

An Analytic and Synthetic Comparison of English Adjectives

Aneta Šimčíková

Bachelor Thesis
2013



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

akademický rok: 2013/2014

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Aneta Šimčíková**
Osobní číslo: **H11440**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Analytické a flektivní stupňování anglických
přídavných jmen**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Prostudování odborné literatury – přídavné jméno, stupňování přídavných jmen
Příprava korpusu
Analýza tvarů přídavných jmen v korpusu
Porovnání teorie s daty z korpusu
Stanovení závěru

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Biber, Douglas, et al. 2007. Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. 6th ed. Harlow: Longman.

Dušková, Libuše, et al. 2003. Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny. Praha: Academia.

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Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. 2004. A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. Harlow: Longman.

Swan, Michael. 2005. Practical English Usage. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

Mgr. Dagmar Machová

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

29. listopadu 2013

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

2. května 2014

Ve Zlíně dne 22. ledna 2014


doc. Ing. Anežka Lengalová, Ph.D.
děkanka




PhDr. Katarína Nemčoková, Ph.D.
ředitelka ústavu

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou přídavných jmen a jejich stupňováním v anglickém jazyce. Práce se nejprve zaměřuje na základní charakteristiky přídavných jmen jako slovního druhu, na strukturu frází přídavných jmen a na rozdělení přídavných jmen do dvou skupin, centrální a periferní, které sdílejí stejné vlastnosti.

Hlavním cílem práce je popsat způsoby porovnávání anglických přídavných jmen, analyzovat jejich použití s konkrétními přídavnými jmény a srovnat komparativní a superlativní tvary těchto přídavných jmen v odborné literatuře a korpusech.

Klíčová slova: přídavné jméno, analytické stupňování, flektivní stupňování, nepravidelné stupňování

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis deals with an analysis of adjectives and their comparison in English. At first, the thesis is focused on basic characteristics of adjectives as a part of speech, on a structure of the adjective phrase and on a division of adjectives into two groups – central and peripheral sharing same properties.

The main aim of this work is to describe types of comparisons of English adjectives, to analyze their usage with particular adjectives and to compare comparative and superlative forms of these adjectives in the literature and corpuses.

Keywords: adjectives, analytic comparison, synthetic comparison, irregular comparison

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to express many thanks to my supervisor Mgr. Dagmar Machová for her time, patient guidance, constructive advice and willingness to help me with my bachelor thesis. I am also very grateful to my family for their moral support throughout my studies and also for reposing their trust in me.

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INTRODUCTION

Adjectives are an important part of a language system. They enable speakers to express their thoughts in more elaborate way. It can be said that a language system without adjectives would be blunt as when a speaker wants to express an opinion about something adjectives are instruments which helps him to do so. Moreover, comparative and superlative forms of adjectives are useful in order to express a degree of a certain characteristic which again enables speakers to fully develop their opinions and ideas.

In English similarly as in Czech a large number of various adjectives exist. This thesis hence deals with the topic of shared properties of adjectives as a part of speech, with types of comparisons of adjectives and with a choice of correct comparative and superlative forms with particular adjectives in English.

First of all, adjectives as a part of speech are introduced. Therefore the first chapter of this thesis is related to specific semantic, syntactic and morphological properties of adjectives. The second chapter deals with a description of the internal structure of an adjective phrase and the following third chapter is related to basic division of adjectives into two groups – central and peripheral. The aim of these three chapters is to provide a reader with necessary basic knowledge of the topic of adjectives as this knowledge is seen as a crucial for understanding following, main part of the thesis which deals with three types of comparison of English adjectives – analytic, synthetic and irregular.

The theory of the fourth chapter describes each way of comparisons and provides example adjectives with their comparative and superlative forms. It provides characteristics and patterns essential for the choice between an analytic and synthetic comparison, although some exceptions are also mentioned. All theoretical information provided are based on comprehensive text books such are for example *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* or *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny*.

The main aim of this thesis is to compare patterns provided by comprehensive grammar books with data provided in the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English and to find whether some differences in a usage of certain types of comparative and superlative forms with particular adjectives might appear.

1 ADJECTIVES AS A PART OF SPEECH

This chapter will briefly introduce adjectives as a part of speech. Similarly to Czech language English differentiates several parts of speech – namely nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, pronouns, numerals, prepositions, conjunctions, particles, interjections and articles. Sometimes modal verbs are also added as a separate part of speech (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 3).

Each part of speech consists of specific groups of words which share a number of properties. Criteria for differentiation and establishing parts of speech are based on morphological, syntactic, phonetic and semantic properties of words. However, according to Dušková et al. (2003, 23) one lexical item does not have to agree on all the criteria as through various grammatical theories and languages some of those categories are considered more relevant. Usually morphological and syntactic criteria predominate over the semantic ones (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 3).

Adjectives are also defined by their morphological, syntactic and semantic characteristics which will be described on the following pages.

1.1 Semantic characteristic of adjectives

Adjectives are syntactically distinct groups of words which are used to modify nouns. Their function is an expression of properties, relations and qualities, for example in terms of size, shape, colour, age and worth. In other words, they modify, elucidate and add an additional meaning to the word category of nouns (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 526).

Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 526) point out that besides modification of nouns, adjectives can have also the predicative function as it is shown in the examples below, where adjectives are used as complements of the verb *be* and they are considered as a part of the predicate:

- 1) *They were tired.*
- 2) *The game was easy.*

According to Dušková et al. (2003, 142) adjectives semantically resemble stative verbs. Similarly as verbs adjectives can be divided into two groups – stative and dynamic. Whereas majority of verbs are dynamic, adjectives on the contrary are usually stative. Moreover, some adjectives are followed by prepositions as in *good at counting*, infinitives and subordinate clauses as in *I am happy to be there with you*. which is also common characteristic of verbs (Dušková et al. 2003, 143).

1.1.1 Semantic grouping of adjectives

As it is mentioned by Biber et al. (2007, 508) adjectives can be divided into two semantic groups – descriptors and classifiers.

Descriptors are adjectives defying features such as colour, size and quantity, age, emotion, weight and many other characteristics. They can be usually graded (Biber et al. 2007, 508). See the examples of descriptors:

- 3) *black knight*
- 4) *small room*
- 5) *annual report*
- 6) *hot day*

On the other hand, the definition of classifiers given by Biber et al. (2007, 508) states that the primary function of classifiers is to limit a noun's referent as the referent is put into a category which is in relation to other referents. Classifiers cannot be usually graded.

- 7) *public transport*
- 8) *additional information*
- 9) *environmental changes*
- 10) *phonetic alphabet*
- 11) *American history*
- 12) *Christian holiday*

According to Biber et al. (2007, 509) there are some adjectives that can function both as classifiers and descriptors. Example adjectives are shown in the table below:

Classifier	Descriptor
<i><u>Modern</u> algebra</i>	<i>Some <u>modern</u> authorities</i>
<i><u>Criminal</u> law</i>	<i><u>Criminal</u> activity</i>
<i>A <u>secondary</u> school</i>	<i>A useful <u>secondary</u> function</i>

Source: (Biber et al. 2007, 509)

1.2 Syntactic characteristic of adjectives

Syntactic classification of adjectives is based on their attributive or predicative usage as these are two most usual syntactic roles of adjectives (Biber et al. 2007, 505). Most of adjectives can be used in both of these roles as it is shown in the following table.

