adjectives." (Lüder, *op. cit.,* p. 98). It must be noted that most speakers tend to extend the agreement to situations where adverbs in the relative superlative modify a verb, although the morpheme *cel* remains invariable. Therefore, such constructions as: *sportiva cea mai bine plătită, tezele cele mai bine scrise, firma cea mai bine cotată* frequently replace the correct variants: *sportiva cel mai bine plătită, tezele cel mai bine scrise, firma cel mai bine cotată*.

This tendency could be explained by the frequent confusion between *cel*, morpheme of the adverbial relative superlative (invariable) and *cel*, demonstrative pronoun (variable).

Constructions with demonstrative pronouns are highly used in the current language. Similar to the adjective, the object of relative superlative is built with such prepositions as: *din, dintre*, *de*. *Din* is usually attached to a noun in the singular (*a cântat cel mai frumos din formație*), *dintre* indicates the inclusion of the compared object into a group of elements and combines with plural nouns (*a citit cel mai fluent dintre participanți*), and *de* is used when the object is expressed by an adverb of time or place (*cel mai bine plătit om de atunci / aici*) . The speakers' general tendency to reverse the roles of prepositions *din* / *dintre* is easily noticeable, especially in oral communication (*S-a comportat cel mai frumos din / dintre studenții prezenți*).



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**Absolute superlative**

One of the peculiarities of absolute superlative consists in enriching lexical means with a large number of adverbs of degree and intensity, linked by the preposition *de* (*uluitor, fenomenal, fascinant, extrem, fantastic, grozav, teribil…de*). These forms "involve semes of degree in their semantics indicating the maximum degree of a quantity" (G. Pană Dindelegan, 1992, p. 105).

The prepositional construction *adverb of intensity+de+ adverb* is frequently used in the contemporary language system and expresses a superlative evaluation, generating the idea of maximum intensity. It is mainly used in literary language.

**Conclusions**

Enriching class with a number of new adverbs of manner has generated various possibilities of combination with various degrees of comparison. Along with grammaticalized forms which provide degree values, there are lexical means mainly used in folklore. One can also notice the enrichment of the adverb class with numerous stylistic means expressing degree. All these features have emerged as a result of language development, and are sometimes facilitated by the contact with other Romance languages (French, Italian).

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