

There is More to the Morphology of *-š/-iš*: the Comparative in Ukrainian

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How many comparative suffixes are there in Ukrainian?

The comparative suffix in Ukrainian seemingly has four allomorphs: the most productive *-iš*, and the non-productive *-š*, *-č*, and *-šč*.

	POS	CMPR	number
a.	čyst-yj clean-AGR	čyst-iš-yj clean-er-AGR	very productive
b.	dešev-yj cheap-AGR	dešev-š-yj cheap-er-AGR	25 cases
c.	duž-yj strong-AGR	duž-č-yj strong-er-AGR	7 cases
d.	vysok-yj high-AGR	vyšč-yj high-er-AGR	3 cases

Table1.Comparative adjectives in Ukrainian

I argue (following Bezenko 1960) that there are only two: the productive *-iš*, and the non-productive *-š*. The rest are phonologically conditioned versions of *-š*.

	phonology	morphology	orthography
a.	-iš	-iš	-иш
b.	-š	-š	-ш
	-č		-ч
	-šč		-щ

Table2.Allomorphy in comparative suffixes

When we are left with the two suffixes *-š* and *-iš*, Ukrainian fits in the picture of other Slavic languages, as shown below.

Proto-Slavic	Old Church Slavonic	Ukrainian	Polish	Czech	Slovak
*-ejъs	-ejъš	-iš	-ejsz	-ějš	-ejš
*-jъs	-jъš	-š	-sz	-š	-š

Table3.Comparative suffixes in Slavic

Conclusion 1:

There are two comparative suffixes in Ukrainian: *-š* and *-iš*

The choice between *-š* and *-iš* is not phonologically conditioned

- Argument 1: there are adjectives that have very similar phonological environment, but take different comparative suffixes.

	POS	CMPR -š	CMPR -iš	translation
a.	dešev-yj važlyv-yj	dešev-š-yj važlyv-š-yj	*dešev-iš-yj važlyv-iš-yj	cheap important
b.	duž-yj sviž-yj	duž-č-yj sviž-č-yj	*duž-iš-yj sviž-iš-yj	strong fresh

Table4.Adjectives that take different CMPR suffixes

- Argument 2: there are adjectives that can take both comparative suffixes.

	POS	CMPR -š	CMPR -iš	translation
a.	bahat-yj	bahat-š-yj	bahat-iš-yj	rich
b.	hrub-yj	hrub-š-yj	hrub-iš-yj	rude

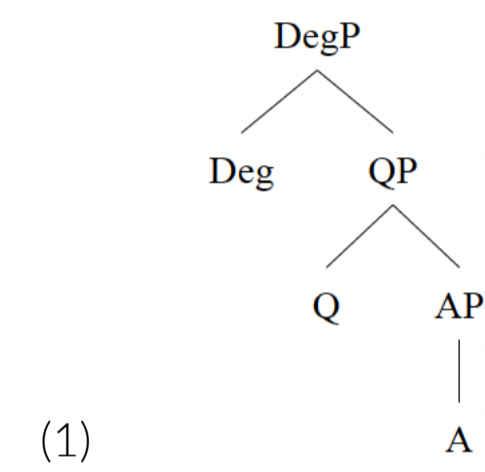
Table5.Adjectives that can take both CMPR suffixes

Conclusion 2:

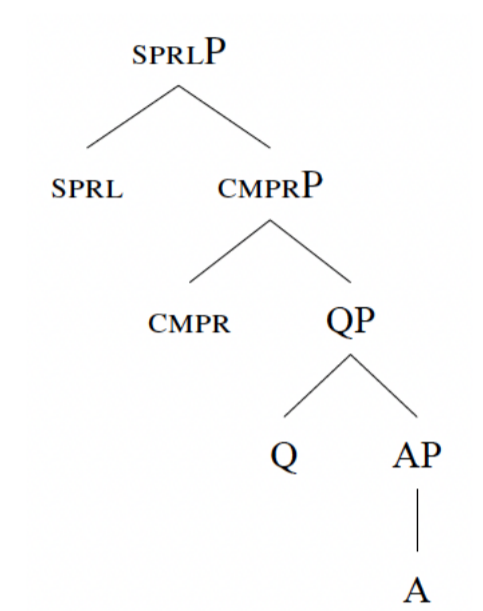
The choice between *-š* and *-iš* is not phonologically conditioned

The notion of degree

Corver (1997) argues for the structure of the adjectival domain as in (1). However, since there are different types of degrees (positive, comparative, superlative), Bobaljik (2012) suggest that the DegP has to be decomposed into CMPR and SPRL, as in (2). The corresponding trees are slightly modified by De Clercq et al. (2022) with a more fine-grained structure of QP.



