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ZERO-DEGREE INTENSIFIERS WITH SERBIAN AND ENGLISH COMPARATIVES

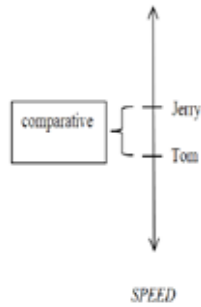
While degree intensifiers marking minimum comparative degrees have been an inevitable topic in both grammatical and linguistic literature, the possibilities of using adverbs to signify the zero value appear to have been systematically avoided. This gap in the current literature served as a main motivation for this analysis. The paper aims at identifying and analyzing intensifiers used with comparatives by focusing solely on the adverbial lexemes which are used to signify the zero-degree, i.e. to cancel or nullify a comparative degree. The independent corpus analyses were conducted on annotated electronic corpora: *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and *Korpus savremenog srpskog jezika* (KSSJ). *Englesko-srpski paralelni korpus* (ESPK 2012) is used for demonstrating the observed similarities and differences. Based on the criteria introduced by Đorđević (2004), the contrastive analysis conducted here can be classified as an independent, theoretical, structural, and descriptive contrastive study. The findings prove that the lexical repertoires of both languages include adverbial devices used with comparatives which alleviate comparative degree to the zero value. In addition, we can make a differentiation between two lexico-semantic sub-categories of such lexical devices: those signifying the absolute zero value and those marking the borderline, i.e. limitary values.

Key words: modifier, intensifier, adverb, degree, Serbian, English

1. INTRODUCTION

Comparatives (e.g. *faster*) are used to express the differences in properties (e.g. speed) between the entities being compared (*Jerry* and *Tom*): *Jerry*_{comparee} *is faster than Tom*_{standard of comparison}. The properties (e.g. speed) are expressed by an adjective or an adverb (e.g. *fast*). The utterance is valid if the degree to which Jerry is fast is higher than the degree to which Tom is fast.

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Comparatives refer to the difference in those degrees by asserting its existence. However, there are numerous linguistic devices (predominantly adverbs and particles), which modify comparative degree in that they can quantify it, emphasize it, intensify it, etc.

A modifier is a lexical unit used to specify, supplement, intensify, i.e. to modify the other lexical unit (Bošnjaković 1980: 17). Comparative modifiers can modify comparative degree in numerous different ways since they introduce new semantic components characteristic for the particular lexical coinages (Kuljanin 2017: 75). In other words, modifiers bring their unique semantic and pragmatic contributions and thus particularize a comparative degree.

Terms *modification* and *modifier* are closely related to *intensification* and *intensifier* so they are frequently used interchangeably. However, we should draw clearer lines between two categories. Namely, the concept of intensity is a complex cognitive and linguistic phenomenon that is most commonly divided into two opposite trends: *alleviation* and *amplification* (Edel 1992: 602). The lexemes used to alleviate or amplify intensity, i.e. degree of scalar lexical items are intensifiers (also known as *adverbs of degree*, *degree adverbs*, *degree adjuncts*, *degree particles*). D. Bolinger (1972: 17) uses the term intensifier for all lexemes which grade a property on an imaginary scale, either upwards or downwards. Hence, modification includes, but also surpasses, intensification.

For instance, the Serbian focal particle *sve* (*sve bolje* (*i bolje*)) modifies comparative degree in that this lexical coinage signifies a continual increase or decrease of intensity, quantity, etc. (Kuljanin 2017: 78). In other words, the unique combination *sve* + *comparative* is used to express changes in intensity of any property in different spatial and/or temporal circumstances (Piper et al. 2005: 853). A contrastive analysis of Serbian and English has shown that identical effects are generated in lexical coinages *ever* + *comparative*: e.g. *ever better* (Josijević 2020b). Similarly, the Serbian focal particle *što* modifies comparative meaning (*Trči što brže*) in that the coinage is used to express *limitary superlative possibility* (Piper et al. 2005:

862; Kuljanin 2017: 91–94).² In semantic literature, these forms are better known as *modal superlatives* (Schwarz 2005; Romero 2010; Alrenga & Kennedy 2013; Romero 2013). Also, the Serbian focal particle *još* has been recognized as a lexical device which can have a comparative form in its focus. In such lexical coinages, comparatives have entailments (*Mika je još viši od Jove* ⊢ ‘Mika je visok’). They do so even with open-scale gradable adjectives which otherwise do not generate such entailments (*Mika je viši od Jove* ~ ⊢ ‘Mika je visok’) because there is always a certain set of entities that neither an adjective nor its antonym are applicable to, i.e. there are people who are neither good nor bad or neither tall nor short (Ivić 2007). The same features have been attributed to Serbian particle *čak* and English particle *even*: *Mika je čak viši od Jove* ⊢ ‘Mika je visok’ and *Mike is even taller than John* ⊢ ‘Mike is tall’ (Josijević 2022).

