DEGREE MODIFIERS AND INTENSIFIERS OF ADJECTIVES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A LEXICAL-SEMANTIC AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The expression of intensity is an important semantic and grammatical phenomenon in English and Uzbek. Besides the comparative and superlative degrees, both languages allow speakers to strengthen or weaken the quality expressed by an adjective by means of degree modifiers. Although the communicative function is shared, the two languages rely on different lexical and morphological resources. This study aims to examine the lexical-semantic characteristics of adjective intensification in English and Uzbek, focusing on the classification of degree modifiers, their semantic restrictions, and their functional equivalence. The research employs descriptive, contrastive, and lexical-semantic analysis, drawing on established grammatical descriptions and illustrative examples from both languages. The analysis considers the English modifiers very, extremely, quite, rather, slightly, and absolutely, and the Uzbek modifiers juda, nihoyatda, ancha, biroz, and mutlaqo, as well as the Uzbek reduplicative intensive forms such as qop-qora and oppoq. Particular attention is paid to gradable and non-gradable adjectives, to the interaction between degree modifiers and comparative forms, and to cases of non-equivalence. The discussion demonstrates that, despite functional similarities, the two languages differ in the mechanisms used to encode intensity, and that Uzbek possesses a productive morphological strategy for colour adjectives that has no direct counterpart in English. The study provides a theoretical framework for further empirical research in comparative linguistics and may contribute to translation studies, bilingual lexicography, and foreign-language teaching.

Keywords: degree modifiers, intensifiers, downtoners, gradability, reduplication, adjectives, lexical semantics, contrastive linguistics, English, Uzbek.

1. Introduction

Adjectives express properties of people, objects, and situations, and many of these properties can be present to a greater or lesser extent. Speakers therefore need resources for indicating how strongly a quality holds. The comparative and superlative degrees are one such resource; degree modifiers, often called intensifiers when they strengthen a quality and downtoners when they weaken it, are another.

In English, degree modification is typically realized by adverbs placed before the adjective, as in very interesting, extremely difficult, rather expensive, and slightly cold. Uzbek also employs pre-adjectival modifiers, including juda in juda qiziqarli, nihoyatda in nihoyatda qiyin, and biroz in biroz sovuq. In addition, Uzbek forms intensive variants of many colour adjectives by reduplication, for example oq–oppoq and qora–qop-qora. These examples illustrate a shared communicative function accompanied by differences in lexical and morphological realization.

The classification of English degree modifiers is addressed in A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985), and in The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language by Huddleston and Pullum (2002). Bolinger (1972) offers a classic study of degree words, and Paradis (1997) analyses the semantics of degree modifiers of adjectives in spoken

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British English. Parrott (2010) discusses degree adverbs from the perspective of language teaching. For Uzbek, Sjoberg's Uzbek Structural Grammar (1963) provides a documented grammatical description of the language.

Despite the availability of grammatical descriptions, a contrastive investigation must distinguish between formal correspondence and semantic equivalence. For example, the English very and the Uzbek juda can express comparable meanings, but their ranges of use are not identical: Uzbek juda may correspond to either very or too in English, depending on context. Likewise, English adjectives such as perfect resist modification by very, whereas the Uzbek expression juda mukammal is generally acceptable in everyday usage.

The research problem addressed in this paper concerns the relationship between lexical meaning, gradability, and the expression of intensity in English and Uzbek.

The aim of the study is to identify the principal lexical-semantic characteristics of degree modifiers of adjectives in the two languages.

The objectives are to:

1. Describe the principal lexical and morphological means used to strengthen and weaken adjectival meaning in English and Uzbek.
2. Examine the relationship between adjective meaning, gradability, and the choice of degree modifier.
3. Identify major structural similarities and differences between the two languages.
4. Consider the implications of these differences for translation and English language teaching.

2. Methodology

The study employs descriptive, contrastive, and lexical-semantic methods. The descriptive method is used to characterize the forms of degree modification in each language. Contrastive analysis identifies correspondences and differences between English and Uzbek constructions, while lexical-semantic analysis examines how the meaning of an adjective constrains the modifiers with which it can combine.

