REMARKS ON INTENSIFICATION AND COMPARISON IN ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH

Constantin MANEA*

Abstract: *Even if the relationship between comparison and intensity has generated much debate, concerning both the respective grammatical concepts and the associated systems of comparison, and although the distinction between the two concepts is hardly ever made, we think the safest way of treating grammatical comparison and intensification is to consider them as different linguistic procedures or mechanisms. This paper aims to provide a comparative approach to intensification and comparison in Romanian and English, illustrating it with remarks that the author culled from various didactic materials, and thus trying to emphasize the importance of reflective writing in the field of grammar and TEFL. While the comparison of adjectives (and adverbs) – be it explicit or implicit – is a morphological category expressed by inflection (different forms of the two parts of speech), intensification of adjectives (and adverbs) essentially depends on the presence and the involvement of the speaking subject. Unfortunately, the inventory itself of the values of comparison fails to achieve unanimity of views. The main individual illustrative cases dealt with in this paper were: expressing the superlative degree in English and Romanian, gradable adjectives and gradability, the objective vs. subjective opposition, some specific issues as far as expressing subjectivity in the group of the adjective is concerned, a number of intensification patterns involving combining forms that are frequently used by the lingo of today's Romanian media; thus, increased expressiveness and brevity are secured, with significant consequences at the level of syntax.*

Keywords*: comparative approach, English and Romanian, adjectives, (explicit / implicit) comparison, (means of) intensification, word formation, grammatical and lexical structures, combining forms, divergence and convergence.*

1. Comparison and intensity. In the grammar of the adjective, one of the most interesting issues is that concerning the relationship between *comparison* and *intensity*. In grammar, the possibility for a quality to be intensified is essentially specific to the lexical class of the adjectives (although not all adjectives admit intensification, because it largely depends on the presence and the involvement of the speaking subject, who treats adjectives differently with regard to several criteria).

There has been much debate over the grammatical concepts and the associated systems of comparison, and whether intensity and gradability should be considered and analysed together or in strict separation. Actually, both comparison and intensification essentially refer to the class of the adjective, although most adverbs can be subject to them, as well as some nouns (be it only incidentally, e.g. *He was more of a poet than Joe*, *Dan este cel mai artist dintre toți amicii tăi*).

Comparison, and to a specific extent intensification, mark the (comparative) degrees of intensity that a quality can reach in two or several objects / referents, the degrees of intensity that a quality of the same object can reach in different circumstances, or the degrees of intensity of a two qualities of the same object – or (more rarely) of two objects.

2. Tentative definitions. The distinction between the two concepts is, as a rule, hardly ever made, and therefore they seem to have the same content; however, they are

*University of Pitești, kostea_m@yahoo.com

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

different. The safest way of treating grammatical comparison and intensification should be, in our opinion, to consider them as different linguistic procedures or mechanisms.

The category of *comparison* was defined differently depending on the type of grammar that dealt with it. Thus, in traditional grammars, the comparison of adjectives and adverbs is defined as a morphological category which is expressed by different forms of the two parts of speech, "each form representing a different degree of intensity of the properties expressed by an adjective or adverb" (*Gramatica limbii române* / *Grammar of Romanian*, I, 1966, p. 126). Consequently, "the forms that the adjective assumes to show that a feature / an attribute can exist in two or more objects to different degrees are called degrees of comparison" (*Ibid*).

The opinions of structuralist grammarians hold that comparison is a morphological-syntactic category of a relational nature, both semantically and grammatically. So, to define its various values the morphemes of comparison and the comparative components are considered equally important.

2.1. Another aspect the literature highlights is the fact that there are two kinds of comparison – implicit and explicit. Thus, "implicit comparison requires the very presence of an adjective" (Niculescu, 1999, p. 182). The other type of comparison, the explicit one, involves establishing a relationship between two terms. It should be emphasized, therefore, that "to adequately describe the genesis of the new forms of comparison and intensity it is necessary to set out from the semantic analysis of implicit comparison" (M. Găitănaru, 2002, p. 131).

In terms of traditional grammar, it should be noted that describing the category of comparison "is usually done in keeping with etymological and semantic criteria" (Manoliu-Manea, 2004, p. 34). The author notes that these criteria prove to be ineffective in linguistic analysis, leading to inconsistencies, and failing to reveal the key issues, through which this category can be defined in terms of grammar.

GALR, 2005 substitutes the traditional term (or rather, phrase) *the category of comparison*, for its modern equivalent, i.e. *the category of intensity*, which represents "in the nominal group, the specific feature, versus the adjective and the pronoun, and semantically deals with the adjective, and, within the verbal group, the adverb" (*GALR*, I, p 154).