These three examples prove that modification is a broader category which does not include only intensification and/or adverbial modifications. Very frequently, it is a particle that takes the main role in modifying the semantic structure of the lexeme it precedes. In conclusion, intensification is only one form of modifying meanings of lexical units so intensifiers are a subclass of modifiers: modifiers of intensity or degree modifiers. With comparatives, intensifiers modify comparative degree in that they enable grading within comparative degree (Kuljanin 2017: 76).

Intensification has been an inevitable topic in all current grammatical³ literature and pertinent studies. As will be demonstrated in the next section of the paper, amplification, including the minimalization of degree, has always been included. On the other hand, the possibility of using adverbial intensifiers to cancel degree, i.e. to express the zero degree, has been rarely mentioned. In this paper, we shall establish this category as a separate lexico-semantic class of degree adverbs. The term *zero-degree* adverbs is coined and used here as a label for this type of comparative intensifiers.

2. ON ADVERBIAL INTENSIFIERS IN THE CURRENT LITERATURE

Since *Degree Words* by D. Bolinger (1972) was first published, the interest in semantic aspects of scalar expressions has been thriving per-

2 Semantically equivalent forms in English are formed by joining modal verbs or adverbs with equative structures: e.g. *Run as fast as possible* and *Run as fast as you can* (Josijević 2021); or with superlatives themselves: e.g. *the fastest possible* or *the fastest you can* (Schwarz 2005; Romero 2010; Alrenga & Kennedy 2013; Romero 2013).

3 The following grammatical literature was consulted: Stevović 1960; Stevanović 1979; Mrazović & Vukadinović 1990; Stanojčić & Popović 2000; Simić 2002; Klajn 2005; Piper & Klajn 2013; Zandvoort & van Ek 1975; Quirk & Greenbaum; Quirk et al. 1985, Greenbaum & Quirk 1991; Palmer et al. 2002; Huddleston & Pullum 2002; Eastwood 2002; Downing & Locke 2006; and Altenberg & Vago 2010.

sistently. Different aspects of different categories of scalar expressions have been examined from different theoretical and methodological perspectives (e.g. Doetjes 2004; Neelman et al. 2004; Kennedy & McNally 2005; Morzycki 2008; Beltrama & Bochnak 2011). Most papers focus on a small-scale repertoire of adverbial intensifiers and, more frequently than not, in specific lexical coinages. Comparative, but also positive, forms of adjectives have not been subjected to any extensive analysis yet. For instance, R. Nouwen (2008) analyzed *very*, *quite*, *too*, *more* и *enough* with positives. C. Kennedy and L. McNally (2005) focused on *well*, *much* и *very* with deverbal adjectives. C. Rotstein and Y. Winter (2003) examined the lexical coinages of *slightly*, *nearly*, *completely*, *almost* и *very* with total and partial adjectives.

D. Bolinger (1972: 17) classifies English intensifiers into four categories (given in descending order): *boosters* (e.g. *terribly*), *compromisers* (e.g. *fairly*), *diminishers* (e.g. *little*), and *minimizers* (e.g. *a bit*). Quirk et al. (1985: 445–449) treat an intensifier as any lexeme having the effect to “increase or decrease” the property expressed by a lexeme it modifies. Their typology starts with three most general groups: *emphasizers*, *amplifiers*, and *downtoners*. In contrast to amplifiers and downtoners, *emphasizers* are said to co-occur with non-gradable adjectives. This class includes, inter alia, adverbs like (a) *actually*, *certainly*, *clearly*, *definitely*, *indeed*, *obviously*, *plainly*, *really*, *surely*, *for certain*, *for sure*, *of course* and (b) *frankly*, *honestly*, *literally*, *simply*, and *fairly*. The former group is said to express the comment that what is being said is true, while the latter group includes the lexical items conveying the speaker’s assertion that his words are the unvarnished truth (ibid.: 583). Amplifiers upwards and downtoners scale downwards from an assumed standard or a norm (Quirk et al. 1985: 589–591). Such scaling requires that the lexical item to which intensifier applies is gradable. Amplifiers are further divided into *maximizers* (e.g. *completely*) and *boosters* (e.g. *very much*). Boosters denote a higher point on the scale and maximizers strive toward the upper extreme:

- (a) BOOSTERS: *badly*, *bitterly*, *deeply*, *enormously*, *far*, *greatly*, *highly*, *intensely*, *much*, *severely*, *strongly*, *terribly*, *violently*, *well*, *a great deal*, *a good deal*, *a lot*, *by far*
- (b) MAXIMIZERS: *absolutely*, *altogether*, *completely*, *entirely*, *extremely*, *fully*, *perfectly*, *quite* (also a compromiser), *thoroughly*, *totally*, *utterly*, *in all respects*