Attributive role	Predicative role
A <u>tired</u> man	The man was <u>tired</u>
A <u>beautiful</u> woman	The woman is <u>beautiful</u> .

A frequency of the usage of attributive and predicative adjectives varies according to registers. Biber et al. (2007, 506) point out that both types of adjectives – in the attributive and in the predicative role are relatively rare in conversations in comparison with written registers where the usage of them is very frequent. In those written registers attributive adjectives tend to be used more often than the predicative ones.

Another distinguishing characteristics of adjectives as a part of speech given by Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 528) are that adjectives do not take inflection according to number or tense, they cannot be modified by other adjectives and in most cases they do not use noun phrases as complements.

1.2.1 Adjectives with attributive syntactic role

As it is stated by Biber et al. (2007, 510) adjectives in attributive roles are used to modify nominal expressions and they are considered as a part of a noun phrase. They usually stand in front of the head noun as it is shown in the examples below. However, it has to be pointed out that some adjectives and also complex adjectival phrases stand after the head noun. This claim will be developed later.

- 1) an empty room
- 2) an unusual story

Some adjectives show a strong preference to appear in the attributive position. Bieber et al. (2007, 508) claim that adjectives ending in *-al* like in *historical*, *economical*, *physical*, etc. most usually appear in the attributive position and the adjective *mere* is exclusively attributive, too. Dušková et al. (2003, 144) add that only attributive function is also typical for restrictive adjectives. See the examples:

- 3) a particular reason
- 4) * the reason is particular
- 5) the main idea
- 6) * the idea was main
- 7) the exact properties
- 8) * the properties are exact

However, some of those adjectives may have more word meanings which means that they may be used also in the predicative position (Dušková et al. 2003, 145):

- 9) *He was particular about the cars.*

Some adjectives derived from adverbs such as *lower, upper, inner, outer* and some comparative forms like *former, elder*, etc. are added to those restrictive adjectives, too (Dušková et al. 2003, 144):

- 10) *former president*

- 11) * *the president is former*

- 12) *elder person*

- 13) * *the person is elder*

Swan (2005, 8) adds that emphasizing or in other words intensifying adjectives are also placed before nouns:

- 1) *That's sheer foolishness!*

- 2) * *That foolishness is sheer.*

As it was shown above attributive adjectives usually precedes the head noun. However, according to Dušková et al. (2003, 145) some set phrases do not follow this rule. In these phrases adjectives appear after the head noun which they modify. These adjectives are called postposed adjectives. They are typically used in some fixed expressions as it is shown in the following examples:

- 3) *the Secretary General*

- 4) *from time immemorial*

- 5) *notary public*

- 6) *the president elect*

- 7) *court martial*

- 8) *the boat afloat*

In some cases a usage of postposition is a result of polysemous meanings of the adjective (Dušková et al. 2003, 144):

- 9) *the present state*

- 10) *the students present*

In the phrase *the present state* the adjective *present* is used with meaning of 'current' – *the current situation*, on the other hand in the phrase *the students present* the adjective *present* is used to describe students who were not absent, in other words students who were participating in the lesson, for example.

The similar usage is connected with the adjective *proper*. When it is placed before a noun it is used with the meaning of ‘genuine’ or ‘real’. After a noun it describes the central or main part of something (Swan 2005, 14):

- 1) *Vltava is a proper river, not a stream.*
- 2) *After few hours of paddling we get the river proper.*

Postposed adjectives are also frequently used after superlatives and *the only* (Dušková et al. 2003, 146):

- 3) *the most difficult game imaginable*
- 4) *the only solution possible*

Moreover, postposition can be used to express temporary validity, because adjectives preceding the head noun are usually used to express permanent validity (Dušková et al. 2003, 146). See the example phrases:

- 5) *the stars visible*
- 6) *visible stars*

The stars visible are stars which can be seen only occasionally, while *visible stars* represent a group of some stars which are visible in general.

Swan (2005, 8) adds that placing of adjectives after nouns was also quite usual feature in a poetry and songs in older English.

It is also common to use postposition after adjectives ending in *-able* or *-ible* as for example with *possible* or *available* and also after indefinite pronoun heads like *something*, *anything*, *nothing*, *somebody*, *nobody*, *somewhere*, *anywhere* etc. (Swan 2005, 9 - 10).

- 7) *There was not any room available in the hotel.*
- 8) *Have you met anyone interesting recently?*
- 9) *We should move somewhere quiet.*
- 10) *The police did everything possible to find the murderer.*

Another case when adjectives usually follow the head noun is when an adjectival phrase is too complex. It usually contains the adjectival complement (Biber et al. 2007, 519).

- 11) *It is a dog extremely loyal to its master.*
- 12) *Kate is a woman very attractive for man all around the world.*
- 13) *Thomas is student ambitious, popular and involved in many after-school activities.*

1.2.2 Adjectives with predicative syntactic role

Adjectives in the predicative role are used with copula verbs and they are part of the predicate (Dušková et al. 2003, 146). They help to define a noun phrase that behaves as a separate clause element. We distinguish subject and object predicatives (Biber et al. 2007, 505).

Predicative adjectives function as subject complements, in other words subject predicatives, or object complements, in other words object predicatives (Biber et al. 2007, 515). “Subject predicatives complement a copular verb, characterizing the nominal expression in subject position.” (Biber et al. 2007, 515). See the examples of subject predicatives:

- 1) *The weather is beautiful.*
- 2) *He seems happy.*
- 3) *The fans became nervous.*

On the contrary, “object predicatives follow a direct object, making a predication about that noun phrase” (Biber et al. 2007, 515). The usage of object predicatives is illustrated in the following examples:

- 4) *We did not find it funny.*
- 5) *He made her happy.*
- 6) *They consider it wrong.*

Some predicative adjectives may be often found with phrasal complements or clausal complements of their own, for example with prepositional phrases, clauses with *to*-infinitive or clauses with *that* (Biber et al. 2007, 515).

According to Biber et al. (2007, 508) the predicative syntactic role is associated with majority of adjectives beginning with the prefix *a-*, e.g. *alive, alone, afraid, alike, asleep*, etc. as they are usually used after copula verbs.

- 7) *She is afraid of spiders.*
- 8) *I was almost asleep.*
- 9) *They look alike.*
- 10) *The child fell asleep quickly.*

Other adjectives showing strong preference to appear in the predicative position are also words like *ill, easier, glad, impossible, ready, sure, sorry* and many others (Biber et al. 2007, 508).

Dušková et al. (2003, 147) add that the usage of an adjective in the predicative and attributive syntactic role is also influenced by the fact whether the aim of the adjective used is to express a permanent or temporary quality. Adjectives in the attributive syntactic role usually point at a permanent quality and adjectives in the predicative role express a neutral durability.

