

# DEGREE WORDS IN ENGLISH: A FUNCTIONAL DISCOURSE GRAMMAR ACCOUNT\*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an account of English degree words within Functional Discourse Grammar. It is argued that the function of degree words is to specify the degree or value of a gradable unit along a scale or dimension. Crucially, the members of the degree word class show different grammatical properties, which is partly due to the fact that some introduce a standard of comparison with result or comparative clauses, whereas others do not. Consequently, it is claimed that the former are best treated as lexical predicates, while the latter should be considered the grammatical expression of operators at the Representational Level. Additionally, the interpersonal value of degree adverbs in *-ly* is also commented upon.

**KEY WORDS:** Functional Discourse Grammar, degree words, degree adverbs, gradation, intensification, interpersonal meaning.

## RESUMEN

El presente artículo desarrolla un análisis de las palabras de grado en el inglés en la Gramática Discursivo-Funcional. La función de las palabras de grado es especificar el grado o valor de una unidad graduable en una escala o dimensión. Una observación crucial es el hecho de que las palabras de grado muestran propiedades gramaticales diferentes, lo que se debe en parte a que tan sólo algunas introducen un estándar de comparación en forma de cláusula comparativa o de resultado. En consecuencia, el artículo argumenta que estas han de ser analizadas como predicados léxicos, mientras que aquellas que no introducen un estándar de comparación deben considerarse como la expresión gramatical de un operador en el Nivel Representativo. Por último, el artículo hace también referencia al valor interpersonal de los adverbios de grado en *-ly*.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Gramática Discursivo-Funcional, palabras de grado, adverbios de grado, graduación, intensificación, significado interpersonal.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to provide an account of English degree words in Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) as presented in Hengeveld and Mackenzie, with particular reference to the question of their grammatical or lexical status. Section 2 will provide a brief characterization of gradable adjectives and degree words with relevant examples from the English language. It will be shown that the main function of degree words is to further specify the degree of measurement established by the adjective along a given dimension or scale. The notion of standard of comparison will also be introduced as a key to understanding the syntactic properties of degree words. In section 3, I will review the main proposals for the representation of degree words in the Functional (Discourse) Grammar (F(D)G) tradition. It will be claimed that the analyses that have been proposed so far cannot account for the complexity and variety of degree modifiers and, most importantly, that no definitive proposal exists at the moment in current FDG. Finally, section 4 will provide analyses of different representatives of the class of degree words in English. I will show that it is necessary to pay attention to individual items and propose specific representations for each rather than treating degree words as a uniform class. The final conclusion will be that some degree words are grammatical and some lexical, with significant differences among lexical degree words too.

## 2. ENGLISH DEGREE WORDS

Quirk et al. state that degree words<sup>1</sup> “are concerned with the assessment of gradable constituents in relation to an imaginary scale” (485), and Huddleston and Pullum note that the prototypical adjective is gradable and “denotes a property that can be possessed in varying degrees” (531). Similarly, but more technically, Kennedy and McNally state that gradable adjectives

map their arguments onto abstract representations of measurement, or DEGREES, which are formalized as points or intervals partially ordered along some DIMENSION (e.g. height, cost, weight, and so forth; ...). The set of ordered degrees corresponds to a SCALE, and propositions constructed out of gradable adjectives define relations between degrees with truth conditions (Kennedy and McNally 349).

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I will use the term “degree word” for all kinds of degree expressions, and I will reserve the term “degree adverb” for degree words formed through suffix *-ly*.





The crucial factor is thus that non-gradable adjectives, when combined with degree words, must necessarily be interpreted as gradable, and hence adapt their senses to match the requirement of degree modification.

Kennedy and McNally further claim that the properties of the scale or dimension of the adjective have relevance on the distribution of degree modifiers, “in particular, whether the scale is fully closed (has a minimum and maximum value), partly closed (has only a minimum or maximum value, but not both), or fully open (has no minimum or maximum value)” (348). Gradable adjectives which belong to open scales display another relevant property, the fact that their denotation is context-dependent: “an adjective like *tall*, [...] may be true of an object in one context and false in another”, but an adjective like *empty* “simply requires its argument to be devoid of contents”, without reference to context. The authors provide the following examples with the adjective *expensive* as an illustration:

- (4) a. The international space station is very expensive.  
(for space projects; large increase from contextual standard of comparison)
- b. The coffee at the airport is very expensive.  
(for coffee; small increase from contextual standard)

Absolute adjectives are context independent, whereas standard gradable adjectives are context dependent and *relative* to a scale.

