

# **THE GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY OF INTENSITY IN CONTEMPORARY/CURRENT ROMANIAN LANGUAGE**

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## Argument

The relation between *intensity* and *comparison*, understood as distinct grammatical categories, is a highly debated issue in the current grammar. Echoes of these discussions have penetrated Romanian linguistics, where various opinions were expressed in this regard. Our solution, taking into account these views, differs from them by a clear conceptual and grammatical distinction between the two entities. To reach this boundary, it was required an extensive historical excursion determined by the fact that between expressing synthetic intensity and creating, at the expense of its, grammaticalized comparative analytical structures that are still sighted in traditional grammars, there was an appreciable temporal gap. Without this diachronic approach, our research would have been deprived even of the premises of the conclusion we reached.

*Intensity*, expressed synthetically, was one of the basic categories of Indo-European language, given that the comparison was not known. We cannot pinpoint the period when *comparison* has come to grammaticalize, putting on the backburner the former category of *intensity*. The fact is that in the Early Latin, the main analytical structures of comparison are already known and used, especially in popular variant (Vulgar Latin). A long time, grammarians were concerned only for comparison, without referring that communication still kept statements containing the idea of intensity. Only structural-functional grammars have called into question the relation between intensity and comparison, both of them characterizing the adjective and the adverb.

Generally, it is considered that the publishing of Georges Gougenheim's work, *Système grammatical de la langue française* (of which we could see the new edition, appeared in Éditions d'Artrey, Paris, 1963), represented the moment when grammarians began to analyze the structures of intensity understood as an intrinsic characteristic of a property of objects, in natural languages. The structures were described and there were settled some of its graduations, somewhat similar to those of the comparison.

Although there are quite a lot of studies, the relation between the categories of comparison and intensity remained open, justifying further research and, obviously, new viewpoints, such as the one that we tried to put in out.

Within Romanian linguistics, the idea of *intensity* appears in many modern grammars, but without being understood concerning its status and role in the grammatical system. The first thorough analysis in this direction is represented by Iorgu Jordan and Vladimir Robu's work,

*Limba română contemporană*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1978  
(*Contemporary Romanian Language*, Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978.)

The matter was taken up in further grammars and analyzed in several outstanding studies, but we intend to maintain the image of intensity as part of the "classic" comparison in which some segments express comparison, while others do not express it (positive and superlative).

At present, especially through GALR and GBLR, Romanian grammar admits the existence of the degrees of intensity, with specific features [*Intensity*] and [*Comparison*], on which the degrees of comparison are not still described, but directly: positive, comparative of equality and inequality, the latter in higher degree and lower degree, and relative superlative and absolute superlative, both in lower and higher degree.

## **Chapter I: General theoretical framework**

Following the grammatical category of *comparison*, we found the lack of interest of grammarians to address the issue theoretically. Structures found in traditional grammars, mostly with logicistic value, are considered *a priori* as immutable grammatical organization. *Comparison* was, of course, the subject matter of Logic. Only structuralist and functional grammars have questioned this "dogma", strengthened by a long tradition.

## **Chapter II: From Indo-European to Latin and Romance languages**

### **2.1. From Indo-European to Latin**

### **2.2. Continuity and discontinuity in Latin Language diachrony**

### **2.3. Romance languages grammar: historical conditionings**

Disclaimer: Given the history of the category of *intensity* and then the one of *comparison*, we considered as compulsory the recourse to the situation from Indo-European language. Once clarified the significance of grammatical category of *intensity* and of its grammatical expression, we watched how the comparison system was set up in Latin, on the one hand, and the peculiarities of this transmission phenomenon of the system in the Romance languages, on the other hand.

We stopped at the most common Romance languages, namely French, Italian and Spanish, obviously, paying attention closely to the situation in Romanian language. We followed, above all, the historical circumstances in which the Romance languages created the distinct, but structurally uniform, means of expression of *intensity* and *comparison*. This option was based on the consideration that an *ex abrupto* passage from Latin to modern Romance languages could become a major drawback in the configuration of our analysis.

## **Chapter III: Comparison in Latin-Romance linguistic area**

### **3.1. Comparison in Latin**

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Chapter III was concentrated on detailing the comparison structures in Latin and mentioned Romance languages. We stressed, in this context, from a strict grammatical perspective, the morphemic material and the specific relational aspects of comparison as they appear in traditional/classic grammar, where the intensity category, as we mentioned, is almost totally ignored.

