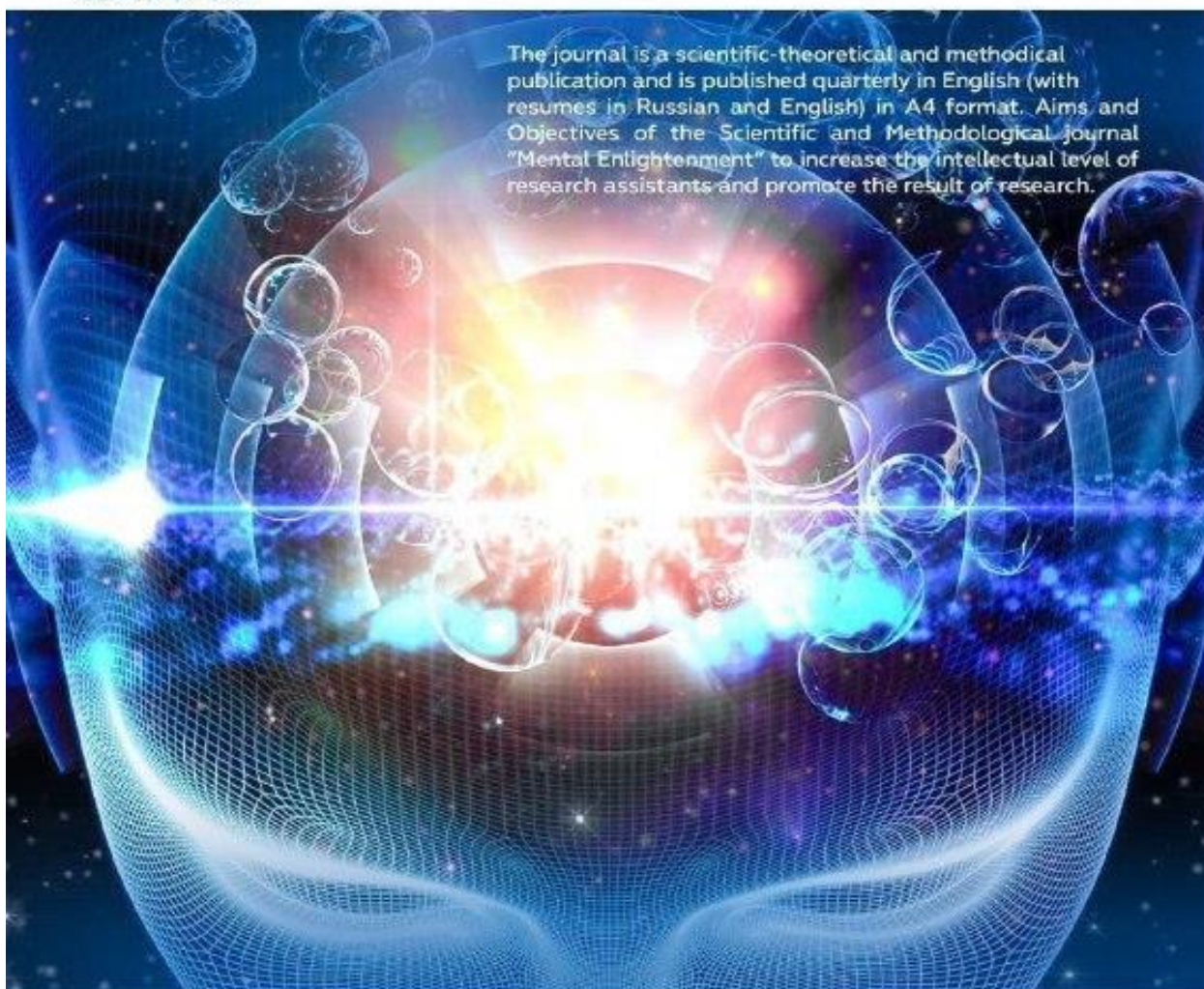


# MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC-METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL



Jizzakh State  
Pedagogical Institute

ISSN: 2181-6131



The journal is a scientific-theoretical and methodical publication and is published quarterly in English (with resumes in Russian and English) in A4 format. Aims and Objectives of the Scientific and Methodological Journal "Mental Enlightenment" to increase the intellectual level of research assistants and promote the result of research.