- 11) *a rich man*
- 12) *They are very rich.*

1.2.3 Adjectives in other syntactic roles

As it was mentioned on the previous pages most usual syntactic roles of adjectives are attributive and predicative, but of course they are not the only ones associated with this word category. Biber et al. (2007, 519) distinguish also adjectives as noun phrase heads, adjectives with a clause linking function, adjectives as exclamations and adjectives as detached predicatives.

Adjectives can be used as the head of noun phrases. In this case, adjectives are not usually used in plural and they frequently characterize some groups of people (Biber et al. 2007, 520).

- 1) *The gap between the rich and the poor is growing.*
- 2) *There were a lot of conflicts between the young and the old.*

Some adjectives may also serve as links between clauses.

- 3) *Worse there was nothing they could do.*
- 4) *Still more important, government should maintain its policy of protecting the environment.*

The usage of adjectives as exclamations is very common in conversations, fictional dialogues and for example in headlines of newspapers (Biber et al. 2007, 520):

- 5) *Wonderful! It sounds great!*
- 6) *Alive!*

Biber et al. (2007, 520) state that adjectives used as detached predicatives modify a noun phrase, but are syntactically free. These constructions are typical for a fiction. They are usually placed within the beginning of sentence, but can appear also at the end of the sentence. See the example sentences:

- 7) *Too lazy to get up, he stayed in bed all afternoon.*
- 8) *She shouted, highly scared.*

1.3 Morphological characteristic of adjectives

Considering morphological criteria, many adjectives can be inflected in order to show a degree of comparison, e.g. *small, smaller, smallest* (Bieber et al. 2007, 505). However, as it was mentioned this feature is not sufficient enough in order to claim that a certain word is the adjective because of two reasons: also adverbs can be graded and on the contrary there are adjectives which cannot be graded.¹ These are for example adjectives which denote some absolute characteristic, quality or material (Dušková et al. 2003, 141). See examples below:

- 9) *He was dead.*
- 10) * *He was more dead.*
- 11) *It is impossible.*
- 12) * *It is more impossible.*
- 13) *This house has wooden floor.*
- 14) * *This house has more wooden floor.*

Suffixes can be also considered as characteristic properties of adjectives as there are some specific suffixes like *-ous* in *luxurious*, *-able* in *unbelievable*, *-ible* in *visible*, *-ive* in *expensive* etc. which may help to define adjectives as a part of speech (Dušková et al. 2003, 141). However, Dušková et al. (2003, 141) add that some suffixes may be used with different parts of speech and moreover, a large number of adjectives use no suffixes as they do not have a distinctive form as a part of speech, for example *large, short, soft, mild*, etc.

Morphologically, adverbs are most similar to adjectives. As it was mentioned adverbs also take part in comparison and there are some adverbs which have exactly the same form as adjectives – e.g. *long, close, fast, wrong*, etc. Suffix *-ly* is very common for adverbs, but some adjectives use it, too. Therefore many words with this suffix function both as adjectives and adverbs, e.g. *likely, early, monthly*, etc. (Dušková et al. 2003, 142).² Therefore the right way how to distinguish adjectives and adverbs should be based on their

¹ Because adjectives and adverbs share some properties, such as for example grading which was mentioned in this chapter, some modern grammatical approaches see them as members of one category called ‘A’ category (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 59).

² According to traditional grammars *-ly* is regarded to be a suffix of adverbs as it is considered as a derivational morpheme. However, modern approaches consider this suffix as an inflectional morpheme, because as it was mentioned adjectives and adverbs are taken as members of one category ‘A’ differentiating only in element they modify (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 60).

syntactic functions as adverbs are most likely used as adverbials while adjectives do not appear in this function (Dušková et al. 2003, 142).

2 INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF ADJECTIVE PHRASE

A bare adjective phrase is composed of a head of the phrase which is a plain adjective itself, like *big*, *long*, *old*, etc. More complex adjective phrases might be developed on elements premodifying the head or elements post modifying the head. Of course, it is possible to use both premodifying and postmodifying elements in one adjective phrase. See the structure of adjective phrase in the table:

Premodification field	Head - adjective	Postmodification field
<i>too</i>	<i>determined</i>	<i>to give up</i>
<i>more</i>	<i>beautiful</i>	<i>than they expected</i>

Premodifying elements are most frequently grading adverbials, in other words degree words such as *more*, *the most*, *less*, *the least*, *incredibly*, *too*, *very*, etc. (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 51).

- 1) *very / incredibly / too expensive*
- 2) *less / the least / more / the most interesting*

Other phrases which can be used for premodification of the head of an adjectival phrase are measure phrases (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 51), as in:

- 3) *a [AP ten-year old] girl*
- 4) *a [AP fifteen-meter high] building*

On the other hand, elements postmodifying an adjective head can be complements of adjectives. These are prepositional phrases, *that*-clauses, verb phrases beginning with infinitive with *to* and grading adverbs (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 51). See the examples of these various types of complements below:

- 5) *a student [AP (very) good at mathematics]*
- 6) *a message [AP (extremely) important to addressee]*
- 7) *mother [AP proud that her children are successful]*
- 8) *I am [AP pleased that you are calling].*
- 9) *They were [AP ready to go].*
- 10) *He was [AP happy to help his parents].*
- 11) *She is not [AP as clever as she seems].*
- 12) *This house is [AP bigger than ours].*

As it was mentioned the most usual function of adjectives is the modification of nouns. In that case an adjective phrase is a part of a noun phrase. In other words it means that an

adjective phrase has the attributive function as it modifies a head noun (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 59).

Position of adjectives modifying nouns differs according to the characteristics of an adjective and according to complexity of an adjective phrase. To put it another way, adjectives may be placed both – in front of and also after a head noun (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 53).

According to Veselovská and Emonds (2011, 53) adjective phrases used to premodify the head noun are usually simpler in the sense that they are usually either bare (contains only the adjective head) or premodified, but they are never postmodified. See the examples:

13) *Kate is* [_{NP} *a* [_{AP} (*very*) *happy*] *woman*].

14) *They love* [_{NP} *their* [_{AP} *two-year old*] *son*].

15) * *Kate is* [_{NP} *a* [_{AP} *happy to get the job of her dreams*] *woman*].

Postmodifying adjectives are adjectives with certain specific lexical or idiosyncratic characteristics or complex postmodified adjective phrases. Generally, it can be said that complex adjective phrases are placed after a head noun they modify (Veselovská and Emonds 2011, 54).

16) *Kate is* [_{NP} *a woman* [_{AP} *happy to get the job of her dreams*]].

17) *She met* [_{NP} *a boy* [_{AP} *more handsome than her ex-boyfriend*]].

3 CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL ADJECTIVES

Considering position of adjectives there are two types of adjectives – central and peripheral (Bieber et al. 2007, 506).