The fact that adjectives denote different degrees along a scale derives from the fact that they are “scalar and inherently comparative” (Murphy 228). Even in its positive use, an adjective like *tall* sets the value relative to a standard of comparison. A man is *tall* if he is taller than a height which we consider “unremarkable” for some group (Murphy 228).

But of course, properties can also be graded relative to standard of comparison which may be made explicit in the linguistic expression, and need not be inferred contextually. In English standards of comparison with degree words can be introduced by a comparative clause or prepositional phrase. Semantically, those standards may be classified along two basic parameters, which Huddleston and Pullum name *scalar* and *equality* (1099). This yields the combinations given in Table 1:

TABLE 1. (IN)EQUALITY AND (NON-)SCALAR		
	EQUALITY	INEQUALITY
SCALAR	<i>Kim is as old as Pat</i>	<i>Kim is older than Pat</i>
NON-SCALAR	<i>I took the same bus as last time</i>	<i>I took a different bus from last time</i>

Non-scalar comparisons are not related to grading and will no be considered here. Within scalar comparisons, Huddleston and Pullum make a further distinction between *term comparison* and *set comparison* as illustrated in (5):



- (5) a. Ed is more tolerant than he used to be (term comparison)  
 b. Ed made the most mistakes of them all (set comparison)

What both types have in common is the expression of a relation between a primary and a secondary term. The secondary term is usually realized by means of a clause or some other phrase. Comparatives typically appear in term comparisons and superlatives in set comparisons, although comparatives can also appear in set comparisons with just two members (e.g. *Jill is the taller of the twins*).

Additionally, the standard of comparison may be introduced by a result clause, as in the following examples (Baker 315):

- (6) a. Martha is *too* intelligent *to miss the problem*  
 b. Martha is *so* intelligent *that she got an A+*  
 c. Martha is intelligent *enough to get at least a B*

According to Baker, the clause introduces a region along the scale where a certain result would follow from degrees that fall within the region (315). So, the representation for (6a) would be the following:

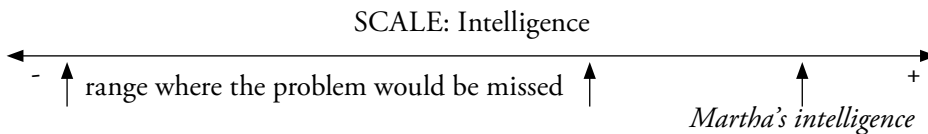


Figure 2. Scale: *Intelligence* (adapted from Baker 315)

This allows the following classification of scalar degree words in English (adapted from Huddleston and Pullum 1104):

TABLE 2. STANDARDS OF COMPARISON AND DEGREE WORDS				
STANDARD OF COMPARISON				
NON-CONTEXTUAL			CONTEXTUAL	
COMPARISON		RESULT		
EQUALITY	INEQUALITY			
+	-	-	-	
-	+	-	-	<i>more /-er than; less than; rather than</i>
-	-	+	-	<i>So... that; too... to; enough to</i>
-	-	-	+	<i>Very, rather, quite, highly, extremely, etc.</i>

As Table 2 shows, degree words may be classified according to whether they introduce their own standard of comparison or whether they make use of the one which is activated in the context by the adjective. In the latter case, English offers degree words like *very*, *rather* or *quite*, as well as de-adjectival forms like *highly* or



*extremely*. However, the contextual standard of comparison may be replaced or deactivated by that introduced by degree words through comparison or result expressions. Comparison expressions may be further subdivided into those of equality and inequality (see Table 1). Relevant examples of English degree expressions are given on the right-hand column.

Now that the main properties of English degree words have been introduced, section 3 will be devoted to examine the way they have been treated in the FDG tradition. As will become evident, the theory does not seem to offer a comprehensive analysis, although it does offer the tools with which such an analysis can be implemented. Section 4 will thus be aimed at providing such an analysis.