(1)



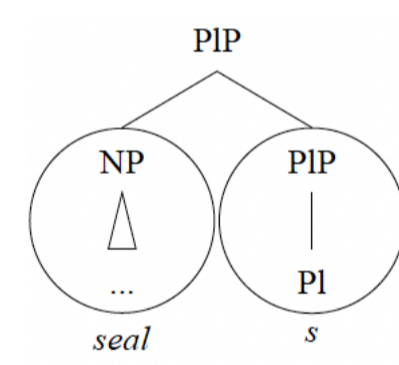
(2)

"the deeper we dig into the morphological marking of degree, the more functional heads we will be able to unearth." (De Clercq and Vanden Wyngaerd 2017)

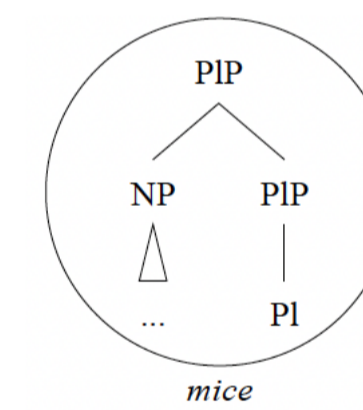
Nanosyntax enters the chat

- submorphemic syntax

Morphemes are not the smallest units in Nanosyntax. One morpheme can span several syntactic terminals (Starke 2009). It is built on the observation that there are more featural distinctions than there are morphemes available.



(3)

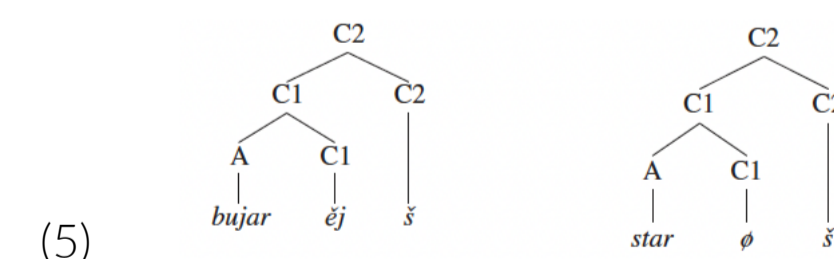


(4)

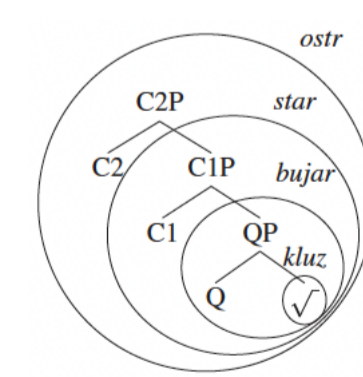
- phrasal spellout

Lexicalisation applies not to terminals, but to phrasal nodes. If multiple heads make up a single morpheme, then it must be possible for spellout to target phrases (XPs) and not just heads (Baunaz and Lander 2018).

Bobaljik (2012) proposed the containment structure: the comparative is formed by attaching a CMPR head to A, and then the SPRL head is attached to form a superlative. Caha et al. (2019) suggested that the CMPR head in fact has to be decomposed into C1 and C2, as in (5).



(5)

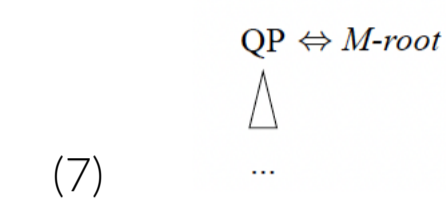


(6)

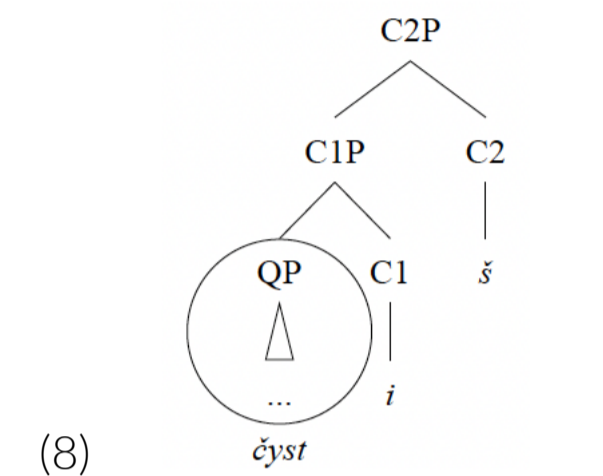
Caha et al. (2019): the less structure the positive degree spells out, the more additional morphology an adjective needs in the comparative. Those Czech adjectives that take the *-ějš* suffix are of size QP. In contrast, adjectives with the *-š* suffix are of size C1P.

