
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Lexical Meaning to Contextual Interpretation: Gradable Adjectives in Ramthawi Arabic: A Qualitative and Descriptive Study of Word Meaning and Context

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| ABSTRACT

This paper examines the meaning of gradable adjectives and degree modification in Ramthawi Arabic. It focuses on adjectives such as *ṭawīl* 'tall', *kabīr* 'big', *ġāli* 'expensive', *ḥāmi* 'hot', and *zuṭug* 'overly salty', and *layig* 'beautiful/nice' whose interpretation can change depending on context. The study argues that these meanings cannot be understood through basic word meaning alone. Speakers also rely on comparison groups, shared expectations, and information from the situation. The paper examines positive comparatives, and superlative meanings, as well as degree modifiers such as *kthīr* 'very/a lot' and *gattoma/šway* 'little'. It uses a qualitative and descriptive semantic approach based on representative Ramthawi Arabic examples. The theoretical framework combines lexical meaning, gradability, comparison, degree modification, and contextual interpretation. The analysis shows that the interpretation of gradable adjectives results from an interaction between word meaning and context. The paper therefore highlights the importance of Ramthawi Arabic for studying how speakers understand degrees, comparison, and meaning in everyday communication.

| KEYWORDS

Ramthawi Arabic, Semantics, Gradable adjectives, Degree Modification, Contextual Meaning, Comparison Groups, Comparative Meaning, Superlatives, Lexical Semantics.

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Introduction

The meaning of words does not always exist in a straightforward, fixed way. Speakers frequently use expressions whose meanings depend on the context, the people who are involved in the communication, and the common knowledge between them. Gradable adjectives are often used as classic examples of the relationship between word meaning and meaning in context (e.g., Kennedy & McNally, 2005). When a speaker says that someone is tall, the sentence does not normally identify a universal height that separates all tall people from all non-tall people. A child may be tall in relation to other children but may not be tall when compared to adults. A person may have expensive tastes in one economic context but inexpensive tastes in another context. Likewise, a person may refer to a hot day in the winter in Jordan as being merely warm in the summer.

The semantics of gradable adjectives has therefore generated considerable interest in the field of linguistics. Gradable adjectives are different from many other types of adjectives because they allow degrees and comparisons. Speakers may refer to a person as being tall, very tall, or slightly tall, or they may compare that person with others. These possibilities show the connection between gradable meaning and ideas of intensity, comparison, salience, and context.

Ramthawi Arabic is a rich area of inquiry for investigating these issues. In everyday conversation, there are many ways of describing properties of people, temperature, cost, size, appearance, taste, and judgments about a person. A Ramthawi speaker may say: *Gasim ṭawīl*. 'Gasim is tall.' *Gasim ṭawīl kthīr*. 'Gasim is very tall.' *Gasim ṭawīl gattoma*. 'Gasim is a little tall.' *Gasim aṭwal min ʿAbdulruhman*. 'Gasim is taller than Abdulruhman.'

The examples above have the same general description, yet they have different meanings. The positive form should be interpreted according to its meaning in context, while the term *kthīr* intensifies the property. In contrast, the adverb

gattoma/šway presents the property as limited or relatively weak. A comparative form presents the property in comparison with another person.

This study adopts a qualitative semantic approach to examine how Ramthawi speakers interpret gradable adjectives in different contexts. It focuses on lexical meaning, comparison groups, degree modification, and the semantic differences among positive, comparative, and superlative forms.

Spoken Arabic varieties have been investigated at different linguistic levels. AlBzour (2015), for example, examined the syllable structure of Ramthawi Arabic, while Al-Deaibes (2016) investigated assimilation and gemination in Rural Jordanian Arabic. Other researchers have focused on comparative, superlative, and syntactic constructions in Arabic varieties: McNabb and Kennedy (2011) analyzed extraction and deletion in Palestinian Arabic comparatives, Abusalim (2016) investigated comparative constructions and degree semantics in Jordanian Arabic, and Hallman (2016, 2022) studied the syntax and degree semantics of superlatives and comparatives in Syrian Arabic. Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to the semantic interpretation of gradable adjectives in Ramthawi Arabic.

Thus, this study will investigate language issues related to Ramthawi Arabic, which is a regional variety of Jordanian Arabic spoken primarily in Ramtha, a city in northern Jordan near the Syrian border. It belongs to the broader Levantine Arabic group (AlBzour, 2015). The study will analyze not only the Ramthawi equivalents of the selected English adjectives but also how their meanings are used in different linguistic contexts.

Background to the Study

An important issue in studying gradable meaning is the relationship between the lexical meaning of a word and the actual situation in which the word is used. The adjective *ṭawīl* has a meaning that has to do with height, but this information alone does not determine the way the adjective is understood in every situation. When a twelve-year-old is called *ṭawīl* for instance, another child of the same age might be compared to him. If however, the same boy is compared with adult basketball players, the situation would change. The same applies to many other gradable adjectives such as *ġāli* 'expensive'. For a college student, something might be considered to be *ġāli* while for an adult with a high-paying job, such expense might be reasonable. The meaning implies something about price but the idea of what price is too much depends on what people expect in a circumstance. The third significant question is how does one come about the standard that is used in the situation. It is interesting to note that in most cases, the speaker knows how to convey the same meaning without being explicit about the meaning of the comparative class being used at each specific context. Other contextual information ensures that. Another question in regard to degree modification. Speakers of Ramthawi Arabic often use expressions *kthīr*, *bizyadeh* in to intensify the meanings of the degree adjectives. The meaning of the phrase *hāmi kthīr* is different from that of *hāmi gattoma* or from the plain word *hāmi*. The third problem involves the concept of comparison. Arabic has quite productive comparative and superlative systems, and Ramthawi Arabic has been discussed in terms of comparative meaning and interpretation. This concept is very important since it makes it possible to distinguish between things on the basis of their grade of comparison.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

