

## The Use of Gradable Adjectives in Ernest Hemingway's '*Hills Like White Elephants*'

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes the use of gradable adjectives in Ernest Hemingway's short story *Hills Like White Elephants*. Specifically, it focuses on the use of the adjectives such as for instance "fine" as an example, and their implications in the dialogue between the two main characters, a couple who are discussing whether or not to have an abortion. The study explains that Hemingway's use of GAs as "fine" creates a sense of ambiguity and unease, underscoring the complexity of the characters' emotions and the difficulty of making a decision that will have long-lasting consequences. Through close reading and analysis of the story, the study demonstrates how Hemingway's use of gradable adjectives contributes to the story's overall themes and the portrayal of the characters' inner conflicts.

**Keywords:** Hemingway, Hills Like White Elephants (HLWEs), Gradable adjectives (GAs), ambiguity, theme, analysis.

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## أستعمال الصفات المتدرجة في قصة إرنست هيمغواي " تلال كالفيلة البيضاء"

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### المستخلص

تعمل هذه الورقة على تحليل استعمال المفردات التي تفيد النعت أو الصفات المتدرجة في القصة القصيرة لإرنست هيمغواي "تلال كالفيلة البيضاء". ، تركز الورقة على استعمال صفات مثل "جيد" وانعكاساتها في الحوار بين الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين، وهما زوجان يناقشان ما إذا كان يجب إجراء عملية إجهاض أم لا. تقدم هذه الورقة نقاشاً حول استعمال هيمغواي لكلمة مثل "جيد" باعتبارها صفة متدرجة تخلق شعوراً بالغموض وعدم الارتياح، مما يؤكد تعقيد مشاعر الشخصيات وصعوبة اتخاذ القرار الذي سيكون له عواقب طويلة الأمد. ومن خلال القراءة الدقيقة والتحليل للقصة، توضح الورقة كيفية استعمال هيمغواي للصفات القابلة للتدرج و التي تساهم في تشكيل الموضوعات العامة للقصة وتصوير الصراعات الداخلية للشخصية. و تخلص الدراسة الى أن استعمال الصفات المتدرجة في رواية إرنست هيمغواي "تلال كالفيلة البيضاء" جانباً مهماً في أسلوب القصة وموضوعاتها.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** إرنست هيمغواي، تلال كالفيلة البيضاء، الصفات المتدرجة، الغموض، الموضوعة، التحليل.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Preliminaries

Ernest Hemingway is known for his concise writing style and the use of simple language to convey complex emotions and ideas. In some of his stories, Hemingway uses gradable adjectives, henceforth (GAs) to convey a sense of ambiguity or uncertainty (Study.com, 2024).

GAs are adjectives that express a quality that can vary in intensity or degree. Examples of GAs include "good," "bad," "tall," "short," "heavy," and "light." These adjectives can be modified by adverbs such as "very," "somewhat," "pretty," and "extremely" to indicate the degree of the quality being described (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1976:131-132)

In the story 'Hills Like White Elephants', henceforth HLWEs, Hemingway uses the gradable adjectives as "fine" to convey a sense of ambiguity and unease in the dialogue between the two main characters. The story is about a couple who are discussing whether or not to have an abortion. The man repeatedly tells the woman that the procedure is "perfectly simple" and "not really an operation at all." The woman, however, is clearly uncomfortable with the idea and responds with "I feel fine" when asked how she is feeling.

The use of "fine", as a gradable adjective in this context is significant because it suggests that the woman's emotions and physical states are not as clear-cut as the man believes. The woman's response could be interpreted as her trying to convince herself that everything is okay when it is clearly not. Consequently, the use of GAs in this story underscores the complexity of the characters' emotions and the difficulty of making a decision that will have long-lasting consequences. In general, Hemingway's use of GAs in "*HLWEs*" and other stories helps to create a sense of tension and ambiguity that adds depth to his characters and themes.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following questions: How does the use of GAs , for example, "fine", create a sense of ambiguity and tension in the dialogue between the two major characters? What is the significance of the woman's response of "I feel fine" when asked how she is feeling? How does the use of GAs in this story contribute to the portrayal of the characters' internal struggles and the difficulty of making a life-altering decision?

### 1.3 The Hypothesis

The hypothesis proposes that the employment of GAs in HLWEs acts as significant tool for understanding the emotions and tensions within the story. The recurrent use of GAs in the story indicates a link between these linguistic selections and the underlying perception tension and difficulties in communication experienced by the characters.

### 1.4 The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study includes a close analysis of the use of GAs in HLWEs, specifically focusing on the implications of the use of the adjective "fine" in the dialogue between the couple. The study could also analyze the broader themes of the story, such as the difficulty of communication in relationships, the complexity of decision-making, and the consequences of choices

### 1.5 The Aim of the Study

By making a quantitative and content analysis of the use of the GAs , the following points demonstrate the aim of the study:

- i. To apprehend how Hemingway's use of GAs contributes to the general meaning and impact of the story.
- ii. To investigate the effectiveness of Hemingway's use of GAs in creating a particular mood or atmosphere in the story.
- iii. To explore the role of GAs in conveying the theme of the story and the larger societal issues it addresses.