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***DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF ADVERBS IN LINGUISTICS***

***Anora Jabbarova***

***PhD, Head of Department***

***E-mail address: [jabbarova.anora86@gmail.com](mailto:jabbarova.anora86@gmail.com)***

***Nazarkosimova Ozoda***

***Student of Foreign Languages Faculty***

***Jizzakh state Pedagogical University***

***E-mail address: [nazarkosimova@mail.ru](mailto:nazarkosimova@mail.ru)***

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## DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF ADVERBS IN LINGUISTICS

Anora Jabbarova

PhD, Head of Department

E-mail address: [jabbarova.anora86@gmail.com](mailto:jabbarova.anora86@gmail.com)

Nazarkosimova Ozoda

Student of Foreign Languages Faculty

Jizzakh State Pedagogical University

E-mail address: [nazarkosimova@mail.ru](mailto:nazarkosimova@mail.ru)

**Abstract:** Adverbs are highly complex and significantly less studied than other major lexical categories such as nouns or verbs. The purpose of this article is to devote some much needed attention to this part of speech and to examine and compare adverbs of degree. For our research we took three adverbs hardly, barely, and scarcely. Though these adverbs are generally considered synonymous, they have a slight difference from each other and they are not interchangeable in every possible context. Each of the adverbs occurs with different words, in different registers and contexts, and forms different collocations. To determine the differences, we pay our attention mainly on the meaning and usage of each of the adverbs and on the words they occur with.

**Key words:** adverbs, words, concept, classification, intensity, modifier, intensifiers, degrees, scale, adverbial, viewpoint, subgroup.

### INTRODUCTION

Biber [3: 552] points out that “many adverbs have meaning that vary with context of use”, in other words, “the meaning of an adverb is often context-dependent”. As Chalker argues, “since adverbs as a whole are so complicated, there is no consensus as to what the broad categories should be” [6: 190]. Various grammar books agree on the category of manner, place and time. However, they differ in

further classification. Biber add the category of adverbs of degree, additive/restrictive adverbs, adverbs of stance and linking adverbs [3: 554-59]. Chalker supplements focusing adverbs, intensifying adverbs, sentence adverbs, and connectors [6: 194-95]. Leech determines, apart from the three main categories, the adverbs of degree, frequency, length of time, comment and attitude, viewpoint, adding and limiting adverbs, and linking adverbs [14: 20]. Last but not least, Alexander [2: 122] adds intensifiers, viewpoint adverbs and connectives, adverbs of degree, focus, and frequency.

Quirk [17: 479] provide a slightly different classification, where adverbs of space substitute for adverbs of place and where there is no category of manner. They propose these categories: adverbs of space, time, process, respect, contingency, modality, and degree [17: 479].

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

According to Biber, adverbs of degree “describe the extent to which a characteristic holds. They can be used to mark that the extent or degree is either greater or less than usual or than that of something else in the neighboring discourse. They occur as both adverbials and modifiers” [3: 554]. In a similar way, Leech and Svartvik maintain that these adverbs “have a hightening or lowering effect on some part of the sentence” [14: 200].

There is no unified classification of adverbs of degree. Therefore, we give account of some of the concepts of categorization presented by various grammarians.

Biber et al. [3: 554-556] divide degree adverbs into two categories:

1. amplifiers/intensifiers - degree adverbs that increase intensity; they indicate either degrees on a scale (e.g. *more, very, so*) or an endpoint on a scale (e.g. *totally, absolutely*)
  2. diminishers/downtoners - degree adverbs which scale down the effect of the modified item; as with intensifiers, many indicate degrees on a scale (e.g. *less, slightly*)
- Huddleston and Pullum [9: 721-24] present a more detailed classification:

1. maximal subgroup - indicates a degree at the top end of the scale; suggests either the completion of an accomplishment (e.g. *completely, entirely*) or extremely high degree of a gradable property (e.g. *absolutely, thoroughly*)
2. multal subgroup - covers a range on the scale from above the midpoint to near the top end (e.g. *profoundly, greatly*)
3. moderate subgroup - e.g. *moderately, partially*
4. paucal subgroup - e.g. *a bit, a little*
5. minimal subgroup - the adverbs are non-affirmative or negative (e.g. *barely, hardly, scarcely*)
6. approximating subgroup - e.g. *almost, nearly*
7. relative subgroup - do not identify some constant area of the scale but quantifies the degree relative to some other situation (e.g. *enough, sufficiently*)