Downtoners are further divided into *approximators* (e.g. *almost*), *compromisers* (e.g. *kind of*), *diminishers* (e.g. *partly*), and *minimizers* (e.g. *hardly*) (Quirk et al. 1985: 597–601). Approximators serve to express an approximation to the degree or force expressed by a scalar term: *almost*, *nearly*, *practically*, *virtually*, etc. Compromisers have a slight lowering effect: *kind of*, *sort of*, *quite*, *rather*, *enough*, *sufficiently*, *more or less*, etc. Diminishers mean ‘to a small extent’ and, thus, scale downwards. They are divided into

expression *diminishers* (e.g. *mildly, partially, partly, quite, slightly, somewhat, in part, in some respect, to some extent, a bit, a little, least*) which seek to express only part of the force (i.e. degree) of the lexical item they modify; and *attitude diminishers* (e.g. *only, merely, simply, just*) which seek to imply that the force expressed by a lexeme they modify is limited. Minimizers mean 'not to any extent' and they include: *negatives* (e.g. *barely, hardly, little, scarcely*) and *non-assertives* (e.g. *in the least, in the slightest, at all, a bit*). Huddleston and Pullam (2002: 721–725) propose the following classification of degree modifiers: *maximal* (e.g. *absolutely, completely*), *mutual* (e.g. *deeply, greatly*), *moderate* (e.g. *partly, quite, rather*), *paucal* (e.g. *a bit, a little*), *minimal* (e.g. *hardly, scarcely*), *approximating* (e.g. *almost, kind of*), and *relative* (e.g. *enough, sufficient*).

First, we must note that these classifications are general in that they refer to intensifiers used with any scalar lexeme. When it comes to intensifiers of comparative and superlative degree, the overviews of intensifiers are substantially less extensive. Grammars only mention a handful of such terms, usually the same ones: *very, much, little*, etc. (Quirk & Greenbaum 1976: 135; Quirk et al 1985; Downing & Lock 2006). The same trend is evident in linguistic literature. Most papers and studies focus on intensifiers used with positives (Bolinger 1972; Paradis 1997, 2000; Hackl 2000; Meir 2003; Rett 2008; Jung 2009; Wittouck 2011; Romero 2012; Su 2016). The most extensive overview we have found is the one offered by E. M. Benzinger (1971: 43–48) who categorizes intensifiers of gradable adjectives into four categories based on their distribution and frequency. Some intensifiers are used with only with positives (*awful good – *awful better – *awful best*): e.g. *awful, awfully, extremely, fairly, good and mighty, more, most, pretty, quite, real, right, so, terribly, too, and very*. Some are used with comparatives only (**a lot good, a lot better, *a lot best*): e.g. *a (whole) lot, far, much, still*. One group of intensifiers can be used with both positives and comparatives (e.g. *rather good – rather better – *rather best*): e.g. *a good/great deal, quite, (quite) a bit, rather, some, somewhat*. Finally, there are intensifiers which can be used with all three degrees (i.e. positives, comparatives, and superlatives): *somehow good – somehow better – somehow best*. These include, inter alia, *way, even, far and away, just, more or less, only, really, somehow, and simply*.

None of the authors mentioned above has acknowledged the existence of zero-degree adverbial intensifiers used with comparatives. The most extensive and comprehensive study on manner adverbs in the Serbian language proposes a complex typology of eleven lexico-semantic categories of manner adverbs (Ristić 1990). For the purposes of this paper, only the seventh class is relevant – *adverbs signifying degree or intensity* (Ristić 1990: 112–131). They are divided into six categories based on their integral seme: (1) 'high degree', (2) 'excessive degree', (3) 'complete degree', (4) 'incomplete degree', (5) 'sufficient degree', and (6) 'low degree'. The adverbs used to annul comparative degree are not included.

The recent studies have provided some insight into this category of adverbial intensifiers. S. Kuljanin (2017: 103) mentions that Serbian adverb *ništa* can be used to cancel comparative degree, and J. Josijević (2020a: 166) adds *nimalo* to the list. The latter author compares and contrasts both forms with their English equivalents – the pronominal adverbs *none* and *no*. Even though the semantic potentials of the given lexemes have been acknowledged, neither of the studies proposed their establishment as a separate class of intensifiers and hence no term for them has been introduced yet. This paper will argue that the current degree scale, i.e. *maximum – high – moderate – low – minimum*, should also include *zero-degree* adverbs.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

Since the insight into the repertoires of zero-degree intensifiers provided by all current studies is limited, this paper aims at expanding the list of lexical items bearing the aforementioned lexico-semantic features. Namely, comparatives serve to signify the differences in the degrees of any property expressed by an adjective or adverb found in or exhibited by the entities being compared (i.e. *comparee* and *standard of comparison*). For instance, if we say that X (i.e. a comparee) is fatter than Y (i.e. a standard of comparison), a comparative form marks that the property (i.e. weight) is present in a higher degree in X entity. This paper will focus solely on those intensifiers which reduce those differences in property degrees to the zero value.