### 3. DEGREE WORDS IN FUNCTIONAL (DISCOURSE) GRAMMAR

In traditional grammar degree words are considered to belong to the general class of adverbs. Some grammatical models, though, treat them as a class of their own, and assume they show a syntactic behaviour similar to other lexical categories, in that they can also head phrasal units. Within the F(D)G tradition, degree words have not received much attention, but the initial strategy has been to treat them as operators on the property variable 'f'. This is the analysis we find in Samuelssdorf, where it is explicitly stated that an item like "*very* is a grammatical morpheme expressing intensity" (275). Mackenzie offers a more detailed treatment ("Adverbs" 126), which divides degree words into three types, following the descriptive analysis of Downing and Locke (522):

1. Degree adverbs of comparison: *more, most, less, least*, etc.
2. Degree adverbs of intensification or attenuation: *fully, quite, somewhat, hardly, very*, etc.
3. Degree adverbs of approximation: *about, roughly, more or less*, etc.

In order to determine whether degree adverbs should be included in the lexicon or should be treated as grammatical operators, Mackenzie employs three criteria, which can be summarised with the following questions:

- a. Do the words in the class have an identifiable function?
- b. Do the words in the class have their own predicate frames?
- c. Is there evidence that the words in the class are not derived from an existing part of speech?

The second and the third criteria are crucial to determine whether degree words should enter the lexicon as a class of their own. Mackenzie concludes that they lack the richness of meaning to satisfy criteria (b) and are therefore "unlikely candidates for lexical status, with a grammatical rather than a lexical role to play"

(“Adverbs” 126). Accordingly, he proposes representations like the following, in which pluses and minuses symbolize relevant grammatical operators:

- (7) *very competent* (+f<sub>i</sub>: competent)  
*extremely competent* (++f<sub>i</sub>: competent)  
*insufficiently competent* (-f<sub>i</sub>: competent)

Other degree words may be introduced through percentages which would apply to the value of the adjectival function:

- (8) *somewhat tall* (50% f<sub>i</sub>: tall)

The opposing view in the FG tradition, though, is found in Hengeveld, who treats degree adverbs as predicates, rather than operators, which restrict the property variable (126-127). Thus, the entry of the adverb *extremely* in (9a) would be stored in the FG lexicon, and it would modify an adjective, as indicated in the representation of the sequence *extremely clumsy* in (9b):

- (9) a. *extremely*<sub>Adv</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>)  
 b. (f<sub>i</sub>: *clumsy*<sub>Adj</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>: *extremely*<sub>Adv</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>)))

It should be noted, though, that Hengeveld classifies adverbs on the basis of the layer they modify in the structure of the clause, and thus degree adverbs are grouped with manner adverbs as predicate satellites. Indeed, there is significant evidence that manner adverbs are lexical predicates, as they are typically created through derivational rules and may impose semantic restrictions on the predicate they modify. However, Hengeveld does not discuss whether degree words show properties similar to manner adverbs apart from the modification of the “f” variable.

These conflicting views on the treatment of degree words in FG reflect the inherent difficulty in classifying them as lexical or grammatical elements. Current FDG seems to have opted for the second analysis. Although no comprehensive treatment of these items is offered in Hengeveld and Mackenzie’s monograph, we do find a couple of references which indicate that they are treated as lexical predicates. Thus, in Hengeveld and Mackenzie we find the following representation for the Dutch expression ‘*erg ziek*’ (*very sick*) in which ‘*erg*’ is treated as a lexeme modifying the lexical property ‘f’ (221):

- (10) (f<sub>i</sub>: *ziek*<sub>A</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>: [(f<sub>j</sub>: *erg*<sub>Adv</sub> (f<sub>j</sub>)) (f<sub>i</sub>)]))

A few pages later, however, ‘*erg*’ is analysed as a *DAdverb* (i.e. degree adverb) (267):

