

# Negative Adjectives: Evidence from Czech

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**1. Claim.** We propose that negative adjectives (like *bad, sad, false*, etc.) involve a covert Neg-feature. We present evidence from Czech comparatives in support of this analysis.

**2. Proposal.** We take the difference between positive and negative gradable adjectives to be a difference in size: positive adjectives are the phrasal spellout of the structure in (1a), negative ones spell out the larger structure (1b), which involves an additional Neg-feature:

- (1) a.  $[_{QP} Q [_{aP} a [ \sqrt{\quad} ]]] \Rightarrow \textit{good, happy, true} \dots$   
 b.  $[_{NegP} Neg [_{QP} Q [_{aP} a [ \sqrt{\quad} ]]]] \Rightarrow \textit{bad, sad, false} \dots$

**3. The data: Czech suppletive comparatives.** The pattern we want to account for is summarised in the following table:

(2)		equative	comparative	
a.	aff	dobr-ý	lep-ší	'good-better'
b.	neg	ne-dobr-ý	ne-dobr-ejší	'bad-worse'
c.	neg	mal-ý	men-ší	'small(er)'
d.	neg+neg	ne-mal-ý	ne-men-ší	'not small(er)'

Czech has a positive adjective *dobr-ý* 'good'. The root *dobr-* 'good' has a suppletive form *lep-*, which appears in the comparative *lep-ší* 'better' (2a). There is also a derived negative adjective *ne-dobr-ý* 'bad', which is derived from *dobr-ý* 'good' through prefixation with the negative prefix *ne-* 'un' (2b). Interestingly, to derive the comparative of *ne-dobr-* 'bad', one cannot use the suppletive root (*\*ne-lep-ší*). Instead, one has to retreat to the regular root *ne-dobr-ejší* 'worse'.

The negative adjective *mal-ý* 'small' also has a suppletive comparative (*men-ší*) (2c). Negative adjectives can likewise be negated by *ne-* (2d). However, this time the suppletive form is not blocked in the comparative in the context of the negative prefix: one gets *ne-men-ší* (neg-small-er), and in fact one cannot fall back on the regular root (*\*ne-malej-ší*).

**4. Analysis.** We propose that the negative marker *ne-* in (2d) occupies a different position from the one in (2b). This is because the negative adjective *mal-ý* 'small' already incorporates a Neg-feature, so that the overt negative marker *ne* 'not' is forced to take a higher position.

- (3)  $[\textit{ne-}[\textit{mal-ý}]] = [\text{NEG} [\text{NEG BIG}]]$

This analysis is confirmed by a meaning difference between the comparative in (2b) and the one in (2d). The structural difference, which correlates with a scopal difference, is represented in (4):

- (4) a.  $[[\textit{ne-dobr-}]\textit{ejší}] = [\text{MORE} [\text{NEG GOOD}]]$  i.e. 'worse'  
 b.  $[\textit{ne-}[\textit{men-ší}]] = [\text{NEG} [\text{MORE} [\text{NEG BIG}]]]$  i.e. 'not smaller' (rather than 'bigger')

The semantics of (4a) (e.g. in 'A is *ne-dobr-ejší* 'worse' than B') is incompatible with a situation where A and B are equally bad. In contrast, if 'A is *ne-men-ší* 'not smaller' than B', the sentence is compatible with a situation where A and B are equally large. The difference crucially relies on the assumption that a negative adjective like *mal-ý* 'small' incorporates a Neg-feature, as represented in (4b), which pushes the second Neg-feature to a scopally higher position than the comparative.