As far as *comparison* (of both adjectives and adverbs) is concerned, Romanian typically uses inflected forms. In the grammar of most Indo-European languages, *inflection* is defined as the process by which grammatical categories are manifested in morpho-syntactic sequencing; or (*COLL*) "*Grammar*. a change in the form of a word, usually modification or affixation, signalling change in such grammatical functions as tense, voice, mood, person, gender, number, or case".

In Romanian, the adjective as a morphological class has both a synthetic and an analytical inflection (the latter serves to express the degrees of intensity). In contemporary Romanian, the analytic type of inflexion covers two concepts: the concept of intensification and the concept of comparison. Here is the simplest dictionary definition of the term comparison: (COLL) "Also called: *degrees of comparison*. *Grammar*. the listing of the positive, comparative, and superlative forms of an adjective or adverb".

3. Points of debate. It should be emphasized that the issue of comparison of adjectives and adverbs itself has engendered much discussion in the literature. The main differences that have occurred in the theories developed include: ● The status of the category: whether lexical and / or grammatical, or morphological and / or syntactic; ●

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

The inventory of the linguistic facts covered by the grammatical category of comparison; ● The inventory of the values of the category and their classification.

3.1. On the other hand, the theory was also formulated that the definition of the category of comparison should be broadened "to include also the issue of comparing two different features or qualities that are attributes of the same object" (Avram, 2001, p. 92). E.g. 1. *El este tot atât de puternic cât şi de rapid.* 2. *El este pe cât de puternic pe atât de rapid.* (1. *He is strong as well as quick.* 2. *He is as strong as he is quick*), which falls within the scope of the equality comparative.

So, it can be said that this category is manifested in terms of grammar only in adjectives and adverbs, and only in those structures that express certain relationships.

According to *GALR*, I, 2005, "The comparative intensity of a quality / feature can be appreciated as having the same degree or different degrees for two or more objects or the same object in different circumstances. In an explicit comparison of the degree of intensity two terms are always involved: the term (the *nominal*) compared, and the reference point of the comparison" (*GALR*, I., 2005, p. 154). In normative studies, the specific structures of comparison cover: ● Two or more objects of the same class or set (*Tom is the best of the students*) or in different classes / sets (*The soles are farther from the head*); ● An object under different circumstances (*He could send his letter in less danger than ever*); ● Two features or attributes of the same object (*More scared than excited, she was wondering what had happened to her*).

3.2. As for the inventory of values of the category of comparison, it can be said that, in this respect either, there is no identity of views. Traditional grammar identifies eight types of adjective forms, grouping them into three degrees of comparison: the positive, the comparative, and the superlative. According to most grammarians, this classification, made from an etymological and semantic perspective, is not fully satisfactory, as long as it inconsistently uses two criteria: the criterion of comparison, and the criterion of intensity.

Most researches had to conclude that, in Romanian, the category of comparison includes five values: the positive, the comparative of equality, the comparative of superiority, the superlative relative, the absolute superlative. Some books and papers describe comparison as a way of expressing the *intensity* of a property / feature in two forms: "as absolute values (without the complement of comparison) and as relative values (with comparison)" (G. D. Trandafir, 1977, p. 45).

Therefore, the phenomenon (or mechanism) of comparison involves a hierarchy or an equivalence of objects according to the intensity of the property they possess. It should be noted that "very much as synthetic inflexion is entirely determined by the nature of the head / *regent* element, the analytical inflection behaves in the same way" (M. Găitănaru, 2002, p 95).

Therefore, if the feature / property is attributable to an object or group of objects considered as a unitary set, "we are dealing with the so-called degrees of intensity: the intensity of the property is considered normal, usual (the *positive*), increasing (the *progressive*), decreasing (the *regressive*), and at the extreme pole of normality (the *absolute superlative*)" (*Ibid*).

4. Intensification. The category of intensification / intensity is specific to an assorted class of adjectives, and is also found in the class of the adverb. It was argued that the category marks, "through analytical means, the evaluative grading of the quality specified by the adjective" (*GALR*, 2005, p 141).

In this sense, it is correct to say that the positive is the mark of non-comparison, but in terms of intensity one cannot speak of such a thing. In a statement such as: *Maria*

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

şi Ion sunt deopotrivă de harnici (*Mary and John are equally hard-working*) one can speak of an explicit positive, as long as the attribution is directed to a group considered in unitary terms. It is easy to see that what we have here is a case of synonymy with an explicit comparative: *John is as hard-working as Mary*.

4.1. It should be noted that "as the positive and the comparative of equality are at the same level in the structure of analytical inflexion, their interference has led to the emergence of either the analytic positive (*atât de înaltă, destul de înaltă – so tall, quite tall / tall enough*), or the elliptical comparative (*tare ca piatra, albă ca zăpada – (as) hard as a rock, (as) white as snow*) (Ştefan Găitănaru, 1998, p. 94). Such comparative structures are semantically tantamount to the absolute superlative.

