Negative Adjectives: Evidence from Czech*

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1 Introduction

▷ The Czech positive gradable adjective *dobr-ý* 'good' has a suppletive stem *lep-*, which is used in the comparative *lep-ší* 'better' (see (1)).
▷ Its antonym *ne-dobr-ý* 'bad' uses the same root, yet does not have the suppletive stem in the comparative (see (2)).

(1) a. dobr-ý
good-NOM
'good'
b. lep-ší
good-CMPR
'better'

(2) a. ne-dobr-ý
NEG-good-NOM
'bad'
b. ne-dobř-ejší
NEG-good-CMPR
worse'

▷ *malý* 'small' has a suppletive stem *men-* (3).
▷ its antonym *ne-mal-ý* 'big' also makes use of the suppletive stem (4).

(3) a. mal-ý
small-NOM
'small'
b. men-ší
small-CMPR
'smaller'

(4) a. ne-mal-ý
NEG-small-NOM
'big, large'
b. ne-men-ší
NEG-small-CMPR
'bigger'

*We are very grateful to Pavel Caha, who pointed us to this data set.

▷ The aim of this talk:
- to account for the data pattern above in terms of the presence of a negative feature in negative gradable adjectives;
- to show how the presence or absence of suppletion correlates with the different scopes that negative features can take.

▷ Structure of this talk:
- Prerequisites for the analysis
- The Czech data: analysis
- Conclusion

2 Prerequisites for the analysis

2.1 Nanosyntax: general principles

▷ late (postsyntactic) insertion
▷ phrasal spellout: lexical items are inserted at the *phrasal* level (not at the level of the head)
▷ in this way, lexical items can straightforwardly spell out *sets* of syntactic features (without the need for local dislocation, fusion, merger, etc.)
▷ account for syncretism in terms of overspecification (instead of underspecification)

(5) *Superset Principle*
A lexical entry may spell out a syntactic node iff the features of the lexical entry are a superset of the features dominated by the syntactic node.

(6) *The Elsewhere Principle*
In case two rules, R_1 and R_2, can apply in an environment E, R_1 takes precedence over R_2 if it applies in a proper subset of environments compared to R_2.

▷ Suppose we have a syntactic object XP containing the features A, B, and C (as in (7)), and a lexicon as in (8):

(7) $[_{XP}$ A B C]

(8) a. </α/, [A B C D]>
b. </β/, [A B C]>
c. </γ/, [A B]>

▷ both the lexical items α and β are candidates for insertion (by the Superset Principle)
▷ (8c) is not a candidate
▷ by the Elsewhere Principle, β will be inserted, as it is a closer match for (7), blocking the insertion of α

2.2 Nanosyntax of negation

▷ languages quite often have a variety of negative markers (e.g. English *not, non-*, and *un-*)
▷ these different negative markers have different scopes (e.g. sentence negation vs constituent negation)
▷ De Clercq (2013) distinguishes four different categories of negative markers (based on their functions, semantics, scope, and differences in stackability)
  ○ T^{Neg}-markers take sentential scope, and can stack on all the others.
  ○ Foc^{Neg}-markers take scope over the untensed predicate.
  ○ $Class^{Neg}$-markers scope over the predicate term.
  ○ Q^{Neg}-markers take lowest scope and do not stack on top of any others.
▷ studying syncretisms in negative markers in a sample of nine different languages, De Clercq (2013) has found that negative markers can be arranged in a paradigm that respects the *ABA-restriction (syncretism only affects contiguous cells):

(9)

