

Death-related intensifiers: grammaticalization and related phenomena in the evolution of the intensifiers *dead* and *deadly*



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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)

Descriptive meanings:

(1) *All þat met hym with malis..Auther dyet of his dyntes* ['stroke of a weapon'], or were **ded** wondit. (a.1400. *MED*, s.v. *dedli*, adv.).



Subjective meanings:

(2) *Custaunce, with a **dedly** pale face..toward hir she wente.* (c.1390, *MED*, s.v. *dedli* adv.3).



Intensifying meanings:

(3) *I þat es sa **dedli** dill* ['stupid']. (c. 1300, *OED*, s.v. *deadly* adv.4).

(4) *Oh he is olde dogge at expounding, and **deade** sure at a Catechisme.* (1589. *OED*, s.v. *dead*, adv. 2a).

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.

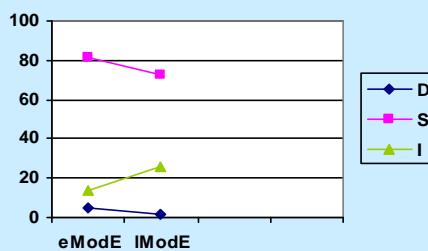
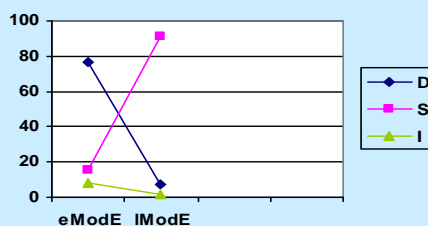


Figure 2. Descriptive, subjective, and intensifying readings of the collocations of *deadly* in the databases.



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 neuer 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 Myrror 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/tödlich 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

Claridge, C. 2011. *Hyperbole in English. A corpus-based study of exaggeration*. Cambridge: CUP.

MED = *Middle English Dictionary*. Online version available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med>.

OED = *Oxford English Dictionary*. Online version available at <http://www.oed.com>.

Peters, H. 1994. 'Degree Adverb'. In Kastovsky, D. (ed.), *Studies in Early Modern English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 269-288.

8. Acknowledgements

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