There are several important objectives for this study. First, it seeks to describe some of the semantic properties that define a selected group of gradable adjectives used in Ramthawi Arabic and to examine the role of lexical knowledge in their interpretation. Second, the research aims to clarify how context has a significant effect on how such adjectives are interpreted. Third, this research will examine how comparison groups and speakers' expectations about the meaning of an adjective affect the degree attributed to a certain object. It will also examine the distinction between evaluative adjectives, sensory and more measurable gradable adjectives. Moreover, the study will demonstrate how degree modifiers such as *kthīr* and *gattoma/šway* contribute to the meaning of gradable adjectives. Furthermore, it will discuss the semantic differences between positive, comparative, and superlative expressions without relying on formal semantic notation. Finally, it aims to highlight the value of Ramthawi Arabic data for broader discussions of gradability, lexical meaning, and contextual interpretation.

1.3 Research Questions

RQ1. How are selected gradable adjectives interpreted in Ramthawi Arabic, and to what extent do lexical knowledge, contextual factors, comparison groups, and the distinction between evaluative and more measurable adjectives influence their interpretation?

RQ2. How do degree modifiers such as *kthīr* and *gattoma/šway* affect adjectival meaning, and what semantic differences exist between positive, comparative, and superlative expressions in Ramthawi Arabic?

RQ3. What can the analysis of gradable adjectives in Ramthawi Arabic contribute to broader discussions of gradability, lexical meaning, and contextual interpretation?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in four major aspects. To begin with, this study is built on a dialect of Jordanian Arabic that has received little attention for research purposes. In the studies of the Arabic language, Modern Standard Arabic has generally been the focus of interest, as it has been extensively researched. However, dialects provide many valuable insights into the everyday meaning and treatment of meaning of words and expressions.

Additionally, the paper demonstrates that researchers in semantics do not have to limit their studies to technical and formal models. Rather, it is possible to focus on issues such as context and meaning of words, as well as on issues related to comparison and interpretation, through qualitative research. This is especially appropriate for the present research, which is exploratory in nature and seeks to describe the semantic system based on data collected from speakers of the language. Further, the topic leads to more general questions within the area of linguistics. For instance, how do speakers decide whether an adjective applies? What information is included in the basic meaning of a term? How does the context serve the purpose? What makes a saying more appropriate in one setting than in another? Gradable adjectives provide researchers to answer such questions. Finally, there is methodological value in the work presented. The study is an example for how Ramthawi Arabic can be described in more straightforward manners rather than just describing the inventory of forms.

1.1 Research Problem

Ramthawi Arabic is used in everyday communication by Ramthawis, but unfortunately the meaning of gradable adjectives within this dialect seems to have not been as thoroughly studied as the general discussion regarding the Arabic comparison and adjective structure. The use of the term *ṭawīl* 'tall' or *ġāli* 'expensive' does not necessarily hold the same application in Ramthawi Arabic. Rather, the meaning of the word can shift from one context to another depending on comparison groups and the common understanding shared among individuals. Therefore, this study deals with gradable meaning in Ramthawi Arabic as well as how context and degree expressions work with this meaning.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research is about some selected gradable adjectives and related expressions in Ramthawi Arabic. The examples will be used in the study to illustrate positive, comparative, and superlative functions. However, this study is only descriptive and qualitative in nature. Accordingly, the analysis focuses specifically on Ramthawi Arabic, and the findings should be understood within this linguistic and geographical context rather than as representing all varieties of Jordanian Arabic.

1.6 Organization of the Paper

The paper is organized as follows. The first section introduces the research problem, objectives, research questions, significance, and scope of the study. The second section reviews the relevant previous research and theoretical background. The third section describes the qualitative and descriptive methodology used in the study. The fourth section presents the semantic analysis and discussion of the Ramthawi Arabic examples, focusing on gradable adjectives, degree modification, comparison groups, comparative meaning, and superlative meaning. And finally, Section five presents the conclusion of the study.

2.0 Previous Research

Gradable adjectives describe properties that can have different degrees. For example, a person can be tall, very tall, or taller than another person. However, the meaning of these adjectives does not come from the word alone. Speakers also use the context, the comparison group, and their shared knowledge. Earlier studies have examined this topic from several sides. Some studies discuss scales and standards, while others focus on context, degree modifiers, comparatives, or superlatives. This section brings these areas together and connects them with the present study of Ramthawi Arabic.

2.1 Gradable Adjectives and Scale Structure

Kennedy and McNally (2005) discuss the concept of gradable adjectives that are connected with scales. A scale shows different levels of a property, such as height, size, price, or temperature. Some scales are open because they do not have a clear final point. For example, there is no fixed maximum degree of tallness. The researchers note that these differences influence the manner in which adjectives combine with the degree modifiers. Thus, the meaning of an adjective specifies the modifiers to be used.