Quirk et al. [17: 485-86] suggest that there are three ‘subroles’ of degree adverbs:

1. amplification - asserting a generalized high degree (e.g. *increasingly*)
2. diminution - asserting a generalized low degree (e.g. *a little*)
3. measure - without implication that the degree is notably high or low (e.g. *sufficiently*)

Though *barely, hardly, and scarcely* mostly appear as a subgroup of adverbs of degree, it is important to point out that some grammarians [6: 201; 18: 285] place them in a separate group. According to Chalker, the adverbs fall into group of intensifiers [6: 201]. Sinclair [18: 214] also creates a separate category and labels the adverbs ‘broad negatives’. The most convenient concept of classification for my thesis is provided by Quirk [17: 589-90], who place the adverbs into group of intensifiers, specifically minimizers. I deal with this particular categorization in the next subchapter.

As Quirk [17: 589] maintain, intensifiers “are broadly concerned with the semantic category of degree”. They emphasize that “the term ‘intensifier’ does not refer only to means whereby an *increase* in intensification is expressed. Rather, an

intensifying subjunct indicates a point on an abstractly conceived intensity scale; and the point indicated may be relatively low or relatively high” [17: 589]. Quirk [17, 589-90] distinguish two subgroups of intensifiers:

1. amplifiers - maximizers (e.g. *completely*)
  - boosters (e.g. *very much*)
2. downtoners - approximators (e.g. *almost*)
  - compromisers (e.g. *more or less*)
  - diminishers (e.g. *partly*)
  - minimizers (e.g. *hardly*)

Furthermore, Quirk et al. point out that “amplifiers scale upwards from an assumed norm; downtoners have a lowering effect, usually scaling downwards from an assumed norm” [17, 590]. From now on, I will concentrate only on the group of downtoners, as the adverbs *barely*, *hardly*, and *scarcely* fall into this category.

As has been already stated, downtoners “have a generally lowering effect” and they are classified into four groups [17: 597-98]:

1. approximators - serve to express an approximation (e.g. *almost*, *nearly*)
2. compromisers - have only a slight lowering effect (e.g. *kind of*, *sort of*)
3. diminishers - scale downwards and roughly mean ‘to a small extent’ (e.g. *slightly*, *quite*)
4. minimizers - are negative maximizers and roughly mean ‘(not) to any extent’ (e.g. *barely*, *hardly*, *scarcely*)

Quirk et al. further divide the minimizers into negatives (e.g. *barely*, *hardly*, *a little*) and nonassertives (e.g. *in the least*, *in the slightest*, *at all*, *a bit*) [17: 598]. They argue that the negatives cannot be negated [17, 600].

Furthermore, Quirk et al. state that “the minimizers differ from other downtoners in providing a modification towards a version that is more strictly true rather than a denial of the truth value of what has been said” as in *I can barely understand him* ( - in fact *I can’t understand him*) [17, 599]. As far as the syntactic

features of downtoners are concerned, minimizer negatives cannot lie within the scope of clause interrogation and negation [17: 601]. As for the position of *barely*, *hardly*, and *scarcely*, Quirk et al. suggest that they tend to be restricted to *M* (*He could hardly be described as an expert*) or *iM* (*He hardly could be described as an expert*) position, however it is also emphasized that *iM* position is unacceptable to many people [17, 602].

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Synonymy is considered one of the ‘sense relations’, or in other words, “the meaning relations that hold within the vocabulary of a language between words themselves” [12: 64]. Linsky states that “two linguistic expressions are synonymous if and only if they have the same meaning”. Harris focuses on the relationship between form and meaning and suggests that “there may be cases in which a difference of form between two expressions is not accompanied by a difference of meaning: in such cases we may speak of synonymous expressions” [7: 6]. In a similar way, Jackson claims that “synonymy deals with sameness of meaning, more than one word having the same meaning, or alternatively the same meaning being expressed by more than one word” [11: 64].

Bolinger and Sears argue that if two words are synonyms, it means that “they are close enough to allow the speaker a choice between them in a significant number of contexts”. Jackson goes even further when he suggests that “two words are synonyms if they can be used interchangeably in all sentence contexts”. Thus, it is implied that “the measure of synonymy is replaceability” (Bolinger and Sears 1981: 123). Ullmann asserts that “very few words are completely synonymous in the sense of being interchangeable in any context without the slightest alteration in objective meaning, feeling-tone or evocative value” [21: 142]. In this respect, Jackson [11: 66-67] proposes two types of synonymy:

1. strict synonymy - interchangeable in all contexts
2. loose synonymy - pairs of words that can substitute for each other in a wide range of contexts but not necessarily absolutely.