- (11) (f<sub>i</sub>: *erg*<sub>DAdv</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>)) (f<sub>j</sub>))



which might seem to indicate that degree adverbs are treated as a distinct lexical category. Similarly, on page 231, the authors offer the following analysis for the expression *a very amazingly good book*, in which *very* is treated as a lexical restrictor over the adverb *amazingly* (although no subscripts for parts of speech are provided):

$$(12) \quad (x_i: [(f_i: \text{book } (f_i)) (x_i)]: [(f_j: \text{good } (f_j): [(f_k: \text{amazing } (f_k): [(f_l: \text{very } (f_l)) (f_k)]) (f_j)] (x_i)])$$

This analysis very much coincides with the typologically-based study of Salazar García on degree words in Romance languages. He notes that degree words are free forms whose prosodic behaviour is analogous to that of lexical words, and that some degree modifiers, those obtained derivationally, impose selection restrictions on the modified item (799). This contrasts with the behaviour of other units like *very*:

- (13) a. A guest is very ill.  
b. A guest is very optimistic.

- (14) a. A guest is seriously ill.  
b. \* A guest is seriously optimistic.

The author concludes that degree words are best treated as lexical predicates, although there are significant grammatical differences between the members of the class.

Salazar García also notes that the class of degree words in Romance languages is flexible, and items can usually take different functions and modify different word categories. He argues for the introduction of a parameter of flexibility as a synchronic determinant within a given class. Thus, the fact that most degree words in Romance languages can perform different grammatical functions can be explained according to a number of implicational hierarchies. These hierarchies provide additional evidence in favour of the lexical status of degree items.

However, these general indicators of the treatment of degree words as lexical items rather than grammatical operators in current FDG, contrast with the analysis we find in Hengeveld and Mackenzie, where we read that ‘Degree adverbs will be seen as indicating the Quantity of application of their head’ (270). The following analysis is proposed for the expression *highly intelligent*:

$$(15) \quad (f_i: \text{intelligent}_A (f_i): [(q_i: [(f_j: \text{high}_A (f_j)) (q_i)]) (f_i)])$$

The example reflects the close relationship between degree intensification and quantification which has been much studied in the literature. Significantly, Salazar García treats degree words as a subclass of quantifiers.

However, the representation in (15) contrasts with the analysis of the Dutch item ‘erg’ and with Salazar García’s view that deadjectival adverbs are clearly lexical.





Hengeveld and Mackenzie treat adverb *-ly* formation as an inflectional process,<sup>3</sup> a kind of word-class changing inflection, which is dealt with by the morphological encoder (266). In other words, the category Degree Adverb in the lexicon would only be reserved for invariable forms like *very, how, too, rather, enough, so, as*, etc. which are not formed derivationally.

From this it follows that the analysis of degree words in the F(D)G tradition has fluctuated between the lexicon and the grammar. Although extant analyses suggest that degree words should be treated as lexical units, the fact is that none of the analyses examined offers a full treatment of degree modification and/or degree words in a single language. A notable exception is Salazar's work, although its typological orientation hinders the examination of non-central members of the degree word class in a particular language. In what follows, I will propose a first analysis of several illustrative degree adverbs in English within FDG.

#### 4. ENGLISH DEGREE WORDS IN FDG

The conclusion that can be drawn from the previous sections is that the analysis of degree words as lexical or grammatical modifiers must rest on a careful study of the individual properties of each item as they do not constitute a uniform class (some are invariable, some are not; some introduce standard of comparisons, some do not). Indeed, grammaticalization studies have pointed out that it may be too imprecise to classify entire classes as either lexical or grammatical, given the fact that members within the class may show different degrees of lexical and / or grammatical behaviour (e.g. Lehmann). Intuitively, this seems to be the case with degree words, which, at least in English, show significant semantic and syntactic differences.

In the next pages, then, I will examine the behaviour of three English degree words which, in principle, seem to show different semantic properties, and see to what extent they also present different syntactic and morphological features. The items chosen are *very, so* and *highly*, which are representatives of contextual, result and de-adjectival degree words respectively. Reference will also be made to comparative degree words.

##### 4.1. *VERY*

*Very* combines with gradable adjectives and does not introduce a standard of comparison itself, but changes the degree value of the adjective by raising it in some amount. The standard of comparison is therefore established contextually, and this affects the intensification of the item (see example 4). Syntactically, *very* does not

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<sup>3</sup> That is the reason why *amazingly* in example (12) is represented with the adjectival form 'amazing' and *highly* in (15) with the adjective 'high'.



introduce a result or comparative clause, as no standard of comparison is required, and it shows a semantic contribution which is adjusted in context. Morphologically, it is an invariable item, so it would seem a natural candidate for grammatical status.

