

Adverb-Adjective Combinations in Health Sciences: A Collocational Perspective

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Abstract

Through this paper we aim at studying adverb-adjective combinations from a perspective of use in written texts, both from the formal use of language as well as semantically and collocationally. The samples used are drawn from two corpora: texts from health sciences and from literary criticism. Teaching language, whether to health science students or students of philology, makes one realize that not everything has to do with syntactical accuracy. We must also be concerned with expressions that may sound correct in terms of syntax, but that they are often affected not only by its semantic nuances but also by differences according to specialism.

Introduction

It has been often said that non-native speakers tend to produce non-standard variant forms when speaking a language other than their own, and this is more noticeable in academia. The search for the precise word or combination of words, specially in the spoken use of the language, makes the speaker every so often stumble over some nominal group, or perhaps a series of adjectives or adverb-adjective combinations which are perhaps uncommon to his/her native language. If this is still difficult to produce in an impromptu speech, it is more so in writing. Written language is indeed more permanent than spoken, and thus more precision is required in its structuring. We often read expressions that make the nonnative ask him/herself a few practical questions not only in terms of pragmatic adequacy, but also syntactical accuracy.

In this paper we are concerned with adverb-adjective combinations from a perspective of use in written texts, both from the formal use of language as well as from the collocational point of view. Part of the samples used are drawn from a corpus of health science texts. Teaching health science students makes one realize that not everything has to do with syntactical accuracy. We must also be concerned with expressions that may sound correct in terms of its pragmatic use, but that are often affected by the ethnic group the learner/writer belongs to. We must then think about how to “correlate language and sociocultural variables” (Basham & Kwachka, 1989: 129). Our concern further goes into the use of these combination in different types of texts according to their specialism; in other words, how some adverbs collocate better with some adjectives than with others, and the reason is often found precisely on the speciality of a given text.

In English, most commonly, the modifying adverb is a scaling device called an intensifier, whether modifying an adjective, as in ‘It is *extremely good* for you’ (Quirk et al., 1985: 445), or an adverb; in this case, the adverb can only be an intensifier, as in the sentence ‘He spoke *extremely quickly*’ (ibid., p. 449). In this paper, we are concerned with adverbs

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modifying adjectives.² As pointed out by Johansson (1993: 39), however, there is no simple way to distinguish between and adverb-adjective combination modifying a noun (the corpus has to be syntactically parsed for that purpose)—e.g., ‘An *absolutely true* story’—from combinations where the adverb functions as an adverbial on the clause level—i.e., ‘This story is *probably true*.’

In general English texts, the intensifier most often used is the adverb *very*, and from a practical point of view, its use offers little difficulty to learners. Furthermore, it is not just how to use an adverb, or an adjective, but also how to properly distinguish between them. In addition, grammarians have already pointed out that there are no “fixed boundaries” between adjectives and adverbs, which adds to the difficulty in their use (cf. Jespersen, 1949, vol. VI, p. 47). Most discussions of adverb-adjective combinations have particularly dealt with their intensifying characteristics (e.g. Bäcklund, 1973) and little on other semantic features (e.g. Quirk et al., 1985: 445ff; Sinclair et al., 1990: 93-97). Our aim is to analyze a series of texts in order to draw, with a clear pedagogical purpose in mind, some clues as to how these combinations are used by different authors, in two different specialisms, and with what purpose.

The corpus

For our research we studied two different corpora: first, we randomly gathered 20 research articles (RAs) from health science journals, with a total of 79,049 words; the number of sentences was 3,630 with an average length of 21.78 words per sentence (HS, for citation purposes); and second, for comparison purposes, we also studied Lionel Abel’s *Metatheatre*, a 52,111-word text from literary criticism (LC) containing 2,560 sentences, with an average length of 20.16 words per sentence. Our idea for comparing these two corpora was to bring about some evidence in regard to both the frequency with which these adverb-adjective combinations are employed, and also to draw some conclusions from the point of view of different specialisms. We also undertook the analysis of the dominant force exerted by either the adverb or the adjective in their pre-modification function, as well as collocational differences observed in the use of these combinations in both corpora.

