

'BLOOD-HOT', 'STONE-GOOD' : a preliminary report on adjective-specific intensifiers in Dutch

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In the languages with which I am familiar, exaggeration is a normal part of everyday speech¹. Someone who 'hasn't seen you for ages' might be 'thrilled to death to see you', even though he would 'never' have thought of you 'in a million years', if he had not run into you. If you dislike this article, you may be 'bored stiff', or 'silly', or 'to tears' or, God forbid, 'to death', yet it is unlikely that you actually manifest any of these physical or emotional states. As habitual hyperbole devalues expressive innovations into clichés, language users create new - and exaggerated - ways of reinforcing an idea and asserting its truth.

One traditional area for variety and inventiveness has been adverbial intensifiers. Immediately one thinks of the universal but colorless *very*, originally 'truly', now simply 'to a relatively high degree'. But so neutral is *very* that most speakers use it much less frequently than one realizes, employing in its stead such alternative intensifiers as *awfully*, *terribly*, *frightfully*, *dreadfully*, *excruciatingly* and such on the gruesome side, and *pretty*, *fairly*, *really*, *extremely*, *entirely* and the like on the positive side. As a sidetrack from my primary topic, I have compiled a list of such widely used adverbial intensifiers in Dutch (List I below). Although it contains over sixty items, it is really only the start of such a list. I cannot discuss these adverbial intensifiers at length here; however, I should point out that some have strong semantic and lexical restrictions on their use. Nevertheless, many can modify virtually any adjective.

Three adverbial intensifiers are quite common and neutral in flavor : *zeer*, *heel* and *erg*. *Zeer* seems restricted to Flemish and formal or academic speech; *heel*, *erg*, and the combination *heel erg* are all current in the Netherlands. In emphatic popular speech, they often pick up the *-e* from an inflected adjective, something which adverbs are not supposed to do, for example :