The above-mentioned concept is valuable for this study. The adjectives of Ramthawi Arabic, i.e. *ṭawīl* 'tall/long', *kabīr* 'big', *ġāli* 'expensive', *ḥāmi* 'hot' *zuṭug* 'salty' place people or objects on scales. However, this information does not always indicate the degree required by the listener. The latter may need to rely on contexts. The same structure of the scale may influence the meaning of the phrases involving *kthīr* 'very/a lot' and *gattoma/šway* 'little'. Although Kennedy and McNally did not study these Arabic terms, their theory helps in explaining why a modifier may behave differently with different adjectives.

Kennedy (2007) distinguishes between relative and absolute gradable adjectives. Relative adjectives, such as tall and expensive, require the context standard. Thus, a person can be tall for a child but not tall for a basketball player. Absolute adjectives, such as full or empty, correspond to the limiting point. He also points out that vagueness should not be confused with loose or fuzzy use, where the adjective can be applied even in approximate meanings. The distinction between relative and absolute adjectives

is not the same as the distinction between evaluative and more objective adjectives used in this study. *ṭawīl* 'tall' and *ḥāmi* 'hot' have measurable properties, but the meaning of the words is determined by the context. Unlike them, *layig* 'beautiful/nice', *may/sihl* 'easy', and *ṣuṣub* 'difficult' acquire clarity from personal views or opinions.

2.2 Context, Comparison Classes, and Vagueness

According to Klein (1980), a gradable adjective is usually understood in relation to the comparison class. The comparison class is defined as a reference group of people or things that specify the appropriate comparison standard. For example, the construction *gasim ṭawīl* which means that *gasim* is considered tall against boys of his age, adult men, or any other reference group. Although the sentence does not specify the comparison class, the listener can infer this group by relying on conversational context. The theory of comparison class can also help explain borderline cases. For instance, some people may be neither clearly tall nor clearly short because the boundary between the two descriptions is not always exact.

Solt (2011) addresses comparison classes that are explicitly expressed, such as the phrase *tall for a jockey*. She explains that the identification of the comparison class allows speakers to select an appropriate status of comparison. Moreover, the distribution of comparison value among comparison class members also contributes to the selection of the standard. This idea is applicable to the Ramthawi Arabic sentence *myriam ṭawīleh la banat jeelha/ la-ṣumur-ha* 'meaning that Maryam is tall for her age. The phrase *la banat jeelha/ la-ṣumur-ha* clarifies the relevant comparison class and minimizes the ambiguity of meaning.

Research conducted by Toledo and Sassoon (2011) focuses on the importance of context in interpreting gradable adjectives including those that seem less context-dependent. In contrast to other ranges of adjectives, those considered gradable should be interpreted in terms of their comparison classes. Relative adjectives are generally interpreted in relation to a relevant group of individuals, while some absolute adjectives may involve comparison between different states or stages of the same object. They also discuss Kennedy's (2007) principle of Interpretive Economy, according to which scale endpoints are preferred when they are available. This helps explain why some adjectives appear to depend less on context than others, even though contextual effects may still occur. Their discussion shows that lexical meaning and contextual information work together in determining adjectival interpretation.

According to Syrett, Kennedy, and Lidz (2010), an experimental investigation of how adults as well as young children understand gradable adjectives has revealed that both children and adults indeed rely on the interaction of meaning and context while interpreting the meaning of lexical adjectives. The study indicated that by the time children reached the age of 3, they started to distinguish between kinds of meanings of gradable adjectives (i.e. both absolute and relative ones where certain standards were determined) in the process of understanding the meaning of the adjective. Although the results of the study lend support to the theory that both vocabulary and context play a role in the interpretation of words, its experimental design has not been distinguished by the nature of the present research.

Together, these studies clarify many examples from Ramthawi Arabic. For instance, a car can be termed *kabīreh* 'big', when it is compared with small vehicles, while it can be termed as *ṣaġīreh* 'small', when compared with larger cars. Similarly, two people may disagree on whether a room is *imsaġfeh* 'cold' or whether an exam is *ṣuṣub* 'difficult'. This disagreement may be a result of different contextual criteria or reference groups rather than a misuse of the adjective.

2.3 Degree Modification and Evaluativity

Bierwisch (1989) examines adjectives that describe dimensions such as length, size, temperature. He explains that the opposite adjectives belonging to the same dimension, such as long-short and hot-cold, differ in their direction. It is demonstrated by such pairs in Ramthawi Arabic as *ṭawīl-qaṣīr* 'tall/long-short', *kabīr-ṣaġīr* 'large-small', and *ḥāmi-msaġīf* 'hot-cold'. In all cases, it is the word that indicates to the addressee what property is being indicated.

Kennedy and McNally (2005) state that the degree modifier should be used together with the adjective that indicates the description of the property already. This means that the degree modifier does not form a new property. This provides the understanding of the Ramthawi Arabic expressions like *ġāli kthīr* 'very expensive' and *ġāli gattoma/ṣway* 'a little expensive'. *Kthīr* shows that the price is high to a large extent, while *gattoma/ṣway* suggests that the price is somewhat limited.

Rett (2008) analyzes the degrees and degree modifiers. In particular, in her interpretation, she identifies evaluativity as the degree that is estimated relative to a certain standard. It does not only mean personal opinions or adjectives of taste. The adjectives that are connected with the height may be evaluative if they denote that a human height is over the expected value. The theory of Rett allows for distinguishing the general meaning of the adjective from its additional meaning created by the degree modifier.

