

Accounting for Russian superlatives with Nanosyntax

Daniar Kasenov, NRU HSE / MSU
antidanyar@protonmail.com

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Introduction

- This talk provides a Nanosyntactic analysis for Russian adjective degree morphology, following previous Nanosyntactic work (Caha, De Clercq & Vanden Wyngaerd 2019; Vanden Wyngaerd et al. 2020; De Clercq et al. 2022)
- Slides and general info available at github.com/antidanyar/
- Work supported by RSF grant # 22-18-00285

Basic adjectival morphology in Russian

Take *krasiv-yj* 'beautiful'

krasiv-ee 'more beautiful' / *bolee krasiv-yj*

krasiv-ej-sh-yj 'the most beautiful' / *nai-krasiv-ej-sh-yj* /
samyj krasiv-yj

Basic adjectival morphology in Russian

Take *khorosh-yj* 'good'

luchsh-e 'better' / *?bolee khorosh-yj*

luchsh-yj 'the most beautiful' / *nai-luchsh-yj* / *?samyj khorosh-yj*

Superlatives: combining strategies

*samyj krasiv-yj / *samyj krasiv-ej-sh-yj / *samyj
nai-krasiv-ej-sh-yj*

Russian 1: **samyj khorosh-yj / samyj luchsh-yj / *samyj
nai-luchsh-yj*

Russian 2: *samyj khorosh-yj / *samyj luchsh-yj / *samyj
nai-luchsh-yj*

I am strictly a Russian 1 speaker \Rightarrow talk is based on
judgements of people who agree with Russian 1 judgement

Puzzle one

samyj is out with all other superlatives in regular adjectives, but is ok with bare suppletive superlatives for some speakers and isn't for others – why?

Puzzle two

Despite there being variation wrt. *samyj khoroshyj/luchshyj*
there is **none** wrt. *nai-luchshyj*
nai-khoroshyj is always out – why?

Puzzle three

Take another two adjectives: *plokh-oj* 'bad', *strog-ij* 'strict', and compare that with *krasiv-yj*

plokh-oj – *khuzh-e* – *khud-sh-yj*

strog-ij – *strozh-e* – *strozh-aj-sh-yj*

krasiv-yj – *krasiv-ej-e* – *krasiv-ej-sh-yj*

What's up with *strogij*?

Our goal

Main claim: all three puzzles are captured straightforwardly in a Nanosyntactic analysis of Russian degree morphology

Assumptions: Nanosyntactic model of grammar (Starke 2010); prefix theory of Starke (2018); degree structure of Bobaljik (2012) and De Clercq et al. (2022)

Theoretical background

Comparative-superlative containment

Bobaljik 2012: a study of suppletion in comparatives/superlatives

Not attested: same root in positive/superlative, different root in comparative (*ABA)

Based on *ABA, he proposed this structure: [SPRL [CMPR [ADJ]]]

Splitting CMPR

Czech: two types of comparative forms, with one affix clearly being contained in the other

červen-ý / *červen-ěj-š-í* 'red'

bohat-ý / *bohat-š-í* 'rich'

A straightforward solution: two COMP heads, one spells out as -ěj-, other as -š-

Splitting SPRL

Latin: two types of superlative forms, with one affix clearly being contained in the other

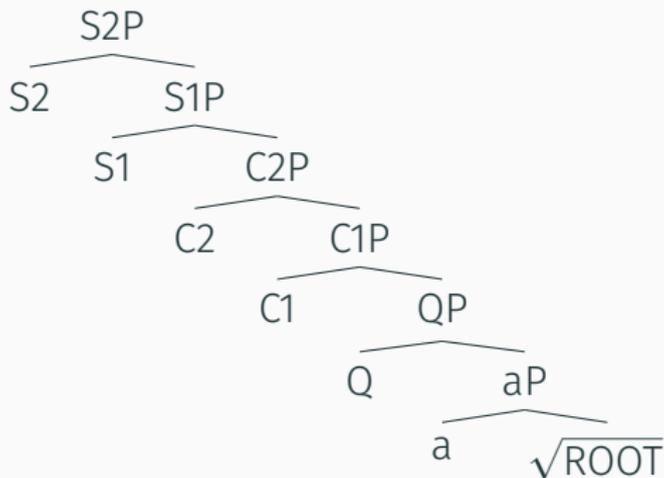
alt-us alt-i-or alt-i-ss-im-us

mal-us pe-i-or pe-ss-im-us

bon-us mel-i-or opt-im-us

A straightforward solution: two SPRL heads, one spells out as -ss-, other as -im-

Our structure

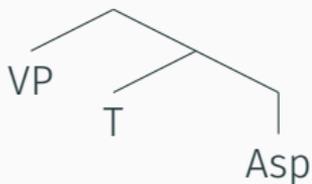


Our goal: provide L-trees given this structure. Our puzzles, however, come from prefixal morphology. How does it work in Nanosyntax?

