

COMPARATIVE DEGREE OF ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS

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ABSTRACT: *The current study entitled "Comparative Degree of Adjectives and Adverbs". Comparison is an attempt to show degrees of comparison in the English language. The degrees of comparison in English grammar are made with adjectives and adverbs to show how big or small, high or low, more or less, many or few, of the qualities, numbers, and positions of the nouns (persons, things, places) in comparison to the others mentioned in the other part of a sentence or an expression. Therefore, the comparative degree is the form we use when we compare two things (a group of things) (Leech 84). This paper deals with regular (e.g. younger, more beautiful, less carefully) and irregular (better, worse, farther) comparative degree of adjectives and adverbs. In addition of the introduction and conclusion, this paper consists of four main sections. Section one deals with the regular and irregular comparative degree of adjectives. Section two studies and explains the regular and irregular comparative degree of adverbs. Section three is an attempt to state the changes that happen in spelling and pronunciation of adjectives and adverbs in making a comparative degree. Section four presents the intensifiers use with a comparative degree of adjectives and adverbs. The work ends with a summary and a prominent conclusion.*

KEYWORDS: Comparative degree, adjectives, adverbs, regular and irregular forms

INTRODUCTION

An Overview of Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjective is a word that describes, modifies, limits distinguishes or otherwise characterizes the noun they refer to. Adjectives take a large category- the noun-and limit it to a percentage of things within what the noun covers. An example is the phrase 'green apples': the large category-apple is made smaller by the adjectives 'green' so that now only green apples (and not red, yellow, or golden apples) are being referred to (Teschner and Evans 10). Furthermore, adjectives possess two functions referred to as 'attributive' and 'predicative': Attributive adjectives function as (pre-) modifiers within adjectives, whereas predicative adjectives function as predicative complements within clauses. A particular type of gradability is known as '**comparison**'. Comparison is a property associated with many adjectives, including the most commonly occurring ones, expressed by three separate inflectional forms known as absolute, comparative and superlative, for example: " Sally is tall", " Sally is taller than Bill", and " Sally is the tallest in class". Regarding form, many (but not all) adjectives take the comparative and superlative suffixes, "-er" and "-est", respectively; thus: "new→ newer→ newest". Other adjectives form comparatives and superlatives by appearing after the Periphrastic Form, "more" or "most", for example: "evil→ more evil → most evil" (Collins and Hollo 95; Teschner and Evans 11).

An adverb describes an action (a verb) saying how, when, where something happens (Vince 140). So, an adverb is a word that describes, limits, distinguishes, or otherwise talks about

verbs. So, adverbs are to verbs as adjectives are to nouns. Adverbs characterize or otherwise assign a manner to their verbs, for example: "Connie jumped up quickly" (in a quick manner). An adverb can also function as an intensifier when it modifies adjectives: "Joe is a very hard"(working person), as an intensifier when modifying other adverbs: "Joe works very rapidly" (Tescher and Evans 12). Like adjectives, many adverbs are gradable. Comparison, however, is normally expressed analytically (e.g. heavily, more heavily, most heavily) rather than inflectionally (e.g. slow, slower, slowest) (Collins and Hollo 94).

1. Comparative Degree of Adjectives

1.1. Regular Comparative Degree of Adjectives

1.1.1. Using the Inflectional Suffix, "-er".

1.1.1.1. According to Swan (113), Comparative degree in one-syllable adjectives is made by adding the inflectional suffix, "-er" to the absolute degree of the adjectives. Consider the following examples:

(1) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
young	younger
old	older

1.1.1.2. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (720), state that some disyllabic adjectives that end with a final unstressed –y, take the inflectional suffix, “-er” in forming the comparative degree. Notice the following examples:

(2) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
happy	happier
noisy	noisier

1.1.2. Using the Periphrastic Form, "more"

1.1.2.1. According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (721), two-syllable adjectives that do not end with unstressed vowel -ly, -y, -ow or -le (syllabic [ɪ]) take only the periphrastic form, "more". Consider the following examples:

(3) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
curious	more curious
pleasant	more pleasant

1.1.2.2. Quirk et al. (462), confirm that periphrastic form, "more" is used when the comparative degree of participle adjectives are made. Notice the following examples:

(4) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
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interesting	more interesting
wounded	more wounded
worn	more worn

1.1.2.3. Biber et al. (523), say that adjectives ending in –full, -less, -al, -ive, -ous, take only periphrastic form, "more". Consider the following examples:

(5) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
useful	more useful
mindless	more mindless
musical	more musical
effective	more effective
zealous	more zealous

1.1.2.4. Quirk et al. (462), state that only the periphrastic form, "more" is used when three-syllable or longer adjectives are compared. Consider the following example:

(6) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
beautiful	more beautiful

1.1.2.5. When two descriptions (saying that one is more suitable or accurate than another) are compared only the periphrastic form, "more" is used. It is not possible to use the inflectional suffix, "-er". Notice the following examples from Swan (114).

