

For better or worse, we need to talk about -š

Madeleine Butschety

UNIVERSITY OF NOVA GORICA

Petra Mišmaš

UNIVERSITY OF NOVA GORICA

This analysis focuses on a puzzling class of verbs from Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS) and Slovenian involving the suffix *-š* (henceforth: *š*-verbs) that are derived from comparative adjectives. Interestingly, this relatively small class systematically differs from other deadjectival verbs in BCMS, such as *pojačati* ‘to strengthen’ in (3), as well as from their Slovenian correlates in that BCMS *š*-verbs never occur without a prefix.

BCMS *š*-verbs include *poboljšati* ‘to better’, (1), *pogoršati* ‘to worsen’, derived from the suppletive comparative forms of *dobar* ‘good’ and *zao* ‘bad, evil’, respectively (see also Despić 2019), as well as verbs derived from non-suppletive forms such as *mek* ‘soft’, (2), *lep* ‘beautiful’ and *lak* ‘easy’. For Slovenian, we consider verbs derived from suppletive comparative form of *dober* ‘good’, (4), and from adjectives that derive their comparative form with *-š*, e.g., *slab* ‘bad’, *lep* ‘pretty’, (5).

- (1) *dobar, bolj-i, naj-bolj-i, po-bolj-š-a-ti*
 good good.COMP best.SUPER OVER-better-š-TV-INF
 ‘good, better, the best, to improve’ (BCMS)
- (2) *mek, mek-š-i, naj-mek-š-i, s-mek-š-a-ti*
 soft soft.COMP soft.SUPER WITH-soft-š-TV-INF
 ‘soft, softer, the softest, to soften’ (BCMS)
- (3) *jak jać-i (jak-j-i), naj-jać-i, jać-a-ti, po-jać-a-ti*
 strong strong.COMP strong.SUPER stronger-TV-INF OVER-stronger-TV-INF
 ‘strong, stronger, the strongest, to strengthen, to strengthen’ (BCMS)
- (4) *dober, bolj-š-i, naj-bolj-š-i, (po-)bolj-š-a-ti*
 good good.COMP best.SUPER OVER-better-š-TV-INF
 ‘good, better, the best, to improve’ (Slovenian)
- (5) *lep, lep-š-i, naj-lep-š-i (po-)lep-š-a-ti*
 pretty pretty.COMP pretty.SUPER OVER-pretty-š-TV-INF
 ‘pretty, prettier, the prettiest, to embellish’ (Slovenian)

In contrast to Slovenian (4), the plain comparative ‘better’ does not include the suffix *-š* in BCMS, whereas the verb does (in both languages). Besides some essential parallels in the interpretation of the comparative adjectives and *š*-verbs, only the adjective is potentially ambiguous: It can either express comparison between degrees to which different individuals possess a property, or between degrees to which the same individual possesses a property at different points in time; cf. Kennedy (2007). Deadjectival verbs, however,

can just express the latter kind of comparison. This contrast is illustrated in (6) for BCMS (same judgments for Slovenian).

- (6) a. *We baked a cake last week, but it was awful. We baked a new one yesterday, and it tasted better.*
 b. *We baked a cake yesterday, but it was awful. So we added cream to it, and it tasted better then.*
- (i) Juče smo napravili bolji kolač.
 yesterday AUX.1PL made.PFV better cake
 ‘We made a better cake yesterday.’ ✓ in (6a), but # in (6b)
- (ii) Juče smo poboljšali kolač.
 yesterday AUX.1PL better.PFV cake
 ‘We improved a cake yesterday.’ # in (6a), but ✓ in (6b)

Crucially, the deadjectival verb is only felicitous in contexts in which different degrees of ‘good’-ness of the one and the same individual are compared. We argue that the obligatory presence vs. absence of *-š* in the BCMS verbs and adjectives, respectively, is related to a temporal component in their internal structure. In particular, we claim that this temporal variable is trivially bound by context/tense in the case of adjectives (which is why *-š* can be omitted there), but has to be bound by the (spatio)temporal argument introduced by the respective verb’s prefix (which is why BCMS *š*-verbs cannot occur without a prefix). The (simplified) denotations of the comparative adjective and the deadjectival *š*-verb are illustrated in (7a) and (7b), respectively.

- (7) a. $[[\text{bolji}]] = \max[\lambda x.\lambda d.\lambda t. \text{dobar}(x)(d)(t)] \succ \max[\lambda y.\lambda d'.\lambda t'. \text{dobar}(y)(d')(t')] \text{ s.t. } t = t' = t_{c/T}$
 b. $[[\text{poboljšati}]] = \lambda y.\lambda d'.\lambda d.\lambda t'.\lambda t. \max[\text{dobar}(y)(d')(t')] \succ \max[\text{dobar}(y)(d)(t)] \text{ s.t. } t' \succ t$

We will show that linking this difference in interpretation to the distinction between individual-level and stage-level predicates (cf. Kratzer 1989, a.m.o.) puts our analysis in the position to explain other differences mentioned above between BCMS adjectives/*š*-verbs and their Slovenian counterparts.

In sum, the investigation of the *š*-class of deadjectival verbs does not only provide new insights into the interaction of adjectival and verbal morphology and argument structure, but also into some intriguing differences within Western South Slavic that have not received much attention in the literature yet.

References: – DESPIĆ, MILOJE. 2019. (Non-)Intersective adjectives and root suppletion. *The Linguistic Review* 36: 507-530 – KENNEDY, CHRISTOPHER. 2007. Modes of Comparison. In Malcom Elliot et al. (eds), *Proceedings of CLS 43* – KRATZER, ANGELIKA. 1989. Stage-level and individual-level predicates. *UMass Occasional Papers in Linguistics* 12: 147-221