Within FDG, the lexical-grammatical dichotomy has been studied by Keizer, who introduces a number of criteria, most of them derived from grammaticalization studies, to establish the grammatical or lexical status of different units such as numerals, pronouns or determiners (40-44). *Very* gives positive values for the following of Keizer's criteria:

- (17) No ascriptive function
- Fixed position
- Not modifiable<sup>4</sup>
- Not input to predicate formation rules
- Little semantic content (No denotative meaning)
- No Focus / emphasis

Taken together, these facts seem to indicate that *very* is a grammatical operator, and not a predicate, which takes the adjective as its complement. Keizer introduces an intermediate category of 'lexical operators' for those secondary grammatical words which "are non-descriptive" as "they do not have a predicative function, and as such do not restrict the denotation of the expression in question" (Keizer 50). It would thus seem to be appropriate to treat *very* as a lexical operator and propose representations like the following:

- (18) *very* tall (very  $f_i$ : [ $\text{tall}_A(f_i)$ ])

Additional evidence for this proposal comes from the fact that the equivalent form in other languages, such as Spanish *mu*, is a shortened form derived from other items (*mu*ito), which could be inflected for gender and number. This may indicate a pattern of grammaticalization from forms which show a clearer lexical status.

Current FDG, however, offers another possibility, which is the one I will defend here. Hengeveld and Mackenzie establish a difference between lexemes and words. Whereas the former are relevant at the Representational Level and therefore have denotative meaning, the latter are relevant at the Morphosyntactic Level and give expression to grammatical operators or functions. Precisely, Hengeveld and Mackenzie (401) note that one reason to distinguish the notion of word from lexeme is the fact that grammatical words do not correspond to a lexeme at the Representational Level. This analysis then opens the door to a treatment of degree

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4 Van de Velde comments on the controversial status of the sequence *not very*, as in *not very intelligent*, where it is not clear if *not* has scope over *very intelligent* or over *very* only ("Interpersonal" 227). Be that as it may, the possibilities for *very* to be modified are rather limited.

words as lexical or grammatical, depending on the properties of each individual item. In the case of *very*, I will assume that it should be analysed as a grammatical word which corresponds to the expression of a degree operator of intensification. This would thus be the analysis of the expression *very tall* at the Representational and Morphological Levels:

- (19) RL: (intens  $f_i$ ; tall<sub>A</sub> ( $f_i$ ))  
 ML: (Ap<sub>i</sub>: (**Gw<sub>i</sub>**: **very** (**Gw<sub>i</sub>**)) (Aw<sub>i</sub>: tall (Aw<sub>i</sub>)) (Ap<sub>i</sub>))

This analysis can be extended to neoclassical prefixes (*super-*, *hyper-*, etc.) or suffixes like *-ísimo/a* in Spanish. Significantly, and in spite of the representation of *very* as a lexical restrictor, Hengeveld and Mackenzie note that “grading is the grammatical counterpart of degree modification” (235), and illustrate grammatical degree modification with the Spanish morpheme *ísimo/a*:

- (20) fácil-      facil-ísimo  
 easy        easy-INTENS  
 ‘easy’      ‘very easy’

It is relevant to note that Spanish rejects the concurrent expression of *muy* and morphological intensification: *\*muy facilísimo*, which indicates that both are alternative strategies to express the same content.

#### 4.2. *So*

Degree word *so* can introduce two types of standard of comparison, one of equality as in (21):

- (21) He is not *so* intelligent *as his brother*

and one of result as in (22):

- (22) He is *so* intelligent *that he got an A+*

In the first case it is equivalent to the sequence *as ... as*, but *so ... as* seems to be restricted to non-affirmative contexts only.