Adverb-adjective combination analysis

The number of degree adverbs is indeed very large. Johansson (1993: 40), quoting Spitzbardt, reports that there are “about 1,000 intensive and restrictive adverbs of degree in English.” However, what is more surprising, he adds, is the range and variety of degree expressions. According to Johansson (ibid., p. 41), besides those adverbs expressing more than just degree or extent, conjuncts are quite abundant in the English language. Following Quirk et al. (1985) and other authors, Johansson (1993: 40-45) classifies them into adverb-adjective combinations of [1] degree and extent, [2] emphasis, [3] manner, [4] time, [5] space, [6] viewpoint and respect, [7] evaluation of truth, [8] basic and typical qualities, [9] value judgment, and [10] quality and state. Some of these will be described as we analyze our corpora.

² Our analysis dealt primarily with premodifiers, which is the usual function of the adverb in combination with the adjective, i.e. ‘seriously ill.’ Actually, only two adverbs postmodify adjectives, i.e. *enough* and *indeed*, as in ‘His salary wasn’t high *enough*’ and ‘She spoke very clearly *indeed*’ (Quirk et al., 1985: 449).

Following this classification, we analyzed the adverb-adjective combinations that appeared in our two corpora. Johansson, who draws his information from the tagged LOB Corpus, speaks of the abundant overlap that exists in his classification, and that it is often difficult to classify one combination and make it fit in one specific pattern. To solve this difficulty, he resorts to a good number of examples through which he unravels some of the more complicated uses. Furthermore, it must be added that in our texts, and precisely because of the diverse nature of both corpora, we also observed that some differed considerably insofar as their semantic patterns which, together with differences in their collocations, gave us clues for deciphering some of the alleged classificatory difficulties.

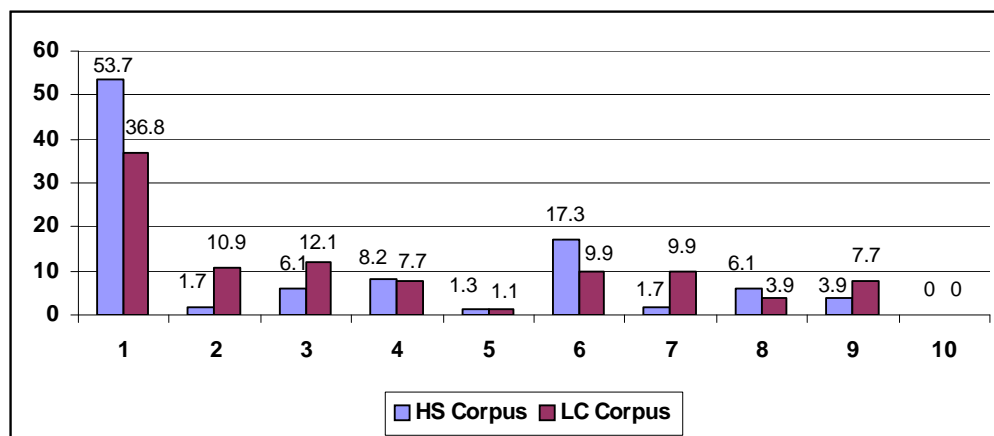
A first approach to the use of adverb-adjective combinations gave us the following numerical data from both corpora (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of Adverb-Adjective Combinations according to Johansson's (1993) classification.

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]	
	degree and extent	emphasis	manner	time	space	viewpoint and respect	evaluation of truth	basic qualities	value judgement	quality and state	Total
HS Corpus	124	4	14	19	3	40	4	14	9	0	231
LC Corpus	67	20	22	14	2	18	18	7	14	0	182

In this frequency list, we did not take into account *-ed* participial clauses as postmodifiers—e.g. ‘A *recently-departed* friend,’ ‘A *newly-arrived* immigrant’—(see Quirk et al., 1985: 1327), although they are quite frequent in both corpora. In terms of the sentence output, the totals shown on table 1 (231 and 182 adverb-adjective combinations) would represent, respectively, that an adverb-adjective combination occurs once every 15.71 sentences in the HS texts, and 14.07 in the LC texts. The data provided by Table 1 produced, from the percentage of use of adverb-adjective combinations, the following graph:

Figure 1. Adverb-adjective Combinations. Percentage of use in both corpora.