Background: prefixes in Nanosyntax

Assume we have a tense-aspect-verb structure (example from Starke 2018)

Suffix structure (born by movement of VP from Comp,AspP to Spec,TP):



Background: prefixes in Nanosyntax

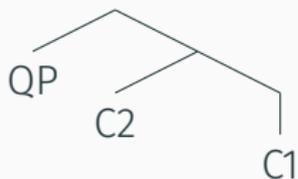
Assume we have a tense-aspect-verb structure (example from Starke 2018)

Prefix structure (built by parallel derivation that merges T and Asp independently):

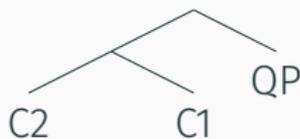


Comparatives

Suffix:



Prefix:



Note: we should carefully track that Merge-F (suffix) is to be preferred to Merge-XP (prefix)

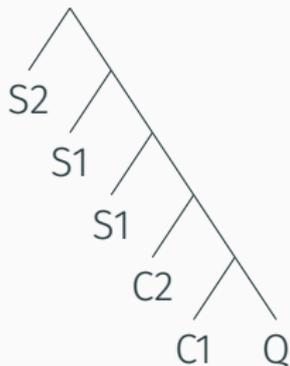
Another note: we assume that there must be one-feature-overlap in merged XP and the main functional structure

Analysis

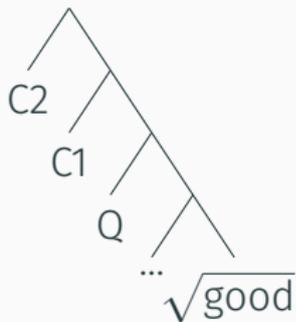
Puzzle one

samyj is out with all other superlatives in regular adjectives, but is ok with bare suppletive superlatives

L-tree for *samyj*



L-tree for *luchsh-*



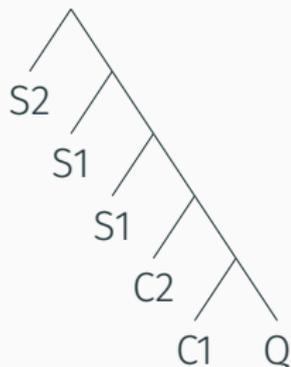
L-tree for *khorosh-*



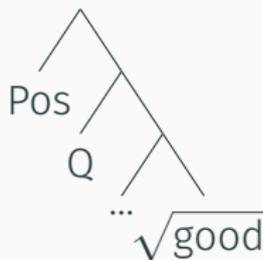
Puzzle one

samyj is out with all other superlatives in regular adjectives, but is ok with bare suppletive superlatives