According to the definition given by Biber et al. (2007, 506) central adjectives are descriptive, usually characterize the referent of a noun phrase, they are gradable which means that they can be also modified by adverbs of degree like *very* and can take comparative and superlative forms. Of course, as it was already mentioned there are some absolute adjectives which cannot be graded, but a lot of common adjectives meet all these characteristics including adjectives of a size and dimension (*big, small, fat, thin*), colour (*white, red, green*) and time (*young, old, new*). Central adjectives can be used in both attributive and predicative roles (Biber et al. 2007, 506).

Peripheral adjectives do not follow all mentioned characteristics as it is visible from the table below.

Example	Attributive role	Predicative role	Descriptive meaning	Morphological inflection	Gradable
<i>Small</i>	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Beautiful</i>	+	+	+	-	+
<i>Afraid</i>	-	+	+	-	+
<i>Absolute</i>	+	+	?	-	-
<i>Different</i>	+	+	-	-	+
<i>Alive</i>	-	+	+	-	-

Source: (Biber et al. 2007, 507)

Peripheral adjectives have usually strong preference to occur either in the attributive or predicative syntactic role, for example the adjective *unable* is typically used in the predicative syntactic role and the adjective *mere* in the attributive role. (Biber et al. 2007, 506) However, some adjective like *able, aloof, aware* may occur with the attributive syntactic role despite the fact that they usually have the predicative role. (Biber et al. 2007, 506) See the examples:

Predicative position	Attributive position
<i>Politicians are <u>able</u> to change law.</i>	<i>A very <u>able</u> politician</i>
<i>President is <u>aware</u> of the problem</i>	<i>Much more <u>aware</u> president</i>

Source: (Biber et al. 2007, 508)

It must be pointed out that there are some parts of speech (e.g. nouns, adverbs) which can be also divided according to their position into central and peripheral. It means that the category of adjectives should not be defined considering only these characteristics.

4 COMPARISON OF ADJECTIVES

Majority of common adjectives are gradable. It simply means that these adjectives are able to denote a certain degree of a characteristic they express. To put it another way, gradable adjectives denote a property that can be expressed in varying degrees (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 531).

Quirk et al. (2004, 458) explain that three types of comparison exist with gradable adjectives. These are comparisons in relation to the same degree expressed by *as* or *so ... as*, to a lower degree expressed by *less* and *the least* and to a higher degree which uses inflectional suffixes *-er* and *-est* or circumlocutional equivalents *more* and *most*. See examples of all these three kinds of comparisons in the following sentences:

- 1) *Tim is as tall as his brother.*
- 2) *This text is less understandable than the previous one.*
- 3) *Tim is taller than his brother.*
- 4) *This text is more understandable than the previous one.*

Quirk et al. (2004, 458) add that comparison of many adjectives in relation to a higher degree distinguish absolute, comparative and superlative forms. The differentiation is based on inflectional contrast of these forms or fixed periphrastic constructions as it is shown in the table below.

Degree	Absolute	Comparative	Superlative
Syntactic comparison	<i>big</i>	<i>bigger</i>	<i>biggest</i>
Analytic comparison	<i>beautiful</i>	<i>more beautiful</i>	<i>most beautiful</i>

In order to indicate comparative and superlative degrees gradable adjectives are marked. Biber et al. (2007, 521) explain that this marking is done to express a level of a degree of the characteristic expressed by an adjective. On the contrary, adjectives in basic – absolute forms are unmarked because they are used to express a characteristic of an adjective itself. As it is shown in the table above there are two possible ways of marking of adjectives in comparative and superlative degrees – either inflectionally or phrasally.

However, there is also an extensive class of non-gradable adjectives such as *previous*, *dental*, *countless*, *federal*, *utter*, *phonological*, *left*, *marine*, *chief*, *dead*, etc. These non-gradable adjectives cannot express comparative or superlative degrees by adding inflectional suffixes and they also cannot be marked phrasally. Generally, it can be said that non-gradable adjectives cannot be compared in relation to the same degree, to a lower degree nor to a higher degree as it is illustrated in the following examples.

- 5) * *Tim is as dead as his brother.*
- 6) * *Tim is less dead than his brother.*
- 7) * *Tim is deader his brother.*
- 8) * *Tim is more dead than his brother.*

However, data in the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English show that some comparative forms of non-gradable adjectives might be applied. Taking into consideration adjective *dead* given in the examples above, a comparison to the same degree expressed by *as dead as* is proved to be used similarly as an analytic comparison to a higher degree expressed by *more dead than* which is frequently used in an idiomatic phrase *more dead than alive*. A usage of a syntactic comparative form *deader* is very rare in British English compared to American English, but might appear in some phrases as it is illustrated in the example sentence below.

- 9) *This club is deader than the previous one.*

Biber et al. (2007, 521) add that some non-gradable adjectives might be modified by emphatic adverbials such as *absolutely, quite, definitely*, etc.:

- 10) *absolutely motionless*
- 11) *definitely tenth*

Moreover, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 531) point out that there are many adjectives which might be used either with a gradable or non-gradable meaning. It simply means that a distinction between a gradable and non-gradable adjective is based on the particular usage or sense of an adjective rather than on an adjective as a lexeme itself. See the table:

Non-gradable sense	Gradable sense
<i><u>Christian</u> martyrs</i>	<i>Not very <u>Christian</u> behaviour</i>
<i>A <u>British</u> passport</i>	<i>He sounds very <u>British</u>.</i>

Source: (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 531)

Taking into consideration example *He sounds very British* where the adjective *British* is used in a gradable sense, it has to be pointed out that according to data in the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English the superlative form *most British* is excluded in this sense. On the contrary, the comparative form *more British* is proved to be possibly used in a gradable sense. See the example sentences below:

- 12) *Drinking tea is more British habit.*
- 13) *This story is more British than the previous one.*
- 14) *At the beginning of nineteenth century more British names started to appear.*

4.1 Synthetic comparison

Synthetic, syntactic or inflectional comparison uses inflectional suffixes *-er* to mark comparative degree and *-est* to mark superlative degree. This type of comparison is related mainly to monosyllabic adjectives, like *cold – colder – coldest* and to numerous two-syllable adjectives. Many of two-syllable adjectives using inflectional comparison end in *-y*, *-ow* and *-er* (Dušková et al. 2003, 150):

- 1) *busy – busier – busiest*
- 2) *narrow – narrower – narrowest*
- 3) *bitter – bitterer – bitterest*

According to Dušková et al. (2003, 150) a number of two-syllable words which have stress on the second syllable use a syntactic comparison as it is shown in the examples below and there are some other adjectives like *quiet*, *wicked*, etc. which also use inflectional comparison.

- 4) *polite – politer – politest*
- 5) *severe – severer – severest*

However, Dušková et al. (2003, 150) claim that many of these adjectives may also be compared analytically mainly if they are used in predicative syntactic role and also if comparison with *than* is applied, as in:

- 1) *This place is more cold than most other places in the Czech Republic.*
- 2) *Why aren't you more polite?*

On the contrary to what was mentioned in the previous paragraphs data in the British National Corpus and also in the Corpus of Contemporary American English show that the adjectives *polite* and *severe* very rarely take an inflectional comparison and they preferably use an analytic comparison even if they are not followed by *than*.