Taking a look at each individual category of the above classification, adverbs of degree and extent [1] are most abundant in the English language, as well as in the two corpora we have analyzed. It should be noted, however, that in the HS Corpus degree combinations amount to 53.68% of the total of combinations in the corpus, while in the LC Corpus it amounts to 36.81% of the total. Using Quirk et al.'s (1985: 445, 589-591) terms, in this category we have found adverbs called amplifiers, that 'scale upwards from an assumed norm,' with samples from our corpora, such as 'highly influential,' 'increasingly difficult' (HS), and 'abundantly clear,' 'highly realistic,' or even 'far more plausible' (LC); and also downtoners, which 'have a generally lowering effect,' as in 'scarcely distinguishable' (LC).

Besides these 'amplifiers' and 'downtoners', which are based on the semantic force of the adverb, we can also perceive in both corpora a similar force from the adjective being modified, with a definite upgrading or lowering effect. Take, for instance, amplifiers such as 'particularly high', 'relatively large' or 'significantly greater' (HS), and downtoners, as in 'somewhat lesser', 'significantly lower', 'proportionately fewest' (HS), and 'infinitely smaller' (LC). The majority of combinations, however, could be termed 'neutral', since they neither upgrade nor diminish the meaning of the expression. For instance, 'equally important', 'equally-sized categories', 'generally skeptical', 'particularly interesting', 'relatively normal' (HS), or 'equally romantic,' 'somewhat comical'.

In the category of emphasis [2] is where the greatest difference can be found. While you can hardly find examples of 'emphasizers' in the HS Corpus, with only four—'clearly inferior,' 'clearly higher,' 'truly representative,' and including the following triple adverb to modify the adjective *enough*, as in 'clearly, slowly, and loudly enough'—in the LC Corpus, these examples are easily recognized and more readily used (20 samples): 'really tragic,' 'really natural,' 'really important,' 'perfectly correct,' 'truly noble,' 'recognizably real', etc. The effect of some of them on the sentence, however, is similar to that of degree expressions (Quirk et al., 1985: 447), as in the case of the above-mentioned HS samples, 'clearly inferior' and 'clearly higher.'

The notion of manner [3] is found normally in adverbials alone, but it is also found in the type of combinations under study. While examples can be easily multiplied in the LOB Corpus (Johansson, 1993: 42), they also appear in our corpora. Their interpretation is more difficult, because they can often be taken as combinations of degree [1]. On the one hand, in the HS Corpus, we find combinations like 'overtly optimistic,' 'consistently more liberal,'

‘wholly compensatory’, clearly expressing notions of manner [3], but also adverb-adjective combinations which are not so clearly distinguishable: for instance ‘consistently higher,’ ‘considerably less’ or ‘slightly greater’ could also be understood as belonging to the degree category [1]. On the other hand, the more rhetorical nature of literary criticism will favor a more consistent use of these adverb-adjective combinations, as in ‘slightly comical,’ ‘overly psychological,’ but particularly ‘humanly important,’ ‘icely inhuman,’ ‘shiningly individual’ (LC). Also ‘deeply troubled,’ ‘deeply tragic,’ although in the last two examples we could also speak of bordering tautology because of the way in which they were ‘troubled’ or how ‘deeply’ a play was ‘tragic.’ Even the expression ‘coolly indifferent’ would be close to this categorization. In most cases, however, many submodifiers can be used with qualitative adjectives, with which their meaning is intensified—Sinclair et al. (1990: 93) give, among other examples, ‘deeply religious’ and ‘heavily dependent.’ Thus, the classification of many of these combinations may often be affected by the submodifying function of the adverb.