This point is important because the present study also uses the term evaluative adjective for such words as *layig* 'beautiful/nice'. These adjectives depend on the taste and the social evaluation of the person's qualities. This usage of the term evaluative is more narrow than that in the understanding of Rett. In Ramthawi Arabic, *kthīr* can enhance a measurable quality such as *ṭawīl kthīr* 'very tall' or an estimation such as *layig kthīr* 'very beautiful/nice.' The example of *gattoma/ṣway* gives the option to have

an expression denoting a small degree, and it may also make the negative proposition sound softer. This study mainly examines the semantic effect while recognizing that tone and politeness may also influence the expression.

2.4 Comparative Constructions in Arabic Dialects

The research conducted by McNabb and Kennedy (2011) on Palestinian Arabic and its relation to Jordanian Arabic is essential for analysis. The authors study comparison constructions initiated by *ma*, writing that they differ in encoding quality and quantity. McNabb and Kennedy pay special attention to syntax and its aspects, including moving and omitting. The authors want to show that Arabic comparisons are not like English grammar.

Abusalim's study conducted in 2016 is very helpful since the researcher investigates Jordanian Arabic. In his work, he identifies three types of the comparative structure and analyses form and meaning. The findings indicate that Jordanian Arabic has three types of comparatives based on their structure but can express degrees in the comparative. We can apply his findings directly to Ramthawi Arabic data; for example, *gasim aṭwal min ʔabduhruman* 'gasim is taller than ʔbdilrahman'. The expression *min* indicates the object used for comparison. In this case, this construction conveys more information than *gasim ṭawil* 'Gasim is tall'. Nevertheless, context is important in the case of broad adjectives, such as 'better', as it is necessary to refer to qualitative, price, service, or other factors.

The comparative constructions are studied by Hallman (2022) in reference to Syrian Arabic. He examines their structure, position in the sentence, and meaning. The findings indicate cases when comparison structure appears separately from the word that encloses the scale. This pattern follows grammatical restrictions. Hallman's work supports the findings of Abusalim through the investigation of another dialect but the differences between the dialects prevent from applying findings from Syrian dialect directly to Jordanian Arabic.

Fassi Fehri (2025) discusses the topic of comparison and grading in Arabic. He studies different types of comparatives in Arabic and how they can vary. The work is significant since it connects dialect studies with broader aspects of adjective classes and comparative forms. It also shows the necessity for studying different dialects separately because the comparison system might be different in different forms of Arabic.

These studies describe Arabic comparisons. They do not focus on typical adjectives and modifiers, such as *kthīr* and *gattoma/šway*. This paper incorporates information from the studies above but focuses on comparisons and positive forms together with idea of measuring, standard-setting, and evaluative judgments.

2.5 Superlatives in Levantine and Jordanian Arabic

A superlative indicates the highest or lowest person, object, or thing in a group. Hallman (2016) investigated the usage of superlatives in Syrian Arabic and that the word superlative *aktar* can appear far from the adjective or other phrase that forms the scale of comparison. He also finds that Syrian Arabic has much in common with English due to having various ways of meaning the same thing even if the languages have different surface structures. The main point of the study is that a superlative needs a relevant set anyways, otherwise the phrase 'the tallest student' would not be understood properly as the listener remains unaware of what students are meant.

Abu Helal (2022) studies the two forms of superlative modification of the Jordanian Arabic definite relative clause, i.e. attributive superlative and genitive superlative. The results indicate that the two forms do not allow the same meaning. The attributive form can convey both absolute and relative meanings in the construction, while the relative meaning can be used only with the attributive form. The results of these studies illustrate how to analyze the expression *aṭwal ṭālibbil-šaff* 'the tallest student in the class'. The meaning of the phrase *bil-šaff* narrows the meaning of the group. In many situations the group should be volunteered with the help of the dialogue context.

2.6 Synthesis and Research Gap

The previous studies offer a number of interrelated points. Kennedy and McNally (2005) and Kennedy (2007) demonstrate that gradable adjectives can be classified according to their scales and criteria. Klein (1980), Solt (2011), and Toledo and Sassoon (2011) demonstrate how important the context and comparison groups are. Syrett et al. (2010) show experimental evidence to back up the theory that people turn to the kind of adjective and context. Bierwisch (1989) and Rett (2008) help clarify dimensionality, standards, modification, and evaluativity. Finally, the research done on Arabic shows that comparatives and superlatives possess a range of distinctive grammatical and semantic properties in Palestinian, Syrian, and Jordanian Arabic.

However, the approaches described above are rarely integrated. The general studies on gradable adjectives often involve examples from English and involve complex formal models. The studies conducted on Jordanian Arabic usually consider the comparison groups and do not focus on the way that positive adjectives and the gauging expressions interact. There is a particular lack of focused investigation of the everyday meanings of *kthīr* and *gattoma/šway* as applied to the Ramthawi Arabic adjectives.

This study addresses the gap by conducting investigation of the adjectives that pertain to height, size, temperature, cost, distance, beauty, degree of difficulty. The study focuses on the role of lexical meaning, context, comparison groups and

investigates the distinction between evaluative adjectives and those expressed in more measurable terms. The research includes both *kthīr* and *gattoma/šway* and compares positive, comparative, and superlative forms of expressions.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative semantic design. It is exploratory and descriptive, with an emphasis on interpretation rather than statistical testing. The data include typical Ramthawi Arabic examples of gradable adjectives, degree modifiers, comparatives, and superlatives.

The study aims to reveal semantic patterns and to show how other factors of the context play a role in interpretation. Because the paper does not report an original large-scale experiment, its claims are presented as analytical observations rather than as findings that can be applied to all speakers.