One crucial question in scalar comparisons is the status of the comparative clause of equality and the result clause. There seems to be a more or less general consensus in the literature that the comparative and result clauses are syntactic complements of the degree word, and the intervening adjectival structure therefore creates a discontinuous unit. This is recognized in most syntactic analyses in the Chomskyan tradition (see Escribano for a general view on recent generative analyses) and also in descriptive grammars. Huddleston and Pullum call *so* in (21) a “comparative governor” which licenses a complement expanded by *as*, a preposition (1104). This obviously underlines their status as syntactic heads.



The most obvious piece of evidence in favour of this analysis comes from the fact that the comparative and result clauses cannot remain in the expression if the degree word is removed:

- (23) a. It was *so* expensive *that I decided not to buy it*  
b. \* It was expensive *that I decided not to buy it*
- (24) a. This may be a *more* serious problem *than you think*  
b. \* This may be a serious problem *than you think*

Within FG, Mackenzie has noted that the following examples are instances of discontinuous structures (“Grammar” 87):

- (25) a. *As pretty* a girl *as you will ever meet*  
b. *Too much* food *to eat*

However, he prefers to see the prepositional phrase and the result clause as modifiers or satellites to the adjectival and nominal heads, rather than arguments, given the fact that they are usually omissible. This position can be reinforced by the observations in Huddleston (309), who discusses examples like those in (26):

- (26) a. She was (*as*) slim *as a reed*  
b. He was (*too*) old *to be doing this kind of work*

In both examples the degree word can be omitted, as indicated by the parentheses, but the prepositional phrase in (26a) and the clause in (26b) may remain in the expression. Huddleston also argues that the analysis of these units as complements of the degree word is problematic for inflectional comparatives, which would force the treatment of suffix *-er* as a lexical element.

I would argue, however, that this approach is not adequate. First, the fact that a given phrase is structurally omissible does not necessarily mean that it is a modifier and not an argument. Given the appropriate circumstances, many semantic arguments can be omitted. Note also, that result and comparative clauses introduce a standard of comparison, but if it is not present, speakers will look for one in the relevant context, as this is a necessary property in the interpretation of all gradable adjectives. This facilitates the omissibility of comparative and result clauses.

Secondly, the fact that, in some cases, degree words may be omitted without causing the ungrammaticality of the expression with the result or comparative clause merely indicates that, on some occasions, these may function as independent modifiers of the adjective. But if this analysis is extended to all degree expressions, the dependency between the degree word and the clause (cf. 23 and 24) is unaccounted for.

As I have claimed in section 2, though, the standard of comparison is a crucial element for the semantic interpretation of adjectives and degree modification. The fact that degree words like *very*, *rather*, etc. do not introduce one standard of



comparison results from the fact that gradable adjectives themselves are inherently scalar. But if the degree word introduces one standard of comparison (as in the case of *so...as/that*), it replaces or makes unnecessary a default contextual one.

The proposed representation for the degree phrase *so... as* is thus the following:

- (27) so intelligent that he got an A  
 $(f_i: \text{intelligent}_A (f_i): [(f_j: \text{so}_{\text{Deg}} (f_j)) (p_i: \text{---that he got an A--- } (p_i))_{\text{Result}}] (f_i))$

As (27) shows, *so... that* functions as a lexical modifier of the property variable restricted by the adjective *intelligent*. The degree word and the clause thus form a semantic unit, which is based on a predicate / argument relation. In other words, *so* is a lexical element, which takes a proposition as its argument. This semantic constituent modifies the adjectival head. Unlike *very*, which is the grammatical expression of intensification, *so* behaves as a lexical head and is labelled as a Degree word.

The fact that *so, as, more*, etc. are treated as predicative lexical elements helps understand some differences with *very*, which I analysed as a grammatical word. First, degree words introducing a comparative or result clause can be pre-modified, which is not the case with *very* (but see footnote 4):

- (28) a. Just as intelligent as Peter / \* Just very intelligent  
 b. Much more intelligent / \* Much very intelligent

And, given that they receive a different treatment (grammatical vs. lexical) it is expected that the two can be combined in the same expression, as in the following example from the British National Corpus (BNC):

- (29) He was **so very** young, so hurt and confused by all that had happened in his life, it seemed only natural that he should want to lash out. (FPK1158)

The analysis for the sequence *so very young (that) it seemed...* would thus be the following:

- (30) so very young (that) it seemed...  
 $(\text{intens } f_i: \text{young}_A (f_i): [(f_j: \text{so}_{\text{Deg}} (f_j)) (p_i: \text{---it seemed...--- } (p_i))_{\text{Result}}] (f_i))$

Even the sequence *too very* seems possible, though admittedly, the BNC provides only two examples:<sup>5</sup>

- (31) Hmm you didn't sound *too very* enthusiastic. (KBB3509)

<sup>5</sup> The impossibility of other combinations (*\*as very; \*more very*, etc.) may be due to a semantic incompatibility between intensification and (in)equality.