Lyons [16: 60-61] divides synonyms into three groups:



1. near synonyms - expressions that are more or less similar, but not identical, in meaning
2. partial synonyms - they meet the criterion of identity of meaning, however, for various reasons fail to meet the conditions of what is generally referred to as absolute synonyms
3. absolute synonyms - all their meanings are identical
  - they are synonymous in all contexts (they have the same collocational ranges)
  - they are semantically equivalent on all dimensions of meaning, descriptive and non-descriptive.

According to Ullmann [21:142], “when we see different words we instinctively assume that there must also be some difference in meaning, and in the vast majority of cases there is in fact a distinction even though it may be difficult to formulate”. Harris [7:14-15] presents Collinson’s list of nine possible differences between synonyms:

1. one term is more general and inclusive in its applicability, another is more specific and exclusive, e.g. *refuse/reject*
2. one term is more intense than another, e.g. *repudiate/refuse*
3. one term is more highly charged with emotion than another, e.g. *reject/decline*
4. one term may imply moral approbation or censure where another is neutral, e.g. *thrifty/economical*
5. one term is more “professional” than another, e.g. *domicile/house*
6. one term belongs more to the written language, it is more literary than another, e.g. *passing/death*
7. one term is more colloquial than another, e.g. *turn down/refuse*
8. one term is more local or dialectal than another, e.g. *to feu/to let*
9. one term belongs to child-talk, is used by children or in talking to children, e.g. *daddy/father*



Corpus linguistics is “the study of language on the basis of text corpora” [1: 1]. As Bowker and Pearson point out, it is “an approach or a methodology for studying language use. It is an empirical approach that involves studying examples of what people have actually said, rather than hypothesizing about what they might or should say” [5: 9]. Aijmer and Altenberg [1: 4-6] state that corpus linguistics is useful for comparing regional and stylistic varieties, for studying linguistic variation and the stylistic properties of texts and genres, for investigation of prosodic phenomena or the functions of particular discourse items, and in areas such as historical linguistics and dialectology.

According to Sinclair [18: 171], a corpus is “a collection of naturally-occurring language text, chosen to characterize a state or variety of a language. Similarly, Bowker and Pearson describe a corpus as “a large collection of authentic texts that have been gathered in electronic form according to a specific set of criteria” [2002: 9]. The corpus gives information about the occurrence of words, their frequency in different registers and collocations they create. Sinclair [18: 171-72] presents two kinds of corpora:

1. sample corpus - a finite collection of texts; once a sample corpus is established,

it is not added to or changed in any way

2. monitor corpus - a corpus which re-uses language text that has been prepared

in machine-readable form for other purposes - for typesetters of newspapers, magazines, books, word-processors; and the spoken language mainly for legal or bureaucratic reasons.

According to the dictionary definitions, the adverb *barely* is used primarily for saying that something just happens or is accomplished but “only with great difficulty or effort” [LDCE: 105] as in *She was barely able to stand* [OALDCE: 105]. Furthermore, we employ *barely* when we want to say that something happened but it almost did not. In other words, *barely* indicates that “something almost does not happen or exist, or is almost not possible” [MED: 105] as

OALDCE demonstrates in the example *She barely acknowledged his presence* [105]. Analysing the entries, I found another meaning of the adverb *barely*. It can be found in all the three consulted dictionaries. Evidently, *barely* is connected with describing a sequence of events. It is applied when we want to emphasize that “something happened only a very short time before something else” [MED: 105] as in the sentence *Graham had barely finished his coffee when Henry returned* [LDCE: 105]. Last but not least, there is one more situation in which *barely* is employed. We can often find this adverb before numbers and amounts of something. In this sense, *barely* has a function of “emphasizing how small an amount is” [MED: 105]. Examples of such usage are *He was barely 20 years old and already running his own company* [OALDCE: 105] and *The party had been in government for barely seven months* [LDCE: 105]. Apart from the definitions, OALDCE also points out that “*hardly* and *scarcely* can be used to mean ‘almost never’, but *barely* is not used in this way” [680].