Independent corpus analyses were chosen here in order to avoid the limitations of working on parallel corpora. First, the preliminary tests have shown that the largest available electronic parallel corpus, *Englesko-srpski paralelni korpus*, would limit our findings since the majority of intensifiers detected in the monolingual corpora of both languages are not attested with a sufficient number of examples. This state of affairs conflicts with the main goal of this paper – to record as many intensifiers of the selected type as possible and hence to expand their current descriptions. Second, the given corpus comprises the translated material. The choices made by translators in choosing the equivalent in a target language (L2) can be affected by the original form used in a source language (L1). Independent corpus analyses, on the other hand, allow us to examine the desired lexemes in their natural habitat, i.e. as being unmotivated by any source language. Finally, the preliminary tests have shown that comparative intensifiers are sometimes neglected in translation, i.e. they are left untranslated or mistranslated, which might be an interesting topic for some future studies.

The independent corpus analyses were conducted on the annotated monolingual electronic corpora: *Corpus of Contemporary American English*

(COCA) and *Korpus savremenog srpskog jezika*. Both corpora are tagged. In COCA, the following annotation was used:

COCA	KSSJ
ADV _jir	[pos="ADV"] [pos="A"] "od"
ADV more ADJ	[pos="ADV"] [pos="A"] "nego"

The given tags isolated ADV + _jir (synthetic comparative) or more ADJ (analytic comparative) sequences. The limit was set at 5000 hits. Since *Korpus savremenog srpskog jezika* (KSSJ) does not have a tag for comparative only. Since the preliminary search conducted by combining two conditions [pos="ADV"] [pos="A"] provided more than 60,000 hits for ADV + ADJ sequences, we opted for more restrictive searches. Namely, we included both options for standards of comparison (*od* and *nego*; the equivalents to English *than*).

Based on the criteria proposed by R. Đorđević (2005), the contrastive analysis conducted here can be classified as an independent, theoretical, structural, descriptive contrastive study. The equivalence is established based on the lexico-semantic features derivable from the dictionary definitions. Four dictionaries are used: *Rečnik srpsko-hrvatskog književnog jezika* (RMS 1990, six-volume dictionary), *Rečnik srpskoga jezika* (RSJ 2011, edited and revised edition), *Oxford English Dictionaries* (OED, online edition), *Cambridge Dictionary* (CD, online edition). The parallel electronic corpus, *Englesko-srpski paralelni korpus* (ESPK) is used for the sole purpose of demonstrating the observed similarities and differences in two languages.

4. ZERO-DEGREE COMPARATIVE INTENSIFIERS

The extended analysis of comparative intensifiers allowed us to detect a handful of adverbial devices which precede comparative forms and modify their meaning in that they cancel their intensity. It is not surprising that the findings suggest that these intensifiers are not numerous since they are competing with negation via negative predications. If, for instance, we take two pronominal adverbs *no* and *nimalo* (*Tom is no faster than Jerry* and *Tom je nimalo brži od Džerija*), it becomes more evident that semantically speaking, these utterances are synonymous to sentences in which the negation of comparative forms is realized by negating the predication: *Tom is not faster than Jerry* and *Tom nije brži od Džerija*. The only difference is that the negation with negative pronominal adverbs is more emphatic, and thus stylistically marked.

In addition, the adverbial intensifiers identified in this analysis prove that zero-degree comparative intensifiers are not a uniform class. There are two subcategories: (1) intensifiers signifying the absolute zero level, i.e. the complete non-existence of any difference in property degrees

exhibited by entities being compared, and (2) intensifiers which mark the borderline values, i.e. the degree values close to the limit which divides equatives and comparatives. The following sections shall also emphasize the formal, i.e. categoral, differences between these two classes.

4.1. THE ABSOLUTE ZERO VALUE

The functions of the pronominal adverb *ništa* in cancelling comparative degree have been already acknowledged (Kuljanin 2017: 103). *Ništa* is defined as: (*adverbial meaning*) *ni u kojoj meri, nimalo, nikako* (RSJ 2011: 822), meaning 'not to any measure', 'not to any extent', or 'not in any way'. The use of *ništa* is also attested in our sample:

Sudeći prema izgledu, ni kuća ne izgleda *ništa* starija od svog vlasnika. Lazarovi prijatelji, [...], nisu bili *ništa* kooperativniji. [...] video sam toliko jezera i ovo nije *ništa* čudnije [...]. Biti u Londonu, to nije *ništa* utešnije [...]. Izabela mi nije *ništa* bliža od nje [...]. Patos umetnosti nije *ništa* potrebniji od patosa patnje ili patosa želje. [...] način na koji su epidemije tome doprinosile nije *ništa* strašniji od drugih. Pričalo se da on nije *ništa* sposobniji od svog učitelja, da je samo spletkaroš. (KSSJ)

The potentials of *nimalo* to reduce comparative degree to the zero value have been already recognized in J. Josijević (2020a). The adverb is defined as *ni u kojoj meri, ni najmanje* (RMS III 1990: 784), meaning 'not to any measure' or 'not at least'. This sample abounds in *nimalo* + comparative forms:

Bio je to konjički polk, *nimalo* gori od Harahovih kirasira. Na samom vrhu, stvari su *nimalo* jednostavnije. Ali zbog toga mu je *nimalo* lakše: vest ga je itekako pekla. Sreski špijun Aleksa Žunić nije *nimalo* lošiji obaveštajac od zapadnjačke paradigme. [...] onda naša objektivna realnost nije *nimalo* istinitija od nerealne prošlosti. Efikasnost njene terapije danas nije *nimalo* manja, ako ne i veća, od terapijskih procedura internističkih grana. Pitanje da li je iskustvo prethodilo predstavi jamačno nije *nimalo* razloženije od poznatog pitanja [...]. Diktatura hrišćanstva nije *nimalo* zahvalnija od diktature proletarijata [...]. (KSSJ)

This analysis reveals that *ne*, a negative particle equivalent to *no*, has the identical semantic potential. As a comparative modifier, it cancels comparative degrees:

Očekujemo, do kraja godine, rezultate *ne* lošije nego prošle godine. I saznajući da uzima časove *ne* duže nego Vera [...]. Sekundarna odlika, mada *ne* manje izražena po intenzitetu jeste toplije vreme od proseka. Drugi, *ne* manje problematični primeri oštećenja postali su rutinski. Piće je bilo donekle nalik na najjeftinije vrste konjaka, zlatnožute boje i *ne* gušće od vode. Jedan laki lanac zamenjivao sa drugim, *ne* težim, [...]. [...] dokaz nadležnog organa uprave o izmirenju poreza, *ne* stariji od šest meseci. [...] može na svoj zahtev da radi sa skraćenim radnim vremenom, ali *ne* kraćim od polovine punog radnog vremena. (KCCJ)

Finally, this analysis detected that several more negative pronominal adverbs can be used for the same purposes, including *niukoliko*, *nipošto* and *nikako*:

[...] a sedeti u sobi nije bilo *niukoliko ugodnije* nego ležati na balkonu, u zimskom kaputu [...]. [...] to ih ne bi učinilo *niukoliko manje prijatnim*. [...] ali *nipošto manja* od drugih. [...] devojne *nipošto starije* od dvesta meseci. [...] i kiridžije neće *nipošto veći* put učiniti. [...] ali *nikako manje važan* element triatlona [...]. (KSSJ)

Niukoliko is defined as *ni u kojoj meri, ni najmanje* (RSJ 2011:820), *nipošto* as *ni u kom slučaju, nikako; ni u kojoj meri, nimalo* (ibid.: 821), and *nikako* as *ni u kom slučaju, nikako; ni u kojoj meri, nimalo*. All three adverbs mean: 'not to any measure', 'not at least', 'not in any case', 'not to any extent', 'not at all', or similar. In addition, the negative prefix of negative pronouns, *ni-*, is used independently from the second part of the pronominal compound, divided by a preposition in dependent cased forms: *ni u(po) čem(u)* ('not in anything', 'not in any aspect'). This form has been also attested as a premodifier of comparative forms: e.g. *Ona nisu ni u čemu privilegovanija od mojih drugih slika*. Theoretically speaking, phrases like *ni u kojoj meri* ('not to any extent/measure/degree') and *ni na koji način* ('not in any way') should be possible in this context. However, not a single example with comparatives is attested in the selected electronic corpus. It is important to note that all aforementioned negative adverbs can be used in negative (1) and affirmative sentences (2):

- | | | |
|--------------|---|--------------------|
| (1) Tom nije | <i>ništa (nimalo/niukoliko/nipošto/niukoliko)</i> | brži od Džerija. |
| 'Tom isn't | <i>not to any extent</i> | faster than Jerry' |
| (2) Tom je | <i>ništa (nimalo/niukoliko/nipošto/niukoliko)</i> | brži od Džerija. |
| 'Tom is | <i>not to any extent</i> | faster than Jerry' |

In affirmative sentential contexts (2), comparatives are negated solely by negative pronominal adverbs. In negative sentences (1), it is a negative *verbum finitum* that negates a comparative degree, while negative adverbs serve as mere *emphasizers*.⁴ In other words, only in the former case we can treat these negative adverbs as zero-degree comparative intensifiers. Finally, the given degree intensifiers are found in both up-scale (e.g. *privilegovanija*) and down-scale (e.g. *manje prijatnim*) grading, i.e. with both comparatives of superiority and inferiority, respectively.

In English, comparative degree can be canceled with *none*, a negative pronominal adverb (Josijević 2020a: 166–168), meaning: *by no amount; not at all* (OED). A real plenitude of examples is attested in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*:

4 Serbian, not only allows, but most commonly requires negative concord, i.e. double negation, with negative pronominal *ni-* lexemes (pronouns, determiners, and space and time pronominal adverbs).