An obvious problem, which I will leave unsolved here, is that of comparative and superlative suffixes. On the basis of the analysis proposed for *so*, degree word *more* should also be treated as a lexical item, which seems inadequate for its suffixal counterpart *-er*. Yet, it is obvious that they are so related that a common analysis would be desirable.

As for the syntax of the construction, Huddleston and Pullum note that the most usual position for the comparative complement is at the end of the phrase containing the comparative phrase or even at the end of the clause (1106), as in the following examples:

- (32) a. She's *more* experienced in these matters *than I am*  
 b. *More* people attended the meeting *than ever before*

But occasionally, a comparative clause can also appear in pre-head position:

- (33) A better *than expected* result

In other words, comparative clauses can appear in different positions, preferably at the end of the adjective phrase or at the end of the sentence, presumably due to the syntactic heaviness of the clause itself. This would justify an analysis along the lines of Van de Velde ("PP Extraction") for extraposition of prepositional phrases (Pp) in Dutch. In Van de Velde's proposal, the Pp is treated as an adjacent unit which does not form a constituent with the host Noun phrase. Similarly, the result and comparative clauses would not remain inside the Ap, which would account nicely for cases of extraposition from subject position as in (32b). Thus, the analysis of the expression *so intelligent that he got an A* is given in (34):

- (34) *so intelligent that he got an A*

RL: ( $f_i$ : intelligent<sub>A</sub> ( $f_i$ ): [( $f_j$ : so<sub>Deg</sub> ( $f_j$ )) ( $p_i$ :—that he got an A—( $p_i$ )<sub>Result</sub>] ( $f_i$ ))

ML: ( $A_{P_i}$ : (**Deg**<sub>w<sub>i</sub></sub>: **so** (**Deg**<sub>w<sub>i</sub></sub>)) ( $A_{w_i}$ : intelligent ( $A_{w_i}$ )) ( $A_{P_i}$ ))  
 ( $Cl_i$ :—that he got an A—( $Cl_i$ ))

The analysis shows that the result clause is not an integral member of the Ap, which would also serve to explain its syntactic optionality.

#### 4.3. HIGHLY

As mentioned earlier, degree adverbs in *-ly* are treated at the RL as adjectives which restrict a quantificational variable. The suffix is inserted at the ML, and is therefore treated as a supportive morpheme with no semantic content. This is the same analysis proposed in the theory for manner adverbs in *-ly*, with which they share many properties:



- (35) carelessly  
 (m<sub>i</sub>: [(f<sub>i</sub>: carelessly<sub>A</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>)) (m<sub>i</sub>)])

The only difference between the two is that the adjective restricts a quantificational variable rather than a manner variable:

- (36) highly (intelligent)  
 (q<sub>i</sub>: [(f<sub>i</sub>: highly<sub>A</sub> (f<sub>i</sub>)) (q<sub>i</sub>)])

The relation between manner and degree adverbs has long been noted. Huddleston and Pullum claim that many degree adverbs in *-ly* have a “primary meaning (that) has to do with manner, with the degree meaning secondary” (583). They note the following correspondences:

- |                                      |                                          |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| (37) MANNER                          | DEGREE                                   |
| They behaved <i>dreadfully</i>       | I'm <i>dreadfully</i> sorry              |
| He was acting <i>suspiciously</i>    | The kids are <i>suspiciously</i> quiet   |
| She solved the problem <i>easily</i> | She speaks <i>easily</i> the most fluent |

One of the reasons for the introduction of the ‘m’ variable and the treatment of manner adverb formation in *-ly* as a regular inflectional process is the fact that manner adverbs can be systematically paraphrased with the expression *in a ADJ manner/ way*. According to Hengeveld and Mackenzie, an adjectival predicate in an environment like (35) receives the suffix *-ly* in a systematic way (266).