(7) He is **more lazy** than stupid. (Not ...~~He is **lazier** than stupid.~~)

1.1.2.6. According to Quirk et al. (462), some adjectives that ending in -er can only take periphrastic form, "more". Consider the following examples:

(8) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
eager	more eager
proper	more proper

1.1.3. Using Both the Inflectional "-er", and Periphrastic Form," more"

1.1.3.1. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (720), confirm that many two-syllable adjectives that have a stressed first syllable and unstressed second syllable ending in -ly, -ow or -le (syllabic [l]) can take both the inflectional suffix, "-er" and the periphrastic form, "more". Notice the following examples:

(9) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
friendly	friendlier

	more friendly
narrow	narrower
	more narrow
gentle	gentler
	more gentle

1.1.3.2. According to Swan (114), some compound adjectives like "good-looking" or "well-known" can take both the inflectional suffix, "-er" and the periphrastic form, "more". Consider the following examples:

(10) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
good-looking	better –looking
well-known	better –known

1.1.3.3. Quirk et al. (462), show that the following disyllabic adjectives can take the inflectional suffix, "-er" although they have the alternative of the periphrastic form, "more". Notice the following examples:

(11) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
polite	politer
	more polite
clever	cleverer
	more clever

1.1.3.4. According to Swan (114), some three-syllable adjectives can take both the inflectional suffix, "-er" and periphrastic form, "more". Consider the following examples:

(12) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
unhappy	unhappier
	more unhappy
untidy	untidier
	more untidy

1.1.4. Using Less

Parrott (70), states that less can be used with all adjectives regardless of the number of syllables in words. Notice the following examples:

(13) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
free	less free
gentle	less gentle
important	less important

1.2. Irregular Comparative Degree of Adjectives.

Consider the following examples from Swan (113).

(14) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
good	better
bad	worse
ill	worse
far	farther/ further
old	elder
Little	less
much	more
many	more

2. Comparative Degree of Adverbs

2.1. Regular Comparative Degree of Adverbs

2.1.1. Using the Inflectional Suffix, "-er"

Adverbs that have the same form as adjectives and a few others have comparative degree with the inflectional suffix, "-er". For example , "fast", "early", "late", "hard", "long", "low", "soon", "easy", "slow", "loud", and "quick" (Swan 115).

Notice the following examples from Leech (85).

(15a) A racehorse can run **faster** than a man can. (Adverb)

(15b) This car is **faster** than that one. (Adjective)

2.1.2. Using the Periphrastic Form, "more"

According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (721), most of the adverbs take the periphrastic form, "more" (other than those have the same form as adjectives and few others have comparatives with the inflectional suffix, "-er"). Consider the following examples:

(16) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
skillfully	more skillfully
cautiously	more cautiously
independently	more independently

2.1.3. Using Less

According to Leech (85), less can also be used with adverbs where a negative comparison is possible .E.g.

(17) He drives **less carefully** than a racing driver does.

2.2. Irregular Comparative Degree of Adverbs.

Consider the following examples from Greenbaum and Quirk (156).

(18) <u>absolute degree</u>	<u>comparative degree</u>
badly	worse
well	better
little	less (lesser)
far	further(farther)
much	more
many	more

3.Changes in Spelling and Pronunciation in Comparatives

Certain changes in spelling and pronunciation may happen in the base of those adjectives that take the inflectional suffix, "-er".(Quirk et al. 460).

