

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CATEGORIES OF INTENSITY AND GRADATION: A SEMANTIC, COGNITIVE, AND FUNCTIONAL-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS**A'zamjon Ixtiyorov**

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Abstract: This article analyzes the linguistic nature, semantic essence, and interrelationship of the categories of intensity and gradation. It provides a scientific justification for the role of gradation as a general category expressing the semantics of degree and for intensity as a semantic-pragmatic phenomenon reflecting the higher segments of this system. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of J. Lyons, D. Bolinger, C. Kennedy, G. Lakoff, R. Langacker, A. V. Bondarko, and other scholars, the study examines the cognitive, functional-semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of intensity and gradation. Furthermore, the article explores the connection of these categories with evaluation, expressiveness, and emotionality. A comparative analysis based on English and Uzbek linguistic data reveals both the universal and national-cultural aspects of intensity and gradation. The findings demonstrate that intensity is a category grounded in gradation, yet semantically and pragmatically more complex.

Keywords: intensity, gradation, gradability, intensification, degree semantics, semantic scale, functional-semantic field, evaluative semantics, expressiveness, emotionality, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, intensifiers, English language, Uzbek language.

Introduction

In linguistics, the categories of intensity and gradation are regarded as some of the most complex and multifaceted manifestations of degree semantics. These categories serve to express the varying degrees of an object, phenomenon, action, or attribute within the semantic system of language. Since human cognition perceives reality not in absolute but in relative terms, the category of gradation emerges as one of the universal phenomena of language. According to J. Lyons, most concepts in human cognition possess a gradational character and are situated between opposing poles such as “more–less,” “large–small,” and “strong–weak” (Lyons, 1977, p. 271). Consequently, the category of gradation is directly connected with human activities of evaluation and classification.

The contributions of structural semanticists have been particularly significant in the development of gradation theory. Studies conducted by J. Lyons, R. Quirk, G. Leech, and C. Kennedy provide detailed accounts of gradable adjectives and their semantic structure. Explaining gradation through the theory of semantic scales, C. Kennedy argues that every gradational unit is associated with a specific measurement scale. According to him, adjectives such as *tall*, *short*, *expensive*, *cheap*, *hot*, and *cold* create systems of degrees in human cognition, and these degrees are organized through semantic scales (Kennedy, 2007, p. 4).

As the category of gradability developed, the notion of intensity became an independent object of scientific inquiry. The theoretical foundations of intensity were elaborated in D. Bolinger's influential work *Degree Words*. Bolinger interprets intensity as a semantic mechanism that increases the degree of an existing attribute. In his view, intensifiers do not create new denotative meanings; rather, they amplify the strength of an existing semantic feature (Bolinger, 1972, p. 17). For example, the expressions *beautiful* and *extremely beautiful* share the same denotative meaning, but the latter exhibits a higher degree of intensity.

It should be emphasized that although gradation and intensity are often treated as synonymous phenomena, important semantic distinctions exist between them. Gradation constitutes the general model of degree semantics, whereas intensity is a semantic-pragmatic

phenomenon occurring within the higher segments of that model. In other words, every instance of intensity presupposes gradation, but not every instance of gradation implies intensity. For example, the sequence *good – better – best* represents gradation, whereas *very good – extremely good – exceptionally good* represents intensity.

Representatives of contemporary cognitive linguistics relate gradation and intensity to the conceptual structures of human cognition. G. Lakoff argues that prototypical categories and conceptual metaphors play a crucial role in the formation of gradability (Lakoff, 1987, p. 68). According to Lakoff, people perceive the world not through absolute boundaries but through the principles of center and periphery. As a result, varying degrees of stronger and weaker manifestations emerge within each concept.

R. Langacker associates intensity with an increase in conceptual energy. He maintains that linguistic units are verbal representations of conceptual structures in human cognition. Therefore, intensifiers such as *very*, *highly*, *deeply*, and *absolutely* reflect the speaker's subjective conceptualization more than objective reality itself (Langacker, 1987, p. 104).

The relationship between intensity and gradation can also be explained through the theory of functional-semantic fields. According to A. V. Bondarko's theory, every semantic category consists of a nucleus and a periphery (Bondarko, 1984, p. 492). Within this framework, intensity may be viewed as a functional-semantic field. The nucleus of this field includes central intensifiers such as *very*, *extremely*, *absolutely*, and their Uzbek equivalents *juda*, *nihojatda*, and *g'oyat*, while the periphery encompasses phraseological units, metaphorical constructions, and stylistic devices.

The category of evaluation plays a significant role in explaining the semantic nature of intensity. N. D. Arutyunova defines evaluative semantics as the linguistic expression of an individual's axiological attitude toward reality (Arutyunova, 1988, p. 75). Intensifiers strengthen this evaluative process. For instance, the distinction between *important* and *extremely important* is manifested not only in degree but also in the speaker's evaluative stance.

The studies of C. Paradis further illuminate the pragmatic nature of intensity. According to Paradis, intensifiers enhance the persuasive force of speech acts and strengthen communicative impact (Paradis, 2008, p. 321). Consequently, intensity should be regarded not only as a semantic phenomenon but also as a pragmatic one.

A comparative analysis of English and Uzbek demonstrates that while intensity and gradation possess universal characteristics in both languages, their means of expression differ typologically. In English, intensity is primarily expressed through analytical devices such as *very*, *really*, *highly*, and *absolutely*. In Uzbek, however, alongside lexical means, phonetic and morphological intensification is highly developed, as seen in forms such as *qip-qizil* ("deep red"), *yam-yashil* ("lush green"), *oppoq* ("pure white"), and *qop-qora* ("pitch black"). This difference can be explained by the typological characteristics of Turkic languages.

Thus, the categories of gradation and intensity are closely interconnected and together form an integrated system of degree semantics. Gradation functions as a general semantic model, whereas intensity constitutes the expressive, evaluative, and pragmatically activated segment of that model. Therefore, it is scientifically justified to interpret intensity not merely as a component of gradation, but as an independent semantic-pragmatic phenomenon that develops on the basis of gradation.

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