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DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2522-4077-2026-216-3>**ADJECTIVES' DEGREES OF COMPARISON IN COMIC DISCOURSE: MEANS OF CREATING HUMOROUS EFFECT****СТУПЕНІ ПОРІВНЯННЯ ПРИКМЕТНИКІВ У КОМІЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ: ЗАСІБ СТВОРЕННЯ ГУМОРИСТИЧНОГО ЕФЕКТУ****Narepekha O. R.,***orcid.org/0009-0006-6047-5333**Student at the Applied Linguistics Department
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In modern linguistics, there is growing interest in the interplay between grammatical categories and stylistic devices in discourse. One of the most expressive grammatical tools in English is the adjective, particularly its comparative and superlative forms, which allow speakers to evaluate, emphasize, and contrast qualities. These forms are not only grammatical markers but also important means of pragmatic and expressive communication. In humorous discourse, comparative and superlative forms often transcend their usual grammatical function, acquiring additional stylistic and pragmatic significance. They serve as effective tools for creating exaggeration, irony, and incongruity, the underlying mechanisms of humor. By amplifying evaluations or exaggerating everyday situations, speakers create a comic effect that arises from the contrast between expectations and reality. This contrast is often subtle and relies on the audience's understanding of typical patterns and social norms.

Furthermore, comparative degrees often heighten the emotional intensity of statements, making them seem intentionally exaggerated or unexpectedly understated. These deviations from neutral evaluation contribute to the creation of comic tension and playful ambiguity. In many cases, humor arises when the comparative or superlative degree contradicts the objective reality of the situation, thus emphasizing the absurdity or exposing hidden contradictions.

Despite extensive research on humor, stylistics, and pragmatics, the specific role of grammatical comparison in generating humor remains relatively understudied. Understanding these mechanisms not only sheds light on the relationship between grammar and pragmatics, but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of humor in language use.

Key words: adjective, degrees of comparison, comparative, superlative, comic discourse, humor, exaggeration, incongruity, stylistic devices.

У сучасній лінгвістиці зростає інтерес до взаємодії граматичних категорій та стилістичних прийомів у дискурсі. Одним із найвиразніших граматичних засобів в англійській мові є прикметник, зокрема його ступені порівняння та найвищого ступеня, які дозволяють мовцям оцінювати, підкреслювати та протиставляти якості. Ці форми є не лише граматичними маркерами, а й важливими засобами прагматичного та експресивного спілкування. У гумористичному дискурсі ступені порівняння та найвищого ступеня часто виходять за межі своєї звичайної граматичної функції, набуваючи додаткового стилістичного та прагматичного значення. Вони служать ефективними інструментами для створення перебільшення, іронії та недоречності – основних механізмів гумору. Підсилюючи оцінки або перебільшуючи повсякденні ситуації, мовці створюють комічний

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ефект, який виникає через контраст між очікуваннями та реальністю. Цей контраст часто є ледь помітним і залежить від розуміння аудиторією типових моделей та соціальних норм.

Крім того, ступені порівняння часто посилюють емоційну інтенсивність висловлювань, роблячи їх навмисно перебільшеними або несподівано заниженими. Ці відхилення від нейтральної оцінки сприяють створенню комічної напруги та грайливої двозначності. У багатьох випадках гумор виникає, коли ступінь порівняння або найвищого ступеню суперечить об'єктивній реальності ситуації, тим самим підкреслюючи абсурдність або викриваючи приховані суперечності.

Незважаючи на широкі дослідження гумору, стилістики та прагматики, специфічна роль граматичного порівняння у породженні гумору залишається відносно маловивченою. Розуміння цих механізмів не лише проливає світло на взаємозв'язок між граматикую та прагматикую, але й сприяє глибшому розумінню динаміки гумору у використанні мови.

Ключові слова: прикметник, ступені порівняння, вищий ступінь, найвищий ступінь, комічний дискурс, гумор, перебільшення, невідповідність, стилістичні засоби.