Expressing the *superlative* degree in English and Romanian can be done through an amazing variety of grammatical, lexical and stylistic means, including:

(1) Patterns that use **adverbs**: "She is *very beautiful*", "The movie was *very good indeed*", "He said he was *(very) much obliged*", "You look *too lovely*!" – Cf. Romanian *foarte amabil, tare simpatic, prea cumsecade* (vs. *preafrumoasă, preaiubit* see infra), etc. Postposition of the adverb *foarte* is nowadays considered archaic or literary, *El este învăţat foarte*. Adverbs like *mult, grozav, deplin*, and even *prea* (e.g. *prea bogat, mult milostiv, mult bogat* / *sărac*; "Se vede trupul ei cel *alb deplin*" – M. Eminescu) are usually considered old-fashioned (possibly also literary), while adverbs like *tare, rău* are perceived as mainly regional/dialectal: *prost rău, afumat rău*, and also *frumoasă rău*: *sunt obosită grozav* (Caragiale); *O noapte furtunoasă*);

(2) Patterns including **intensifying adverbs** (*i.e.* submodifiers) such as: *admirably, awfully* (informal), *colossally, completely, considerably, dreadfully* (informal), *entirely, exceedingly, extraordinarily, extremely, greatly, highly, hugely, infinitely, perfectly, remarkably, shockingly, singularly, staggeringly* (informal), *strikingly, stupendously, terribly* (informal), *terrifically, thoroughly, uncommonly, unusually, utterly, vastly* (informal), *wonderfully*, etc. Examples: "It was *awfully kind* of him!", "Donald has been *terrifically busy* lately"; "It was *fiercely cold*"; *I'm frightfully glad*. *I'm frightfully sorry about the delay*. (*Longman Dictionary Online* specifies: *British English old-fashioned*); Cf. Romanian *grozav de gustos, teribil de cald* / *ocupat* / *drăguţ, deosebit de talentat, de-a dreptul şocant*. The series *extraordinar (de), extrem (de), excesiv (de)*; *uluitor (de)* is on a par with structures like *nemaiîntâlnit (de), nemaiauzit (de), fenomenal (de), teribil (de), colosal (de)*, etc. More stylistic emphasis is added by structures like *putred (de)*; *îngrijorător (de), nemilos (de), usturător (de), obositor (de)*, etc. Superlative structures like *mortal (de), demenţial (de)* are used in slangy or (sub)colloquial speech. A structure like *inadmisibil* / *nepermis (de)* is used to convey a sense of censorship. Only literary style favours plus-adverb structures like *negrăit de dulce* (Eminescu). Sometimes, intensification by means of an adverb(ial) is applied to a comparative form, e.g. Este *infinit mai preţios* (cf. Eng. *How much more valuable* it was!)

In the literary style, adverbs like *cumplit, groaznic, amarnic, înfricoşător* may variably express negative or positive nuances according as the context requires the use of negatively or positively directed hyperboles, e.g. *cumplit otrăvită băutură* (Cantemir), *amarnic sfâşiată* (Blaga), *cumplit de singur* (M. Dinescu). In slangy and (sub)colloquial speech, there occur intensifying adjectives like *bestial* (cf. also *meseriaş, de bază*, etc.).

(2') Patterns that use **adverbs** like: *just, quite, positively, really, simply*: "It is *just splendid*!" Cf. Romanian E *chiar nesimţit*! E *de-a dreptul insuportabil*! Este *cu totul şi cu totul nelalocul lui*! Similarly, Romanian uses superlative multi-word adverbs

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

/ adverbial phrases like *cu totul şi cu totul, de tot, din cale-afară, la culme, peste măsură, peste orice limită, peste poate, de-a binelea, de pomină, de mama focului, de para focului, de mai mare dragul, cu vârf şi îndesat, cum nu s-a mai văzut / întâlnit / pomenit, cum / cât nu se mai poate*, etc. E.g. *blând din cale-afară* (Eminescu), *frumos de-adevărat* (Coşbuc), *bolnavă ca vai de capul ei* (Creangă), *năcăjit ca vai de el* (Creangă); *îndrăzneţ peste fire / peste măsură, guraliv nevoie mare*.

Not infrequently, the above superlative adverbial structures are used additively, e.g. era *turbat rău de tot* (Caragiale); e *ameţit rău de tot* (Caragiale).

(2'') A variety of the above type of intensification is what can be called the degree of excessive maximum intensity, marked in Romanian by adverbs and adverbials followed by *de*, e.g. *excesiv* / *exagerat de…*, *peste măsură* / *poate de…*.