3.2 Selection of Linguistic Data

The examples were selected to represent several semantic domains:

Physical dimensions: tall, short, big, small;

Cost: expensive, cheap;

Temperature: hot, cold;

Distance: near, far;

Taste based gradability: overly salty and not salty

Evaluation: beautiful/nice, good, difficult, easy, and salty.

Comparison: comparative and superlative expressions.

This range makes it possible to compare adjectives whose interpretation is connected with relatively measurable properties and adjectives whose interpretation is more strongly influenced by evaluation and social expectations.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

Several steps are followed during the process of this analysis. The first step is determining the meaning of each adjective. The next step is examining the adjective when used in positive language only. Then an examination of the different contexts of the word to see how a word's meaning changes based on its use. Finally, comparative and superlative constructions are examined in relation to explicit and implicit comparison sets.

3.4 Transliteration and Glossing

The Ramthawi Arabic examples have been transliterated practically, focusing on readability instead of giving an accurate phonetic transcription. English glosses are supplied to illustrate the meaning. Because the pronunciation of dialects differs from region to region within Jordan.

3.5 Scope and Limitations

The study examines the semantics of gradable adjectives and degree modification in Ramthawi Arabic, a regional variety of Jordanian Arabic spoken in Ramtha. The analysis focuses on commonly used gradable adjectives and expressions that intensify, weaken, or compare the properties they describe. Particular attention is given to the role of lexical meaning, contextual interpretation, comparison classes, and degree modifiers in shaping the meanings of these expressions. The study is limited to selected semantic patterns and illustrative examples from Ramthawi Arabic. It doesn't attempt to provide a comprehensive description of all semantic properties of Jordanian Arabic or all varieties spoken in Jordan. Since Jordanian Arabic includes regional and social variation, the findings should be interpreted specifically within the linguistic context of Ramthawi Arabic and should not be generalized to other varieties.

4.0 Semantic Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Lexical Meaning, Context, and Adjective Type

4.1.1 Physical Dimension

a) *ṭawīl* 'Tall/Long

The adjective *ṭawīl* shows how the meaning of the word matches the context. When it refers to persons, it usually relates to their height. As for physical things, like roads, dress, or speeches, it can be about their length and duration. *gasim ṭawīl* means "Gasim is tall"; its meaning is understood in the context of height, but it does not make it clear with what Gasim is being compared in terms of height. For example, in ordinary talk about children, we can say that Gasim is a tall boy among boys of his age based on certain norms, but if it is an adult talk, then the comparison can be taken on the basis of different criteria.

Moreover, it can be noted that context changes not only the meaning of the statement but also its communicative meaning. For instance, a parent can say "*ibni ṭawīl*" to mention the rapid growth of his son. A doctor may refer to the same adjective while he is giving a general description of a person.

b) *Gaṣīr* 'Short'

Gaṣīr acts as a comparative adjective, however, the notion of shortness is also context-dependent. A person who is identified as being short among athletes may still not be considered a short individual in most communities. In short, that which is opposite does not need to be exact. A person who is not tall is not necessarily short. There may be a gray area where neither can easily apply. This gray area helps in understanding vagueness. Natural languages sometimes enable speakers to avoid unnecessary precision.

c) *Kabīr* 'Big' and *Ṣaġīr* 'Small'

The adjectives *kabīr* and *ṣaġīr* illustrate how the noun being modified influences interpretation.

hātha elgasur kabīr. 'This palace is big.'

hātha l-talaḥfon ṣaġīr. 'This phone is small.'

A "big palace" and a "big phone" are different kinds of concepts which involve entirely different evaluations. The basic meaning of *kabīr* means big but which aspects of size might be considered relevant will differ depending on the type of the object being evaluated. The other dimension of size variously depends on the function involved. A little apartment will be quite enough for one person but decidedly inadequate for a large number of persons.

4.1.4 Cost

Ġālī 'Expensive' and *Rakhīṣ* 'Cheap'

Cost adjectives demonstrate the role of social and economic context.

hātha ġālī. 'This is expensive.'

hātha rakhīṣ. 'This is cheap.'

The same price can receive different evaluation depending on income, quality, urgency, brand, and available alternatives. Therefore, while the price of one product may be regarded as high in comparison to other products that offer similar value, it may be regarded as low in comparison to luxury products in the market. Cost adjectives are therefore useful in an understanding of how the price meaning is interpreted within the context of social knowledge given that a speaker and listener may not be required to make assumptions at all times due to their active possession of relevant market information.

4.1.5 Temperature

hāmi 'Hot' and *imsaġīṣ* 'Cold'

Temperature adjectives are influenced by environmental context and bodily experience.

il-jaww hāmi. 'The weather is hot.'

il-jaww emsaġīṣ. 'The weather is cold.'

A temperature that feels hot after a cold period may not feel hot during the height of summer. Individual experience can also matter. Two speakers may disagree about whether a room is cold without either speaker using the adjective incorrectly.

Such examples show that contextual meaning may include physical circumstances and subjective expectations.

4.1.6 Distance: *Qarīb* 'Near' and *Baṣīd* 'Far'

Distance is another domain in which context matters.

il-jāmṣa qarībeh. 'The university is near.'

il-jāmṣa baṣīdeh. 'The university is far.'

A distance that is considered near when traveling by car may be far when walking. The relevant mode of transportation, available time, and speaker expectations can all influence interpretation.

