

The English Adjective – its importance in the syntax of sentences

Andreea Mihaela STOIAN*

<https://doi.org/10.52744/AUCSFLSA.2023.01.31>

Abstract:

The English grammar is an important tool for those who want to learn this language correctly. Although Modern English – especially the one used in social media - has suffered many modifications, abbreviations and even incorrect usage of English, Standard English should be taught correctly by following its grammar rules. Understanding its grammar rules and using them in practice helps students achieve a satisfying level of English knowledge.

The English adjectives represent an important part of speech because they offer information about the colour, the shape, the quality and the dimension of an object, an animal or a human being. A sentence without one or more adjectives is a simple one and therefore it does not express and it does not offer many details about the noun or the pronoun that it refers to:

e.g. I saw a car. / I saw a brand new, modern, red car.

The adjective has the power to enrich the meaning of our written or oral messages. The adjective helps the reader who is the one who receives of the message to make himself a clear view of the thing/ being that is described or mentioned in our communication. According to statistics, English adjectives represent one of the most used word classes accompanying the noun or pronoun that they determine. Moreover, the English adjective does not have to agree in gender or number with the noun that it describes.

Those who are studying English as a foreign language can distinguish, quite simply, a noun from an adjective. The noun names the thing, object or being, while the adjective adds a positive or a negative trait, offering characteristics to the noun:

e.g. a bad man, a tragic accident, a stressful situation, an ungrateful woman, a disgusting smell (in these situations the adjectives offer negative traits to the nouns that they determine)

e.g. a good man, a wonderful place, a beautiful flower, a loving mother, a peaceful room, a respectful woman (here the adjectives offer positive traits to the nouns).

Therefore, the importance of the adjective in English is crucial because this part of speech characterizes and offers detailed information related to the thing/ person we refer to (either noun or pronoun).

Keywords: *adjectives, grades of comparison, English, grammar, part of speech*

* Senior Lecturer, PhD. Department of Applied Modern Languages, University of Craiova, Email: andreea.stoian@edu.ucv.ro



Rezumat

Gramatica limbii engleze este o unealtă importantă pentru cei care vor să învețe această limbă. Deși limba engleză modernă – în special cea utilizată în social media – a suferit multe modificări, abrevieri și chiar o folosire incorectă a limbii engleze, limba engleză standard ar trebui predată corect, urmărind regulile sale de gramatică. Înțelegerea și folosirea regulilor de gramatică din limba engleză îi ajută pe studenți să atingă un nivel satisfăcător de cunoștințe în limba engleză.

Adjectivele din limba engleză reprezintă o parte importantă de vorbire pentru că acestea oferă informații despre culoarea, forma, calitatea și dimensiunea unui obiect, animal sau ființă umană. O propoziție fără un adjectiv sau mai multe, este o propoziție simplă, așadar ea nu exprimă și nu ne oferă multe detalii despre substantivul sau pronumele la care se referă:

Ex: Am văzut o mașină. / Am văzut o mașină nou nouță, modernă de culoare roșie.

Adjectivul are puterea de a îmbogăți înțelesul mesajul nostru scris sau oral. Adjectivul îl ajută pe cititor adică pe cel care primește mesajul să își facă o imagine clară asupra lucrului/ ființei care este descrisă sau menționată în comunicarea noastră. Potrivit statisticilor, adjectivele din limba engleză reprezintă una dintre cele mai folosite clase de cuvinte, ele însoțesc substantivul sau pronumele pe care îl determină. Mai mult decât atât, adjectivul din limba engleză nu trebuie să se acorde în gen și număr cu substantivul pe care îl descrie.

Cei care studiază limba engleză ca limbă străină pot distinge, destul de simplu, între un substantiv și un adjectiv. Substantivul numește lucrul, obiectul sau ființa în timp ce adjectivul adaugă o trăsătură pozitivă sau negativă oferind caracteristici substantivului:

Ex: un om rău, un accident teribil, o situație stresantă, o femeie nerecunoscutoare, un miros neplăcut (în aceste situații, adjectivele oferă trăsături negative substantivelor pe care le determină)

Ex un om bun, un loc minunat, o floare frumoasă, o mama iubitoare, un om pașnic, o femeie respectuoasă (aici adjectivele oferă trăsături pozitive substantivelor)

Așadar, importanța adjectivului în engleză este crucială pentru că această parte de vorbire oferă informații detaliate despre lucrul/ persoana la care ne referim (fie substantiv sau pronume).

Cuvinte cheie: adjective, grade de comparație, engleză, gramatică, parte de vorbire

The adjective, in general, no matter if we analyze it, for example in English or Romanian, offers crucial information about the noun/ pronoun related to *his/her/its size, colour, shape, state of spirit, how many, how much, quality, age, type of relationship*, etc. All these features belong to the pronoun or the noun that we speak about. A sentence that lacks adjectives is a simple one.