## **Chapter IV: Comparative structures in Romanian. Their illustration in Romanian grammar works and studies**

### **4.1. Grammatical category of comparison in Old Romanian**

### **4.2. Grammatical category of comparison in the old grammars of Romanian language**

### **4.3. Grammatical category of comparison in modern descriptive grammars of Romanian language**

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#### 4.5. The category of intensity and the category of comparison in studies and articles

The situation of comparison and intensity in Romanian language was given in chapter IV. The highlighting of the issues we are concerned of was based on existing data from the representative grammars of the Romanian language, starting with *Gramatica română* written by Ion Heliade Rădulescu (*Romanian Language Grammar* by Ion Heliade Rădulescu) and ending with the two academic grammars, GALR and GBLR.

The only distinction operated on the studied grammar works was that between descriptive grammars and innovative grammars, the latter distinguished by conceptual and formal uniformity of "classic" grammars by considering certain theories and new structural organization.

In fact, a similar distinction was proposed by Cornel Dimitriu, too, in *Periodizarea gramaticii teoretice românești* (*Periodization of Romanian Theoretical Grammar*) (cf. *Bibliography*.) We also exposed, in this chapter, the ideas and views of representative studies focused on problems of comparison and intensity.

As part of our analytic approach we operate, as we mentioned in the *Introduction*, a distinction between descriptive grammars (traditional) and innovative ones (modern). Within the first category we distinguish between old and modern grammars of Romanian language. For Old Romanian language, we benefited from *Gramatica* (*Grammar*) written by Constantin Frâncu, from which we extracted the basics. As it is understood, only comparison was aimed. In general, the means of forming the comparative and the superlative are the ones of the current Romanian language, i.e. analytical means.

In general, it is recognized that Romanian grammar modern period begins with the work *Gramatica* (*Grammar*) by H. Tiktin. The comments concerning comparison are scarce and fall in traditional grammar scheme: there are "three degrees of comparison": *positive*, *comparative* and *superlative* (*absolute* and *relative*). Iorgu Iordan refers to "differences of degree" of adjective properties, due to its intensity, producing changes in the adjective structure. All of these changes represent comparison and the result of comparison is played by degrees of comparison, the same as in classical grammars.

The well-known book signed by Iorgu Iordan and Vladimir Robu makes the first clear distinction, in Romanian grammar, between *degrees of intensity* and *degrees of comparison*, specifying the morphemes and the modalities of implementation. The intensity values are

updated non-comparatively or comparatively. The degrees of intensity constitute a semantic scale of values which extends from *zero* degree to maximum exceeded intensity. The positive and the absolute superlative are not included among the degrees of comparison.

Corneliu Dimitriu discusses, in a comprehensive chapter in his *Tratat despre „categoria gramaticală a comparației (numită uneori și a intensității) (Treatise on "grammatical category of comparison (sometimes called intensity)."* Moreover, the intensity represents very the content of the category of comparison, namely degrees of comparison, which he describes in full, recognizing that at the positive and the superlative we are dealing with an indirect comparison. Finally, the author believes that in the case of the grammatical category of Romanian adjective comparison "the classic scheme is convenient, but certain nuances should be brought ".

Dumitru Irimia believes that intensity is a grammatical category with its own content and with specific means of expression. The category of intensity includes degrees of comparison and degrees of intensity. The category itself has a double nature, containing objective or comparative intensity, namely, degrees of comparison, and subjective or appreciative intensity, as in GALR I. In GBLR, the category of degrees of intensity is discussed in three aspects: the semantic content; the gradation–syntax relationship and by marking the category of degrees of intensity.

Marcela (Maria) Manoliu proposed a model which is part of the chapter *Adjective* in SMLRC and we also referred to it in this chapter.

Marina Rădulescu admits the structuralism point of view that defines comparison as a relational grammatical category. After analyzing critically the various solutions proposed in the studies focused on comparison, Marina Rădulescu concludes that the feature of comparison appears to all values of category and, therefore, it cannot be a criterion for classification therein.

Mihaela Găitănaru discusses ways of forming intensity by assigning the property of an object or group of objects considered single or of multiple objects or groups of objects. The conclusion proposed in ACCLR is that the opposition between *intensity – comparison* is determined by quantitative opposition "from the level of the objects which are assigned with the property".

GALR I just treats the degrees of intensity, subsumed to the category of intensity, that, traditionally, was called the category of comparison. The category of intensity is a specific category of adjective and adverb (to some extent) in relation to the noun and the pronoun. As well as in Jordan/Robu's work (1978), intensity may be comparable or non-comparable. In addition, comparative evaluation of intensity can be objective or subjective; the latter fits the positive and absolute superlative. The degrees of comparison are three in number, but an "explicit" comparison is achieved only by comparative and relative superlative.

## **Chapter V: Defining intensity and comparison as grammatical distinct entities**

Chapter V is a synthesis of the data recorded in investigated grammars and studies, in order to highlight those elements that gave rise to the premises from which we started our demonstration, although doing so, we had to resume or fill out some information already reported in previous chapters.