The examples are selected to illustrate established grammatical patterns rather than to represent the results of a corpus-based investigation. The analysis is organized around three dimensions: lexical and morphological formation, semantic restrictions, and cross-linguistic correspondence.

The English examples are consistent with the grammatical descriptions presented by Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). The Uzbek examples illustrate commonly used forms and require further examination against a broader Uzbek-language dataset, including native-speaker judgments, for an empirical study.

No quantitative corpus analysis or experimental investigation is claimed in this paper. Consequently, the discussion identifies qualitative patterns rather than statistical differences in frequency or productivity.

3. Degree Modification in English

3.1. Classification of degree modifiers

English degree modifiers are usually divided into two broad groups according to the direction of their effect. Amplifiers raise the degree of the quality, while downtoners lower it (Quirk et al., 1985).

Amplifiers include boosters, which express a high degree without implying an absolute limit: very, extremely, highly, really. They also include maximizers, which express the highest point on the scale: absolutely, completely, utterly, totally.

Downtoners include compromisers, which express a moderate or partial degree: fairly, rather, quite, pretty. They also include diminishers, which express a low degree: slightly, somewhat, a bit, a little.

1. The film was very interesting.

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2. The exam was extremely difficult.
3. The room is rather small.
4. The soup is slightly cold.
5. The answer is absolutely essential.

In each example the modifier precedes the adjective and specifies the position of the quality on a scale. The only common exception is enough, which follows the adjective, as in big enough.

3.2. Gradability and semantic restrictions

The choice of modifier depends strongly on the semantic type of the adjective. Gradable adjectives, such as tall, cold, and interesting, denote properties that vary in degree and combine readily with boosters and diminishers: very tall, slightly cold. Non-gradable or limit adjectives, such as unique, perfect, essential, and dead, denote properties that are conceived as either present or absent, and they tend to combine with maximizers: absolutely essential, completely dead, but not usually very unique (Paradis, 1997).

The distinction is not absolute. The modifier quite shows how context can change interpretation: in quite good it often signals a moderate degree, whereas in quite perfect it signals a maximal one. Such variation demonstrates that the meaning of a degree modifier cannot be described independently of the adjective with which it combines (Bolinger, 1972).

English also restricts the combination of degree modifiers with comparative and superlative forms. The booster very does not normally modify a comparative: speakers say much taller or far better rather than very taller. The modifiers much, far, and a lot are therefore used with comparatives, while the superlative may be strengthened by the very, as in the very best.

Therefore, degree modification is not merely an optional addition to an adjective. It participates in the organization of scalar meaning together with the comparative and superlative degrees.

4. Degree Modification in Uzbek

4.1. Lexical degree modifiers

Uzbek expresses adjectival intensity through lexical modifiers placed before the adjective and through morphological processes. Three groups of lexical modifiers are particularly relevant.

The first group expresses a high degree: juda (very), nihoyatda (extremely), g'oyat (exceedingly), behad (immensely). The second group expresses a considerable or moderate degree: ancha (fairly, considerably). The third group expresses a low degree: biroz and sal (somewhat, slightly).

1. Bu kitob juda qiziqarli. (“This book is very interesting.”)
2. Imtihon nihoyatda qiyin edi. (“The exam was extremely difficult.”)
3. Bugun havo ancha sovuq. (“The weather is quite cold today.”)
4. Bu xona biroz kichik. (“This room is a bit small.”)

Similarly to English, these modifiers precede the adjective. However, Uzbek uses the same position for the equivalent of enough: yetarlicha katta (“big enough”) places the modifier before the adjective, whereas English places enough after it.

Uzbek also permits modifiers to combine with the comparative suffix -roq. The modifier ancha is commonly used in this way: Bu yo'l ancha qisqaroq (“This road is much shorter”). In this respect, ancha corresponds more closely to the English much or far than to very.

Maximizing meaning may be expressed by words such as mutlaqo (absolutely) and butunlay (completely), as in mutlaqo to'g'ri (“absolutely correct”).