The majority of English grammar books tell us that an English adjective can be identified in a simple way: first look for the noun and in front of it you will see the adjective:

e.g: The blue sky predicted sunny weather.

Colourful butterflies surrounded the small flower.

Cashmere sweaters can be bought from that store.

Even if this is the standard position of the adjectives, we can also find them after linking verbs. In this case, the adjective becomes predicative and it offers information related to sensory experiences or feelings:

e.g. The children feel sad because they lost the contest.

The colour of her blouse seems to be dark red in the fade light of the restaurant.

The food tastes delicious.

He seems happy and content with the results.

In these examples, even if the adjectives were placed after the linking verbs (*feel, is, taste, seem*) they kept their main trait: to offer information related to the noun or pronoun from the sentence.

Degrees of the English adjectives

In English, the adjective comes in three forms that are known as degrees. These three forms are: positive, comparative and superlative. The purpose of these degrees of comparison is to compare two or more things/ people or to illustrate *the best version* (in a positive or negative way) from a group of things or people. These degrees of comparison apply to the English adjectives and adverbs. However, not all English adjectives can be compared or intensified. The adjectives that can't be compared or intensified are called *absolute adjectives* because they are always in the superlative degree of comparison. Absolute adjectives are non-gradable because the person or the thing that they describe **can't be made:**

e.g. more ideal, the most perfect, more complete, the most unique, etc (all these examples are incorrect). **We can say:**

e.g. an ideal situation, a perfect place, a unique dress.



Other examples of absolute adjectives that are non-gradable are:

e.g. digital, chemical, excellent, impossible, domestic, terrified, awful, unknown, etc.

The positive degree of comparison describes the thing/ person as he/ she/ it is:

e.g. a happy child / an easy task / a black dress / a good essay / an important event, etc.

The second form in which adjectives may be encountered is the comparative degree of comparison. With the help of this degree we only compare two things; this degree helps us express which of these two things is: better, friendlier, more expensive, bigger, etc.

When we form the comparative degree of comparison we have to take into consideration that there are two types of adjectives: those that add the suffix *-er* and those that add *more* in front of them. The suffix *-er* is used for the majority of one-syllable adjectives as well as for the two syllable adjectives that end in: *-y, -ow, -le, -er* or *-ure*. The adjectives that end in *-y* will change it into *-i* before adding the suffix *-er*:

e.g. happy - happier / friendly - friendlier / easy - easier / juicy - juicier / lovely - lovelier / spooky - spookier / shy - shier / messy - messier / heavy - heavier / funny - funnier / crispy - crispier, etc.

But we also have adjectives that double their last consonant and others that add only *-r* in the comparative degree of comparison:

e.g. big - bigger / large - larger / thin - thinner / nice - nicer / hot - hotter / rare - rarer / true - truer, etc.

The adjectives that add *more* - in front of them in order to form the comparative degree of comparison are those which have two, three or more syllables and those that do not end in *-y*:

e.g. more important, more beautiful, more attractive, more fascinating, more confused, more difficult, more expensive, more ambitious, more efficient, etc.

The third category of adjectives is represented by those that change their form completely for the comparative and superlative degree of comparison:

e.g. good - better / bad, ill - worse / many - more / far - farther, further / little - less / old - elder.

Those adjectives that add *more* in order to form the comparative:

e.g. important - more important / beautiful - more beautiful / difficult - more difficult / interesting - more interesting / careful - more careful / expensive - more expensive / intelligent - more intelligent, etc.



The comparative degree of comparison can be used when we want to strengthen or emphasize a comparative adjective. In this situation we use: far, a lot, much, even or rather:

e.g. This is far less interesting than the other one. / He is much happier now than he was last week. / Mary is even more convinced of the quality offered by that restaurant than she was last summer when she ate in the same place.

The word than is essential in the comparative degree:

e.g. He is taller than his brother. / Bryan is shorter than his cousin. / This museum is more interesting than the last one.

The comparative degree of comparison can also be used in the following situations:

e.g. The darker it gets the scarier this place becomes. / The more difficult this situation is the more captivating it becomes for those who want to solve the mystery.

In the case of equality between the things that we speak about, we can use: as+ adjective/ adverb +as:

e.g. He is as intelligent as his colleague. / She was as tall as her sister.

When things are not equal we use: not as+ adverb/ adjective + as:

e.g. Vera is not as thin as her mother. / This place is not as beautiful as the other one.