(3) Lexical constructs using **prefixes** like *hyper-*, *extra-*, *over-*, *super-*, *ultra-*: e.g. *hypersensitive, oversized, superfine, ultra-critical*. Cf. Romanian prefixes and *prefixoide*: *hiperacut, arhiplin, superfin, supraalimentat, ultraconservator, ultraprogresist, ultrasimplu, extrafin*, etc. Older prefixes like *stră-, prea-, răs-* occur mainly in literary texts, e.g. *străvechi, preacinstit, preacucernic, preafericit, preacredincios, preaînalt, preasfânt, preadrept*, etc. Additionally, some neologistic prefixes and combining elements of this type can be used in isolation, as invariable adjectives, e.g. o maşină *super*, un MP3 *extra*, un computer *ultra*, etc. The occasional use of two joined prefixes further emphasises intensity, e.g. *extraextrafin, supersuperinteligent, ultraultrasensibil*, etc.

Romanian also uses (be it rarelly) the Latinate / Romance suffix *-isim(ă)*, e.g. *rarisim(ă), clarisim(ă), simplis(s)im(ă)*; "…dacă am fi siguri, *sigurisimi* că-i aici!" (Caragiale). Forms like *verissim* and *(ocazie de gol) urieşisimă* are very infrequent, indeed.

Likewise, some augmentative and even diminutive suffixes can be used to the same effect, *mâncău, tinerel*, etc.

(4) **Composition** is rarely used for intensification in contemporary Romanian, e.g. *atotputernic*, cf. Eng. *almighty* and *all-powerful*.

(5) **Conversion** occurs only as a rhetorical device (even in common speech): intensifying adverbs result from nouns whose underlying force is based, more often than not, on elliptical similes, e.g. *adormit buştean, îngheţat tun* / *bocnă, sănătos tun, gol puşcă, îndrăgostit lulea, singur cuc, beat turtă / criţă / Krupp / cui / cleşte / cuc / muci, răcit cobză, bătut măr, sărat ocnă, curat lună, prost tufă / grămadă, slab scândură, priceput foc*, etc. Also, with the reverse syntactic order: *turtă de beat, foc de priceput*.

(6) Using **the relative superlative without mentioning the second term** (or mentioning it rather generally), e.g. "Lucy has *the worst of tempers*", "Joe was *the funniest child*", "She wasn't *the tiniest bit moved*", "She is *the noisiest creature*", "He is *most annoying*!" Cf. Romanian: (Victor) este *cel mai tare*!

(7) Syntactically: by **exclamatory patterns** like "*What a fine* lady!", "You were *so nice* to her!", "*How green* was my valley!", "Isn't she *the most exquisite* girl!" Cf. Romanian *Ce* (*mai*) dimineaţă *strălucitoare*! *Ce* / *Cât de albastră* e apa mării! Era *aşa / atât de amabil*!

(8) A **noun or a superlative in a genitival phrase** such as: *a / the knave of knaves, the lowest of the low, the virtue of all virtues, in her heart of hearts* ("the depths of one's conscience or emotions" – COLL). Cf. Romanian structures (which are sometimes also called the ***Hebrew*** or ***Oriental superlative***) like: *voinicul voinicilor, frumoasa frumoaselor, hoţii hoţilor, isteţ între isteţi, cel mai netrebnic dintre netrebnici*,

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

sfânta sfintelor, *ultimul* dintre (cei) *umili*, etc. In fact, the Romanian structure involves repeating the substantivized form of the adjective in the Genitive or in the Accusative.

The recent tendency featuring such repetitive structures as *băiat de băiat*, *gagică de gagică*, *vodcă de vodcă* clearly belongs to slangy and (sub)colloquial speech. The underlying semantic-syntactical analysis could be supported by comparison with such superlative structures involving nouns depleted of their initial signification as: (Computerul lui este) *marfă* / *beton* / *meserie*.

(8') A similar mechanism involves **reduplication of the noun** in Romanian: *bătaie-bătaie*, nu aşa… (cf. *băiat de băiat*), *stoluri, stoluri*, etc.

(8'') Substitution of the adjective by a **noun derived** from the same lexical **root**, e.g. *o minunăţie de iapă*, *o bunătate de copil*, etc.

(9) **Repeating an adjective** or **adverb**: "She's *goody-goody*", "He's *clever-clever*", "The *never-never* system", "*Naughty-naughty*!" Cf. Romanian "O bătrână mică, urâtă (…) şi *gătită-gătită*" (I. L. Caragiale, *Five o'clock*), Era *roşie-roşie* la faţă; *bătrân, bătrân* în imperiul meu / bradul bărbos… (Blaga); sunt *sigură… sigură…* (Caragiale). Romanian also uses variations of the above pattern: (a) by repeating the adjective with the diminutival form, e.g. *singur-singurel*; (b) by reduplication of the diminutival form of the adjective, e.g. o să rămână *singurel-singurel* (Z. Stancu), *tinerel-tinerel*.

(10) In Romanian, no less than English, **two adjectives** (or adverbs) in the positive degree of comparison can render the idea of a superlative, e.g. *E mare şi tare!* – cf. Engl. *hard and fast*, *far and wide*.

