

Abstract:

There are some adjectives in language which sound strange to a native speaker in their graded form. Consider this sentence: “These pearls are more real than the real ones!” (“Tyhle perly jsou pravější než pravé!”) How can they be more real? What does it even mean? I attempt to answer these and other questions in this paper.

While the phenomenon of rarely graded adjectives may quite peripheral, it is nonetheless interesting and understanding it is important for the general understanding of adjective gradation.

Adjectives such as real are traditionally considered non-gradable. However, as we can see from the example, that doesn't mean they can't be graded. The distinction between gradable and non-gradable adjectives apparently cannot be clear-cut. The goal of this paper is to describe this phenomenon, determine which properties rarely graded adjectives have and how they can be graded.

I use data from a large corpus of written Czech (SYN v4) to find these adjectives and the way they are used. I employ both quantitative and qualitative methods to reach a comprehensive overview of rarely graded adjectives. I use statistical methods to find parameters specific for this type of adjective and semantic analysis to divide it into well-motivated categories. I also explain why they are graded only rarely, how their gradation works and what functions it serves.

I conclude that gradability should be seen as a statistical tendency rather than a line dividing adjectives in a straightforward way.