Taking into consideration the adjective *severe*, it has to be emphasized that a usage of its comparative degree formed by a synthetic comparison is almost excluded as opposed to a usage of a superlative degree of this adjective formed by an analytic comparison which is considered as more common, although as it was mentioned an analytic comparison predominates according to both corpuses.

Data in both corpuses also support the claim that the adjective *quiet* takes an inflectional comparison. However, according to data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English a comparative degree of this adjective formed by an analytic comparison may occur despite the fact that a synthetic comparison is much more frequent.

According to data in the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English the adjective *wicked* which was also mentioned rather to take a synthetic comparison is not likely to be used in order to express a comparative neither superlative degree regarding both analytic and synthetic comparisons. Data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English show that the form *more wicked* sometimes occurs, but even this particular usage is very rare.

Dušková et al. (2003, 150) also add that in clauses like *she is more clever than wise* or *he was more dead than alive* usage of a syntactic comparison is not possible as in these clauses *more* can be replaced by *rather*.

4.1.1 Changes in spelling

Addition of inflectional suffixes *-er* and *-est* is sometimes accompanied with changes in a spelling and pronunciation of an adjectival stem: “silent *-e* is omitted before adding the suffix, a single final consonant is doubled after a single vowel letter and a final *-y* is changed to *-i-* if a consonant letter precedes it” (Biber et al. 2007, 522). See the examples of changes mentioned:

- 3) *wide – wider – widest*
- 4) *big – bigger – biggest*
- 5) *heavy – heavier – heaviest*
- 6) *gay – gayer – gayest*

However, Quirk et al. (2004, 461) point out that the adjective *neat* uses comparative *neater* and superlative *neatest* although final consonant [t] is preceded by a single vowel [a]. Similarly also the adjective *thick* uses comparative *thicker* and superlative *thickest*. It is also added that adjective *cruel* may be compared in two ways what is illustrated in the examples below where the first set of comparison is used mainly in British English and the second set mainly in American English. This basic division of the usage of these stems was proved as correct according to data in both the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English.

- 7) *cruel – crueller – cruellest*
- 8) *cruel – crueler – cruelest*

Dušková et al. (2003, 150) point out that the adjectives *shy* and *sly* can be compared in two ways, too:

- 9) *shy – shier – shiest, sly – slier – sliest*

10) *shy – shyer – shyest, sly – slyer – slyest*

According to Dušková et al. (2003, 150) the second set of examples where final -y is not changed to -i-, despite the fact that a consonant precedes is applied mainly in American English.

This claim was not proved to be absolutely correct according to data in corpuses. Considering the adjective *shy* data in the British National Corpus show that neither set of comparisons illustrated in the examples above can be considered as correct as this adjective is not usually used in comparative or superlative degrees. However, very rarely comparative form *shyer* is applied so it can be said that even in British English final -y is might be changed into -i-.

On the other hand, data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English support the claim that the second set of comparison of the adjective *shy* where final -y is not changed to -i is preferred. However, the usage of a comparative form *shier* is not totally excluded.

According to data in the British National Corpus no comparative and superlative forms of the adjective *sly* are applied in British English and there is rather an exceptional occurrence of both sets of comparative and superlative forms of this adjective in American English, too.

Dušková et al. (2003, 150) add that there is also a change in pronunciation related to adjectives *long*, *strong* and *young*. While they are used in a comparative or superlative degree the consonant [g] is pronounced.

4.2 Analytic comparison

Analytic comparison is also called phrasal or periphrastic comparison. This kind of comparison uses the adverbial *more* which precedes an adjective in a comparative degree and the adverbial *most* which precedes an adjective in a superlative degree. Analytic comparison is applied with adjectives composed of three or more syllables.

1) *expensive – more expensive – most expensive*

2) *beautiful – more beautiful – most beautiful*

Some two-syllable adjectives also use an analytic comparison. According to Dušková et al. (2003, 151) two-syllable adjectives taking an analytic comparison are frequently adjectives ending in -ct as in *correct*, -nt as in *fluent*, -ous, -ful, -al as in *brutal*, -less as in *hopeless*, adjectives beginning with prefix *a-* like in *afraid* and participial adjectives (adjectives in a

form of participles), e.g. *tiring*, *amazing*, *tired*, *amazed* and unusual phonological or morphological structures like *bizarre*, *fantastic*, *antique*, etc.

It is also claimed that in the case of comparing two descriptive adjectives analytic comparative forms with *more* are considered to be correct while synthetic comparatives with *-er* are not (Swan 2005, 114):

3) *He is more lucky than clever.*

4) *He is more experienced than educated.*

Moreover, the usage of *most* with the meaning of *very* is essential with adjectives expressing an approval and disapproval in a rather formal style according to Swan (2005, 114). See the example:

5) *Thank you very much for your wishes. That is most kind of you!*

4.3 Choice between synthetic and analytic comparison

As it was pointed out the choice between those two types of comparisons is based mainly on the length of a particular adjective.

Monosyllable gradable adjectives in most cases use synthetic comparisons in which inflectional suffixes *-er* and *-est* are added to the adjectival base. However, a few of them such as *real*, *right* and *wrong* use only phrasal forms of comparison (Quirk et al. 2004, 461). This claim was proved to be correct by data in both the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English although a synthetic comparison rarely might appear, too.

Biber et al. (2007, 522) add that sometimes monosyllabic adjectives can also take an analytic comparison in order to make comparison more significant as it is illustrated in the examples below. However, this usage is not very frequent.

1) *Doesn't it sound more fair?*

2) *I think my brother is the one my mum is most proud of.*

Swan (2005, 114) explains that the usage of an analytic comparison with monosyllabic adjectives is also possible in cases where *than* is not immediately placed after a comparative which is the case of the example [1].

Disyllabic adjectives take either a synthetic or analytic comparison. Phonological and morphological criteria are determining with these adjectives. A few disyllabic adjectives such as *costly*, *deadly*, *friendly*, *lively*, etc. might even use both analytic and syntactic

comparison. Disyllabic adjectives which take inflectional forms are mainly adjectives with unstressed vowels like *-y*, *-ow*, *-le*, *-er*, *-ure* at the end.

According to Quirk et al. (2004, 462) an analytic comparison is used with three or more syllable adjectives with the exception of adjectives using negative prefix *un-* where synthetic comparison is applied:

3) *unhappy* – *unhappier* – *unhappiest*

4) *untidy* – *untidier* – *untidiest*

However, data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English do not support this claim as an analytic comparative form *more unhappy* is preferably used with the adjective *unhappy*. Synthetic comparative and superlative forms of this adjective are not excluded, but analytic ones are much more frequent in American English.

On the other hand, according to data in the British National Corpus neither analytic nor synthetic comparison is preferred as frequencies of the usage of comparative forms *unhappier* and *more unhappy* and superlative forms *unhappiest* and *most unhappy* are almost the same.

Taking into consideration an adjective *untidy* data in both corpuses show that neither analytic nor synthetic comparisons are used as this adjective does not take comparative nor superlative degrees.