Though he, *none the better*, knew of men who were brutes with women. And if all goes well, the outside world will be none the wiser. Yet in the estimation of the authors, these ladies were none the worse for that. [...] but I count myself *none the poorer* for having passed on the shot. [...] we should be *none the wiser* if we could name them, they themselves none the more honourable. They talk bad about the UN but support it *none the less*. But it is *none the less extraordinary* to see those twelve private credit monopolies [...]. The study of the uncivilized will be *none the less valuable* [...]. [...] we are facing a hidden, but *none the less formidable* crisis [...]. [...] but the memories struck by 167 these photos are *none the less vivid*. (COCA)

The use of the definite article *the* is mandatory in this context, i.e. *none* is always followed by the definite article (*none + the + comparative*): *none the wiser*. The same semantic feature has been attributed to the negative adverb *no* (Josijević 2020a: 166–168), meaning *not*, *not any* (CD), *not at all*, and *to no extent* (OED).

Those bastards, they're *no better* than animals. No, my French is *no better* than my English. I am *no weaker* than a diabetic who takes insulin daily. I am on *no firmer* ground scientifically than those who believe mobile phones are harmful. I bet he was *no uglier* than that boy there. Prudence became *no more dangerous* than any squirming child. She is *no more mysterious* and complex than any other person. They are addictive, but *no more harmful* than caffeine. This is *no more surprising* than the fact that Los Angeles has a hockey team. Indeed, his tone was more serious, but the story was *no less enthralling*. The Strokes' guitarist compiled a solo debut that's sweeter and mellower but *no less appealing* solo. Lesser known but *no less spectacular* than the famed Tetons [...]. (COCA)

This analysis indicates that there are idiomatic intensifiers which have a semantic potential of annulling comparative degree – *by no means + comparative* and *no way + comparative*:

[...] Foxconn is *by no means worse* than Nokia [...]. Roger is by no means worse than AT&T. [...] that are *by no means stronger* than you without damaging the safety net. Leaner, but *by no means meaner*. In the hierarchy of evils, talking with Iran is *no way worse* than war engulfing the most strategically important region in the world. Glory is evil and powerful; and in *no way prettier* than me. Our colonialism is *no way milder*; it is total. I am in *no way luckier* than you or smarter than you.

The idiomatic expression *by no means* is defined as: *not at all*, *not in any way* (OED), *in no way*, and *certainly not* (CD). *No way* is also an idiom used informally, which means: *no or not in any way* (OED). It also appears as a compound adverb *noway*, meaning *in no way*, *respect*, or *degree*; *not all*; *nowise*. As illustrated in the examples above, all lexical devices modify both synthetic and analytic comparatives; and both comparatives of superiority and inferiority.

In both languages, negative pronominal adverbs can be used to negate comparative degree and hence reduce it to the absolute zero value. Once they do so, a comparative construction loses its comparative meaning. Semantically speaking, it becomes an equative. In other words, by negating that there is any difference in property degrees exhibited by the entities being compared, we assert that the degree is equal. The following examples from the chosen electronic parallel corpus testify to this fact:

- (1) All the continents and oceans of Earth appeared *no larger than India* [...].
 → Svi kontinenti i okeani Zemlje izgledali su veliki kao Indija [...].
 (2) Charles is *as bad as* any of them.
 → Čarls je *ništa bolji od* drugih. (ESKP)

The example (1) demonstrates that the English form *no + comparative + than* is translated with the Serbian equative construction, i.e. positive + *kao*. The second example illustrates the equivalence between the English equative construction (*as + positive + as*) and Serbian comparative construction (i.e. *bolji od*) negated by the negative adverbial *ništa*.

In addition to pronominal adverbs which as comparative premodifiers signify the absolute non-existence of any difference in property being expressed by an adjective or an adverb, we have found a few adverbs in both languages whose contributions are somewhat different.

4.2. LIMITARY ZERO-DEGREE INTENSIFIERS

A certain set of adverbs in both languages has the power to cancel comparative degree, but has an additional semantic component bearing the meaning that the level of the property expressed by an adjective or an adverb given in its comparative form is very close to the limit. In other words, if zero-degree adverbs signify the absolute non-existence of any difference in property, limitary zero-degree adverbs additionally signal that the difference in property degrees between the comparee and the standard of comparison in question is almost, nearly existent. They indicate that a comparee is on the point of surpassing its standard of comparison in property degree.

The corpus analysis of the Serbian language indicates that the following adverbs have the aforementioned semantic potential: *bezmalo*, *gotovo*, *skoro*, *zamalo*, *umalo*, *maltene*.

On kaže da je džak bio *bezmalo* viši od tog krupnog lica. Ali Fenja se od tog izlaska uplašila *gotovo* više nego kad je maločas utrčao i jurnuo na nju. Znam *skoro* više o njoj nego o Srbiji gde sam rođena. Beše to *skoro* veličanstvenije od lica anđela koji su ga slušali. [...] a koji su, međutim, *skoro* stvarniji i od same stvarnosti. Samo nas nekolicina smo u tome bili *umalo* uporniji [...]. Ponovo sam debitovala, a u književnim sam krugovima *maltene* više bila poznata kao zabranjeni pisac nego kao pisac. [...] dobija *maltene* veću platu od onog koji radi [...]. (KSSJ)

The adverbs are defined as follows: (1) *bezmalo* as *gotovo*, *skoro*, *zamalo*, *umalo*, *maltene* (RSJ 2011: 70); (2) *gotovo* as *skoro*, *bezmalo* (ibid.: 205); (3) *zamalo* as *umalo*, *skoro*, *gotovo* (ibid.: 384); (4) *maltene* as *gotovo*, *skoro* (ibid.: 660); (5) *skoro* as *bezmalo*, *gotovo* (ibid.: 1208); (6) *umalo* as *skoro*, *gotovo*, *zamalo*. It is evident that the selected dictionary defines the adverbs via the synonymous lexemes, which this analysis has found to cancel comparative degree. They all mean: 'almost', 'nearly', 'lacking a little', 'close to', and similar.