Often adverbs modifying adjectives express time [4]; for instance, ‘formerly essential’ will make reference to a situation which may have been decisive some time back. In our HS Corpus, we have found 19 instances (vs. 14 in the LC Corpus): for instance, ‘once safe,’ ‘sometimes longer,’ ‘ever-present vexation’ (HS); ‘always inflexible,’ ‘often unreal,’ ‘still submissive’ (LC), among others.

More sparingly (only 3 and 2 examples, respectively, in both corpora) will appear combinations in which the adverb refers to the notion of space [5]. In this respect, combinations with ‘internationally’ and particularly with ‘widely’ will be used in RAs from other disciplines. In addition, it often happens that some samples could be interpreted as being closer to degree expressions [1] than to space. Take, for instance, ‘widely available’ (HS), and even to manner [3], as in ‘widely separate’ as modifier of ‘modes of thinking’ (LC). Other samples offer less difficulty in their interpretation as belonging to the category of space [5]: ‘universally critical’ from HS, or ‘universally known’ (LC).

The so-called ‘viewpoint and respect’ category [6], next to degree [1], appear to be the most frequent in our exposition, with 40 instances in HS and 18 in LC. As noted by Quirk et al. (1985: 438ff), these type of adverbs derive most commonly from adjectives by the addition of the suffix *-ly*, adverbs which act as premodifiers of adjectives in terms of viewpoint (Quirk et al., 1985: 448). This makes them more clearly distinguishable than the rest of categories, [7] to [10].

In this category of ‘viewpoint and respect,’ Quirk et al. (1972: 448) include combinations derived from adverbs, such as ‘economically,’ ‘ethically,’ or ‘technically’; Johansson (1993: 43), in turn, includes combinations such as ‘commercially unrealistic,’ ‘economically disastrous,’ ‘emotionally offensive,’ which are most commonly found in English texts. Our corpora is no exception in this respect: ‘statistically significant’—in other words, X is ‘significant’ from the point of view of statistics—proved to be the most repeated combination in both corpora, and it is very common in scientific texts: it appeared 17 times in our HS Corpus, out of the 40 combinations in this category (obviously none in the LC Corpus).

The use of disjuncts referring to truth statements, also called ‘evaluation of truth’ [7], at first thought would seem to be a common occurrence in scientific papers, but not so much in texts from literary criticism. One of the basic elements that can be drawn from a scientific text is conviction on the author’s part, and this conviction will induce disjuncts, such as

‘probably Shakespearian,’ or ‘ostensibly minor.’ We detected only 4 examples from our HS Corpus; e.g., ‘presumably responsible,’ ‘obviously essential.’ Our LC Corpus, however, appeared to be much more prolific in this category, offering 18 examples, eight of them with the adverbial opener ‘utterly’ preceding adjectives like ‘implausible,’ ‘inconceivable,’ ‘sterile’ or ‘undramatic’; and others, such as ‘strictly true,’ ‘simply unplayable,’ ‘obviously secondary,’ etc.

Some adverbs are used to stress the qualities considered ‘basic or typical’ [8] of the noun clause they refer to. It may often happen, however, that some of them, rather than qualities, point to degree of truth, and thus—as Johansson (1993: 44) remarks—they are concerned with “some kind of evaluation.” Adverbs like ‘basically’ or ‘essentially’ will often form combinations that can be classified under category [8] or [7]. In our HS Corpus we found combinations such as ‘basically sound’, in reference to ‘knowledge,’ or ‘especially critical’; while in our LC Corpus, we collected ‘typically Brechtian’ or ‘typically Elizabethan,’ combinations that fit specifically category [8]. Nevertheless, another set of combinations, based on the adverb ‘fundamentally’ combining with adjectives like ‘coherent,’ ‘poetic,’ ‘prosaic’ or ‘sensible’ (LC Corpus), express degree of truth [7] rather than ‘basic or typical qualities’ [8].