Biber et al. (2007, 522) add that also trisyllabic adjective ending in *-y* such as for example *almighty* may be sometimes compared with an inflectional comparison. This claim is in a contrast with data in both corpuses as according to them the adjective *almighty* never takes inflectional comparison. Moreover, it can be said that it generally does not take any comparative and superlative forms at all as according to data in both corpuses neither analytic comparison is applied with this adjective.

Variable comparison is associated with adjectives ending in *-ly*, where according to Biber et al. (2007, 522) for example *earlier* is more usual than *more early* and on the other hand *more likely* is more usual than *likelier* which was also verified as a true in both corpuses. According to Swan (2005, 114) two comparative and superlative forms are also applied with compound adjectives such as *good-looking* or *well-known*. See the table below:

	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
<i>good-looking</i>	<i>better-looking</i>	<i>best-looking</i>
	<i>more good-looking</i>	<i>most good-looking</i>

*well-know**better-known**best-known**more well-known**most well-known*

According to data in the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English comparative forms *better-looking* and *better-known* and superlative forms *best-looking* and *best-known* are preferred and it can be said that neither British nor American English use forms *more good-looking* or *most good-looking*. On the other hand, forms *more well-known* and *most well-known* are exceptionally used in both varieties of English.

4.3.1 Doubly marked comparatives and superlatives

The usage of adjectives marked with both syntactic and analytic markers at the same time might sometimes appear. It happens mainly in a conversation. It is said that these adjectives are doubly marked in order to express a degree (Biber et al. 2007, 525). However, these structures are considered as grammatically incorrect.

5) *It is more colder here.*

6) *This exercise is more easier than the previous one.*

Also data in both the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English show that this usage is quite rare, but is sometimes applied mainly in spoken informal speeches.

Occasionally, adjectives with irregular comparative and superlative forms are additionally marked with inflectional suffixes *-er* and *-est*, too:

7) *That was the bestest concert you could go.*

Considering the example adjective *bestest* data in corpuses classify this usage rather exceptional and again related mainly to informal spoken language. Similarly, the adjective *bad* which also takes irregular forms of a comparison is never used in the form *worstest* in British neither American English according to data in corpuses.

4.4 Irregular forms of comparison

Small group of frequently used English adjectives does not use inflectional suffixes neither periphrastic constructions in order to express comparative and superlative degrees, but an adjectival base of these words is changed into different stems (Quirk et al. 2004, 458).

See the list of these adjectives and their comparative and superlative forms on the following page.

Absolute	Comparative	Superlative
<i>good</i>	<i>better</i>	<i>best</i>
<i>bad</i>	<i>worse</i>	<i>worst</i>
<i>far</i>	<i>further / farther</i>	<i>furthest / farthest</i>
<i>little</i>	<i>less / lesser</i>	<i>least</i>
<i>many, much</i>	<i>more</i>	<i>most</i>

4.4.1 Comparison of *far*

Quirk et al. (2004, 459) explain that both sets *farther/farthest* and *further/furthest* are often used synonymously to express physical and abstract relations. However, Dušková et al. (2003, 154) point out that *farther* and *farthest* might be exclusively used to express the physical distance, as in:

- 1) *at the farther end of the street*
- 2) *it was ten kilometers at the farthest*

According to data in both the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English this claim is proved not to be absolutely correct as both comparative stems *farther* and *further* and both superlative stems *farthest* and *furthest* might be used to describe physical distance. In this sense stems *farther* and *farthest* are used more frequently, but the usage of stems *further* and *furthest* is not excluded.

Dušková et al (2003, 154) also add that the comparative form *further* and the superlative form *furthest* might be used in the same meaning as *farther* and *farthest*, but it is more common to use them in a sense of ‘one more’, ‘later’ or ‘additional’ as it is illustrated in the examples below. Data in both corpuses support this claim.

- 3) *without further ado*
- 4) *Any further questions?*
- 5) *For further information, do not hesitate to contact us.*

4.4.2 Comparison of *much* and *many*

The basic distinction of absolute forms *much* and *many* is that *many* is applied as a determiner with countable nouns in plural while *much* is used with uncountable nouns.

Stems *more* and *most* can be used in two ways – they might serve as inflectional comparative and superlative forms of adjectives *many* and *much* where they serve as determinatives, but also as adverbials used to express non-inflectional comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 197).

The usage of *more* as a determinative is illustrated in the following table:

Absolute	Comparative
<i>They did not have many problems.</i>	<i>They had more problems than you can think of.</i>
<i>We do not have much homework.</i>	<i>We have more homework than we like.</i>
<i>I did not like it much.</i>	<i>I like it more than when I was a child.</i>

In these cases *more* functions as a comparative of absolutes *much* and *many*. In the first and second sentence *much* is used as a determiner of a noun phrase. In the third sentence *much* serves as an adjunct of a degree. As it is illustrated in the table in verbal constructions *more* is placed after the head while with adjectives and adverbs it precedes (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 534).

Huddleston and Pullum (2005, 198) point out that *much* and partly also *many* are non-affirmative words which means that negative clauses are applied with them. That is the reason why a shift from an absolute into a comparative is accompanied with a change of a polarity of a verb. See the examples of the sentences which are not likely to be used in Standard English:

- 1) * *We have much homework.*
- 2) * *I like it much.*

On the other hand, when *more* is used as an adverbial it functions as a modifier of an adjective or an adverb. In other words, it is used for a marking of a comparative, as in:

- 3) *It's more beautiful than I thought.*
- 4) *This is more likely to be the truth.*

Both usages mentioned might be also applied with *most*. Moreover, *most* can be also used with non-superlative meaning of 'extremely' or 'very'. See its possible usage in the table:

Absolute	
<i>They did not have many problems.</i>	<i>They had the most problems.</i>
<i>It's beautiful.</i>	<i>It's the most beautiful.</i>
<i>He found it sophisticated.</i>	<i>He found it most sophisticated.</i>

In the first sentence *most* is applied as an adjective – as the superlative of *many*, in the second sentence *most* functions as an adverb used to mark superlative of the adjective *expensive* and in the third sentence *most* again functions as an adverb although in this case it is not used to mark a superlative but only of a higher degree (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 198).

4.4.3 Comparison of *little*

Similarly as *more* and *most*, *little* and *least* might be used either as determinatives when they are applied as comparative and superlative degrees of the adjective *little*, or as adverbs modifying degrees (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 198). See the examples below where in the first sentence *less* is used as a determiner of *little* and in the second and third sentence *less* is used as a modifier of the adjective *important* and adverb *decently*.

- 1) *There is less room than in my flat.*
- 2) *It was less important than she thought.*
- 3) *He behaved less decently than his brother.*

When *less* is used as a determinative it has similar syntactic properties as its opposite *more*. However, *more* might be applied as a comparative for both – *much* which is used with uncountable nouns and *many* which is used with countable nouns in plural. The opposite of *many* is *few* which means that its comparative form is *fewer*. On the other hand opposite of *much* is *little* therefore its comparative is *less*.