## 2. Background

Hemingway's distinctive style is best exemplified by *The Old Man and the Sea*. Straightforwardness, clarity, and freshness are conveyed through its natural and straightforward language. The reason for this is because Hemingway consistently choose terms that are conversational, informal, precise, more common, and concrete. In addition to avoiding complex grammar, he hardly ever utilizes adjectives or abstract nouns (Xie, 2008:156). He is notable for his spare prose, minimalist style, and capacity to capture the essence of human feelings and experiences. His writings were distinguished by a sense of ambiguity and understatement, and he frequently explored themes like masculinity, love, war, and death. Out of all contemporary novelists, Hemingway was possibly the most reserved, but he was also, in a sense, the most

expressive about himself. He incorporated his experiences into almost all of his works, but he purposefully kept his identity hidden behind his fictitious characters and avoided disclosing any significant details about his personal life or creative output (Ghauri, 1997: 11-12).

Hemingway's style focuses on action and dialogue, lacking deep insights into characters' thoughts. It often uses direct speech without detailed descriptions of tone or speech verbs, or employs neutral verbs. Scene descriptions are brief, allowing readers to fill in many details themselves. Hemingway uses a limited vocabulary and minimizes adjectives and adverbs. This approach leaves readers with gaps in information, such as the characters' ages, how they met, their backgrounds, and their future plans. These gaps encourage readers to invest in interpreting the physical settings, like the train station. Hemingway's choice to omit details is driven by a desire to leave much unsaid, relying on the reader to infer meanings and emotions, following his belief in presenting just the surface of the story, like the tip of an iceberg, to create a more impactful narrative (Avitzour, 2018:60).

### 3. Literature Review

An adjective is typically defined as a word that adds detail or describes a noun, or more precisely, a word that modifies a noun by enriching its meaning while also narrowing down its applicability. For instance, consider the word 'house.' When we say 'the big house,' we're adding information about the house's size but also excluding smaller houses. Adding 'new' to 'the big new house' gives even more detail but also reduces the range of houses that fit the description. Finally, 'the big, new, white house' narrows down the options even further, describing a specific type of house. This progression from general to specific usage shows how adjectives enhance understanding while limiting the scope of what they describe (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1960: 64).

This explanation highlights a definitional issue regarding the relationship between nouns and adjectives. It argues that using a definition where a noun is equated with a thing leads to confusion. Specifically, it critiques the notion that the adjective '*big*' in 'a big house' describes the noun 'house.' The argument is that the size attribute ('*big*') applies not to the word 'house' itself but to the actual object represented by that word. In essence, words are symbols for things, and nouns are a type of word representing those things. Therefore, it's essential to remember that adjectives describe the objects that nouns signify, not just the words themselves. (Ibid).

Gradability is seen as such an essential property of adjectives that many writers include it in their definition of the category (Raskin and Nirenburg, 1999:12). GAs are that type of adjectives that represent attributes like size, temperature, or color that can be measured or compared. They provide intensity and detail to descriptions and are frequently utilized in written and spoken language. In literature, GAs have a deeper function; they not only set a certain mood or atmosphere but also subtly and intricately transmit emotions, attitudes, and topics. Because it adds to the story's sense of tension, ambiguity, and undercurrent perception turmoil, the use of GAs in HLWEs is especially noteworthy.

Generally, there has been a significant amount of discussion and analysis across languages regarding qualitative adjectives that can be graded or scaled. The literature highlights two main issues: the primary focus is often on the degrees of comparison of GAs, with formal semanticists particularly interested in their relationship with presuppositions and their classification based on quasi-logical principles, albeit with inconclusive results. Comparatively, more attention is given to the morphology and syntax of comparative adjectives rather than their semantics. The meaning of positive adjectives like 'good' and 'big' in comparison to their comparative forms has been a subject of inquiry, emphasizing the primary nature of comparatives psychologically, as noted by Sapir. Additionally, the use of a gradable antonym always implies some form of grading, even if not explicitly stated. This thesis proposes an analysis of the positive adjective 'tall' in sentences like: "*John is a tall man*" and "*John is taller than an average man.*" (Ibid: 19-20).

Sloboda (1991:14) sees Hemingway's use of the word 'dimension' as an attempt to capture the full perception depth in his writing. This intensity is evident in HLWEs, where a young couple avoids directly discussing the woman's abortion. The story's irony requires readers to grasp the underlying tension and sense that something is amiss, as seen in lines like "I feel fine, *she said*". "*There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.*" This irony, conveyed through simple sentences, understatement, and omission, heightens the perception impact and anxiety within the story. While the story is minimalist and brilliant in its significance, it also leaves much unsaid, leading some to prefer a more explanatory account with clear authorial guidance. Such texts provide a framework for interpretation but may limit readers' opportunities to question their own values and interpretations. Hemingway skillfully manipulated the focus to the end, making the reader

consider the ironic elements of the story and holding their interest. Sometimes the change is so minor that the author's true purpose could be misinterpreted (Ghauri, 1997: 19).

In the field of linguistics, GAs have been widely studied. GAs are a subclass of adjectives that, according to Huddleston and Pullum (2002:526-527), convey the strength or degree of a quality or property. These adjectives can be altered by adverbs like "very" and "extremely," and they frequently have comparative and superlative forms (for example, large, bigger, and biggest).