The problem of the study lies in the insufficient investigation of the role of comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives as grammatical means of creating humorous effect in discourse.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. In English grammar, adjectives are important in describing the qualities or features of a noun and a pronoun. They can be used by writers and speakers to express more specific information about an object, person or idea relating to dimensions, color, amount, ownership, and even emotional condition. Due to their linguistic importance, adjectives have been thoroughly studied and are very well defined in different linguistic literature, which give a detailed insight on what they are, how are they structured and how do they behave grammatically.

In the present study, the focus is placed on the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives, since these forms are often employed to create humorous, exaggerated, or ironic meanings in different types of discourse. Within comedic speech, adjectives of comparison can serve as stylistic devices that intensify evaluation, produce contrast, or convey playful overstatement – all of which contribute to generating a comic effect.

Purpose of the Study.

The object of the research is the aspect of adjectives' degrees of comparison.

The subject of the research is the role of adjectives' degrees of comparison in creating a humorous effect.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the growing scholarly interest in the interaction between grammar and stylistics, particularly in how grammatical categories can serve as mechanisms of humor creation. The research also contributes to the broader field of discourse studies, since humor represents a vital part of everyday communication and creative language use.

Adjective as a Part of Speech

The adjective is a very important and useful part of speech in English. It has a descriptive role when it is used for a noun, and when it is used for a pronoun serves to give additional information about its qualities or states. Adjectives are important in grammatical and stylistic terms since they enable speaker and writer to express evaluation, emotion, and contrast.

Etymology and Historical Development

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*,

adjective (gram.) designating an attribute. XIV. – (O)F. adject, -ive – late L. adjectivus, -iva, f. adject-, pp. stem of adicere add, f. AD- + jacere throw; see -ive. [1, p. 5]

Etymologically, the word *adjective* derives from the Latin *adiectivus*, which literally means *that which is added*. This origin reflects the basic grammatical function of the adjective – to add descriptive or qualifying meaning to a noun. Historically, adjectives were regarded as *additions* to substantives, serving to characterize or specify them.

Lexicographic Definitions

According to *Macmillan School Dictionary*,

adjective /ædzɪktɪv/ noun [C] LANGUAGE a word used for describing a noun or pronoun. The word 'big' is an adjective in 'a big house' and 'the house is big'. Many adjectives are comparative, which means you can have greater degrees of the quality they describe, for example 'small' and 'smaller,' and 'sensible' and 'more sensible', or superlative, which means you can have the greatest degree of the quality they describe, for example 'small' and 'smallest', and 'sensible' and 'most sensible'. Adjectives you might use to describe someone's mood are 'happy', 'bad-tempered' or 'cheerful'. [2, p. 10]

The ability to express degrees of comparison allows adjectives to show varying intensity of qualities and to convey evaluative or emotional nuances.

In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, **Bill Guerriero** defines an adjective as follows:

adjective, a word or phrase that modifies, or specifies, the meaning of a noun or pronoun. An adjective provides additional information about a noun or pronoun by answering the question What kind? (for example, a green bicycle), Which one? (the second episode), How much? (more ice cream), How many? (three cats), or Whose is it? (her backpack). [3]

Grammatical and Functional Characteristics

According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*:

adjective n – a word that describes the thing, quality, state, or action which a noun refers to. For example, black in a black hat is an adjective. In English, adjectives usually have the following properties:

- (a) they can be used before a noun, e.g. a heavy bag;*
- (b) they can be used after be, become, seem as complements;*
- (c) they can be used after a noun as a complement;*
- (d) they can be modified by an adverb, e.g. a very heavy bag;*
- (e) they can be used in a comparative or superlative form, e.g. the bag seems heavier now. [4, p. 12]*

The definition emphasizes the syntactic versatility of adjectives and their ability to occupy various positions within the sentence.

In *Modern English Grammar* by H. V. Verba and L. G. Verba, the authors note:

In English adjectives have no number, case or gender distinctions. Qualitative adjectives have the positive, the comparative and the superlative degrees. The comparative and the superlative degrees are formed in two ways: by means of the endings -er and -est (synthetic forms); by means of the words more and most (analytical forms). ... The comparative degree can be emphasized by means of the words much, far, still. When equal degrees of a quality are compared, the adjective in the positive degree is placed within as...as. To express a smaller degree of a quality the adjective in the positive degree is placed within not so...as. [5, p. 148]

This description reflects the morphological processes of adjective comparison, distinguishing between synthetic and analytical forms, which play an important role in the stylistic expressiveness of English.