As for the adverb *hardly*, there are some common characteristics as well as differences from the adverb *barely*. According to the dictionary entries, the primary meaning of *hardly* is ‘almost not’. We can find this adverb in sentences which indicate that “something is almost not true or almost does not happen at all” [MED: 687] such as *Alice was so busy she hardly noticed the days pass by* [MED: 687]. The adverb *hardly* is, as well as *barely*, employed for describing the succession of two events. As MED suggests, it is applied to say that “something had only just happened when something else happened” (687). This is clearly visible in the sentence *She had hardly arrived when she started talking about leaving again* [MED: 687] or, in a more formal style, *Hardly had she spoken than she regretted it bitterly* [OALDCE: 681]. The dictionary definitions provide us with another meaning of the adverb *hardly*, which suggests that “it is obvious that something is not true, not possible, not surprising etc [MED: 687] as in *It’s hardly surprising she was fired; she never did any work* [OALDCE: 681]. According to LDCE, “when you are suggesting that the person you are speaking to will agree with you”, *hardly* means ‘not’ in this sense [740]. Thus, we may see that *hardly*

can stand for both ‘almost not’ and ‘not’. One of the dictionaries [MED] speaks about another context in which *hardly* can be used. In British spoken language, “when you think someone has suggested something that is impossible” [MED: 687] and you say *hardly*, it means ‘no’ as in ‘*Are you hung over?*’ ‘*Hardly! I don’t even drink!*’ [MED: 687]. Furthermore, according to OALDCE, *hardly* is employed in language to “emphasize that it is difficult to do something” (680) as in *I can hardly keep my eyes open* [OALDCE: 680].

Analysing the dictionary entries of the adverb *scarcely*, we may see that this adverb is employed in three different situations, which are stated in all the three entries. Apparently, *scarcely* is primarily used to imply “almost not or almost none at all” [LDCE: 1463]. An example of such usage is *There was scarcely any traffic* [MED: 1325] or *It was getting dark and she could scarcely see in front of her* [LDCE: 1463]. As the dictionaries indicate, *scarcely* is used, as well as both *barely* and *hardly*, to describe a sequence of two events. In this sense, it is employed “to say that something happens immediately after something else happens” [OALDCE: 1303]. We may clearly see it in the example *He had scarcely sat down when there was a knock at the door* [LDCE: 1463]. Last but not least, we can also apply *scarcely* when we want to state that something that has been suggested “is not at all reasonable or likely” [OALDCE: 1303] and that it is “certainly not true or possible” [MED: 1325]. In this sense, *scarcely* means ‘certainly, definitely not’ as in *Early March is scarcely the time of year for sailing* [LDCE: 1463] or in *It was scarcely an occasion for laughter* [OALDCE: 1303]. Comparing the definitions of the adverbs *barely*, *hardly*, and *scarcely*, we may say that these adverbs are equal in some of their meanings. However, it is also obvious that the adverbs slightly differ in some sense and are used in different situations. First, I will deal with the meanings all the three adverbs share. We can see that all of them signify ‘almost not’ or ‘almost none’. It is useful to compare the examples of each of the adverbs.

*There was barely any smell* [OALDCE: 105]

*There was hardly any traffic* [LDCE: 740]

*There was scarcely any traffic* [MED: 1325]

It is interesting that two different dictionaries demonstrate a particular meaning using the same sentence, only with different adverbs. This proves the equality of the adverbs, as far as this meaning is concerned.

Furthermore, all the adverbs are employed in language to “emphasize that something happens immediately after a previous action” [LDCE: 105]. They are all connected with sequence of events.

*I had barely started speaking when he interrupted me* [OALDCE: 105]

*We had hardly sat down to supper when the phone rang* [OALDCE: 681]

*We had scarcely driven a mile when the car broke down* [MED: 1325]

These two meanings are shared by all the three adverbs. Nevertheless, there are some additional meanings, which are associated only with one or two of the adverbs. According to the consulted dictionaries, the adverbs *hardly* and *scarcely* can indicate that “something is not at all reasonable or likely” [OALDCE: 1303]. They both mean ‘certainly, definitely not’. Evidently, the adverb *barely* is not very common in this sense.