Citing Lyons (1968) and Cruse (1986). Asudeh (2018:3) indicates a number of characteristics of gradability and scalar quality, which are related to antonymic adjectives in terms of the possibility of grading adjectives and the qualities of length, speed, and temperature are examples of scalar properties of which the elements of an antonymic pair indicate degree. This viewpoint infers a division of scalar adjectives, such as "tall" and "heavy," are frequently assessed on a continuous scale and can be modified by phrases like "a little" and "quite." non-scalar adjectives, like "red" and "square," lack a continuous scale and cannot be changed in the same way.

Furthermore, Kennedy (2007:1-2) elaborates that based on the semantics of the positive form, which demands that an object stand out in relation to the theme assured represented by the adjective, is the particular theory of ambiguity that he has defended. For adjectives with closed scales, this feature can only hold under certain strict scale qualities, leading to an interpretation that can be either absolute minimum or absolute maximum. Adjectives with open scales require fixing truth conditions for the predicate by examining the distribution of objects in a domain (a comparison class) in relation to the theme assure function the adjective expresses; vagueness arises from epistemic uncertainty about where we actually draw the line and metalinguistic resistance. He adds it's commonly acknowledged that the source of ambiguity in sentences like *"The coffee in Rome is expensive"* lies in the predicate containing the gradable adjective *"expensive"*. In the field of linguistic semantics, a productive area of study has emerged that examines an unmarked gradable predicate—referred to as the positive form of the predicate—as a relationship between the extent to which an object possesses the property expressed by the predicate and a context-specific standard for comparing that property. A predicate like *"is expensive"* signifies the property of having a level of cost equal to or greater than a certain

standard of comparison, with the specific value of that standard not being inherent in the lexical meaning of "expensive."(Ibid).

GAs are 'inherently vague'. When we say that something in language is imprecise, it means that it doesn't provide a specific or exact meaning. For instance, consider this sentence: "The patient was given a high dose of insulin." Understanding such a sentence can be challenging because it's not clear exactly how much insulin was administered. Gradability refers to a linguistic feature that allows a word to describe the level or intensity of something in a particular context. This feature makes words like 'high' gradable because they convey a sense of measurement or quantity (Shivade et al, 2016: 17).

Understanding GAs can be challenging due to their context-specific nature and lack of precise definition. The appropriateness or truthfulness of a statement like "John is tall" hinges on the context, especially the group of people used for comparison regarding John's height (Qing and Franke, 2014:1). The opinion above discusses a common confusion where vagueness is sometimes seen as a type of imprecision or all imprecision is seen as vagueness. However, according to the arguments presented here, these two types of interpretive uncertainty are different: absolute adjectives aren't vague but can be imprecise. If imprecision is fundamentally a pragmatic issue, this implies that vagueness is mainly about semantics, emerging when specific elements' conventional meanings combine to create it, while imprecision is a broader aspect related to usage.

A substantial amount of research has focused on the use of GAs in written content. According to Halliday (1967:214), the selection of GAs plays a crucial role in shaping the mood and tone of a text. Positive GAs like "beautiful" and "wonderful" can foster a positive and uplifting tone, eliciting feelings of optimism. On the other hand, the use of negative GAs such as "ugly" and "terrible" can elicit negativity and pessimism, thereby influencing the text's mood towards a darker or more critical perspective.

The study of GAs in grammar and writing generally emphasizes the significance of these adjectives in influencing the overall tone, mood, and characterization of a text. GAs can paint a vivid and evocative picture of a text's setting and characters, highlighting the intricacy and nuance of their circumstances and assisting the reader in comprehending and interpreting the



text. Polonska (2017:57) states that gradability has been a subject of significant research. While not all adjectives fall under this classification, it is a crucial semantic feature for many adjectives across various languages. Adjectives can be divided into two main categories: non-gradable and gradable. Non-gradable adjectives, like *"chemical,"* describe qualities that are either present or absent, such as inanimate objects being either chemical or not. This group often includes technical terms like *"atomic" or "nuclear,"* which resist gradability and don't combine with degree modifiers. Similarly, terms like *"dead" or "alive"* categorize animate objects as either one state or the other. On the other hand, gradable adjectives can be further classified into scale adjectives and limit adjectives. Scale adjectives, which are prevalent in English, can be compared using forms like comparative and superlative, and they can be intensified with adverbs like *"extremely" or "very."* For example, one can say the weather is *"very hot" or "incredibly hot."* In contrast, limit adjectives inherently express an absolute degree and can be modified with words like *"absolutely" or "almost"* to convey the highest or near-highest degree, respectively. However, limit adjectives typically don't form comparisons (Ibid: 58)

Leech and Svartvik (2003: 83-84) expound that not all words, such as verbs and adjectives, can be modified by adverbs indicating degree. Degree adverbs apply only to gradable words, which are those that can be understood in terms of a scale. Many words that are opposites, like "old" and "young," fall into the gradable category: for example, you can say, "The dog is very old" or "quite old." To be more precise, you can use measure phrases like "five years" or "six feet." Degree adverbs and phrases can sometimes act as modifiers before the word they modify, e.g. (*"The performance of Hamlet was absolutely magnificent*) or as adverbials in a sentence, e.g. ("I absolutely agree with you"). They distinguish two main types of gradable words: scale words, which indicate a position on a scale (such as "large" or "small"), and limit words, which indicate the end position of a scale (like "black" or "white"). With limit words, the same adverbs can function as modifiers or adverbials as indicated in the following examples, respectively: *"The story is totally false."* (The limit word is used to its fullest extent.) , *"The bottle is almost empty."* (Indicating a position near the limit).