(11) Phonetically, the superlative is rendered by **prolonging** and **emphasizing vowels**: "I haven't got the *least* idea" [li:i:st]; "He's *the rudest* ['ru:u:dist] fellow here". Cf. Romanian *maare*, *muult*, *enorrm*, etc.; *Bu…nă* treabă!" (I. Creangă). Also, suprasegmentals, such as intonation and emphatic stress, can be used in exclamations, e.g. *Frumoasă* treabă, (n-am ce zice)!; *Bu^{u}nă* rezolvare!; "*Mare* nătărău mai eşti, Dănilă Prepeleac!" (I. Creangă).

(12) Last but not least, there are **comparative patterns conveying the idea of a superlative** (especially as idioms, and frequently having a colloquial, or jocular tone), *e.g. as blind as a bat, as bold as brass, as close as an oyster, as cool as a cucumber, as dead as mutton, as dumb as a fish, as good as gold, as hard as nails, as keen as mustard, as mad as a March hare / as a hatter, as poor as a church mouse, as sharp as a needle, as tall as a maypole*, etc. Cf. Romanian *tare ca piatra*, *alb ca zăpada*, *iute ca săgeata* (– *(as) hard as a rock, (as) white as snow, as swift as an arrow*); *bun ca pâinea caldă*, *negru ca pana corbului* / *smoala* / *catranul*, *verde ca iarba* / *smaraldul* / (rarely) *ca frunza codrului*, etc.

Guţu-Romalo believes that the structures of the elliptical comparative belong to the positive degree of comparison, because "the positive involves in no manner an indication of the intensity, and yet it admits comparison" (Guţu Romalo, 1985, p. 148).

Similarly, Romanian uses comparative set phrases which, although sounding like interjections or exclamatory phrases ("o păreche de boi *de-a mai mare dragul* să te uiţi la ei" – I. Creangă), intensify the (positive or negative) quality in question. *GALR* calls them "false superiority comparatives (…), equivalents of absolute superlatives", thus recognising their belonging to the category of intensification.

5. Comparison. Some grammarians chose to draw a distinction between the absolute and the relative degrees, in accordance with the presence or absence of the operator *comparison*.

The two types of adjectival inflection are "apparently different, but there is a common point relating them, i.e. being both determined by the nature of the head

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

element: the synthetic inflection has such fundamental grammatical marks as gender, number and case, essentially involved in the phenomenon of concord or agreement, while the analytical inflection, which expresses the quantitative stances and relations of the respective features, critically emphasizes the quantitative aspect of objects" (Mihaela Găitănaru, 2002, p. 87).

The absolute degrees (of comparison) are not actually… comparable, they lack a term of comparison, and therefore they are far from qualifying for real degrees of comparison, "Therefore, the defining values are, for the absolute degrees, intensification, and for the relative degrees – ranking in a hierarchical system (…) For the absolute degrees, the medium term, or the progressive, expresses *intensification* of the feature, so its suitable name should be *degrees of intensity*" (Șt. Găitănaru, 1998, p.94).

5.1. A prime condition for distinguishing gradable adjectives, in Romanian very much as in English, is the capacity of the forms in question to accept the gradation of the semantic values conveyed by those adjectives. Of course, only some of the adjectives in both languages satisfy this condition, which, as a matter of principle, depends on the speaker's own subjectivity.

Since it was largely found that the criteria used to distinguish adjective subsets in point of gradability are rather vague, some grammarians (e.g. Buffard-Moret) thought it more appropriate to refer to several uses of the adjective, i.e. the objective, subjective, axiological use, etc.

Subjectivity (which incorporates the products of the mind of the thinking subject, rather than proceeding from the very nature of the object being considered, and so emanates from a speaker's emotions, prejudices, etc.) has its own definite role in marking the values transmitted by adjectives in a natural language. Moreover, the correlation that forms between the subjective values of the adjectives' semantic content and the reality described can be conceived like a scale, the two extremities of which are, respectively, the pole of (pure, descriptive) objectivity, and the pole of (evaluating) subjectivity. Intensification can be treated in much the same terms.

In linguistics, *gradable* means "denoting or relating to a word in whose meaning there is some implicit relationship to a standard: "big" and "small" are gradable adjectives" (*COLL*). By way of tradition, non-gradables are adjectives like *atomic*, *metallic*, *the first*, *utter*, *mere*, etc. One has to distinguish between those adjectives that are non-gradable on account of semantics proper (or of grammar AND semantics, e.g. *own*, *atomic*, etc.), and those which cannot admit of intensification simply because they already possess emphasis, e.g. *superior*, *convinced*, *freezing*, etc.