A similar description can be made when classifying adverbs under the category called ‘value judgment’ [9]. On the one side, some of them could be perfectly understood as degree adverbs [1] or even as adverbs of manner [3]. To simplify our classification effort, Johansson (1993: 44) suggests to try them out by paraphrasing them with ‘so’ as follows: the combination ‘absurdly long’ should admit the paraphrase ‘so long that it is absurd’; and ‘acceptably small’ should admit ‘so small that it is acceptable.’ Thus, we can admit as belonging to this category combinations like ‘vitaly important’ (HS) or ‘genuinely realistic’ or ‘extraordinarily prolific and inventive’ (LC). On two occasions we found the expression ‘authentically unbrilliant’ (LC). This combination, more than an expression of ‘value judgment’ seems to be fitting an absurd category. Could we say of a play that it is so ‘unbrilliant’ that it is ‘absurd’? This apparent contradiction of terms, however, fits perfectly with the line of thought the literary critic was trying to convey in the text we extracted this combination from. Lionel Abel (1963: 128), speaking of *The Living Theatre* and Jack Gelber’s *The Apple*, writes, “I found *The Apple* an authentically unbrilliant play with an authentically unbrilliant message. What it says is: Be an imbecile.”

The last category, ‘quality and state’ [10] is another difficult category to classify, since most adverbs that may qualify could also fit under manner [3], but most likely they should be interpreted as interfering with the domain of adjectives. Both qualities and states are fundamentally expressed by adjectives. In other words, the combination ‘gravely compassionate’ could perfectly be taken as ‘grave and compassionate’, and ‘calmly reasonable’ as ‘calm and reasonable.’ In this sense, it is somehow reasonable to find these combinations in a literary text than in a scientific paper. In our LC Corpus, basically dealing with drama, we have found samples like ‘deeply tragic,’ ‘exclusively erotic,’ or ‘wonderfully lucky,’ which have been initially included in the category of ‘manner’ [3], could perfectly been classified as ‘quality and state’ [10]. The context of each of these expressions, however, would seem to justify our decision. On the other hand, it is rare that we find this type of combinations in scientific RAs, and none that we can report from our HS Corpus.

Collocations

From the point of view of meaning, as well as collocationally, we have found some combinations which truly indicate there is more than just a taste for style that prompted their use, but rather a semantic reason behind it. Thus, some of these adverb-adjective combinations appear differently used depending on the corpus being analyzed. We observed a high frequency of use of such combinations as ‘statistically significant’ (17 times in our HS texts [see Figure 2]; none in the LC Corpus). In one instance, ‘statistically’ appeared in combination with ‘representative’ (HS): ‘these nurses are not, strictly speaking, *statistically representative* of the ...’

Figure 2. Collocations with ‘statistically’ combined with adjectives (HS Corpus).

1	the study population as a whole made	statistically significant	changes in
2	in breast self-examination behavior, no	statistically significant	outcomes were
3	Hispanic, and native American women. No	statistically significant	differences we
4	breast self-examination behavior were not	statistically significant.	Overall, 22 patients
5	positive change category. Nevertheless,	statistically significant	values were no
6	as opposed to treatment group, had a	statistically significant	effect;
7	frequency, 4.89, after six months. No	statistically significant	effects
8	In addition, although the result is	statistically non-significant,	only 11%
9	characteristics were found to be	statistically significantly	different be

In addition, we have also found numerous constructions with the adverbs ‘relatively’ and ‘significantly’ combining with a wide range of adjectives, such as ‘few,’ ‘good,’ ‘high,’ ‘infrequent,’ ‘large,’ ‘little,’ up to 25 different uses in our HS Corpus (Figure 3), while they are obviously avoided in the LC Corpus.

Figure 3. Collocations with ‘relatively’ and ‘significantly’ in combinations with adjectives (HS Corpus).

