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Some Views on the System of Modern English Adverbs

The English language has developed an original system of adverbs that is composed of historically different components. The dominant way of the formation of adverbs in present-day English grammatical system is adding the –ly to the adjectival stems.

It is commonly believed that historical changes in the system of the adverb in English led to the appearance of a new dominant regular adverb-forming suffix in Middle English when the Old English suffix -e was gradually superseded by the suffix -ly. Throughout the Middle English and Early Modern English periods both forms of the adverbs: with a reduced Old English adverbial suffix and with the suffix -ly were functionally in free variation, though adverbial forms with the suffix -ly were given preference in usage. In the eighteenth century the adverbial word-formation with the suffix -ly became dominant and productive. It was accepted as a norm in the British English literary standard. As a general tendency of the development, the forms with a reduced old suffix have acquired a peripheral status in the language system. Processes of levelling to the advantage of the adverbs with the suffix -ly have been going on up to the present day and the results are generally to the advantage of the forms with the suffix.

In a new developing world, with the extension of its social functions, the North American variety of English has become a powerful

factor of the development of English alongside the British English variety. The North American English literary standard prescribes the same basic rules of regular formation and regular usage of adverbs as the British literary standard does, with a few minor exceptions. The inventories of adverbs without the adverbial suffix, that are homonymous with the corresponding adjectives, almost coincide in both varieties and compose a common grammatical system [1: 325; 2: 462–463]. It is evident enough that the parallel functioning of some adverbial forms without the suffix *-ly* and their counterparts with the adverbial suffix is a general grammatical feature of the Modern English grammatical system that reflects the historical changes in the system of the adverb.

The groups of the adverbial forms without the suffix *-ly* are restricted in number and their usage covers a limited list of possible options in both varieties. The actual realizations of these options may differ in communicative and functional characteristics. They may be perceived as the preservation of earlier forms and as cases of regional variation. The actual realization with functional specification has led to the rise of some divergences seen in North American English and British English usages, especially in oral discourse. The communicative and pragmatic potential of adverbial forms with a reduced suffix in North American English usage seems to be functionally larger than in British English, though confined either to informal discourse or to their use in stereotyped phrases in literary speech. The common North American English usage of adverbs with a reduced suffix is usually marked socially and functionally. The Webster's Dictionary of 1968 publication marks adverbs, such *easy*, *mighty*, *real* as colloquial, whereas the adverbs *quick*, *slow*, *sweet*, *true* are not treated as such [3].

In North American English usage, adverbial forms with a historically reduced suffix fall into some groups depending on their

communicative, pragmatic and functional characteristics. Firstly, adverbs that are restricted in British English usage to idiomatic use are more freely used in North American English oral or written discourse (*slow, quick, easy*). Secondly, adverbs that have become outdated in British English usage can occasionally be found in North American English usage (*tender, true*) or can regularly function in oral discourse in North American English (*mighty, real*). Thirdly, adverbs that are North American innovations (*awful*).

Almost all adverbs treated as specifically North American English formations are old forms by origin and are outdated in contemporary British English, as, for example: *nice* (1540), *true* (1303), *sweet* (1250), *tender* (1424) [4]. A characteristic feature of the North American usage is the preservation of the sets with both adverbial forms that may differ in frequency or in the register of usage. None of the isolated adverbial forms with a reduced suffix seems to have survived without its counterpart with the suffix *-ly* in the Modern English grammatical system. Some adverbs, such as *low*, do not have correlative forms with the suffix in current British English. In contrast, the adverbial formations with a reduced suffix have preserved their historical counterparts with the suffix *-ly* in North American English literary usage: *low* (EME) – *lowly* (ME) humbly, *dead* (1393) – *deadly* (OE), *bloody* (1400) – *bloodily* (1565), *sweet* (1250) – *sweetly* (1530), *mighty* (OE) – *mightily* (OE), *real* (1658) – *really* (ME), *quick* (ME) – *quickly* (OE) [3; 4]. The adverbial form *lowly*, not accepted by the British English literary standard, is a norm in North American English usage in the meaning *humbly*.

North American English usage of adverbs generally shows more diachronic stability and often reflects the usage of adverbial forms in free variation that was characteristic of the earlier periods of the history of

English. Some examples from Shakespeare's works can provide convincing evidence to support this view.