In *English Grammar Theory* by O. I. Fedorenko and S. M. Sukhorolska, it is stated that:

The adjective as a part of speech is characterized by the following features: its categorial meaning "property of a substance"; typical stem-building affixes (-ful, -less, -ish, -ous, -able, -ive, -ic, un-, pre-, in-, etc.); grammatical category of the degrees of comparison; combinability with nouns, link verbs, adverbs; syntactical functions of an attribute and predicative. [6, p. 200]

In the article *Lexical and Stylistic Mechanisms of Creating Humor in the Children's Speech in the Works of René Goscinny 'Le Petit Nicolas' and Marcel Pagnol 'Le Temps des amours'*, it is stated that:

Lexical and stylistic mechanisms of humor reflect the child's subjective interpretation of reality and serve to amplify emotional and evaluative meaning. Through contrast, hyperbolic description, and playful shifts in semantic perspective, young narrators create humorous effects that reveal how children perceive, categorize, and emotionally respond to the surrounding world. [7, p. 70]

In the article *Primary and secondary semantics of english basic gustatory adjectives by Koliada E. K. and Kalynonska I. M.*, it is stated that:

The authors focus on the primary and secondary semantics of English basic gustatory adjectives, namely *sweet*, *bitter*, *sour*, and *salty*. They note that the literal meaning of gustatory adjectives is directly related to the food sphere, while figurative meaning arises from a metaphorical reinterpretation of primary semantics. *“The literal meaning of gustatory adjectives is directly related to the food sphere, and figurative meaning is based on a metaphorical reinterpretation of primary semantics”* [8, p. 87].

Regarding literal meanings, the article identifies:

- *Sweet*: “*having a taste like that of sugar; “not rancid or stale; fresh, “not salt or salted”;*
- *Bitter*: “*having a sharp, biting taste, like beer or black coffee without sugar”;*
- *Sour*: “*having a taste like that of a lemon or of fruit that is not ready to eat, “having the taste of fermentation”;*
- *Salty*: “*tasting of salt or containing a lot of salt”*. [8, p. 88–90]

The authors conclude that metaphorization of gustatory adjectives involves a synesthetic shift from the taste modality to olfactory, auditory, visual, and tactile perceptions, as well as an analogous categorical shift in emotional and rational understanding of experiences.

In the article *Black Humour as a Peculiar Kind of Comic by Kuzebna V. V. and Hrechukha L. O.*, it is stated that:

“The characteristic features of black humour that distinguish it from other forms of comic humour are identified. Its eclecticism is highlighted, defined as the combination of seemingly incongruous elements, such as the coexistence of the funny in the tragic.” [9, p. 158]

This quote emphasizes that black humour has its own distinctive features, particularly eclecticism, which is the combination of elements that seem incompatible, such as humor within tragic situations. For example, joking about death or serious illness in a way that is simultaneously shocking and funny illustrates this ambivalent nature.

The theoretical presentation has shown that adjectives and their degrees of comparison are not only grammatical categories, but also important stylistic tools. Their ability to express gradation, evaluation, and emotional intensity makes them particularly relevant for the study of humorous discourse. Scholars emphasize that comparative and superlative degrees can change meaning, create contrast, and introduce hyperbole (important mechanisms of humor).

Presentation of the Main Material

Comedic discourse constitutes a distinctive subtype of discourse, analyzed within the framework of modern linguostylistics. Adjectives have a significant function in the formation of this kind of discourse. The degree of comparison is a very fertile category in this sense, since it allows to express gradation, exaggeration and overstatement, all parameters of comic effect.

In this section it is presented a rather practical analysis of comparative and superlative adjectives in humorous language, utilizing extracts of a comedy monologue (podcast transcript). Each element above shows us how adjectives of comparison can be a source of irony, exaggeration and stylistic contrast.

Analysis of the Use of Adjectival Comparison in Creating a Comic Effect in TED talks

Excerpt: *“Humor can help you to look better, live longer and make it rain, right?”* [10].