The superlative degree of comparison is used when we want to express the fact that something or someone is the best or has reached the highest level surpassing others of its kind. In general, one syllable and some two-syllable adjectives receive the suffix -est for the superlative degree. The rest of the adjectives use: the most in front of them. For the irregular adjectives, the superlative form is totally different.

e.g. tall – taller – the tallest / happy – happier – the happiest / dark –darker- the darkest/ expensive –more expensive – the most expensive / difficult – more difficult – the most difficult.

For irregular adjectives:

e.g. good – better – the best / bad – worse – the worst / far –farther/ further – the farthest/ the furthest / little –less – the least.

For the comparative as well as for the superlative form we can use: “...pre-modifiers or intensifiers adverbs like **many, much, very much, more, pretty, so, far, even, rather, quite, a lot, lots, a whole lot, a heck of, a little, a bit, slightly, all the, just, only, almost, any, no, not at all, by far, at most, at least and somewhat**. For example:

She is <u>a lot</u> richer than her husband.
--

The lady is <u>far</u> better than her husband.



She is quite the most beautiful person I have ever met.

This is by far the best movie

(Kannan, 2018: cxlvii)

Arranging multiple adjectives in a sentence

In English, the rule when using multiple adjectives is to place them in a certain order. Even if this order is only partially fixed, we have to take into consideration that opinion comes first and fact comes second. According to the majority of English grammar books, the order of adjectives is: opinion, size, age, shape, colour, origin, material, purpose.

In their book "The Grammar Book: Understanding and teaching primary grammar", the authors Zoe and Timothy Paramour admit that: "For those of us who grew up with English as a first language, the order of adjectives is almost innate knowledge." (Paramour, 2020:69). Thus, if for native English speakers the order of multiple adjectives come in a natural way, for English learners this order has to be learnt and practiced. In this case, English learners should not take their intuition into consideration when they have to arrange multiple adjectives; it is advisable to follow the grammar rule. The same authors provide a simple and clear table with the correct order of multiple adjectives. "Without realizing it, when you use multiple adjectives to describe a noun, you list them in the following order.

Order	Describe	For example
1	Opinion	Magnificent, enthralling, terrible
2	Size	Tiny, huge, short
3	Physical quality	Smooth, thick, bristly
4	Shape	Square, round, hexagonal
5	Age	Ancient, young, newborn
6	Colour	Green, black, orange
7	Origin	British, Greek, Dutch
8	Material	Fabric, metal, wooden
9	Purpose	Cleaning, hammering, cooking

So, I might say: I have a useful, skinny, blue, Swedish, plastic, shopping bag" (Paramour, 2020: 69, idem 4)

Conclusions

English language as well as all the other languages is in a continuous process of changing, adding and modifying its vocabulary. Even though modern teaching tells us to simplify some grammar rules so that foreign learners can have a better understanding of how English works, we have to take into consideration that modern teaching offers: "...the ability to



introduce the latest innovative technologies in the process of learning foreign languages on the part of the teacher.”(Păunescu, Chirițescu: 2017, p. 375-382)

To learn, how and when to use a certain grammar rule, is essential for a good and comprehensive communication in English. Each part of speech has its importance in *the infrastructure* of a language. The English adjective offers detailed information about the subject of our sentence, phrase or context. Without adjectives, the communication would be truncated and incomplete. Even though the information, that we, English teachers, transmit to our students: “...cannot and must not be restricted to traditional structures of grammar, vocabulary and so on” (Lăpădat & Lăpădat: 2020, p.139-148), we have to select and to present English grammar to our students according to the latest standards of the teaching and learning process.

Our role as English teachers is “...to make the learning process accessible for every category of learners. The purpose of the English class/ course is to make the learner acquire a grammatically accurate English language. Therefore the teaching-learning process of the English language needs to be updated and adjusted to the requirements of the educational system and of the job/ career opportunities.”(Stoian: 2019, p.1717-1719)

References:

- Chirițescu, I.M. & Păunescu, F.A., (2017). *Innovative Methods and Techniques of Languages Teaching and Learning*, International Journal of Arts & Sciences 10 (1).
- Kannan, V.P.,(2018). *English Grammar for EFL / ESL Students (Simple, Practical yet Comprehensive)*, Notion Press, Chennai, India.
- Lăpădat, L & Lăpădat, M. M., (2020). *Teaching Foreign Languages: Between Tradition and Contemporary Synchronicity*, Revista de Științe Politice, Revue des Sciences Politiques, no. 68.
- Paramour Z & T., (2020). *The Grammar Book. Understanding and Teaching primary grammar*, Bloosbury Education, London, UK.
- Stoian, A.M., (2019). *Professional Development and Continuous Training of English Teachers*, EDU-WORLD2018-Education Facing Contemporary World Issues, (https://www.europeanproceedings.com/files/data/article/79/6294/article_79_6294_pdf_100.pdf)