True – truly: Coriolanus: If you have writ your annals *true*, 'tis there / That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli. (Coriolanus, Act V, Sc. 6, ll. 114 – 115) [5: 869]; Countess: I charge thee, / As heaven shall work in me for thine avail, / To tell me *truly*. (All's Well That Ends Well, Act I, Sc. 3, ll. 175) [5: 321].

Slow – slowly; swift - swiftly: Pisano: ..., as the fits and stirs of's mind / Could best express how *slow* his soul sail'd on / How *swift* his ship. (Cymbeline, Act I, Sc. 4, ll. 12 – 13) [5:1200]; Rosalind: Ay, of a snail; for though he comes *slowly*, he carries his house on his head (As you Like it, Act IV, Sc. 1, l. 48 - 49) [:274]; Adam: Your praise is come too *swiftly* home before you (As you Like it, Act II, Sc. 3, l. 9) [5: 261]

Low – lowly: Anne Bullen: I swear 'tis better to be *lowly* born / And range with humble livers in content / Than to be peck'd up in a glist'ring grief / And wear a golden sorrow. (King Henry the Eighth, Act II, Sc. 2, ll. 18 – 22) [5: 761]. Clown: O, stay and hear; your true love's coming, / That can sing both high and *low*. (Twelfth Night; or, What You Will, Act II, Sc. 3, l. 42) [5: 356].

The history of individual adverbial forms with a reduced suffix and of their correlative counterparts may show different ways of their development depending on the communicative and functional characteristics. For example, in British English the adverb *bloody* regarded as slang, taboo or, recently, spoken, had no counterpart with the suffix -ly. Under the North American English usage the adverb *bloodily* that has been preserved there (Webster, 1968) seems to have been reintroduced into the British lexis: All the demonstrations were *bloodily* suppressed by government forces. [6; 7; 8]. The adverb *overly* (ME), earlier obsolete, or dialectal, in British English, but often found in North American English

usage, has been reintroduced into the British literary standard and has shifted into the neutral register: Your views on economics are overly simplistic. I'm not overly fond of cats [6; 7; 8]. Sometimes American influences can have a strengthening effect on usages that have been functionally or pragmatically peripheral in British English, for example, the use of the adverbial form *deadly* in such cases as, *deadly* extremely (*deadly* serious) – *deadly* deathly: (*deadly* pale) [6; 7].

New adverbial form without the suffix *-ly* *awful*, marked as North American English, and *dirty*, marked as British English, are registered by Modern English dictionaries of recent years of publication [7; 8]. Both morphological forms seem to be analogous innovations of English informal usage: That kid's *awful* cute with her red curls. Clint is *awful* smart. Diz likes football, but he plays it *dirty*. The puppy turned out to be a *dirty* great Rottweiler. [7; 8]. The adverbs *awfully* and *dirtily* historically have no counterpart without the suffix *-ly* [4]. The rise of these adverbial forms, to my mind, has become possible in oral informal discourse due to the action of analogy stimulated by the use of such adverbs as *pretty*, *dead* in spoken English with intensifying or emphatic effect in the meaning of *very*, for example, in British English: You were *dead* lucky to get that job [7]. This usage also seems to be supported by a regular use of *mighty*, *real* with the same pragmatic force in North American English usage: You seem *mighty* sure of your facts. He is a *real* nice guy. [6; 7]. These two adverbial forms, found in informal discourse, bear a functional restriction: they are the forms used with the same pragmatic force, but in different varieties of English.

Our study shows that the divergences of both of the national variants in the usage of adverbial forms without the adverbial suffix *-ly* and of their counterparts with the suffix demonstrate the same processes with different actual realizations, sometimes coinciding, sometimes with

divergent results. A peculiar character of usage of adverbial forms in North American and British English concerns a definite, restricted group of adverbs and does not violate the general tendency of the development. North American usage shows not a productive way of forming new adverbial forms from adjectives, but a wider use of ready forms that existed in the language earlier, or those that became functionally or communicatively peripheral in British usage because of the process of levelling when the dominant forms established themselves. The usage of adverbs without the adverbial suffix -ly, such as *slow*, *quick*, is not a North American English innovation. It shows, in some cases, the increase in the functional and communicative load of the historical forms. North American English influences can probably be seen in the extension of the functioning of some adverbial forms without the suffix -ly in British English.

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