5.1.1. In English, those adjectives which do not usually have comparative forms – *viz.* in keeping with the patterns valid for most adjectives – are commonly called **non-gradable adjectives**; they fall into the following subclasses:

a) those which are already **explicit superlatives** (*the last*, *the latest*, etc, or derived from Latin adjectives in the superlative – *cf.* corresponding Romanian forms: *e.g. optimum, maximum, minimum, supreme*), or **implicit superlatives** – in which case the adjectives can be compared with themselves, so they can possibly evince the form of an absolute superlative (*most excellent*, *most exquisite*, etc.), but not the comparative degree;

b) those adjectives that are already **comparatives** (either Latinate forms, most of them also to be found in Romanian, or made up of native elements), *e.g. major, minor, superior, lesser, the latter*;

c) **determinative** adjectives, *e.g. both, own, very*;

d) '**relative**' adjectives (referring to the substance, stuff / material an 'object'

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

is composed of)**,** many of which have the *–en* suffix, *e.g. wooden, silken, earthen*, etc;

e) similarly, those adjectives referring to **chemical** substances, *e.g. chlorinated, hydric, sulphurous* (AmE *sulfurous*), etc;

f) adjectives similar to **articles**, *e.g. any, either, some, neither*;

g) adjectives referring to **nationality** or **geographical** units, *e.g. English, German, Russian, British, South-American, North-Korean, Peruvian, European*;

h) adjectives referring to **languages**, **dialects**, etc., *e.g. Romance, Germanic, Hindi, Welsh, Singhalese, Australian*;

i) '**adverbial**' **adjectives** (having the initial particle **a-**), also called 'statives', 'categories of state', or 'adjectival adverbs', *e.g. ablaze, agape, aslant, afire, akimbo, awry*;

j) various adjectives **in postposition** (predicative, determinative, etc.) *e.g. below, alone, abroad, above, errant* (in *knight errant* "(especially in medieval romance) a knight wandering in search of deeds of courage and chivalry / chivalrous adventures"), *marshal* (in *knight marshal* "(formerly in England) an officer of the royal family / household or court, esp. one in charge of protocol, or having judicial functions"), *elect* (in the phrase *the president elect* / *the President Elect* "elected to, or chosen for a position / voted into office, but not yet in it / not yet installed"), etc.;

k) '**technical'** adjectives – such as 'comparative' in *comparative grammar / method*, 'binocular' in *binocular vision*, or atomic in *atomic bomb*;

l) numerous adjectives derived **from past participles** (which, however, agree with a number of pre-modifiers), *e.g. departed, escaped, bereaved, wounded, written*; to these are added a great deal of negative forms such as *unwritten, unbroken, unrelieved, unscathed*; *misunderstood, misspelt*, etc. (although adjectives like: *blessed, crooked, dogged, learned*, or: *uneducated, unembarrassed*, etc. can take comparative and superlative forms).

6. Objective vs subjective. Considering the above-mentioned *objective* vs. *subjective* opposition, one can analyze adjectives placed nearer the [objective] and the [–objective] extremities, respectively.

Since various linguistic communities express subjectivity differently, in keeping with what can be called *verbal mentality* (cf. also the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, which emphasises the direct relationship existing between a natural language and the surrounding world, suggesting that "human languages determine the structure of the real world as perceived by human beings, rather than vice versa, and that this structure is different and incommensurable from one language to another" – *COLL*), the selection of the type of features that a speaking community conveys tends to be highly specific.

In Romanian (very much as in French, Spanish, Italian), lots of adjectives derived from Latin are (etymologically and semantically) considered incompatible with intensification, and hence non-gradables: e.g. terms like Rom. *colosal* "colossal", *cumplit* "excruciating; horrendous", *monstruos* "monstrous", *extraordinar* "extraordinary; astounding", *desăvârşit* "perfect", etc., or French *colossal*, *absolu*, *supérieur*, *immense*, *extraordinaire*, *sublime*, etc. The reason is they contain the semantic element that establishes their belonging to the class of the superlatives (or the comparative degree, e.g. *superior*, whose etymon is Latin *superus* "placed above", from *super* "above").

Sometimes however, even adjectives like *superior*, *suprem* and *optim*, whose comparative or superlative value is part of their very semantics, are used in comparative or gradation structures, e.g. **mai superior*, **mai suprem*, **cel mai optim*. Such instances are usually considered utter solecisms in Romanian, and censured accordingly, though

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

French grammarians and language standard-setters, for example, would treat them more tolerantly or indulgently. In a very similar way, English accepts structures such as *a most superior being* – although it would be rather difficult to say that instances like **the most ultimate solution* are really acceptable.