Three English adverbs, i.e. *almost*, *nearly*, and *practically*, are detected in our sample. They have the same semantic potential to cancel comparative degree while still emphasizing that the value on the scale is close to the limit, i.e. the borderline dividing the non-existence of any difference in property degrees exhibited by the entities being compared:

[...] it is a shinier, louder, *almost happier* place. The dead face a little fleshier, *almost healthier*. The sound is *almost freer* than later work by the group. Car running is both high and well-known to allow between the two aspects for *nearly greater* abuse when met. The cable's dock connector will look *nearly bigger* than the Nano itself. Why, you are *nearly shorter* than my waist! For starters, the kids I baby-sit every Wednesday are *practically taller* than I am. Why doesn't rational mind come to the conclusion that that risk is practically lower than breathing? (COCA)

Almost is defined as *nearly*, *nearly but not quite* (CD); *nearly* as *almost*, *or not completely*, *almost but quite*, *close to* (CD); *practically* as *almost or very nearly* (CD). Based on the definitions, *practically*, as very nearly, seems to be the closest to the limit.

Limitary zero-degree comparative intensifiers cancel comparative degree, i.e. they establish equative relations between the entities being compared. However, they contain the additional sense signifying that the conditions for comparative degree are almost met. Interestingly, with equatives they seem to do the opposite:

- (1) Tom je *skoro* (*zamalo*, *maltene...*) brz kao/koliko (i) Džeri.
- (2) Tom is *almost* (*nearly*, *practically*) as fast as Jerry.

In both cases, there are inferences that Jerry is faster than Tom. As with comparatives, these intensifiers additionally signal that the difference in the property (e.g. speed) being compared between two or more entities is slight, almost approximate. It may be also interesting to note that the adverb *approximately* has not been detected in comparative constructions other than those that have numerical values as standards of comparison (e.g. *approximately more than 20,000 dead*; *than 60% of overweight*; *than 4 times*; *than \$4 million*, COCA). However, it is detected in equative constructions which imply comparative degree:

U. S. Department of Agriculture also is looking into industry complaints that retail pork prices are *approximately as high as* a year ago. In the deep dermis, elastic fibres were rare and *approximately as thick as* those in the middle layer. Most of them are *approximately as stylish as* a burlap sack with handles. I am still convinced that if we don't assume malice, symmetric encryption is *approximately as safe as* asymmetric for this particular scenario. Eating pineapple when your lips are burnt is *approximately as painful as* giving birth to triplets. [...] his new girlfriend is *approximately as gorgeous as* Gwyneth Paltrow. Once it gains altitude, it appears *approximately as bright as* the zero-magnitude stars Arcturus and Vega. (COCA)

These findings suggest that positive intensifiers should deserve closer inspection, too. They should be examined more thoroughly in the future.

4.3. THE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

This paper first focused on zero-degree intensifiers. All lexical coinages with comparative forms are mutually synonymous to one another in that they all have identical semantic contributions, and as such, they are equivalent to the adverbial devices described for the other language. The examples retrieved from the chosen electronic parallel corpus provide evidence for such claims:

(1) Amelia deserves *no better*.

→ Amelija ne zaslužuje *ništa bolje*.

(2) I meant to go with you, Charles, for I am *no more useful* than you at home.

→ Nameravam da idem sa tobom, Čarlse, jer nisam *nimalo potrebija* kod kuće nego ti.

(3) [...] the former of whom had particularly set her heart upon going, and the latter *no less anxiously* placed his upon pleasing her [...].

→ Na savetovanju u četiri oka između Izabele i Džejmsa na kome se ona naročito zalagala za to da se ide, a on se *ne manje zalago* da njoj učini radost [...]. (ESPK)

The same English form (*no + comparative*) is translated with: *ništa + comparative*, *nimalo + comparative*, and *ne + comparative*.

Since English does not allow negative concord in this context, the comparative can be also canceled with negative predication. Commonly, the adverb *any* appears as an emphazier in this context.