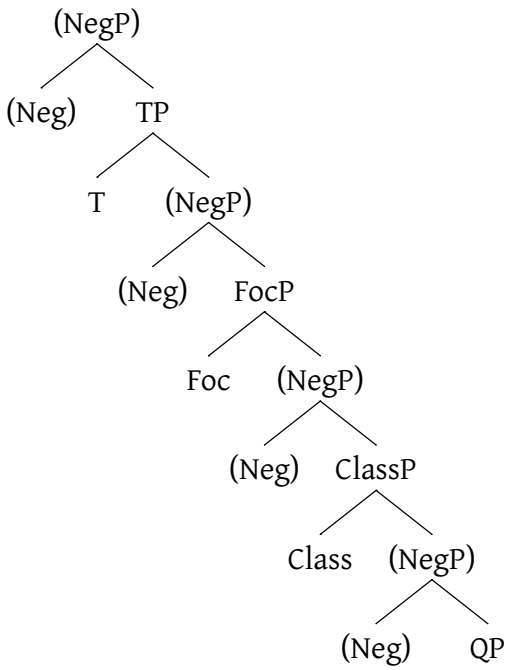
	T^{Neg}	**Foc^{Neg}**	**$Class^{Neg}$**	**Q^{Neg}**
Greek	dhen	oxi	mi	a-
English (formal)	not	not	non	un-
English (informal)	n't	not	non	un-
French (formal)	ne … pas	pas	non	iN-
French (informal)	pas	pas	non	iN-
Chinese	bù	bù	fēi	fēi
MS Arabic	laa	laa	ghayr-	ghayr-
Persian	na	na	qheyr-	qheyr-
Moroccan Arabic	ma (ši)	muši	muši	muši
Dutch	niet	niet	niet-	on-
Hungarian	nem	nem	nem	-tElEn
Czech	ne-	ne	ne-	ne-

▷ Greek does not show any syncretism, and therefore provides evidence for the existence of four different types of negation.
▷ Czech has a single syncretic negative marker (*ne-*), which is the equivalent of *not*, *non-* and *un-* in English.

(10) a. Ja ne- jsem šťastný.
I NEG- am happy.
'I am not happy.'
b. Ja jsem ne- šťastný.
I am NEG- happy.
'I am unhappy.'
c. Je ne- americký.
is NEG American
'He is un-American.'
'He is non-American.'

▷ the Czech-type syncretism shows that there must be an underlying featural unity to all these negation types.
▷ the underlying featural unity resides (minimally) in the presence of the feature Neg.
▷ the Neg-feature is never spelled out alone: the different negative markers represent packagings of Neg with different sets of features.
▷ we assume an fseq for negative markers <T, Foc, Class, Q>.
▷ negative markers are built by adding a negative feature Neg on top of either QP, ClassP, FocP, or TP:

(11)



▷ (11) is shorthand for a series of four different trees, each corresponding to a particular negative marker
▷ (12) gives the lexical items for the negative markers *not, non*, and *un-*, respectively:

(12) a. < /nɒt/, [$_{\text{NegP}}$ Neg [$_{\text{TP}}$ T [$_{\text{FocP}}$ Foc [$_{\text{ClassP}}$ Class [$_{\text{QP}}$ Q]]]]] >
b. < /nɒn/, [$_{\text{NegP}}$ Neg [$_{\text{ClassP}}$ Class [$_{\text{QP}}$ Q]]] >
c. < /ʌn/, [$_{\text{NegP}}$ Neg [$_{\text{QP}}$ Q]] >

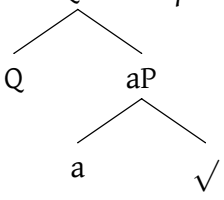
▷ negative markers also have an external syntax
▷ the highest non-negative feature in the nanospine indicates where negation will take scope in the clausal spine
  ○ if the nanospine spells out as *not*, its highest non-negative feature is either T or Foc; negation will then take scope high in the clausal spine, i.e. be inserted above either FocP or TP
  ○ if the nanospine spells out as *un-*, its highest non-negative feature is Q; its scope will be limited to those positions in the clausal spine where a QP occurs (i.e. low in the clausal spine)

2.3 Adjectives: a difference in size

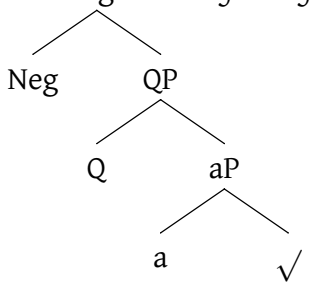
▷ gradable adjectives spell out:

- a root feature ($\sqrt{}$)
- a categorial head feature (*a*)
- a gradability feature (Q)
- negative gradable adjectives differ from positive ones in the presence of an additional Neg-feature

(13) a. QP ⇒ *positive gradable adjective* (e.g. *happy*)



b. NegP ⇒ *negative gradable adjective* (e.g. *sad*)



2.4 Evidence for a Neg-feature in negative adjectives

▷ De Clercq & Vanden Wyngaerd (2016) argue that there exists a ban on stacking negative affixes that are structurally adjacent

▷ data illustrating this ban from English morphology are given in (14):