*This is hardly the place to discuss the matter* [LDCE: 740-41]

*It was scarcely an occasion for laughter* [OALDCE: 1303]

On the other hand, it seems that only *barely* is associated with numbers and amounts of something, “emphasizing how small an amount is” [MED: 105] as in *Barely 50% of the population voted* [OALDCE: 105]. As for *hardly* and *scarcely*, there is no mention about highlighting quantity or amount in the consulted entries. Another meaning which is connected with exerting effort is obviously valid only for *barely* and *hardly*. These two adverbs both express that “it is difficult to do something” [OALDCE: 680] and that something happens but “only with great difficulty or effort” [LDCE: 105]. No connection between *scarcely* and expending effort was mentioned in the consulted dictionaries.

*She was very old and barely able to walk* [LDCE: 105]

*I can hardly keep my eyes open* [OALDCE: 680]

Furthermore, the adverb *hardly* is used in special context. As MED suggests, it means ‘no’, “when you think someone has suggested something that is impossible” [687] as in ‘*Are you hung over?*’ ‘*Hardly! I don’t even drink!*’ [MED: 687]. We can find this kind of usage in British spoken language.

It is important to focus also on the collocations and common grammatical patterns mentioned in the entries. Comparing them, we may see that there is one grammatical pattern, which is connected with *hardly* and *scarcely*, but not with *barely*. This pattern is clearly visible in the following examples.

*Hardly a month goes by without another factory closing down* [LDCE: 740]

*Scarcely a week goes by without some new scandal in the papers* [OALDCE: 1303]

Apparently, this pattern does not tend to be used with *barely*, as there is no mention of this construction in the entries of this adverb.

*Hardly* and *scarcely* also share grammatical pattern ‘hardly/scarcely...when’. This construction is related to describing two events. Though all the three adverbs can be used in this way, it seems that it is considered a common grammatical construction only when *hardly* and *scarcely* are used in this phrase. In the entries of *barely*, this construction is not highlighted as common. Swan [1980: 278] deals with this particular phrase and mentions only *hardly* and *scarcely*. Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage points out that ‘barely...when’ is not very frequent construction [1989: 165]. However, it also claims that the phrase is impeccable with *scarcely* [1989: 829] and correct and standard with *hardly* [ibid., 496].

*She had hardly sat down when the phone rang* [LDCE: 741]

*He had scarcely put the phone down when the doorbell rang* [OALDCE: 1303]

OALDCE argues that in formal, written English, the adverbs “can be placed at the beginning of the sentence and then the subject and verb are turned around [680]. According to the BNC, this inversion is associated mainly with *hardly* and *scarcely*, much less with *barely*.

Analysing the collocations of the adverbs, we can see that, unlike *barely*, both *hardly* and *scarcely* often occur with *ever* (*hardly ever*, *scarcely ever*).

Furthermore, the dictionaries show that *barely* often collocates with *enough* and the adjectives *able*, *audible*, *perceptible*, *visible* and *discernible*. In contrast to this, *hardly* often occurs with *any*, *surprising*, *expect*, *blame*, *believe*.

## CONCLUSION

Backlund points out that all the three adverbs have pessimistic colouring, however, *hardly* implies a more pessimistic frame of mind than *barely*. In other words, the negative aspect of *barely* is much weaker than that of *hardly*. It is also claimed that “*hardly* is used in more emotional contexts, to a great extent expressing failure to reach a desirable standard, whereas *scarcely* seems to occur more often in neutral collocations” . Moreover, Backlund maintains that the function of *scarcely* is to express quantity and that it is descriptive in character. As for *hardly* and *scarcely*, Crabb says that “in many cases they can be used indifferently; but where practicability predominates *hardly* seems most proper and where the idea of frequency predominates *scarcely* seems preferable” . Furthermore, Jacobson stresses that *hardly* is used for saying that a particular circumstance came close to not arising and that “*scarcely* denotes a deficient number and *barely* a minimal number of prerequisites for an occurrence or circumstance to arise” [12: 75]. He also suggests that *barely* is sometimes synonymous with *just* rather than with *hardly* [12: 266].

As the analysis of the dictionary definitions shows, the adverbs *barely*, *hardly*, and *scarcely* are equal in some of their meanings. However, it is important to point out that they are not coincident in all contexts. Therefore, these adverbs cannot be called absolute synonyms. Moreover, according to the dictionaries, each of the adverbs forms different collocations and is part of different grammatical constructions. In this respect, *hardly* and *scarcely* seem to be more similar.

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