The Canadians are *not any better*. She was *not any more attractive* than most of the other women here. [...] but it's *not any clearer* if it's going to help him politically either. [...] the new connector is *not any faster* than the old one. It's *not any nicer*, believe me, but there's more intentionality to it. A man is *not any godlier or holier* or more successful because he decided to learn to play the guitar. It's *not any grander or prettier* than that. Men are *not any brighter*. I have about as much hair as last year, and it's *not any grayer*. His walk was *not any more brisk* than usual [...]. (COCA)

It is important to note that *any* does not have power to cancel comparative degree on its own so it cannot be treated as a zero-degree intensifier. It is rather a mere emphasize. The electronic parallel corpus provides an interesting example:

- (1) They were there every day, but that *did not make it any less annoying*.
→ [...] ali njihova pojava *nije bila ništa manje neprijatna*. (ESPK)

A negative predicate (*did not make*), followed by *any* + comparative form (*less annoying*) is translated into Serbian with a negative predicate (*nije bila*) followed by *ništa* + comparative (*manje neprijatna*). Since negative predication (*nije bila*) is primarily responsible for negating comparative degree, *ništa* serves as a mere emphasize in this case. However, it can be used as a zero-degree intensifier in this context with affirmative predication: *ali njihova pojava je bila ništa manje neprijatna*.

Since English does not allow negative concord here, a phrasal zero-degree intensifier, i.e. *by no means*, has an equivalent form with negative predications: *not by any means*. Semantically speaking, this structure is equivalent to all sentential structures with zero-degree intensifiers (or emphasize) and comparatives.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This analysis aimed at detecting and analyzing the comparative intensifiers which have semantic potentials to cancel comparative degree in the Serbian and English language. This class of intensifiers is termed as zero-degree intensifiers. The findings indicate that there are two sub-categories of zero-degree intensifiers: absolute zero and limitary.

Absolute-zero intensifiers cancel comparative degree, and actually transform comparatives structures into equatives. In Serbian, they can be used with both affirmative and negative predicates. In the former case, they are responsible for negation and true zero-degree intensifiers. In the latter case, it is negative predicates that are primarily responsible for negating the existence of comparative degree, so these negative adverbs serve as mere emphasize, i.e. they just amplify, emphasize the negation.

Limitary zero intensifiers cancel comparative degree, and thus express equations between the properties. However, they also carry additional meaning – that the value is very close to the limit needed for the existence of comparative degree. The findings also indicate that the same set of adverbial intensifiers can be used with positives, i.e. in equative constructions. These forms carry inferences about the existence of comparative degree.

Finally, we shall conclude that despite the real abundance of literature on degree adverbs, comparative and superlative intensifiers remain

relatively under-researched. The numerousness of available lexical items, in addition to the fact that they are used for subjective evaluations and estimations, and can as such exhibit a high level of *semantic imprecision*, makes this category very intriguing. As such, it deserves more attention in the future.

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Jelena M. Josijević, Sanja S. Markeljić / INTENZIFIKATORI NULTOG STEPENA UZ KOMPARATIVE U SRPSKOM I ENGLJESKOM JEZIKU

Rezime / Intenzifikatori kojima se označava minimalni stepen do sada su bili neizbežna tema u gramatičkoj i lingvističkoj literaturi. Sa druge strane, mogućnost upotrebe priloških intenzifikatora za označavanje nultog stepena nije dobila zasluženu pažnju. Uočena praznina u dosadašnjoj literaturi poslužila je kao glavna motivacija za ovaj rad. Cilj rada je identifikacija i analiza intenzifikatora koji se upotrebljavaju uz komparative, a koji se koriste za označavanje nultog stepena, tj. poricanje komparativnog stepena. Nezavisne korpusne analize sprovedene su na anotiranim elektronskim korpusima: *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) i *Korpus savremenog srpskog jezika* (KSSJ). *Englesko-srpski paralelni korpus* (ESPK 2012) koristi se samo za ilustrovanje uočenih sličnosti i razlika između dva jezika. Na osnovu kriterijuma koje daje R. Đorđević (2004), kontrastivna analiza može se odrediti kao nezavisno, teorijsko, strukturalno i deskriptivno kontrastivno proučavanje.

Rezultati ukazuju da leksički repertoari oba jezika raspolažu priloškim i fraznim sredstvima koja se javljaju uz komparative, a koja umanjuju komparativni stepen do nulte vrednosti. Uz to, u okviru ove klase mogu se izdvojiti dve leksičko-semantičke podvrste intenzifikatora nultog stepena: intenzifikatori koji označavaju vrednost apsolutne nule i granični intenzifikatori nultog stepena. Prvi su u oba jezika zamenički odrični prilozi. U srpskom jeziku, u zavisnosti od toga da li je predikat potvrđan ili odričan,

могу се третирати као интензификатори нultог степена или као пuki емфатички изрази. Други су чисти прилози и поред порицања компаративног степена имају додатна семантичка обељења да је степен разлике врло близу, тик уз граничну вредност компаратива. Иста прилошка средства беље се и уз позитиве, а у том случају имплицирају компаративности.

Кључне речи: модификатор, интензификатор, прилог степена, српски језик, енглески језик

Примљен: 14. јануара 2023.

Прихваћен за штампу марта 2023.