1. Introduction

The apparent human ‘taste for hyperbolic expression’ (Peters 1994: 271) makes intensifiers one of the most prolific areas for the expression of exaggeration.

Death is an issue of the most genuine concern for all cultures and societies worldwide.

This anthropological interest might result in death being exploited as a common source of intensification cross-linguistically (cf. Claridge 2011).

2. Aim of the presentation

In this presentation I will focus on the evolution of two death-related intensifiers, namely the –ly form deadly and its zero-adverb counterpart dead, both meaning ‘utterly’, ‘extremely’ in PDE.

I will additionally show how these death-related forms have counterparts in other languages, and, therefore, there might be common cross-linguistic sources of intensification (cf. Claridge 2011).

3. Sources

OED and MED

The online databases Early English Books Online (EEBO), Eighteenth Century Fiction (ECF), and Online Books Page (OBP).

Monolingual dictionaries for languages other than English

4. Evidence from the dictionaries

In line with other intensifiers, dead and deadly have undergone a process of subjectification and grammaticalization over time:

Qualitative adv. > booster (Peters, 1994)

5. Evidence from a selection of collocations in the databases

Figure 1. Descriptive, subjective, and intensifying readings of the collocations of dead in the databases.

Figure 2. Descriptive, subjective, and intensifying readings of the collocations of deadly in the databases.

Examples from the databases

(5) When shall we get to land? Captain—they have hearts like stones—O I am deadly sick! (ECF. 1760. Sterne, Laurence. Tristram Shandy).

(6) The fellows were made almost dead drunk. (ECF. 1754. Richardson, Samuel. Sir Charles Grandison).

(7) And although the attainment be never so difficult yet hauing him in my companye, I hope to make all things dead sure. (EEBO. 1583. De la Sierra, Pedro. The second part of the Myrrof of knighthood).

6. Cross-linguistic parallels

Dead[ly] tired mort(e) de fatigue (Fr.), todmüde (Ge.), stanco/a morto/a (It.), morto/a de cansaço (Pt.), muerto/a de cansancio (Sp.).

Dead[ly] bored mort(e) d’ennui (Fr.), sich zu Tode/bödlich langweilen (Ge.), morto/a di noia (It.), morto/a de aborrecimento (Pt.), muerto/a de aburrimiento (Sp.).

Dead[ly] scared mort(e) de peur (Fr.), sich zu Tode fürchten (Ge.), morto/a di paura (It.), morto/a de medo (Pt.), muerto/a de miedo (Sp.).

7. References


