2

5 Although adjectives are generally classified as either *gradable* or *ungradable*, some are used in both ways, often with a change in meaning. Consider these examples of the adjective *dead*.

The tiny bird had fallen from its nest and was dead. (Literal use – ungradable – a bird is either dead or alive.)
The town centre is completely dead after eight o'clock at night. (Figurative use – gradable, with degree adverb used for emphasis.)

Compare the use of *British* in these examples. Which is ungradable?

Richard is British by birth but moved to Spain 20 years ago.
Despite living in Spain, Richard remains very British in his behaviour.

6 Comment on the differences in meaning in these pairs of examples. Which pairs include a meaning that is restricted to informal use?

a I couldn't get to the market today, so we'll have to use frozen spinach instead.
It's minus 15 outside and I had to walk home – I'm absolutely frozen!

b Your glass is empty. Shall I get you another drink?
Margit's life is totally empty without him.

c Brad won't listen to me – he's being utterly impossible!
It was impossible to drive the car as all four tyres were flat.

d The crowd went absolutely insane when the band came on stage.
He was finally diagnosed as insane and remained in an institution until his death.

e Right now, Shirley feels she has an utterly bleak future ahead of her.
The house stands on a bleak, windswept moor and is very isolated.

f They eventually dished up a pretty tasteless bowl of lukewarm soup.
George's jokes in the wedding speech were fairly tasteless in my view.

7 Choose suitable suffixes from the box to make adjectives from these verbs and nouns, making any necessary changes to the base word and being careful with spelling.

EXAMPLE: adore *adorable*

-able	-ary	-ible	-ical	-ive	-ous	-some

a alternate
b caution
c collapse
d detest
e honour
f labour
g loathe
h hypocrisy
i philosophy
j repel
k tenacity
l theatre
m virtue
n volunteer