4.1.7 Taste based gradability: *zuṭuġ* 'overly salty' and 'not salty'

Taste adjectives demonstrate how gradability operates on specific, independent sensory scales.

li-kbabāt zuṭuġāt. 'The kebabs (a popular Ramthawi dish) are overly salty.'

li-kbabāt miṣ mālḥāt. 'The kebabs are not salty.'

When we evaluate the dish in terms of "*zuṭuġāt*," we are not referring to a different flavor such as "sweet" or "bitter." Saltiness has its own unique scale of degrees. To say "not salty" just means that the saltiness is toward the lower end of the scale, rather than a shifting to a different taste category. In addition, the phrase *li-kbabāt zuṭuġāt* shows both a measurable property and a negative subjective taste evaluation. While saltiness refers to the actual quantity of salt, the meaning of the term *zuṭuġāt*, which

is an evaluative adjective, refers to the amount of salt that the speaker deems unreasonable, in order to demonstrate that they don't enjoy the taste of this particular dish.

Just as the same price can be evaluated differently based on the individual's income, one individual may find a dish acceptable while another considers it too salty. This implies that the listener must understand the speaker's expectations and tastes in relation to the actual states of being in the world.

4.1.8 Evaluative Adjectives

a) *layig* 'Beautiful/Nice'

Evaluative adjectives are not only quantitatively measurable; they also have their subjective meaning depending on individual or cultural opinions.

il-fustān layig. 'The dress is beautiful/nice.'

This is an example expresses a positive evaluation, but different speakers may have different standards. Further, in Ramthawi Arabic, the adjective *layig* has a flexible meaning and usage that may refer to a range of things such as appearance, tastes, experiences, etc. Because of this flexibility, evaluative adjectives are very relevant in semantic studies since there is no less content to convey in the same way.

b) *mayy/sihel* 'Easy' and *ṣuṣub* 'Difficult'

The adjectives *mayy/sihel* 'easy' and *ṣuṣub* 'difficult' are also highly sensitive to the situation.

il-imtiḥān may/ sihil. 'The exam is easy.'

il-imtiḥān ṣuṣub. 'The exam is difficult.'

An exam may be easy for one group of students and difficult for another. Knowledge, preparation, and expectations influence interpretation. Therefore, the property is not simply a fixed feature of the exam independent of the people evaluating it. This demonstrates that some gradable meanings are relational: the object is evaluated in relation to an experienter or group of experiencers.

4.1.9 Comparison of Adjective Types

The findings indicate that gradable adjectives in Ramthawi Arabic can be roughly divided into several classes based on general semantic trends. Physical adjectives usually have dimensions that can be measured; however, context plays an important role in the application. The aspect of cost and distance is highly dependent on society and practice. Temperature combines a measurable external circumstances and subjective understanding by an individual. Evaluative adjectives are especially dependent on taste and social norms. Easy and difficult depend on the relationship between a task and the abilities of an experienter. The central pattern is therefore not that all adjectives behave identically. Instead, different semantic domains display different forms and degrees of dependence on the situation.

4.2 Degree Modification in Ramthawi Arabic

4.2.1 The Meaning of *kthīr*

Kthīr is one of the most frequent expressions used to indicate a high degree or intensity in Ramthawi Arabic. It can modify a wide range of predicates and is highly productive in everyday speech.

Examples include:

ḥāmi kthīr/saleega. 'very hot.'

gāli kthīr/naar. 'very expensive.'

ṭawīl kthīr/ṣamood. 'very tall.'

layig kthīr/bookhuth el ṣaqul. 'very beautiful/nice.'

taṣbān kthīr/katt. 'very tired.'

The modifier does not create the relevant semantic dimension by itself. Rather, it strengthens a property introduced by another expression. Consequently, its interpretation depends on what is being modified.

4.2.2 Context and Intensification

The meaning of *Kthīr* is also influenced by the context in which it is used. Therefore, when it is used to describe the price of a phone, it can indicate that the phone's price is high in comparison to the other products being talked about. When it is said that the weather is *ḥāmi kthīr* meaning that the weather is hotter than expected during that particular season. Very commonly *kthīr* is used to communicate feelings or attitudes. A speaker may utilize *kthīr* to communicate not just information but also to show his surprise, displeasure, admiration, or approval of something. Thus, we conclude that there is a clear divide between meaning and communicative stance.

4.2.3 *Gattoma/Šway and Limited Degree*

Gattoma/Šway generally presents a property as limited or relatively small in extent.

ḥāmi *gattoma/šway*. 'a little hot.'

Ġāli *gattoma/šway*. 'a little expensive.'

bašid *gattoma/šway*. 'a little far.'

The modifier may soften a statement. In speaking, there are times when no one wants to state their beliefs as categorical convictions. Sometimes saying that something is "a little expensive" is gentler than saying that an object is simply pricey. This shows how degree modification can interact with communication between people. The semantic content concerns limited intensity, but the choice of modifier may also help manage politeness or reduce the force of an evaluation.

4.2.4 *Modification and Adjective Type*

Not every modifier is compatible with every single adjective. What the adjective means lexically will determine whether a given modified construction is grammatically acceptable. For example, it is common to intensify adjectives of temperature, price, or beauty. Other adjectives may not accept certain types of modification or may call for a specific kind of context first. This suggests, however, that the process of degree modification is ultimately determined by the semantics of the adjective rather than being an entirely free grammatical process.