The choice between *-š* and *-iš* is morphologically conditioned

There are two types of roots in Ukrainian - 'medium' (*M-roots*) and 'large' (*L-roots*). *M-roots* are of size QP, such adjectives are 'small', they need both C1 and C2 to be spelled out by an additional morphology. Thus, they take the suffix *-iš* in the comparative.

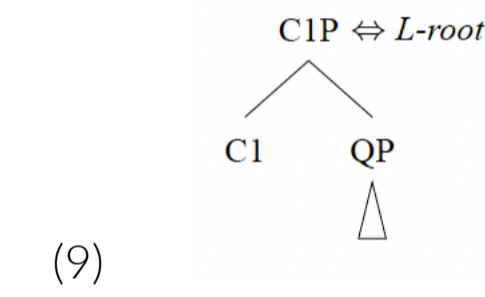


(7)

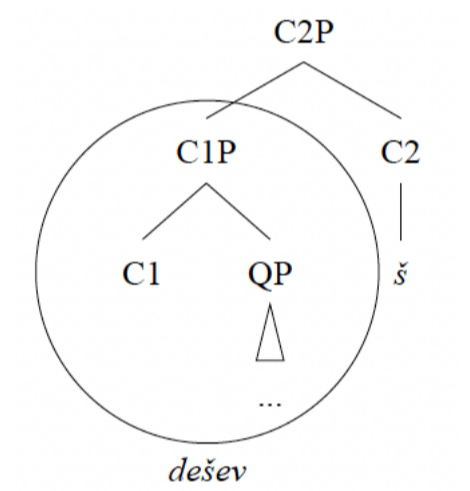


(8)

Meanwhile, *L-roots* are of size C1P. They are 'big enough' as they spell out more structure than *M-roots* and need only *-š* to spell out C2.



(9)



(10)

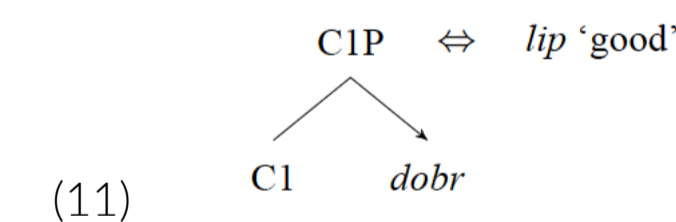
Thus, there are two types of roots in Ukrainian:

root type	POS	CMPR	example
M-root	root	root-i-š	čystyj – čyst-i-š-yj
L-root	root	root-š	dešev-yj – dešev-š-yj

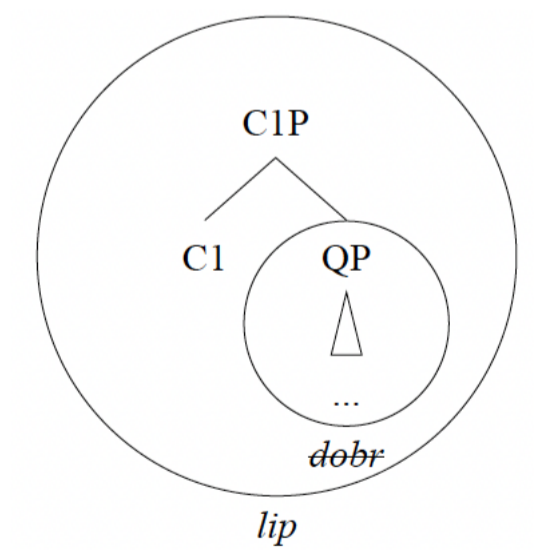
Table6. Root types in Ukrainian adjectives

Notes on Ukrainian suppletion

Nanosyntax uses *Pointers* to account for irregular morphology. Pointers 'point to' or make a reference within a lexical entry to another lexical entry (De Clercq and Vaden Wyngaerd 2017). All suppletive adjectives in Ukrainian take the suffix *-š*, e.g. *dobr-yj-lipš-yj* 'good-better' in (11).



(11)



(12)

The lexical item *better* contains a pointer to the lexical item *good*. In the course of derivation *good* gets overridden by *lip* and then combines with a CMPR suffix *-š*. Since the root is of size C1P, suppletives belong to the *L-root* adjectives and they are incompatible with the *-iš* suffix.

Conclusions

- iš* and *-š* are the only two comparative suffixes in Ukrainian, *-č* and *-šč* are phonologically conditioned versions of *-š*;
- the distribution of comparative suffixes is not phonologically conditioned;
- the distribution of comparative suffixes is morphologically conditioned;
- there are two types of roots in Ukrainian adjectives: *M-root* and *L-root*, each differing in the amount of structure it spells out.

References

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