Taking into consideration *less* as an adverb, it can be again compared to its opposite *more*. While *more* is used to express superiority, in other words to express a higher degree, *less* is used as a marker of inferiority – a lower degree (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 199). It has to be pointed out that superiority might be expressed not only by *more*, but also inflectionally (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 199). However, no inflectional form matching *less* exists. See the examples:

- 4) *My house is bigger than yours.*
- 5) *My house is more spacious than yours.*
- 6) *My house is less big than yours.*
- 7) *My house is less spacious than yours.*

According to Dušková et al. (2003, 154) *less* is used merely with uncountable nouns while *lesser* is used only in the attributive syntactic role with meaning ‘of less important’ or ‘of smaller size’.

- 8) *a message of less importance*
- 9) *the lesser-known writer*
- 10) *to a lesser degree*
- 11) *Lesser Town*
- 12) *the Lesser Antilles*

Adjective *least* has meaning of ‘slightest’ and according to Quirk et al. (2004, 460) it is often used with abstract nouns in nonassertive context and it might be also used as the head of a noun phrase, as it is shown in the examples:

13) *He committed that crime without the least hesitation.*

14) *That was the least he could do.*

Quirk et al. (2004, 460) add that adjectives *little* and *small* both have same comparative and superlative forms – *smaller* and *smallest* when they are used to modify countable nouns.

15) *Tom is a small/little boy.*

16) *He is smaller than his friend.*

17) *He is the smallest boy in the class.*

However, Quirk et al. (2004, 460) admit that forms *littler* and *littlest* are sometimes used mainly in some familiar expressions, as in:

18) *The Littlest Angel is well-known Christian story.*

19) *Kate is their littlest daughter.*

Data in both the British National Corpus and the Corpus of the Contemporary American English support this claim. Generally, data show that a synthetic comparison of the adjective *little* might be sometimes applied. Moreover, according to data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English the analytic comparative form *more little* and the superlative form *most little* are in few cases used, too.

4.4.4 Comparison of *old*

The adjective *old* can express comparison in two ways. It can be regularly inflected – *older*, *oldest* or it may be transferred into irregular forms – *elder*, *eldest*. According to Quirk et al. (2004, 459) these irregular forms are used mainly in the attributive syntactic role when the order of birth of members of a family is expressed. In other words, these forms require a personal reference.

1) *My older/elder brother is a writer.*

2) *Their oldest/eldest daughter works as a nurse.*

3) *This guitar is the older/*elder.*

Quirk et al. (2004, 459) add that it is not possible to use *than* after *elder*. To put it another way, the adjective *elder* is not a true comparative.

4) *My sister is two years older than me.*

- 5) * *My sister is two years elder than me.*

It must be also pointed out that a special use of the adjective *elder* exists, for example *Thomas Moore the elder, the elder Moore* or in courtesies like *elder statesman*. In this case *elder* again does not function as a comparative (Quirk et al. 2004, 459).

4.4.5 Comparison of *ill*

The adjective *ill* uses the same comparative as *bad* as it can be paraphrased as *in bad health* (Quirk et al. 2004, 459):

- 1) *My old grandfather feels worse today.*

This claim is supported also by data in both British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English as comparative forms *illier* and *more ill* are not used and the same might be said about superlative forms *illest* and *most ill*.

4.5 Purpose of a usage of comparative and superlative forms

A comparative form is used for a comparison of two people or objects in order to express a higher degree of a characteristic stated by an adjective (Dušková et al. 2003, 151). A meaning of this form can be paraphrased as ‘relatively’ or ‘more than average’ and basically it can be said that comparative forms provide a less clear and narrow range than superlative forms (Swan 2005, 141).

Dušková et al. (2003, 151) add that also absolute comparatives exist. These are comparatives which explain a higher degree of a characteristic not for purpose of comparison, but to express a new quality. See the examples of absolute comparatives below:

- 2) *higher education*
- 3) *younger generation*
- 4) *lower plants*

It is possible to intensify comparative forms by using adverbials such as *much, a lot, lots, far, still, yet*, etc. On the other hand comparative forms might be also weakened by adverbials like *a little, a bit, rather, somewhat, hardly, scarcely*, etc.

A superlative form is used for a comparison of people or objects in order to express the highest degree of a characteristic stated by an adjective (Dušková et al. 2003, 152).

In an informal style a superlative form might be also used instead of a comparative form for comparison of two objects or persons, as in:

- 5) *the smartest of their two sons*

Dušková et al. (2003, 153) explain that there are also superlative phrases formed by substantivized superlative form of an adjective with possessive pronoun after preposition *at* and illustrate this phenomenon on the following examples:

- 6) *first thing in the morning I am not at my brightest*
- 7) *on such occasions he is always at his most courteous*

Similarly as with comparative forms it is possible to change intensification of superlative forms by adverbials like *quite, altogether, absolutely, by far* and *very* which is associated with superlatives formed by a syntactic comparison.

It has to be pointed out that few adjectives use suffix *-most* to express superlative forms. These are for example adjectives denoting cardinal points – *northernmost, southernmost, westernmost, easternmost* and some others like *foremost, inmost, innermost*, etc. (Dušková et al. 2003, 153).

4.6 Usage of articles with comparative and superlative forms

As it was explained comparative and superlative forms are used for a comparison of two persons or objects. Considering a comparative form there is no need to use an article with *than*-constructions:

- 1) *He is more educated than his brother.*
- 2) *He is cleverer than his brother.*

However, according to Swan (2005, 116) comparative forms with the definite article *the* should appear in clauses when it is desired to express that things change or vary as it is illustrated in the examples below. Swan (2005, 116) also explains that in these structures *the* is used as a form of a demonstrative pronoun as originally *the* was used to express meaning of ‘by that much’. In other words it is not used as a real definite article.

- 3) *The older she gets, the happier she is.*
- 4) *The more challenging task it is, the more excited I am about that.*
- 5) *The sooner the better.*

Usage of the definite article *the* is desirable with superlative forms followed by an *of*-phrase (Quirk et al. 2004, 465), as in:

- 6) *He is the most educated of all the classmates.*
- 7) *He is the cleverest of all the classmates.*

It was also mentioned that in informal structures superlative forms are sometimes applied for comparison instead of a comparative form itself. In this case the definite article is required (Quirk et al. 2004, 465).

8) *He is the cleverest (of the two brothers).*

The definite article is also required in constructions where superlatives are used attributively. However, it is possible to replace this definite article by other definite determiners. See the examples:

9) *Tim is the youngest son.*

10) *Tim is our youngest son.*

11) **Tim is youngest son.*

12) *Kate is the most successful writer in the town.*

13) *Kate is our most successful writer.*

14) **Kate is most successful writer.*

Quirk et al. (2004, 466) point out that the definite determiner is optional in cases where an adjective is not used attributively:

15) *Tim is (the) youngest (of all).*

16) *Kate is (the) most successful (of all).*

According to data in both the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English even if an adjective is not used in the attributive role the usage of the definite determiner is essential and these structures are used more often than structures without the definite determiner.