The situation with degree adverbs in *-ly*, however, is not exactly the same. It is not easy to find a regular paraphrase for the meaning of degree adverbs. *Dreadfully sorry* does not paraphrase as ‘sorry to a dreadful quantity’, neither does *suspiciously quiet* paraphrase as ‘quiet to a suspicious quantity’. As noted again by Huddleston and Pullum, *dreadfully* in *dreadfully sorry* is best paraphrased as ‘extremely’ or ‘to a high degree’ and *suspiciously*, to ‘a degree that caused suspicion’. Moreover, *easily*, as a degree adverb, indicates that the degree is achieved by a considerable margin. Others like *fairly*, have a very different and unrelated meaning when they function as degree adverbs from their use as manner adverbs.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that degree adverbs in *-ly* are forms which originally relate to manner adverbs but gradually lose their denotational meaning and gain interpersonal value. This is precisely the analysis defended in Van de Velde (“Interpersonal” 216), taken over by Hengeveld and Mackenzie (111), who argues for a treatment of degree adverbs as interpersonal modifiers at the Interpersonal Level. He claims that many of these adverbs have lost their literal meaning and have undergone a process of subjectification in their evolution from denotative adjectives to grammaticalised adverbs, which serve to express the speaker’s attitude towards the communicated content. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate to treat them just like manner adverbs, as the result of a systematic inflection-like process after the insertion of an adjective in a quantity frame. Given their interpersonal nature, degree adverbs in *-ly* should be treated as ready-made lexemes in the lexicon



which feed the Interpersonal level. Hence, the representation of *dreadfully sorry* is given in (38):

(38) *dreadfully* (*sorry*)

IL: ( $T_1$  : [ ] ( $T_1$ ): *dreadfully* ( $T_1$ ))

RL: ( $f_i$ : *sorry*<sub>A</sub> ( $f_i$ ))

At the Interpersonal Level, *dreadfully* functions as a modifier of the Ascriptive Subact ( $T_1$ ), whose lexical head is the adjectival predicate *sorry* introduced at the Representational Level. As noted by Van de Velde (“Interpersonal” 217) there may be many cases of adverbs which find an intermediate position in their evolution from degree modifiers to grammaticalised interpersonal modifiers. For those cases, it may be difficult to determine the level of representation at which they are relevant, although one possible solution is to assign them to both within the same representation. This would account for the fact that some degree adverbs in *-ly* show both denotational and interpersonal traits of meaning. In those cases in which the degree adverb does not seem to have acquired interpersonal overtones (e.g. *highly*, *extremely*, *sufficiently*, etc.), a ‘denotative’ analysis such as the one provided in (36) seems correct.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have examined the treatment of degree words in English within Functional Discourse Grammar. My main conclusions can be summarized in the following list:

- Degree words do not form a uniform category as there are significant differences in both semantic contribution and morphosyntactic properties among the members of the class.
- Semantically, a main distinction can be drawn between those degree words which introduce an explicit standard of comparison and those which do not.
- Syntactically, the introduction of an explicit standard of comparison correlates with the presence of a comparative or result clause.
- Many degree adverbs in *-ly* function as modifiers at the interpersonal level (cf. Van de Velde, “Interpersonal” 216).

Accordingly, I have proposed different analyses for degree words in FDG:

- As operators at the RL and words at the ML for grammatical degree words like *very*.
- As predicative lexemes which take a result or comparative clause as an argument (*so... that; as/so... as*).
- As interpersonal modifiers originally derived from manner adverbs (*-ly* degree adverbs).





This proposal, however, leaves untouched a number of, admittedly, controversial issues. In particular, the treatment of inflectional comparatives and superlatives seems rather problematic for the analysis adopted here, as it is doubtful that suffixes can be treated as lexical predicates. Additionally, more research is required in different areas of degree modification such as the relation of degree words with quantifiers, degree modification of other gradable units, the internal structure of comparative and result clauses and many other syntactic subtleties. The present article should thus be understood as a first approximation to this complex area of grammar.

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