4.2. Reduplicative intensification of colour adjectives

A distinctive feature of Uzbek is the formation of intensive forms of colour adjectives by means of reduplication. A shortened copy of the beginning of the adjective is placed before it, usually with an

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added consonant: oq–oppoq (white–snow-white); qora–qop-qora (black–pitch black); qizil–qip-qizil (red–bright red); sariq–sap-sariq (yellow–bright yellow); yashil–yam-yashil (green–lush green); ko'k–ko'm-ko'k (blue–deep blue).

For example, Qor oppoq edi (“The snow was pure white”) and Osmon ko'm-ko'k edi (“The sky was deep blue”) express a degree of colour intensity that English normally renders through a separate modifier or a compound, such as pitch black, snow-white, or bright red.

English	Uzbek	Function
very	juda	booster
extremely	nihoyatda	booster
quite / fairly	ancha	compromiser
a bit / slightly	biroz / sal	diminisher
absolutely / completely	mutlaqo / butunlay	maximizer
big enough	yetarlicha katta	sufficiency
pitch black	qop-qora	reduplicative intensive

These correspondences illustrate similarities in grammatical function alongside differences in lexical and morphological structure. The table is illustrative rather than exhaustive. The most appropriate translation may depend on the adjective, sentence structure, and communicative context.

5. Contrastive Lexical-Semantic Analysis

The comparison of English and Uzbek degree modifiers reveals several dimensions that merit attention.

First, both languages provide lexical resources for amplifying and reducing the degree of a quality. English distinguishes a rich set of adverbs, while Uzbek frequently uses juda, nihoyatda, ancha, and biroz. This contrast reflects differences in how the two languages lexicalize a broadly comparable semantic function.

Second, Uzbek has a productive morphological strategy, reduplication, that is concentrated in colour adjectives. English has no regular morphological counterpart; it renders the same meaning through adverb modification (very black), compounds (snow-white), or fixed expressions (pitch black).

Third, formal similarity does not always guarantee complete semantic equivalence. The Uzbek juda may correspond to both very and too in English. Thus Bu choy juda issiq may mean either “This tea is very hot” or “This tea is too hot,” and the intended interpretation depends on context. English, by contrast, distinguishes the two meanings lexically, since too carries an implication of excess that very does not.

Fourth, gradability restrictions are not identical across the two languages. English speakers generally avoid very with limit adjectives such as perfect or unique, whereas the corresponding Uzbek combinations with juda are often acceptable in ordinary usage. Translators must therefore decide whether to preserve the literal modifier or to select a maximizer, such as absolutely, that is more natural in English.

Fifth, the interaction with comparative forms differs. English requires much, far, or a lot with comparatives, while Uzbek uses ancha with -roq. Teaching materials should draw attention to the error of translating ancha yaxshiroq as very better.

Finally, degree modifiers are sensitive to register. Words such as g'oyat and behad in Uzbek and utterly or exceedingly in English tend to be more formal or literary than juda and very. This distinction should be preserved in translation.

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These observations support a multidimensional approach to the analysis of intensity. Rather than comparing isolated modifiers alone, researchers should consider adjective semantics, gradability, morphological strategy, and contextual interpretation together.

6. Conclusion

The contrastive analysis of degree modifiers in English and Uzbek demonstrates that the two languages share the communicative function of strengthening and weakening adjectival meaning while employing different lexical and morphological mechanisms.

English uses a large set of adverbial amplifiers and downtoners, such as very, extremely, quite, and slightly, and restricts them according to the gradability of the adjective. Uzbek commonly expresses degree through juda, nihoyatda, ancha, and biroz, and in addition uses reduplication to form intensive colour adjectives. These patterns provide a basis for identifying correspondences and structural differences between the languages.

The interpretation of degree modifiers depends on the property being described and the context in which the modifier occurs. Consequently, contrastive analysis should extend beyond lists of equivalents to examine the relationship between adjective meaning, gradability, and contextual equivalence.

The principal contribution of this paper is a structured qualitative framework for examining these relationships. The analysis does not claim statistical findings or definitive empirical generalizations. Further research should use a systematically compiled dataset of English and Uzbek examples, supported by native-speaker judgments, to investigate the distribution of degree modifiers, variation among adjective classes, and implications for translation.

The proposed framework may be useful in comparative linguistics, bilingual lexicography, translation studies, and the teaching of English to Uzbek-speaking learners.

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