This example illustrates that comparative forms **better**, **longer** are used to exaggerate the humor effect. The joke works because the realistic results (*looking better*, *living longer*) are placed together with the absurd idiom *make it rain*. This produces semantic incongruity – a mismatch between real and impossible concepts. Because of this contrast, we see how the comparative degree becomes a tool for exaggeration and for creating humor in everyday joke-telling.

Excerpt: *“As if telling a joke is somehow scarier than living with lions”* [11].

The comparative adjective **scarier** is used ironically to emphasize the incongruity of this comparison. A simple, harmless action (*telling a joke*) is contrasted with an extreme and potentially

deadly situation (*living with lions*). This oppositional comparison is typical of humorous discourse, where exaggeration and absurdity are deliberately used to elicit laughter from the audience. The example also shows how evaluative adjectives help express irony, making the contrast even more absurd.

Excerpt: “*I’ve been called hilarious and smart – at least that’s what my mom says*” [11].

In this case, adjectives *hilarious*, *smart* initially seem like objective and positive descriptions. However, the phrase “*at least that’s what my mother says*” immediately undermines their seriousness. This is a clear example of self-deprecating humor, where the speaker pokes fun at themselves, exposing the gap between expectations and reality. This demonstrates how even a positive degree can generate humor through a sudden shift in evaluation within a single sentence.

Excerpt: “*So it’s the most efficient form of dessert because of the deliciousness of ice cream in an easy-to-consume form*” [11].

Here the superlative modifier *the most efficient* is applied metaphorically. Normally, the word “*effective*” belongs to the scientific or technical register, not to desserts. Using this word to talk about ice cream creates stylistic irony. The humor arises from the mixture of highfalutin vocabulary (*effective*) with everyday, lowercase topics (*dessert*). Thus, the highest degree contributes to the comic clash of styles, very common in the language of modern comedy.

Excerpt: “*Hydrogen plus hydrogen plus oxygen too, bonded together with covalent glue. What do you get, just a thing called water, yeah, it’s teaming up and it’s only getting hotter*” [11].

The comparative adjective *hotter* has both literal and figurative senses. The literal sense is temperature and the figurative sense: relating to the speaker’s emotional state becoming more excited. The combination of scientific terminology (*hydrogen, covalent bond*) with informal conversation (“*it’s getting hotter*”) creates a parodic tone. The humor arises from this blend of scientific and informal figurative language, demonstrating how comparative forms can create exaggeration and playful contrast.

Excerpt: “*I can’t tell if my grandmother is the nicest, most sincere grandmother in the world, or if she is secretly trolling me*” [11].

The superlative degree of the adjectives *nicest* and *most sincere* express an extremely positive evaluation. But the second half of the sentence suddenly calls it into question, creating irony. This contrast from admiration to suspicion illustrates the flexible nature of humorous evaluation. The superlative helps create humor by generating a strong expectation that is immediately reversed.

Excerpt: “*They say that a friend falling into an open sewer is less funny than a stranger*” [12].

The comparative *less funny* sets up a scale of hilarity on which the affective outcome is on contrary to social norms. We tend to feel more compassion for a friend, but this phrase presents their misfortune as *less funny* than that of a stranger. This unexpected twist creates humor through a moral incongruity, as it contradicts what we’ve been taught in society. The comparison exposes the somewhat irrational but very human tendency to laugh more at the misfortunes of strangers.

Excerpt: “*They also find this violation funnier when perceived from a far distance than a close distance*” [12].

The humorous comparison *funnier* develops a contrast based on both physical and comic distance. The humor arises from the strange assumption that something becomes funnier the further away you are from it. By using the words “*far*” and “*close*” to make a comparison, the speaker emphasizes how funny emotional distance can be and how it shapes our sense of humor. This creates a humorous tension between what we logically expect and what people typically experience psychologically, creating a dissonance that contributes to the comic effect.

Excerpt: “*Bringing some mild violations closer makes them funnier*” [12].

In this example, the comparative degree *funnier* contradicts the common belief that distance promotes laughter. Usually, physical or mental distance reduces the feeling of threat and allows for a more comfortable enjoyment of humor. The comparison changes the expected emotional pattern, and

this unexpected turn generates humor. Thus, the comparative degree is used to show how unstable and subjective comic judgment can be.