Specifically, we put into equation the morphemic structures of degrees of comparison compared to specific degrees of intensity, noting this occasion, the grammatical and semantic incompatibility of structural association between the two types of degrees, finding that prompted us, finally, to consider that we are dealing with two different grammatical categories, even if they are subjected to certain semantic attraction.

Analyzing the data contained in the considered grammars and studies, we concluded that the *intensity* and the *comparison* are distinct grammatical entities, first of morphological type, the second one of relational type, so syntactical. We put in comparative equations adjectives at different degrees of intensity, accompanied by their specific morphemes, some of them grammaticalized, other in an obvious process of grammaticalization, the entire morphologic complex being considered a unitary construction.

We propose a dissociation of comparison, wherein:

the first term of comparison is the intensity

the second term of comparison is the comparative complement



## Conclusions

Each chapter ends with a conclusion that represents a synthesis of the chapter. The final conclusions summarize the synthesis of the chapters as it follows:

The intensity was a particular grammatical category in common Indo-European language, which we referred to in Chapter II. It can be said that Indo-European expresses the "measure" of intensity of a property, considered "itself" and not by reference to its external entities. It was, in fact, the expression of the stages of a dynamic developing of a trait.

In traditional grammars that actually reproduce the scheme of comparison in Latin, being, therefore, called, "classical", it was shaped a structure, also traditional, of degrees of comparison related to adjectives and adverbs which allow comparison and that are the well-known: *positive degree*; *comparative degree: of equality, of superiority, of inferiority*; *relative superlative degree: of superiority, of inferiority*; *absolute superlative degree: of superiority and of inferiority*.

We mention that in modern grammars this traditional structure has undergone adjustments and reorganizations to which we referred in the thesis. We believe that, from this perspective, the comparative of inequality and of equality are important.

Modern grammars separated, but not unanimously, the degrees that not behave comparison, the positive degree (also called *unmarked degree* or *zero*) and the superlative degree, grouping them in the class of degrees of *absolute intensity*, opposite to the *degrees of relative intensity*, in which the comparative structures themselves were included (the comparative and its subdivisions and relative superlative).

Especially functional grammars introduced the concept of "intensity", starting from the fact that not the objects are compared, but their characteristics, posing "intensity" as intrinsic and immanent feature. This conclusion brings with it the abandoning of the phrase *degrees of comparison* for the phrase *degrees of intensity*.

In Romanian linguistics, French linguist Georges Gougenheim's thesis echoed in Iorgu Iordan and Vladimir Robu grammar. But, unlike G. Gougenheim, Romanian linguists maintain the interrelation contact between degrees of intensity and that of comparison: "The values of intensity are achieved non-comparatively or comparatively, situation of which we can identify two kinds of degrees: *the non-comparative intensity* or (more simple) *of intensity* and of

*comparative intensity* or, as they are usually called, "degrees of comparison" (p. 403-404). The authors determined "about six degrees of intensity" for non-comparative intensity and four degrees of comparison: the comparative of equality, of superiority, of inferiority and the superlative comparative.

GALR and GBLR do not make a clear distinction between *intensity* and *comparison*. A significant fact, however, is the framing, operated by GBLR, of a comparative complement in the complements class and not into the adverbial modifiers one, as it was done traditionally. This inclusion was made, rightly, "based on the common characteristic with that of the complements of being "required" by a particular feature of the center of the group, in this case, the association of the adjectival center with the marks of degree (*more ... than, less than ... than, as ... as (and) most ... in / of*"(GBLR 2010: 216).

We consider *intensity*, like other grammarians, as the specific grammatical category of adjective and of some adverbs. It possesses specific morphemes, some grammaticalized, other undergoing a process of grammaticalization. The morphemes and the adjective or the adverb form an inseparable morphological structure. The category of *intensity* individualizes the adjective from the noun and pronoun. Corroborating data found in the consulted works, we proposed four types of degrees of intensity: *the minimum / low intensity degree; the sufficient intensity degree; the progressive /regressive intensity degree and the maximum/ excessive intensity degree*. Underlying this scale of gradations is the adjective / adverb at stage *zero* of the scale, in other words, in their genuine stage.

It is important to note that not the degrees of intensity are compared, but the characteristic itself, which is the *zero* degree of intensity. Accordingly, the phrase *degrees of comparison* has no justification, the term and the concept of "degree" being appropriate only for intensity. Moreover, it can be seen by the sample itself, the *intensity*, reflected by the degree of intensity, is a *morphological category*, while *comparison* is a *relational construction*, carried out by the comparative complement at syntactic level.

Concerning the morphemes of intensity and the structures they can form, they can represent the subject of a distinct research. We are aware that, despite the conclusions we reached, there are many aspects that require separate investigation, which we refer, we hope, in the next studies. We believe in the scientific truth of our demonstration/research/approach, which, in fact, it is placed in strict proximity of those proposed by GALR and GBLR.