1	particularly painful and may require	relatively	high opioid doses. But several
2	been used by nurses with children,	relatively	little research on the effect
3	systems and five methods of helping. A	relatively	good fit was found with the
4	reflected use of all scale points and	relatively	normal distributions. Mean
5	the nursing staff. The nurses' report of	relatively	infrequent use of pain medication
6	for patient and family to use, and are	relatively	inexpensive. Used in conjunction
7	injury carry high risk but are	relatively	rare modes of transmission in
8	are both strong, as measured by the	relatively	large value of the association
9	have a chronic illness. In contrast,	relatively	few studies have assessed
10	an association was not missed in this	relatively	small sample? The power
11	and across national boundaries. In a	relatively	short period of time, we have
		[....]	
1	consistently been found to be given	significantly	less analgesic medication
2	problems (Vraciu & Vraciu, 1977) but had	significantly	greater reductions in
3	and flavor of medications taken were	significantly	more compliant than
4	of physical pain) as symptoms. They are	significantly	less likely to identify
5	of soap and water, they are also	significantly	more likely to see
6	defined by socioeconomic factors showed	significantly	lower survival rates than

Although the adverb ‘generally’ appears in both corpora, it does not normally collocate with adjectives in our LC texts; we have only recorded the following example: ‘Events in life are *generally so imperfect* that to think ...’. By contrast, this combination appears quite often in HS (Figure 4) combining with adjectives such as ‘knowledgeable,’ ‘sympathetic,’ ‘skeptical,’ ‘unavailable.’

Figure 4. Collocations with 'generally' + adjective (HS Corpus).

1	who have experienced intense pain are	generally	more sympathetic to the patient
2	registered nurses from Lethbridge, while	generally	knowledgeable about AIDS, are
3	Attitudes towards societal care These	generally	more liberal attitudes with
4	parameter estimates, one must remain	generally	skeptical about any interpretation
5	not contain CD4+ cell count, which is	generally	unavailable in administrative

Some adverbs may also collocate better with some adjectives in one corpus compared with the other. This is the case with the adverb 'almost'. In HS texts, this combination is rather scarce and it usually combines with 'half,' 'all acute,' but especially with all sorts of numerical expressions; e.g. 'almost 50% of study,' 'an almost *equal* number,' 'almost 2500 years ago,' etc. In LC texts (see Figure 5), however, it collocates with a wide variety of adjectives, such as 'inconceivable,' 'comical,' 'overwhelming,' 'fatal,' to name but a few. In addition, samples 1 and 8 (Figure 5) offer a somewhat different structure, in which the adjectives 'erotic' and 'present' are being modified by a double adverb, 'almost exclusively' and 'almost ever.'

Figure 5. Collocations with 'almost' (LC Corpus).

1	the themes of his first plays had been	almost	exclusively erotic. Nothing
2	him even to see her again. Antiochus is	almost	comical in this scene, and would
3	pointed out by French critics, Phaedra is	almost	dead at the moment the play
4	If Jack Falstaff, then Prince Hal is	almost	certain to be defeated or eclipse
5	one bad scene in The Balcony, a scene	almost	fatal to the second half of the
6	more clearly what seems to me the	almost	insuperable difficulty of the
7	verse was the accepted medium. It is	almost	inconceivable that this type of
8	metatheatre is very special. His plays	almost	never present a play-within-a-play
9	tragedy is to induce in the spectator an	almost	overwhelming sense of reality
10	is the product of a virile imagination,	almost	Elizabethan in its force and

Some authors (Quirk et al. [1985: 469] among them) would suggest that some adverbs combine better with one type of adjectives than with another. Such is the case with 'perfectly' which, according to these authors, usually collocates with positive adjectives, while 'utterly' with negative. Our search produced no such combinations in the HS corpus; however, in the LC texts, we were able to document that this is so with the adverb 'perfectly'—e.g. 'perfectly correct,' 'perfectly normal.' Nevertheless, 'utterly' appeared in combination with both negative adjectives—e.g. 'utterly implausible,' 'utterly sterile,' 'utterly undramatic,' 'utterly weak,' etc.—as well as with positive adjectives—e.g. 'utterly positive' and 'utterly conscientious.' Other examples: 'reasonably diverse' (HS), 'wonderfully adroit' (LC), on the positive side; and 'seriously ill' (HS), on the negative.