(14) a. *UN+DIS: *undishonest, *undiscourteous, *undisloyal, *undiscomfortable
b. *UN+LESS: *unuseless, *unbreathless, *unsenseless, *unmerciless, *uncheerless
c. *UN+IN: *unirreligious, *unillegitimate, *unillogical, *unimpossible, *unincoherent, *uninappropriate
d. *UN+UN, *DIS+DIS, *LESS+LESS

▷ next consider the data in (15), with 'synthetically negative adjectives' (Jespersen 1942, Zimmer 1964, Horn 1989):

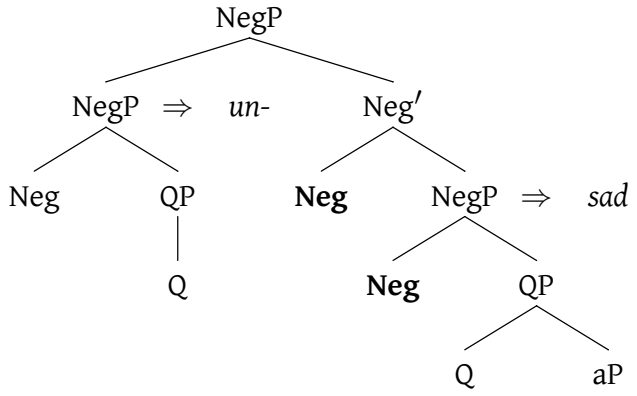
(15) a. unhappy, unwise, unclean, unfriendly, unhealthy, untrue

b. *unsad, *unfoolish, *undirty, *unhostile, *unsick, *unrude, *unfalse

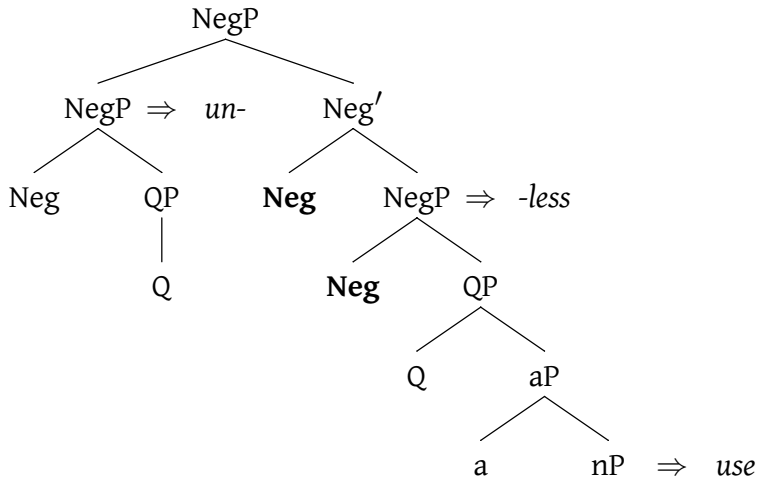
▷ the data in (15b) instantiate the same restriction as the ones in (14), assuming that negative adjectives have a Neg-feature
▷ we argue that these facts follow from the following constraint on double negation:

(16) *<Neg, Neg>
The functional sequence must not contain two immediately consecutive Neg-features.

(17)