Syrett (2007 28-32) illustrates that GAs are adjectives that can be used in comparative constructions and with adverbial degree modifiers. This ability stems from their semantic

representations, which will be discussed in detail later. Essentially, what allows GAs to be used in comparatives is a difference in meaning compared to non-GAs. For instance, you can compare degrees of bigness with GAs but not degrees of deadness. This distinction is important in degree constructions, where GAs allow for comparisons based on relevant properties, unlike non-GAs. She elucidates the distinction between relative and absolute adjectives stating that relative adjectives relate to a standard or norm, while absolute adjectives denote properties that intersect with the noun they describe. Although this distinction seems similar to the gradable/non-gradable one, a closer examination reveals nuances that require a slight adjustment in how we understand gradable and non-GAs, for instance (*Elephants are bigger than penguins. That elephant is very big. \*Attila the Hun is deader than Marie Antoinette. \*The king is very dead.*)

DeRose (2015: 1-3) sees that context determines GAs, explaining that when using a gradable adjective like "tall," the meaning can be clarified by referencing a comparison class. For example, if you say "Sally is tall," you might mean "Sally is tall for a 10-year-old." Later, if you say "Sally is not tall," you could clarify by saying "I meant she isn't tall for a basketball player. This approach, called Implicit Reference Class Theory (IRT), suggests that context determines the comparison class that defines the adjective's meaning. The text highlights a broader assumption about context in language, influenced by IRT in GAs. This assumption suggests that context has a limited role, mainly providing specific values for context-sensitive terms through phrases supplied by speakers. This view restricts context-sensitivity to true indexicals, GAs, pronouns, and a few other types, which poses challenges for wider acceptance of contextualist theories.

Scholars and researchers have long been intrigued by the use of GAs in written works. There has been extensive enquiry and discussion regarding Ernest Hemingway's utilization of GAs in his short story *Hills Like White Elephants*. To grasp the full meaning and application of GAs, it's essential to comprehend their context-dependent nature. This means recognizing that the thresholds for terms like "tall" vary based on the comparison classes we consider. However, there's a complexity here. On one side, certain GAs, known as relative adjectives, can seem vague because their context-dependence isn't always clear, even with a clear comparison class. This vagueness becomes apparent in situations where there's uncertainty about whether the

term applies, like when determining if a basketball player who's 2 meters tall is "*tall*" within the context of other basketball players. On the flip side, some GAs like "*full*" and "*dry*" have positive forms that are less vague. For instance, a glass of water is only "*full*" when it's completely filled with water. These adjectives are labeled as absolute adjectives. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of GAs requires explaining how their thresholds are resolved in context, particularly in distinguishing between absolute and relative adjectives (Qing and Franke, 2014:34)

From another angle, Kartal (2017: 4) confirms that it is essential for foreign language learners and writers to know which adjectives are frequently used. Thus, EFL learners should be guided to reach authentic use of linguistic items. From this point of view, it can be concluded that providing learners with a list that shows the most frequent adjectives and their functions would be an effective way of helping learners to use those adjectives appropriately. He exposed that almost 40% percent of the adjectives in the COCA corpus (The Corpus of Contemporary American English) are evaluative ones. Thus, while using evaluative adjectives in research papers, EFL writers can utilize the appropriate use for any genre and register. Moreover, the use of correct evaluative adjectives is not only important for the genre and the register of the text but also for the correct understanding of the message. He illustrates that evaluative adjectives form a coherent semantic and syntactic class. And they play a crucial role in interpreting discourse. Evaluation encompasses judgments, emotions, or perceptions about something and has three main functions: expressing opinions, fostering relationships, and structuring discussions. Opinion expression reveals the speaker's values, while evaluation also facilitates communication between writers and readers, enabling manipulation, hedging, and politeness. Additionally, evaluation aids in organizing discourse, enhancing coherence and textual effectiveness. (Ibid: 5)

It is agreed that one of the significant and prominent writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's writing style stands apart from the 19th-century tradition that firmly believed in an objectively existing historical world. Unlike those writers, Hemingway, along with other modernists, no longer holds onto such a belief. Instead, they shift their focus to the fictional worlds they create. These modern writers depict a world that is not anchored in "eternal truths" but rather in temporary constructs and artifices. This shift in perspective leads to a heightened emphasis on the structure and form of fiction itself. As a result, there's a diverse

range of critical responses to this innovative approach. Some critics intertwine Hemingway's non-fiction, fiction, and real-life experiences, suggesting that he channels his personal perception struggles into his art (Sloboda, 1991:1).

O'Brien (1992: 20) highlights Hemingway's use of allusion as a writing device in HLWEs, he notes that in the thorough analysis of the dialogues, an important aspect has not received adequate attention. This aspect involves multiple techniques employed by Hemingway, such as repeating key words, using contrasting witticisms to emphasize different meanings, and subtle references to Biblical themes in the conflict between the man and the woman.

HLWEs, first published in 1927 in 'Transitions' and later included in the collection 'Men Without Women' the same year, depicts the dynamic of a deeply involved couple at a train station in Spain, anticipating the Barcelona to Madrid train. Referred to as "the girl" and "the American," they engage in a subdued yet intense argument while drinking.