Furthermore, the combination 'severely symptomatic' (HS), which is usually taken negatively—i.e., referring to some negative condition of the patient in terms of a specific disease—, in the context it was taken, it came to mean a positive and accurate description of a pathological condition. Similarly, we also found combinations which were really contradictory, as is the case of 'oddly delightful,' 'authentically unbrilliant' or even 'cooly indifferent,' all of them examples taken from our LC Corpus. One case, however, which has to be often taken from another angle would be the adverb 'grossly'. According to Johansson (1993: 47), an apparently negative adverb like 'grossly,' in certain combinations has acquired

a totally different meaning. For instance, in medical literature we find frequent expressions with this adverb, such as ‘grossly normal’ and ‘grossly abnormal,’ ‘grossly visible’ and ‘grossly invasive.’ We also found, however, combinations like ‘grossly apparent inguinal [hernia]’ or ‘grossly positive pelvic nodal [involvement],’ and, from our HS Corpus, ‘grossly normal adjacent breast [tissue],’ which would obviously seem to call for a completely different interpretation than we initially would have suspected it to mean.

Finally, a series of combinations based on the adverb ‘somewhat,’ quite frequent in both corpora (8 different combinations in HS texts and 5 in LC texts), are used for completely different purposes: in health science texts ‘somewhat’ tends to combine with adjectives such as ‘ambiguous,’ ‘cautious,’ ‘greater,’ ‘larger,’ ‘stronger,’ or ‘more liberal.’ In LC texts, however, it combines with ‘absurd,’ ‘comical,’ ‘repetitious,’ and the like.

Figure 6. Collocations with ‘somewhat’ (HS Corpus).

1	of AIDS, summarized in Table 2, are	somewhat	ambiguous. Virtually all the
2	care. The post-RN/BN nurses tend to be	somewhat	cautious or conservative in the
3	specifically, the AIDS cohort had a	somewhat	greater proportion of
4	as well, the 'Don't know' category is	somewhat	larger for the student nurses
5	formation from government sources has a	somewhat	stronger effect than the first
6	They do, however, exhibit	somewhat	more liberal attitudes towards
7	This is a	somewhat	unsatisfactory solution. However
8	change category. Older women were	somewhat	more likely than younger women

Figure 7. Collocations with ‘somewhat’ (LC Corpus).

1	through the action safely. The pathetic,	somewhat	comical and modernly complicate
2	makes it seem, for all its brilliance,	somewhat	absurd. Neither Britannicus nor
3	personally motivated; the victims appear	somewhat	better than their murderers.
4	Living theatre," of course, wants a	somewhat	different effect. It wants to
5	Endgame is one long act where Godot was	somewhat	repetitious in two. Those who

Conclusion

Adverb-adjective combinations are quite frequent in the English language. Their use is understood as being basically a tool in the hands of the writer to express—‘submodify’ would be the expression preferred by grammarians (Sinclair et al., 1990)—something more than what the bare adjective indicates in a given sentence. As we have seen, on some combinations the emphasis falls on the adverb, but most often on the adjective, some of which are considered ‘gradable,’ while other may indicate a quality, extent, sufficiency or insufficiency, or even excess (ibid.). Nevertheless, there are other aspects of these combinations, taken as complete meanings, that go beyond this degree and/or manner classification. Thus we have analyzed them, following Johansson (1993), as complete units in order to classify them. This, however, has led us to conclude that a wider classificatory scope would be convenient for language writing, particularly in terms of different specialisms, as shown through the analysis of our corpus.

In our study we have observed, first of all, a difference of use of combinations in the HS Texts of ‘degree,’ as well as combinations referring to ‘viewpoint and respect.’ This is quite understandable in terms of scientific essays that need more precision in their description. We have also observed a definite trend among health science writers to choose more concrete combinations in terms of meaning than literary authors. They would often favor the use of more abstract combinations, at times reaching the point of using hyperbolic expressions, sometimes bordering tautology, and at other instances being close to a contradiction of terms.

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