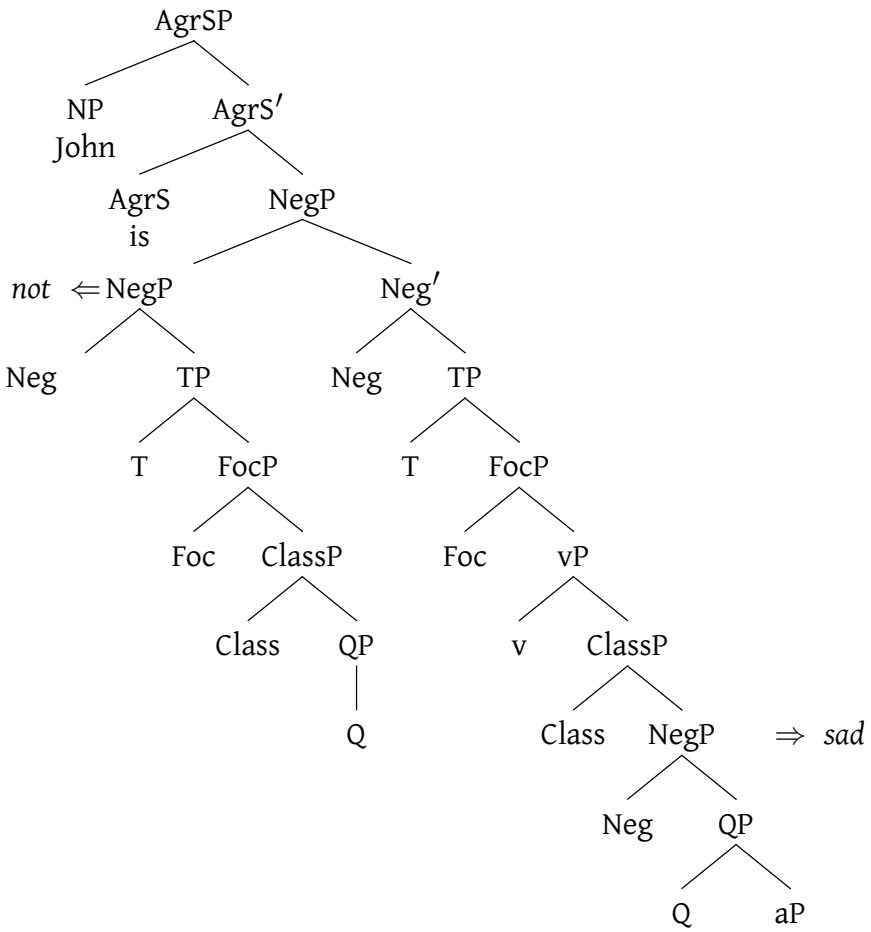


(18)



▷ the prefixes *un-*, *iN-*, *dis-* and the suffix *-less* all take scope in the same position, at QP
▷ the negative marker *not* takes higher scope, and can therefore be stacked onto *un/iN/dis/less* without violating (16) (e.g. *not disloyal/not useless/not impossible/not sad*):

(19)

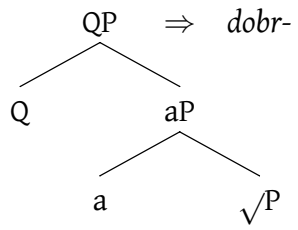


3 The Czech data: analysis

3.1 Positive gradable adjectives and suppletion

▷ the positive gradable adjective *dobr-* spells out the following structure:

(20)



▷ in the comparative, the suppletive root *lep-* appears (*lep-ší* 'better')

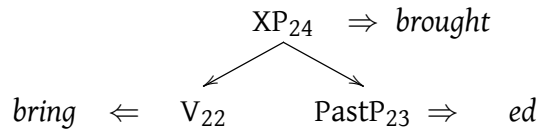
▷ DM-analysis (Bobaljik 2012): suppletion is triggered by the presence of the Cmpr-head which is structurally adjacent to the root, as per the following insertion rule (B assumes that CmprP immediately dominates the root):

(21) $\sqrt{\text{DOBR}} \rightarrow$ lep / ___] Cmpr

▷ this proposal accounts for the the generalisation that, if the comparative uses a suppletive root, the superlative also does (Bobaljik 2012).
▷ NS-approach to suppletion: pointers in lexical items, pointing to other lexical items
▷ *bring/brought* suppletion: the lexical item of *brought* contains a pointer to the lexical items for *bring* and the past tense morpheme *-ed*:

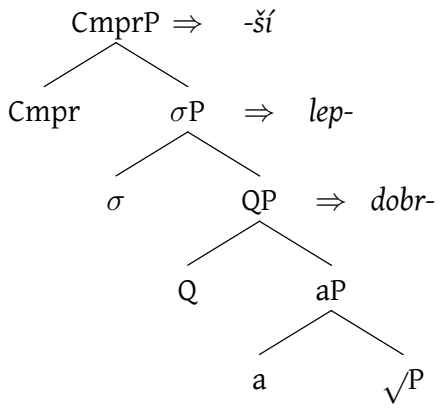
(22) a. <$_{24}$ /brought/, [$_{\text{XP}}$ 22 23]>
b. <$_{22}$ /bring/, V>
c. <$_{23}$ /ed/, PastP>

(23)



▷ suppletion in the comparative and superlative is different, as it concerns only the root, not the affix
▷ we propose to decompose Cmpr into two different features, σ and Cmpr. The suppletive root spells out σP, as shown in (24):

(24)