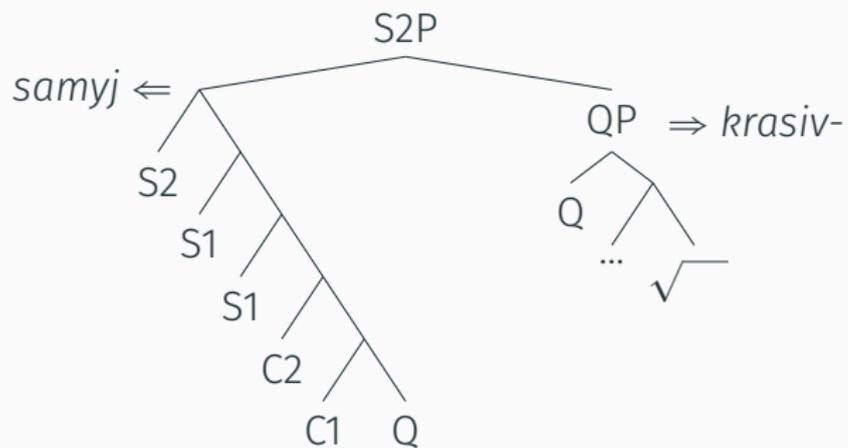
L-tree for *samyj*



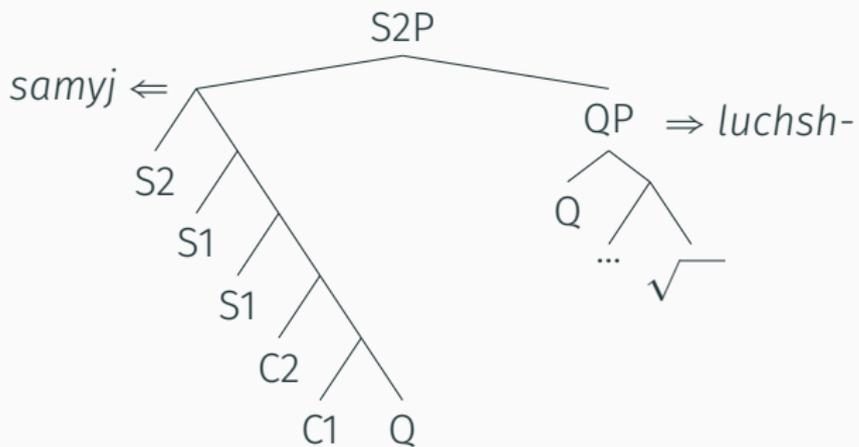
L-tree for *krasiv-*



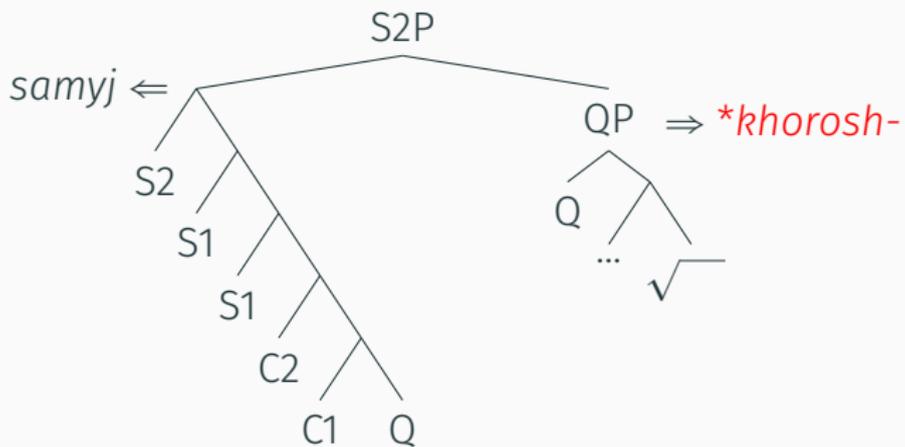
Structure for *samyj*



Structure for *samyj*



Structure for *samyj*

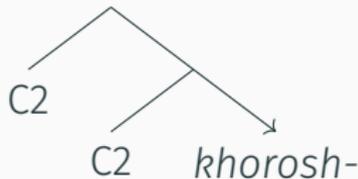
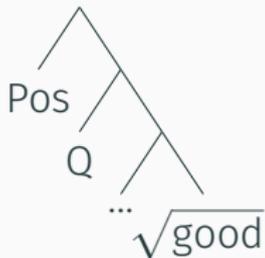


Modelling the speaker variation

Recall: some speakers reject *samyj luchshyj* in favor of *samyj khoroshyj*

Solution: those speakers have different L-trees for suppletion

L-tree for *khorosh-* L-tree for *luchsh-*



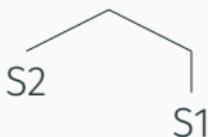
Two types of *luchsh-*

How can *luchsh-* act as a superlative?