4.2.5 *Other Sources of Intensity*

Ramthawi Arabic, like many spoken varieties, can use synonymous intensifiers, repetition and prosodic emphasis to strengthen meaning. A speaker's tone may serve to amplify the intensity of an adjective without utilizing a different lexical modifier. This observation is important because how the meaning is understood in spoken language is not based only on written words. Prosody, stress, and discourse context can influence how strongly an expression is understood.

In turn, based on the consideration of this point, overall statement intensity can derive from several factors: the lexicalized adjective, a degree modifier, repetition, prosody, discourse contrast, and so on. Thus, any semantics study should take into account multiple factors rather than attributing everything to a single base word.

4.3 *Context and Comparison Groups*

4.3.1 *Implicit Comparison Groups*

One of the most interesting features of gradable adjectives is that speakers often compare without explicitly naming what they are comparing against.

myriam *ṭawīleh*. 'Maryam is tall.'

The sentence is understandable even when no comparison group is mentioned. The listener uses contextual knowledge to infer an appropriate standard. If the topic is school children, age may become central. If the topic is adult women, a different comparison group may be relevant.

4.3.2 *Explicit Comparison Groups*

Speakers can make the relevant class explicit when needed.

myriam ṭawīleh la-šumur-ha/la banat jeelha. 'Myriam is tall for her age.'

This expression narrows the basis of evaluation and reduces ambiguity. Explicit comparison is especially useful when the intended standard differs from what a listener might otherwise assume.

4.3.3 *Shared Knowledge and Contextual Shift*

Various interpretations are dependent upon the common knowledge held by the participants. In the case of family discussion regarding an apartment building, the meaning of the statement "the apartment is small" reflects the comparison made with the other apartments in the building. In the absence of any such frame, outsiders may misinterpret its connotation. A shared base of reference plays a vital role in determining the interpretation. It provides referent classes, expected values and appropriate alternatives.

The same entity can receive different descriptions in different contexts without contradiction. A car may be described as small when compared with sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and large when compared with compact cars. A salary may be high in one profession and low in another. This does not mean that adjectives lack stable meanings. Instead, their basic word meanings provide a dimension of evaluation, while context determines an appropriate point of reference.

4.3.4 *Borderline Cases and Speaker Disagreement*

Context also helps explain why speakers may disagree about borderline cases. A speaker can describe someone as "tall" while someone else may argue that the same person is "not tall". Such differences are significant because they show that interpretations of meaning may not solely be a function of factual disagreement.

4.4 Comparative Meaning in Ramthawi Arabic

4.4.1 Positive vs. Comparative Meaning

Comparatives differ from positive forms because they identify a more explicit basis of comparison.

gasim aṭwal min ʔabduṛḥaman. Gasim is taller than Abdulruhaman'.

The sentence asks the listener to compare the relevant property of two individuals. The context still matters, particularly for identifying the relevant dimension or purpose of the conversation, but the standard is more explicit than in the simple statement *gasim ṭawīl*.

4.4.2 The Role of min

The marker *min* plays an essential role in Arabic comparative constructions as it indicates the benchmark of comparison. Research on the comparatives of Jordanian Arabic described the structure and meaning that underlies such a structure. From the point of view concerning meaning, it should be noted that the comparative construction helps direct the attention of the audience toward the relation between the variables. Instead of asking the question regarding whether *ʔabduṛḥaman* meets the threshold for tallness predetermined by the situation, the audience compares *ʔabduṛḥaman* to *gasim*.

4.4.3 Comparatives Across Semantic Domains

Comparatives can be used for a wide variety of domains:

hātha aḡla min hāthāk. 'This is more expensive than that.'

hātha akbar min hāthāk. 'This is bigger than that.'

il-yōm aḡama min msat. 'Today is hotter than yesterday.'

The examples above strongly show that comparison is a general strategy in language use. The same relation can apply to physical size, cost, temperature, distance, and many more attributes.

4.4.4 Comparatives and Context

Even when comparison is explicitly made, the speaker may still be dependent on the context. As an example, if someone says that one restaurant is better than another, then better in what respect? What criteria do they reference (e.g., food quality, price, service, location, atmosphere)? The dialogue will provide the contextual frame of reference. Consequently, while comparative meaning may be explicit at one level, it may still be contextually dependent at another.

4.4.5 Comparatives in Everyday Use

Comparatives are very common when a decision needs to be made or when trying to influence someone. People will use comparatives when comparing products, assessing services, discussing education outcomes, or stating likes and dislikes. Comparatives are useful semantically because they afford the speaker the ability to express a distinction without making absolute judgements. While an individual may not feel comfortable saying that a restaurant is "good," they might be comfortable stating that it is "better than the last restaurant." As Bochnak (2015) explains, "Explicit comparisons, meanwhile, only require a non-zero difference in degrees, and are thus acceptable in crisp judgment contexts" (p. 11). This means that one restaurant only needs to be better than the other; it does not necessarily have to be considered good according to an absolute standard.

4.5 Superlative Meaning

4.5.1 Superlatives and the Relevant Set

Superlatives are words or phrases that identify an entity as distinct from its counterpart. The interpretation of the term will therefore be based on a set of alternatives.

aṭwal ṭālib bil-ṣaff. "the tallest student in the class."

This is meaningful because the class provides a comparison set. If the comparison set is changed, it can now be observed that the identity of the tallest student will also change.