However, it has to be mentioned that constructions with *most* which do not use the definite determiner have ambiguous meaning with evaluative adjectives as they might be interpreted in two ways – as superlative or intensifier. See the example:

17) *Kate is most successful.*

The interpretation of the example sentence above might be that *Kate is the most successful of all* or that *Kate is extremely successful*.

In constructions where *most* is used with the indefinite or zero article *most* is considered as an intensifier (Quirk et al. 2004, 466), as it is illustrated in the examples below where *most* can be interpreted as *extremely*:

18) *Kate is a most successful writer.*

19) *They are most successful writers*

Quirk et al. (2004, 466) add that no parallel construction using syntactic comparison exist if *most* is used as an intensifier.

20) *She is very sympathetic and most kind.*

21) **She is very sympathetic and kindest.*

It is usual to place the definite article in front of *most* for intensification. This is sometimes also applied with superlatives forms using syntactic comparison (Quirk et al. 2004, 466).

See the examples:

22) *She is the most beautiful girl.*

23) *He wears the weirdest glasses I have ever seen.*

4.7 Adjectives with absolute meaning

Some adjectives are traditionally considered to have inherently superlative (absolute) meaning. These adjectives are for example *dead*, *correct*, *perfect*, *total*, *essential*, *ideal*, *unique*, etc. They are usually considered as non-gradable. In other words they cannot be marked in order to express a comparative nor superlative degree and cannot be modified by degree words such as *very*, *too*, *so*, etc.

However, some grammarians go against this conservative view of absolute adjectives. Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 532) use the adjective *unique* as an example and it is explained that a thing is considered 'unique' only if one particular thing with properties taken in consideration exists. Thus building on this claim, *very unique* cannot be used, because if the adjective *unique* is not used as an absolute characteristic of a thing, the thing is not unique at all. Moreover, it cannot be said that one thing is *more unique* than another, because "an absolute degree of uniqueness is the only degree if uniqueness there is" (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 532).

However, this traditional point of view is not the only possible one as it contrasts with common usage shown in the examples:

1) *Her knowledge of English has proved even more complete than she taught.*

2) *The most essential treatment of cancer is chemotherapy.*

According to Huddleston and Pullum (2005, 532) *more unique* might also appear in the sense of 'more nearly unique'. In that context the adjective *unique* corresponds with the meaning of something exceptional or unusual and grading with these adjectives is considered acceptable. See the examples:

3) *this is rather unique example*

4) *the most unique man she has ever met*

Data in the British National Corpus show that the usage of *very unique* and *more unique* is almost excluded in British English. On the contrary, in American English *very unique* is used relatively frequently and *more unique* is also sometimes applied according to data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English.

It was already explained that it is not essential to claim that a particular adjective is or is not strictly gradable because it also depends on semantic compatibility, not only on grammaticality (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 532).

4.8 Comparative clauses and other degree complements

Comparative clauses and comparative phrases are constructions functioning as complements of gradable adjectives. These are prepositional phrases or clauses. According to Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002, 219) six main structural types of degree complements exist.

The first type of a comparative construction which is most usual consists of inflected comparative degree of an adjective followed by a conjunction *than* and a phrase or a clause, as in:

1) *She was smarter than I thought.*

Other possible structure of the first type of a degree complementation is composed of *more* or *less* followed by an adjective and a phrase or clause with a conjunction *than*, as in:

2) *She is more intelligent than I thought.*

3) *She is less smart than I thought.*

This type of a construction is frequently used, because it enables to clarify the nature of an object or person by putting it in contrast or by comparing it with some other object or person (Biber, Conrad and Leech 2002, 219):

4) *This house was smaller than theirs.*

Structure of the second type of comparative constructions is *as* standing as an adverb, an adjective and *as* standing as a conjunction and a phrase or a clause.

5) *She is as smart as I thought.*

As it was mentioned before, comparisons of superiority and inferiority exist. They both represent comparison of inequality. On the other hand, the construction presented in the example above is used for comparison of equality (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 199).

The third type of comparative constructions consists of a conjunction *so*, an adjective and clause with *that*:

- 6) *She is so smart that she was accepted by all best universities.*

The fourth type is formed of the conjunction *so*, an adjective, *as* and a clause with infinitive with *to*:

- 7) *She is so smart as to study for a test is easy for her.*

In the fifth type of a comparative clause an adjective is preceded by the adverb *too* and followed by a clause with infinitive with *to*:

- 8) *She is too smart to do some silly things.*

In the sixth type an adjective is followed by the adverb *enough* and a clause with infinitive with *to*:

- 9) *She is smart enough to pass the entrance exam.*

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis dealt with a description of a word category of adjectives and mainly with their possible comparative structures. The purpose of this bachelor thesis was to provide a comparison of a usage of two most usual ways of comparison – an analytic and synthetic with particular adjectives according to comprehensive grammar books and according to data in the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English.

It has been proved that sometimes a usage of certain type of comparison of a particular adjective illustrated in comprehensive books differs from its usage according to data in corpuses. In other words, theory from comprehensive books does not always agree with data in the corpuses. Moreover, differences between British and American English considering the usage of particular comparative forms of some adjectives were sometimes proved, too.

At the beginning semantic, syntactic and morphological characteristics of adjectives have been described as these characteristics might be seen as crucial in order to establish adjective as a separate part of speech. However, as it was mentioned adjectives share many properties with a word category of adverbs and their differentiation is based mainly on elements they modify. This is also reason why they might be classified as one A category according to modern grammars.

The following chapter dealt with a structure of the adjective phrase which might be seen as important knowledge in order to form a grammatically correct sentence. It was illustrated on the examples that it is possible to form simple adjective phrases containing only the head adjective, but also fully developed adjective phrases composed of a premodification field, head and postmodification field. This information was followed by the topic of central and peripheral adjectives as this basic division enables to assign some shared properties to adjectives.

The last, main chapter of this thesis was related to a comparison of adjectives. As it was mentioned English differentiates analytic, synthetic and irregular comparisons of adjectives. Each type of comparison was described and example adjectives were listed. This part also dealt with the topic of a choice between an analytic and synthetic comparison.

Generally, it can be said that in most cases monosyllabic adjectives take a synthetic comparison and trisyllabic adjectives analytic comparison. Adjectives composed of two

syllables might be seen as problematic because they take both types of these comparisons. Some patterns and rules which should help to choose the correct comparative and superlative forms with these adjectives were introduced.

It was also shown that some adjectives are non-gradable which means they are not usually used in order to express a certain degree of characteristics and on the contrary doubly marked comparative structures were mentioned, too. These are structures where both syntactic and analytic markers appear at the same time. However, it was proved by data in corpora that this phenomenon is typical mainly for an informal language used in conversations.

The topic of irregular comparative and superlative forms was also developed and adjectives taking these forms were described. Finally, a purpose of the usage of comparative and superlative forms was clarified and comparative clauses and other degree complements were examined.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- * Wrong example
- e.g. Exempli gratia – for example
- etc. Etcetera
- NP Noun phrase
- AP Adjective phrase