The paradox is that, apart from the quite numerous problems concerning the use of adjectives like the above ones (where the various departures from the linguistic standard are no longer perceived as such), many Romanian linguists – and indeed quite a lot of common speakers of the language – have become aware that such adjectives as *celebru*, *clasic*, *extraordinar*, *magnific*, *proeminent* should be added to the list of the "irregularities" of comparison and intensification. As a matter of fact, the press is as active as the common speakers in propagating such models, which are hardly perceivable as 'foreign bodies'. It is another illustration of the truth that, if deviations from the norm are bound to occur, they will do so first in speech; collaterally, there are a number of external influences resulting in the emergence of new structures of a natural language, which oppose the (long-)established norms and standards.

If the (primary) etymological and semantic value of such adjectives as *superior*, *minim*, *absolut*, *enorm*, *esenţial*, *extrem*, *unic*, *excelent*, *perfect* / *desăvârşit*, *mediocru*, and even *etern* is worn out by the effect of time, their superlative or comparative value can be perceived as a mere positive; therefore, their being employed with adverbs of intensification would no longer seem out of place – mainly when used in specific or expressive (possibly literary) contexts, e.g. *cea mai completă dare de seamă*, *un incident mai mult decât minim*, *o fiinţă atât de infimă*, *o fiinţă absolut superioară / cu totul superioară*, *temperaturile cele mai extreme*, *cea mai totală / completă înfrângere* , etc.

The *progressive* pattern has been investigated rather little in grammar studies, being placed under the heading of different terminologies. Like the progressive, the structures of the regressive are poorly represented in Romanian, e.g. *tot mai puţin interesant* (*ever less interesting*), *din ce în ce mai puţin interesant* (*increasingly less interesting*).

7. Intensification and style. The intensification patterns and structures in various languages, based mainly on intensifying adverbs, widely differ, not least because of the various *styles* and *registers* such structures belong to.

The lingo of *today's press* (in both Romania, and English-speaking countries) is an excellent case in point; it is strongly marked by expressive nuances, some of which belong to the scope of intensification. Diversification of linguistic expression and innovation go hand in hand. As we can notice, grammatical structure and expressiveness are, functionally, on a par, not only within the scope of artistic literature.

In Romania, there are a multitude of directions, trends and intentions that are capitalizing on this post-1990 need for nuance and novelty. The perceptive linguist cannot fail to capture and record both the dynamics of the system, at various linguistic levels, clear tendencies, and the ephemerality of some of the recently emerged internal patterns, typically using combining forms such as *super-*, (rarely) *supra-*, *mega-*, *ultra-*, (rarely) *macro-*, and even *micro-* and *mini-*.

The Romanian language associates such patterns (*superpotent*, *megainginerie*, etc.) with derivation, although these so-called *prefixoide* and *sufixoide* (i.e. combining forms placed initially or finally) rightfully and naturally belong to the WF mechanism of composition (these forms have a semantics and an etymology of their own – they *mean* something: *super-* and *supra-* derive from Latin *supra* "above", *mega-* comes from Greek *megas* "huge, powerful"); actually, the situation is rather similar in English.

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

These combining forms possess concrete semantic-lexical values, containing the semantic mark of the superlative.

The pattern is extremely productive nowadays. It mostly concerns the class of the adjective, e.g. *elev superdotat* (which can be easily equated to *elev foarte dotat*).

The phenomenon has recently extended to the lexical category of the noun, which only accidentally admits of comparison and intensification, e.g. *supermaşină*, *superocazie*, *superofertă*, etc. This rather unusual tendency (transferring the superlative meaning to noun bases), seems to be presumably in keeping with foreign – especially English – models, e.g. *megashow*, *megaofertă*. Thus, both colloquial speech and mass media usage are favourable to coinages like *superfemeie*, *superbăiat*, *superîntuneric*, *superfoame*, *superlene*.

Another very interesting development, noticeable mainly in the lingo of the press, is the use of structures based on de-semanticisized nouns (*cheie*, *fulger*, *record*, *model*, *etalon*, *limită*, etc.), which have acquired the status of superlative marks, as in: *martor-cheie*, *raid-fulger*, *caz-limită*, etc.

Another group of Romanian *prefixoide*, placed nearer the class of the usual prefixes (i.e. *extra-*, *hiper-*, *ultra-*), mark the intensity of the (adjective) quality, very much like the older prefix-like superlative formants *prea-* (*prefericit*), *răs-* (*răsinformat*), *arhi-* (*arhiplin*).

The coinages employing the prefix-like formant *super-* are by far the most numerous in contemporary Romanian, e.g. *superdeştept*, *superelegant*; or, in the class of the noun: *superproducţie*, *supersonic*, *superputere*, *superspectacol*, *supercupă*, *superofertă*, *superfemeie*, *supercompilaţie*, and even *superchefuri*, *supermanele*. In an earlier period, variants using *supra-* instead of *super-* could be found (even in some dictionaries such as *MDN* (*Marele dicţionar de neologisme*), e.g. *supraputere* / *superputere*). Likewise, let us also compare *superpreţ*(*uri*) and *suprapreţ* in point of semantics. It will be fair to add that, at times, the still unclear status of this prefix-like formant transpires through its hyphenated form, e.g. *super-dictator*.