4.5.2 Absolute and Relative Interpretations

Research shows that superlatives in Jordanian Arabic can be interpreted in several ways depending on the sentence and the context (Abu Helal, 2022). The main difference comes down to whether the meaning is absolute (having the highest degree within a relevant comparison set) or relative (having the highest degree in relation to alternatives introduced by the sentence or context). Without getting into complex linguistic theory, the core question simply relates to what is being compared. To understand the meaning, a listener must determine which people, objects, or other alternatives form the relevant comparison set.

4.5.3 Contextual Restriction

The statement “the best restaurant” cannot be understood without having found a domain of its use. “The best restaurant in Ramtha”, “the best restaurant the speaker has visited”, or “the best restaurant in terms of price” can correspond to different establishments. Superlative construction of Jordanian Arabic can be thought of as another example of the influence of a general meaning of words and the restrictions imposed by context.

4.5.4 Evaluative Superlatives

Superlatives of evaluative adjectives can be especially sensitive to the situation “The Best” might be understood in purely implicit terms. One speaker may find good quality of food more important than price and the other may regard the opposite as essential. As Solt (2018) notes, “subjectivity is proposed to arise because different individuals may weight these component dimensions differently” (p. 2).

4.6. Discussion

The analysis shows that the meaning of gradable adjectives in Ramthawi Arabic is depends on both the meaning of the base adjective and the context of use. Adjectives such as *ṭawīl* ‘tall’, *ġāli* ‘expensive’, *ḥāmi* ‘hot’, *kabīr* ‘big’ represent clearly identifiable properties that still require the context to establish their level. Somebody may be tall in comparison to individuals of the same age but may not be considered tall in comparison to basketball players. Something can be expensive for one individual but not be so expensive for a different person. This indicates the correctness of the position of Kennedy (2007), Klein (1980), Solt (2011), and Toledo and Sassoon (2011), who state that gradable adjectives are often understood based on the corresponding standard or group of comparison.

The results of the analysis also demonstrate that different types of adjectives do not rely on context in exactly the same way. Physical adjectives, like *ṭawīl* ‘tall’ and *kabīr* ‘big’, refer to properties that are usually measurable, but their meaning can differ depending on the group of comparison. Other adjectives, for example, *layig* ‘good/nice’, *mayy/sihil* ‘easy’, and *ṣuṣub* ‘difficult’ rely more on subjective assessment and experience of the person. For example, the same exam can be easy for one group of students and difficult for another. The example indicates that gradable adjectives can have both a measurable aspect and an evaluative meaning.

Moreover, degree modifiers play a crucial role in Ramthawi Arabic as well. The modifier *kthīr* indicates more degree, as in *ḥāmi kthīr* ‘very hot’ or *ġāli kthīr* ‘very expensive’. At the same time, *gattoma/šway* indicates a lower degree of something being, for example, expressed as *ġāli gattoma/šway* ‘a bit expensive’. These examples show that degree modifiers are not capable of creating a new meaning on their own and instead change the degree of the given property.

This coincides with the proposition made by Kennedy and McNally (2005) according to which degree modification has to be analyzed in conjunction with the meaning of the adjective. Thus, they can sometimes convey a certain attitude of the speaker. For example, *kthīr* can express surprise or admiration while *gattoma/šway* will weaken the evaluation.

The examination of comparison also unveils some important differences between positive, comparative, and superlative constructions. A positive construction *gasim ṭawīl* ‘Gasim is tall’ is dependent on a set reference point. However, the comparative construction *gasim aṭwal min* ‘Abdulruhman’ ‘Gasim is taller than Abdulruhman’ gives a reference point for comparison to the listener. Such a situation is in line with the analysis conducted by Abusalim (2016) concerning comparative constructions in Jordanian Arabic. However, comparative constructions need context, too. For instance, saying that one restaurant is better than another requires specification of what criterion was used to compare them, e.g., cuisine or price.

Superlatives illustrate the significance of context and comparison groups as well. For instance, *aṭwal ṭālib bil-šaff* ‘the tallest student in the class’ does not lack context, since the phrase *bil-šaff* establishes a comparison group. So, if the comparison group changes, the person presented as the tallest will be different as well. This is in line with Hallman (2016) and Abu Helal (2022), who demonstrate that superlatives are highly dependent on the background of use and the format of expression.

In conclusion, it may be summarized that Ramthawi Arabic provides good examples demonstrating the way meaning, degree, comparison, and context interact in the language. The basic meaning conveyed by adjectives gives the speakers a vague idea of what is meant by the speaker in terms of either height, size, temperature, or cost, while the context helps arrive at a relevant point of reference. These observations answer the main research questions of the study and show that Ramthawi Arabic can contribute useful examples to the wider study of gradability and contextual meaning.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has discussed gradable adjectives and degrees of modification in Ramthawi Arabic from a simple meaning- centered perspective. It showed that adjectives such as *ṭawīl* ‘tall’, *kabīr* ‘big’, *ġāli* ‘expensive’, *ḥāmi* ‘hot’, *zuḡug* ‘overly salty’ and *layig* ‘beautiful/nice’ cannot always be understood from their basic meanings in words. Their interpretation depends on degree, comparison, and context. Speakers use information about the relevant comparison group, shared expectations, and the nature of the conversation in order to interpret the meaning of the adjectives in a particular situation. That is why the theoretical framework of the paper links lexical meaning to gradability, comparison, modification, and context. This gives a better analytical

framework without being overly technical in terms of formal semantics. Ramthawi Arabic is an interesting and fruitful area of research in the study of language meaning construction in everyday conversation.

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