HLWEs centers on a young couple, referred to as "the American" and "the girl," waiting at a train station café in Spain's Ebro valley. They discuss their situation, revealing that the girl is pregnant, and her partner wants her to have an abortion. Despite his insistence that it's her choice, she seems reluctant and leans towards keeping the baby. The setting between two tracks symbolizes their dilemma, with one track possibly leading to a place for an abortion. The landscape they observe, barren on one side and fertile on the other, mirrors the themes of life and death. The story ends with the man making a move to the other side, and the girl expressing that she feels fine, although the word "pregnancy" or "abortion" is never explicitly mentioned (Avitzour, 2018:49). Although the specifics of their disagreement remain unvoiced, the story suggests a significant change in their relationship by its end, especially highlighted in a crucial moment during their extended conversation initiated by the girl's pivotal question. "Would you do something for me now?" "I'd do anything for you." "Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?" (Laura 2018:1)

The story implies a notable shift in their relationship without explicitly stating the details of their disagreement. This shift is particularly evident during a key moment in their lengthy conversation when the girl asks a crucial question *"Would you do something for me now?" "I'd do anything for you." "Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?"*

She requests the man to stop talking, emphasizing the strained dynamic between them (Laura (2018:1). The use of GAs in HLWEs helps to convey a sense of intricacy in the characters' thoughts and actions. The existing literature on the use of GAs in Hemingway's HLWEs indicates that these adjectives play a role in creating ambiguity and allusion in the story.

The study looks at how Hemingway's use of GAs reflects the characters' attitudes and feelings toward the circumstances they find themselves in, how it establishes a particular mood or atmosphere, and how it communicates the story's theme and more significant societal issues. This will help the reader comprehend and appreciate Hemingway's literary technique while also shedding light on the complex ways in which language can be used to affect and convey meaning to the reader.

#### **4. Methodology and Material**

##### **4.1 Method of Analysis**

The method which is adopted to conduct the analysis of the use of GAs in the story HLWEs is based on the mixing of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The merging of quantitative and qualitative data in the analysis of the GAs in this story can enrich understanding by offering a thorough insight into texts. The quantitative analysis provides tools for statistical investigation. However, the full description of textual effects cannot be captured solely through quantitative analysis, as interpretation depends on the actions of individuals. Combining textual quantitative investigation with qualitative content analysis may result in a vigorous interpretative process. This combined approach is intended to enable a comprehensive assessment of the use of GAs in HLWEs, through qualitative analysis, while statistical data extracted from quantitative analysis can strengthen the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the investigation.

The following steps illustrate the framework of the method.

- i. Indicating the frequency of the use and the dispersion of the GAs in *HLWEs*.
- ii. Analyzing the context in which the GAs are used. This can involve examining the surrounding text to understand how the adjectives contribute to the overall meaning and tone of the story.

- iii. Categorizing the GAs according to their function. For example, some adjectives may be used to describe physical attributes of the setting, while others may be used to convey the characters' emotions or attitudes.
- iv. Drawing up conclusions about the significance of the use of GAs in the story. This can involve discussing the implications of Hemingway's writing style, and how the use of GAs contributes to the broader themes explored in the story.

The context in which the GAs are used is also important to consider. For example, the "white elephants" in the title and in the story are described as *huge*, emphasizing their size and the characters' anxiety about their presence. Besides, the use of GAs in HLWEs contributes to the story's unique style and meaning. By carefully analyzing the material of these adjectives and their context, we can gain a deeper understanding of the characters, their emotions, and the broader themes and ideas explored in the story.

### 4.3 Results

The recurring use of GAs is outlined in Table 1 and Figure 1 below. The data presented in the table were processed from 'Wordsmith', a ('Windows software for finding word patterns', which was published by Lexical Analysis Software and Oxford University Press since 1996).

GAs used in the Story	Overall number of words in the Story	Frequency of GAs	frequency of GAs per 1000 words	Dispersion
fine	6541	8	6.42	0.537
big	6541	3	1.22	0.299
lovely	6541	2	0.46	0
happy	6541	4	0.61	0.244
simple	6541	5	0.76	0.328
bright	6541	5	0.76	0.579
hot	6541	2	0.31	0
better	6541	2	0.31	0
long	6541	11	1.68	0.727
<b>Overall</b>	<b>6541</b>	<b>42</b>		

Table 1. Frequency of the use of GAs in Ernest Hemingway's 'HLWEs'

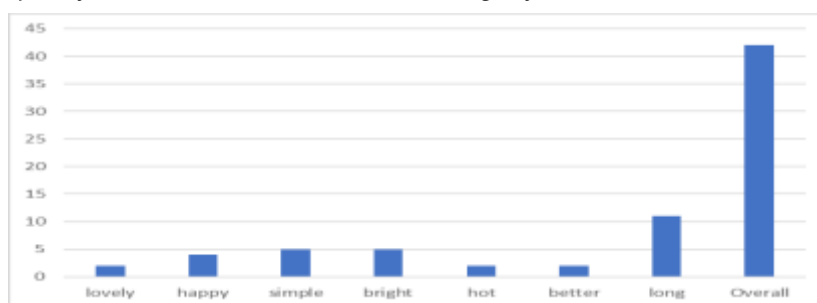


Figure 1. Frequency of the use of GAs in Ernest Hemingway's 'HLWEs'

Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrate the distribution of the gradable adjectives in HLWEs, highlighting that the adjective 'long' holds the foremost position with eleven instances of usage. This high frequency underscores the theme of prolonged deliberation and the characters' struggle with time and decision-making. The frequent repetition of 'long' creates a feeling of time dragging, highlighting the weight of the decisions confronting the man and the women, and the enduring uncertainty that accompanies their process of making decisions. The next most frequent adjective in the text after "long" is "fine," which appears eight times. This adjective stands out because it hides deeper tensions and conflicts in the story by projecting an air of acceptance or contentment. Its frequent usage gives the relationships between the characters more depth by implying that they are striving to keep up a façade of normalcy despite underlying inner anguish. The adjective 'simple' appears five times, reflecting a desire for clarity and uncomplicated solutions within the story. This repetition highlights the characters' longing for straightforward resolutions to their main problem i.e. the abortion operation. Similarly, 'bright' is used five times, symbolizing moments of hope or optimism amidst the challenge that the two characters face. Its recurrence emphasizes the contrast between external appearances and internal struggles, contributing to the characters' inner conflicts. 'Happy' and 'big' each occur four and three times, respectively, in the story. 'Happy' conveys the characters' yearning for joy and satisfaction, while 'big' might feature the significance of the decision they face. These adjectives may help the readers better understand the characters' feelings and aims by adding depth to their perception experiences. The adjectives 'hot,' 'better,' and 'lovely' appear 2 times each, contributing to the story's atmosphere and character dynamics. 'Hot' conveys intensity and passion, 'better' suggests a desire for improvement or favorable outcomes, and 'lovely' hints at passing moments of beauty amidst the challenges faced by the characters.

The frequency of GAs per 1000 words in the story is also shown in Table 1 above. This information is visualized in Figure 2 below.

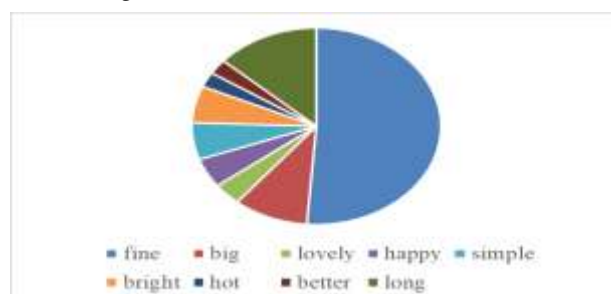


Figure 2. The frequency of Gradable Adjectives (GAs) per 1000 words

Table 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate that the frequency of GAs per 1000 words varies significantly, providing an observation on their thematic roles. The adjective 'fine' dominates with 6.42 occurrences per 1000 words, indicating a deliberate emphasis on precision and nuanced description throughout the narrative. Conversely, 'hot' and 'better' are used sparingly, each appearing only 0.31 times per 1000 words, suggesting their selective deployment to convey specific aspects such as temperature or comparative improvements. 'Long' stands out at 1.68 occurrences per 1000 words, pointing to thematic explorations of duration or elongated states within the story. Other adjectives like 'big,' 'lovely,' 'happy,' 'simple,' and 'bright' fall within the range of 0.46 to 0.67 occurrences per 1000 words, indicating their occasional but impactful use to evoke imagery, emotions, or thematic nuances. This statistical distribution underscores Hemingway's strategic use of GAs to craft an allusive story, elevating the reader's experience and contributing to the story's depth.

Figure 4, based on Table 1, illustrates the range of dispersion of GAs in the story, providing a visual representation of how these adjectives are distributed throughout the narrative.

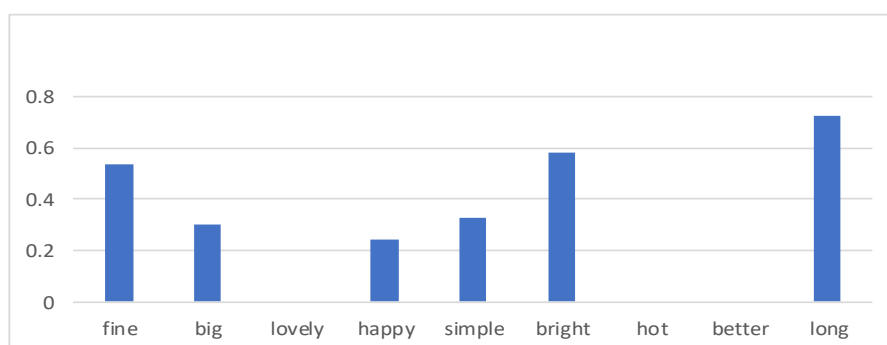
Figure 4. Range of the dispersion of GAs in *HLWEs*

Figure 4 shows that the dispersion of GAs presents that these adjectives are inconsistently deployed throughout the story. 'Fine' appears with a deployment rate of 0.537, suggesting its consistent but not overwhelming use. 'Big' is less frequent at 0.277, indicating its selective but impactful deployment to emphasize size or importance in specific contexts. The dispersion of adjectives such as 'lovely,' 'hot,' 'better,' and 'happy' in the text doesn't show any significant amount, emphasizing their partial relevance to the themes being discussed. 'Simple' appears 0.328 times, likely utilized to underscore clarity or openness in character interactions or



descriptions. 'Bright' stands out with a deployment level of 0.579, indicating its significant use to describe intelligence, clarity, or brightness. 'Long' is also used strategically with a frequency of 0.727, possibly to depict duration or extended aspects within the story. This dispersion could potentially contribute to enhancing the story's imagery, character development, and thematic elements throughout the entire text.