Many such coinages are based on English terms or roots, or are borrowed from English, e.g. *supershow*, *superweekend*, *Superman*, *Superwoman*; or else, they may be cases of loan translation: compare *supermarket* and *supermagazin*.

Another very frequent superlative *prefixoid* is *mega-*, which ahs been borrowed anew from foreign sources (especially from English and French), a lexical element that strongly contributes to the process of neologistic internationalization and "intellectualization" of the Romanian vocabulary, e.g. *megastar*, *megaconcert*, *megainflaţie*, *megaafacere*, *megaafacerist*, and even *megaescroc*, *megagăinar*, *megafiţe*, *megaşuşă*. Similarly, but enjoying far less frequency, the prefixoid *macro-* is used to a similar (stylistic) effect, e.g. *macroeconomic*, *macrogaşcă*, *macroşpagă*.

It is to be noted that both *mega-*, *macro-* and *supra-* have been used for quite a long time in technical contexts, e.g. *megawatt* ("one million watts"), *macrocosmic*, *supraelastic*, *supraîncălzire*. Their "new life" is, consequently, wholly dedicated to the stylistic effect they can produce, so to their connotative force, mainly in mass-media or advertisement contexts.

8. Conclusions. We have to **conclude** that, in such cases as the above, subjectivity interferes with the semantics of the adjective, forming a highly unpredictable interplay of elements – which are semantic, syntactic as well as stylistic in nature. Likewise, it is quite obvious that the forms of manifestation of intensification / intensity in the lexical class of the adjective (and of the adverb) imply a complex system of relationships, manifested by both the degrees of intensity, and the degrees of

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)

comparison of the intensity. In the context, the combining forms in front position, or prefix-like forms (Rom. *prefixoide*), whose role is to render and intensify human emotions produced by specific elements of reality, function to the effect that expressiveness is increased, while achieving brevity and avoiding periphrases. They can thus replace the older lexical means of gradation and intensity, with significant consequences at the level of syntax (or rather, syntagmatics).

References

Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică "Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti"), *Gramatica limbii române – I – Cuvântul*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 2005
Avram, Mioara, *Gramatica pentru toţi*, Bucureşti, Humanitas, 1997
Bantaş, Andrei, *Descriptive English Syntax*, Editura Institutul European, Iaşi, 1996
Bantaş, Andrei, *Limba engleză în liste şi tabele*, Teora, Bucureşti, 1991
Buffard-Moret, B., *Introduction à la stylistique*, Paris, DUNOD, 1998
Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus (electronic version), HarperCollins, 1993 (*COLL*)
Crystal, David, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, Blackwell, 1991
Eastwood, John, *Oxford Guide to English Grammar*, Oxford University Press, 1996
Găităanaru, Mihaela, *Adjectivul în limba română. Structură şi evoluţie*, Editura Universităţii din Piteşti, Piteşti, 2002
Găităanaru, Ştefan, *Gramatica actuală a limbii române*, Editura *Tempora*, Piteşti, 1998
Grevisse, M., *Le français correct. Guide pratique*, Paris, Louvain-la-Neuve, Duculot, 1989
Guţu Romalo, Valeria, *Limba română contemporană*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1985
Harrap's English Grammar, London, 1990
Longman Dictionary Online www.doceonline.com
Manea, Constantin, *English Morphology. Nomina*, Editura Universităţii din Piteşti, 2004
Mihăescu, Nicolae, *Abateri de la exprimarea corectă*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1963
Niculescu, Alexandru, *Individualitatea limbii române între limbile romanice. 3. Noi contribuţii*, Editura Clusium, Cluj-Napoca, 1999
Sporiş, Valerica, *Gradele de intensitate ale adjectivului în limba română. Consideraţii stilistice*, in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Philologica*, 2006, tom I, p. 281-290
Ştefănescu, Ioana, *Morphology (2)*, T.U.B., 1988
Swan, Michael, *Practical English Usage*, Oxford University Press, 1994
The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar, OUP, 1994
Thomson A.J., Martinet A.V., *A Practical Grammar*, Oxford University Press, 1996
Trandafir, Gh. D., *Probleme controversate de gramatică a limbii române*, Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1977
Weiner, E.S.C., Delahunty, Andrew, *The Oxford Guide to Correct English*, Editura *Teora*, 1993
Zbanţ, Ludmila, *Câteva reflecţii privind intensificarea calităţii în limbile română şi franceză*, in *Limba română*, no. 7-8, anul XIV, Chişinău, 2004

Internet Sources

http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/adjectives/intensifiers
http://www.annies-annex.com/intensifiers.htm

BDD-A6033 © 2013 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:54:08 UTC)