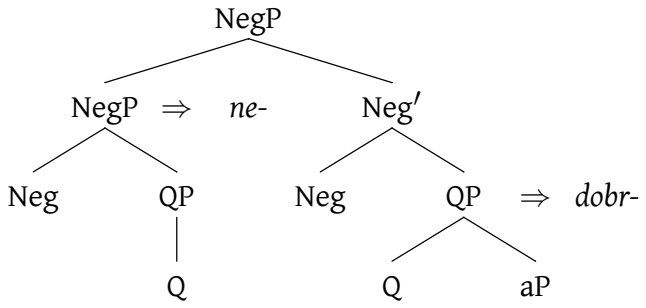


(25) a. < /-ší/, [$_{\text{CmprP}}$ [$_{\sigma\text{P}}$ σ]] >
b. <$_{34}$ /lep-/, [$_{\sigma\text{P}}$ σ 32]] >
c. <$_{32}$ /dobr-/, [$_{\text{QP}}$ [$_{\text{aP}}$ [$\sqrt{}$]]] >

- ▷ *dobr-* spells out QP.
- ▷ at σP, *dobr-* is overwritten by the suppletive form *lep-*
- ▷ at CmprP the comparative suffix is spelled out (modulo raising of σP into SpecCmprP)

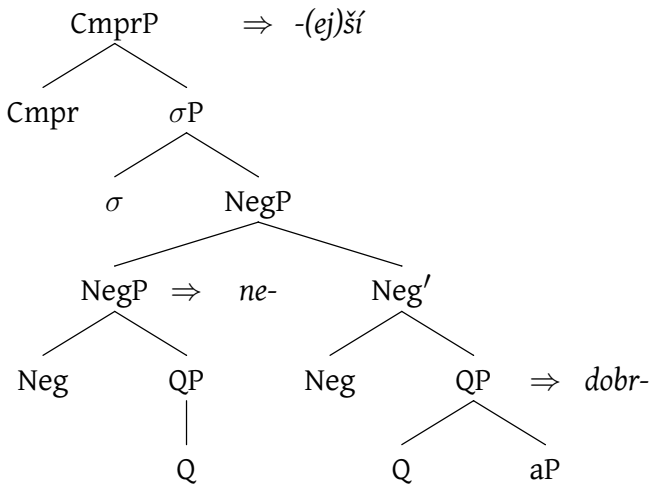
- ▷ Czech also has 'analytic negative adjectives', i.e. positive adjectives that feature the negative morpheme *ne-* and get a negative meaning, e.g. *ne-dobr-* 'bad'.
- ▷ we assume that these have the same structure as negative gradable adjectives (see (13) above), except that there is a complex specifier in SpecNegP:

(26)



- ▷ the comparative of *ne-dobr-* 'bad' shows no suppletion (**ne-lep-ší* vs *ne-dobř-ejší* 'worse').
- ▷ in Bobaljik's terms, this would suggest that there is no structural adjacency between Cmpr and the root $\sqrt{\text{DOBR}}$, as this will bleed the application of the rule in (21).
- ▷ this nonadjacency is achieved in the structure we propose, which has a Neg-head between QP and Cmpr:

(27)



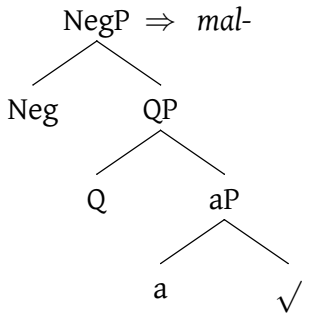
▷ no constituent in (27) could spell out the suppletive root *lep-* 'bett-'.
- ○ σP dominates too many features
- ○ the lexical entry for *lep-* (see (30) above) does not contain a superset of the features of the syntactic tree σP, since it does not contain a Neg-feature, and σP does.

▷ A negated positive gradable adjective cannot get a suppletive comparative root because σP dominates a NegP, and the the lexical entry for the suppletive root does not contain a Neg-feature.