#### 4.4 Discussion

The analysis of GAs in Ernest Hemingway's HLWEs provides valuable insights into the story's themes and writing style. Firstly, these adjectives contribute significantly to the story's ambiguity. Hemingway's use of adjectives with varying interpretations adds layers of complexity, allowing readers to interpret the story's themes in diverse ways. This aligns with Hemingway's "iceberg theory," which advocates for implying meaning rather than stating it outright. Secondly, these adjectives paint a vivid picture of the story's setting and characters. They add depth by conveying both physical and perception weight, highlighting the complexity of the characters' circumstances. Additionally, they evoke a sense of isolation and emptiness, reflecting the perception distance between the characters. Lastly, the use of GAs reinforces the story's themes of loneliness and uncertainty. They underscore the characters' vulnerability and unease, emphasizing the challenge of decision-making and the fear of the unknown. Through these adjectives, Hemingway creates tension and urgency that propel the narrative forward.

Augmenting the investigation of GAs in HLWEs would benefit from a thorough exploration of how these adjectives are used in the characters' conversations throughout the story. This method entails closely examining some examples of each adjective within its specific context, showing the relevant dialogue where it is used, and then conducting an investigation of its role and impact.

Long

*"The hills of the valley of the Ebro were long and white"*

Hemingway's HLWEs begins with the description of the hills as "*long and white*," and the word "*long*" has multiple functions. It vividly describes the expansive landscape, setting the stage for the story. Beyond its literal meaning, '*long*' also hints at the drawn-out nature of the characters' situation and the complex decisions they face. This word slightly suggests the extended

conversations and uncertainties that will unfold, contributing to the story's themes of time, hesitation, and the weight of choices. 'Long' may not only describe the physical scenery but also predicts the thematic exploration of time and emotions throughout the story.

- *"The lines of the rails were long and straight."*

The gradable adjective "long" is employed to characterize both the train tracks and the journey they represent, hinting at a sense of prolonged duration, ongoing continuity, and possibly a challenging pathway ahead.

- *"Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe." "Oh, cut it out."*

In this example, the word 'long' conveys a sense of anticipation or waiting over an extended period. It suggests that the speaker has been eagerly expecting certain things, such as absinthe a green liqueur which is flavored with wormwood, anise, and other aromatic herbs and commercial production of which is banned in many countries for health concerns. The use of 'long' emphasizes the duration of the waiting period and the intensity of the speaker's desire or expectation, adding depth to the statement.

Fine

- *"You started it," the girl said. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time." "Well, let's try and have a fine time." "All right. I was trying."*

This discussion reveals a delicate negotiation of emotions and expectations between the characters. The girl initially expresses her enjoyment with *"I was having a fine time,"* indicating a positive perception state or at least a desire to maintain a positive atmosphere. However, the man's response, *"Well, let's try and have a fine time,"* suggests a subtle shift in tone, perhaps implying a need to improve or restore the mood.

The girl's agreement with *"All right. I was trying"* reflects a willingness to comply or adapt to the man's suggestion, even if it may not entirely align with her initial sentiment. This exchange underscores the complex interplay of emotions, communication strategies, and power dynamics within their relationship.

- *"Do you feel better?" he asked. "I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."*

In this dialogue, the adjective "fine" is used to convey a sense of well-being or normalcy. The character responds that they feel "fine," indicating that they are not experiencing any issues or problems. The word "fine" here suggests a state of health and perception stability, contrasting with the earlier question about feeling better, which implies a previous concern or discomfort.

Bright

*"All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn't that bright?"*

*"That was bright".*

*"The girl smiled brightly at the woman, to thank her. "I'd better take the bags over to the other side of the station,"*

The repeated use of the GA 'bright' serves several purposes. Initially, it conveys a sense of cleverness when one character remarks, "Wasn't that bright?" in response to an observation about the mountains resembling white elephants. This usage emphasizes quick thinking and perceptiveness. The subsequent affirmation, "That was bright," reinforces the notion of intelligence. Furthermore, 'bright' is employed to describe the girl's smile, indicating cheerfulness and gratitude, which contrasts with the underlying tension in the story. Lastly, its metaphorical use when discussing taking action with the bags symbolizes a clear, practical approach, suggesting a decisive attitude.

Big

- Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway. "Yes. Two big ones."

This brief talk is rich in implications that add depth to the characters' dynamics and the story's themes. The woman's question, "Big ones?" reflects her engagement with the man's statement about having "two big ones," which likely refers to the beers they are ordering. On the surface, this exchange seems straightforward, focusing on the size of the drinks they are ordering. However, the use of the term "big ones" can also carry metaphorical weight, symbolizing larger issues or challenges that the characters are facing. It could allude to the weightiness of their conversation, the magnitude of their decisions, or the complexity of their relationship. This ambiguity invites readers to consider deeper layers of meaning beyond the literal conversation about drinks. The woman's question from the doorway also suggests a sense of distance or separation between the characters. She is not physically with the man, indicating a potential perception or relational distance between them. This spatial separation could mirror the

perception distance and communication barriers that exist within their relationship, adding to the story's atmosphere of tension and uncertainty.

Lovely

- *"They're lovely bags."*

"Lovely" is used to describe the bags, suggesting their size and possibly the weight of the decision or burden they represent.

- *"They're lovely hills,"* she said. "They don't really look like white elephants."