3.1. Changes in Spelling

3.1.1. According to Quirk et al. (460), a single consonant at the end of the base is doubled before the inflectional suffix, "-er", when the preceding sound is stressed and spelled with a single letter. For example:

(19) big ~ bigger
sad ~ sadder

3.1.2. According to Quirk et al. (461), "In bases ending in a consonant followed by -y, y changes to -i before -er". Consider the following examples:

(20) angry ~ angrier

early ~ earlier

3.1.3. Quirk et al. (46), state "If the base ends in a mute (unpronounced) -e, this e is dropped before the inflection". Notice the following examples:

(21) pure ~ purer

brave ~ braver

3.1.4. Quirk et al. (461), say if the base ends in -ee the final e is dropped before the inflection suffix, "-er". E.g.

(22) free ~ freer

3.2. Changes in Pronunciation

3.2.1. According to Quirk et al. (461), a disyllable base ending in syllabic[ɹ] normally loses its second syllable before the inflectional suffix, "-er". Consider the following examples:

(23) simple /'sɪmpəl/ → simpler /'sɪmpləʔ/

humble /'hʌmbəl/ → humbler /'hʌmbləʔ/

3.2.2. Quirk et al. (461) state that the /r/ is pronounced before the inflectional suffix, "-er" even for speakers that do not give consonantal value to a final r in spelling. E.g.

(24) rare /reəʔ/ → rarer /reərəʔ/

3.2.3. According to Quirk et al. (461), "Final ng /ŋ/ in the absolute form "long, "strong", and young is pronounced /ŋg/ before the inflection". E.g.

(25) long /lɒŋ/ → longer /lɒŋgəʔ/

4. Using Intensifiers with the Comparative Degree of Adjectives and Adverbs

The intensifier is a class of adverbial elements with an intensifying role that is either positive or negative. The positive ones are amplifiers and include, as amplifiers of the strongest degree, maximizers such as completely or utterly; the negative are downtoners and include, at the other end of a scale, minimizers such as "hardly" or "scarcely" (Matthews 197).

4.1. According to Quirk et al. (472), comparative of both adjectives and adverbs, whether the inflected or periphrastic form can be Pre-modified by intensifiers, such as "much" or "very much". Consider the following examples:

(26a) The job was **(very) much easier / more difficult** than I thought.

(26b) She writes **(very) much better / more easily** than she used to.

4.2. Quirk et al. (573), show that other intensifiers (and intensifying noun phrases) are common with comparative of adjectives and adverbs. Notice the following examples:

(27) somewhat easier
rather better
a lot shorter
lots <informal> shorter
a great deal more /less difficult
a good deal more/less difficult
a good bit <informal> more /less difficult
a hell of a lot better <very familiar>
a heck of a lot better <very familiar>
a damn sight better <very familiar>

4.3. Quirk et al. (473), also say that some intensifiers can be repeated for emphasis. Consider the following examples:

(28) very verymuch sooner
much much..... more careful
far farmore carefully
so somuch better [repeated so BrE only]

4.4. According to Quirk et al. (473), generally, however, the repetition is permissible only if the repeated items come first or follow "so". Notice the following examples:

(29) so very very..... Much better
*very much muchbetter

4.5. According to Quirk et al. (473), "much" can be pre-modified by "so", "very", and "that". Consider the following examples:

(30) (so) (very) much easier
that much easier

4.6. Murphy (212), states that "any" and "no" are can be used before the comparative degree. Notice the following examples:

(31a) I have waited long enough. I am not waiting **any longer**
(=not even a little longer)

(31b) we expected their house to be very big, but it is **no bigger** than ours.
Orit is not **any bigger** than ours. (=not even a little bigger)

4.7. According to Quirk et al. (136), Comparative can also be post modified by intensifying phrases, the most common of which is "by far". Consider the following example:

(32) He is **funnier by far**.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion of this study, it has appeared that adjectives and adverbs have some basic similarities and differences as far as their comparative degrees are concerned, so the following points are considered:

- Both adjectives and adverbs take the inflectional suffix, "-er" and periphrastic form, "more", "less" according to the situation and the number of syllables.
- Some adjectives and adverbs that have the same form like, "fast", "early", "late", "hard", "long", "low", "soon", "easy", "slow", "loud", and "quick" that take the inflectional suffix, "-er" when we make the comparative degree.
- Less is used with adjectives and adverbs whenever the negative comparison is possible regardless of the number of syllables.
- There are irregular forms in both adjectives and adverbs in making a comparative degree.

One syllable and two-syllable adjectives that end in unstressed -y and some three-syllable adjectives take the inflectional suffix, "-er" when we make the comparative degree, but most of the adverbs take the periphrastic form, "more" except those adverbs that have the same form of adjectives which they take the inflectional suffix, "-er".

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