Excerpt: “*Stumbling on a curb is funnier when it happens to your friend than when it happens to a stranger*” [12].

Here, the comparative adjective *funnier* emphasizes the socially recognized presence of *schadenfreude*: the pleasure derived from the minor misfortunes of others. The humor arises from the contrast between “*friend*” and “*stranger*”, revealing a somewhat uncomfortable but very human truth: minor mishaps involving people we know can be more amusing. From a comparative perspective, the passage shows that emotional closeness can sometimes enhance the comic impact, even if the idea itself seems somewhat misguided.

Practical analysis has shown that both comparative and superlative degrees actively contribute to humor in spoken discourse. Comparisons were found to be more frequent and flexible, helping speakers exaggerate everyday experiences, create ironic contrasts, or express playful self-esteem. The superlative degree generated humor through extreme and maximal exaggeration, often transforming everyday events into dramatic or absurd descriptions. Overall, examples from TED Talks confirm that comparative degrees serve as effective linguistic resources for creating comedic effect in modern communication.

Quantitative Analysis of Degrees of Comparison in Humorous Discourse

Table 1

Quantitative Analysis of Degrees of Comparison

Degree of Comparison	Number of Examples	Percentage
Comparative	7	70%
Superlative	3	30%
Total	10	100%

In order to examine the contribution of grammar patterns to humour production, all ten samples taken from TED Talks were analysed and grouped based on the degree of comparison. This research is limited to the comparative and superlative degrees, since the positive degree was only found to have a minimal, ancillary role in humour.

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrates a clear predominance of the comparative degree, which accounts for 70% of the cases. Comparatives can heighten experiences, highlight absurdities, and unveil moral and social reversals, all of which are core mechanisms of humour.

The superlative degree, although less common, accounting for 30% of the data, is also a major source of humour. Superlatives are built on extreme evaluation and hyperbolic extension, and they produce comedy by exaggerating qualities to an upper limit.

Conclusions. The study showed that degrees of comparison play a more significant role in humorous discourse than simple grammatical comparison. Although the category of comparison is traditionally considered a structural tool for denoting relative or absolute qualities, in comedic discourse these forms acquire expressive, evaluative and pragmatic functions. Analyzing examples from TED Talks, it became clear that degrees of comparison and superlatives act as active stylistic devices that create a comedic effect through exaggeration, contrast, emotional intensification, irony and playful exaggeration.

The theoretical review showed that adjectives are not only descriptive units, but also have significant evaluative potential. Their ability to form degrees of comparison and superlatives makes them particularly suitable for humorous purposes, since humor often relies on hyperbole, semantic contrast and violation of expectations. The comparative degree, in particular, was found to be very flexible: speakers use it to create unexpected analogies, highlight inappropriate contrasts, or amplify everyday experiences by placing them on a relative scale of emotions or qualities. These constructions

often generate humor by presenting minor, everyday events as surprisingly dramatic, dangerous, or unusual.

The practical analysis confirmed the theoretical assumptions. Comparative constructions created ironic inversions or moral inconsistencies, demonstrating the flexibility of this grammatical category in humorous communication. Although the superlative was less frequently used, it also played a crucial role in creating comic effects. Superlatives are inherently extreme, and this maximalism naturally leads to exaggeration. In humorous discourse, superlatives often function as a kind of hyperbolic contraction, allowing speakers to present even minor events as the best or record-breaking.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that comedian Degrees of comparison often use comparative structures not only to joke about others, but also to create self-irony. By using comparative and superlative degrees of self, speakers openly mock their own emotions, habits, or experiences.

Overall, research shows that degrees of comparison of adjectives are powerful linguistic resources for constructing humor. Degrees of comparison allow speakers to construct evaluative contrasts, highlight absurdity, and reveal socio-emotional paradoxes, while adjectives in their comparative and superlative forms intensify experiences and create vivid, exaggerated, and memorable descriptions. Together, they form a flexible system of expressive means that enrich humorous communication, making it more vivid, understandable, and exciting.

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