3.2 Negative gradable adjectives and suppletion

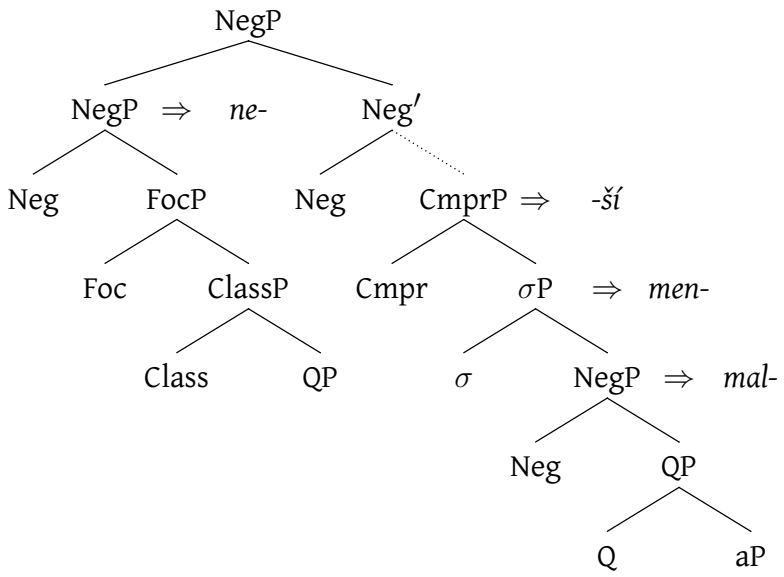
▷ the negative gradable adjective *malý* 'small' spells out the following structure:

(28)



▷ *malý* 'small' has a suppletive comparative *menší*
▷ the suppletive form is not blocked in the context of the negative prefix: *ne-men-ší* (neg-small-er).
▷ the tree structure in (29) explains why this is the case:

(29)



▷ *mal-* 'small' spells out NegP.
▷ at σP, *mal-* is overwritten by the suppletive root *men-*.
▷ the *ne*-marker preceding the negative adjective cannot be merged at QP because of the ban on double negation
▷ *ne* is merged higher in the structure, i.e. it takes scope higher than CmprP (e.g. at the FocP level).

(30) a. < /-ší/, [$_{\text{CmprP}}$ [$_{\sigma\text{P}}$ σ]] >
b. <$_{66}$ /men-/, [$_{\sigma\text{P}}$ σ 65]] >
c. <$_{65}$ /mal-/, [$_{\text{NegP}}$[$_{\text{QP}}$ [$_{\text{aP}}$ [$\sqrt{}$]]]] >

▷ A negated negative adjective can get a suppletive stem:
  ○ because a negative adjective spells out NegP, and a suppletive negative adjective spells out σP immediately dominating this NegP
  ○ the negative marker *ne-* cannot be merged at the same position because of the ban on double negation
  ○ it must therefore be merged in a higher position, after the suppletion root was spelled out at σP.

3.3 Readings of negated comparatives

▷ our analysis entails a different scope for the overt negative marker in *ne-dobr-ejší* and *ne-men-ší*.
▷ this structural difference entails a scopal and meaning difference:

(31) a. [[ne-dobř-]ejší] = [MORE [NOT-GOOD]] i.e. 'worse'
b. [ne-[men-ší]] = [NOT [MORE SMALL]] i.e. 'not smaller' (rather than 'bigger')

▷ (31a) is *inconsistent* with a situation where the two entities being compared are equally bad
▷ (31b) is *consistent* with a situation where the two entities being compared are equally small

(32) a. Your lunch was bad, but mine was worse.
b. Your donation was big, but mine was not smaller.

▷ in the latter case, the scalar focus marker *even* is not possible, whereas it is possible (in fact preferred) in the former one.

3.4 Double negation in Czech negative adjectives

▷ in contrast to English (recall **unsad*), Czech negative adjectives can be negated by *ne*:

(33) ne-malý
NEG-small
'big, large'

▷ given that the Czech negative marker *ne* is fully syncretic, this is due to the fact that *ne-* can take higher scope than English *un-/dis-/iN-/-less*.
▷ that is, (33) is in fact equivalent to something like *not inconsiderable*

4 Conclusion

- ▷ We accounted for the Czech data pattern in terms of
  - the presence of a negative feature in negative gradable adjectives
  - the ban on double negation
- ▷ In negated *positive* adjectives
  - the negative marker *ne-* takes low scope, between Cmpr and Q
  - Neg acts as an intervener, blocking suppletion
- ▷ In a negated *negative* adjective
  - the negative marker *ne-* takes high scope, because the adjective already contains a negative feature, and because of the ban on double negation
  - as a result, the negative marker *ne-* does not act as an intervener between Cmpr and Q
  - suppletion takes place in the same manner as with positive adjectives: there is a lexical item that contains one extra feature (σ) as compared with the nonsuppletive root.

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