The adjective "lovely" is used here to describe the hills initially, but its meaning becomes appealing as the story progresses, indicating something superficially attractive but perhaps concealing deeper complexities or difficulties.

Happy

- "And you think then we'll be all right and be happy." "I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it." "So have I," said the girl. "And afterward they were all so happy." "Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple." "And you really want to?"

In this dialogue, the use of the gradable adjective "happy" shows how the characters view their future happiness. At first, they hope that a specific decision, which is the operation of abortion, will bring happiness, as seen in phrases like "be all right and be happy" and "afterward they were all so happy." However, there's also uncertainty and conditions attached, like "if you don't want to you don't have to" and "if I do it you'll be happy." This implies that happiness isn't guaranteed but depends on choices and situations. This use of "happy" adds depth to their perception journey, showing their desire for happiness while recognizing the challenges in attaining it.

Simple

- "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

"Simple" is used by the man to describe the operation, suggesting a lack of complexity or seriousness, which contrasts with the girl's more concealed view of the situation

Hot

- *"It's pretty hot,"* the man said. *"Let's drink beer."*

The man's remark, "It's pretty hot," suggests a casual response to the weather, but it also hints at a broader atmosphere of discomfort or tension beyond the literal heat. This could symbolize the perception heat between the characters or the weightiness of their conversation. His suggestion to drink beer, accompanied by the Spanish phrase "Dos cervezas," (Two beers) introduces an element of cultural involvement and escape. Beer often represents relaxation or a temporary reprieve from reality, indicating a desire to ease the tension or avoid confronting deeper issues directly. The use of Spanish adds a layer of authenticity to the setting and characters' experiences.

Better

- *"Do you feel better?" he asked. "I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."*

The use of "better" in the dialogue brings in a feeling of uncertainty and underlying meanings. It's a flexible word that allows for different interpretations, giving readers space to deduce the exact emotions or issues being discussed. This ambiguity enriches the conversation, encouraging readers to inquire deeper into understanding the characters' inner thoughts and emotions.

The GAs in HLWEs can be categorized based on the physical descriptions and perception tones they refer. Some adjectives are used to describe the physical attributes of the setting, such as the *long* line of hills and the *white* color of the hills. These adjectives contribute to the story's sense of place and help to establish the mood and tone of the narrative. Other GAs are used to convey the characters' perceptions and attitudes. For example, the *bright* sun and the "hot" day create a sense of discomfort and tension for the characters, while the "big" luggage suggests the weight of their burden and the difficult decision they are facing. These adjectives contribute to the story's sense of ambiguity and understatement, allowing the reader to interpret the characters' emotions and motivations in different ways. The GAs in this story can be classified based on their purpose, as demonstrated in Table 2 below:

Adjective	Meaning	Relevant Instances in the Story	Note
Fine	Perception	"I was being amused. I was having a fine time." "Well, let's try and have a fine time." "Well, let's try and have a fine time." "Do you feel better?" he asked. "I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."	Describing perception state and perception stability
Big	Physical	"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway. "Yes. Two big ones."	Likely referring to the beers they are ordering.
	Perception		Metaphorically used to symbolize the challenges ahead.
Lovely	Physical	"They're lovely bags." "They're lovely hills,"	Describing the size of the bags and the hills
Happy		"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy." "I know we will."	Suggests a positive perception state
Simple	Physical	"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig."	Refers to the straightforwardness of an operation.
Hot	Physical	"It's pretty hot," the man said. "Let's drink beer."	Response to the weather
	Perception		Symbolizing perception of heat between the man and the woman
Better	Perception	"Do you feel better?" he asked. "I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."	Evoking a sense of ambiguity
Long	Physical	"The lines of the rails were long and straight."	Describing the train track
	Perception		Hinting at a persist challenging path ahead.
	Physical	"The hills of the valley of the Ebro were long and white"	Describing the expansive landscape, setting and scenery
	Perception		Hinting at the protracted nature of the characters' situation and the complex decisions they face.

Table 2. Categorization of the GAs based on their meanings in HLWEs

### 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the use of GAs in Ernest Hemingway's HLWEs is a critical aspect of the story's style and themes. Through his careful selection and deployment of these adjectives, Hemingway vividly depicts the characters in the story, capturing their emotions and highlighting the case of their situation. The use of GAs contributes to the story's sense of ambiguity and understatement, allowing for multiple interpretations and creating a sense of complexity that reflects Hemingway's "iceberg theory." The adjectives also create a sense of physical and perception weight, emphasizing the difficulty and complexity of the characters' situation and creating a clear and detailed portrait of the story's setting.

The use of such adjectives reinforces the themes of isolation and doubt within the story. The adjectives create a sense of discomfort and tension that reflects the characters' anxiety, which

accentuates the challenges of making decisions and the worry surrounding uncertainty. The use of GAs in the story provides insight into the characters' feelings and the challenging choices they confront.

The analysis of GAs in HLWEs highlights the importance of these adjectives in painting an expressive picture of the characters and their circumstances. Hemingway's selection of these adjectives contribute to the atmosphere, creating a sense of ambiguity that allows for different interpretations and emphasizes the difficulty of making decisions amidst uncertainty.

As a final point, the use of GAs encourages the readers to interpret the story themselves. With the characters not explicitly stating their intentions or emotions, readers may rely on these adjectives to deduce the perception of the atmosphere. This active engagement enhances the reading experience, making it more interesting and enjoyable.

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