Proposal: *luchsh* as superlative = *luchsh-sh-yj*

Cf: *khuzh-e* (/khud-e/) – *khud-sh-yj*

-sh- as

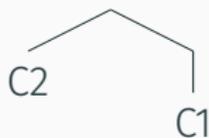


Question for -sh-

Look at: *krasiv-ej-e* – *krasiv-ej-sh-yj*

Where does -e go? We -e as non-varying Agr or Adv

So -ej- acts as



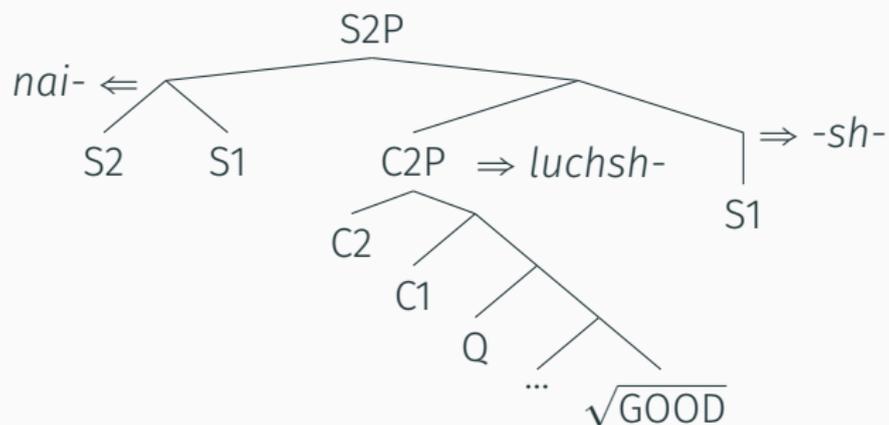
Modelling *nai*-superlatives

There is not much to reduce from *-sh-*, so

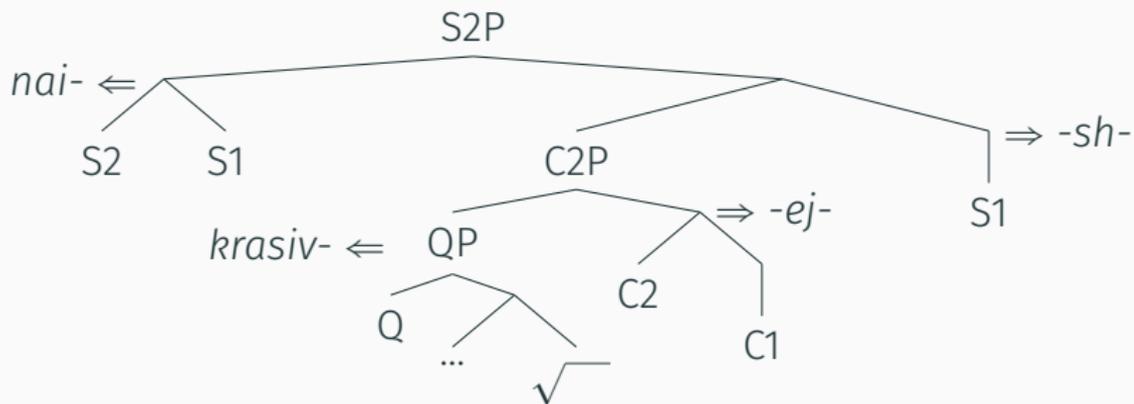
nai- L-tree:



Structure of *nai*-superlatives



Structure of *nai*-superlatives



Puzzle two

The structure of *nai*-superlatives captures the fact that *nai-khorosh-yj* is out: you need a C2P structure there, which is *luchsh-* for all speakers

Diachronic speculation

Different superlative strategies are 'licensed' by a different size of *-sh-*

Purely suffixal: S2-S1 *-sh-*

nai-: S1 *-sh-*

samyj: no *-sh-*, nothing spells out S1

(some Russian speakers deny having productive superlative formation, Alexander Sergienko p.c.)

Puzzle three

plokh-oy – khuzh-e – khud-sh-yj

strog-ij – strozh-e – strozh-aj-sh-yj

krasiv-yj – krasiv-ej-e – krasiv-ej-sh-yj

Root shrinking

Impossible lexicalisation:

Root	C1	C2	S1	S2
khuzh /khud/ khud				-sh-

Root	C1	C2	S1	S2
strozh				
strozh		-aj-		-sh-

Root	C1	C2	S1	S2
krasiv		-ej-		
krasiv		-ej-		-sh-

Root shrinking

Right (-aj- is not allomorph of -ej):

Root	C1	C2	S1	S2
khuzh /khud/				
khud			-sh-	

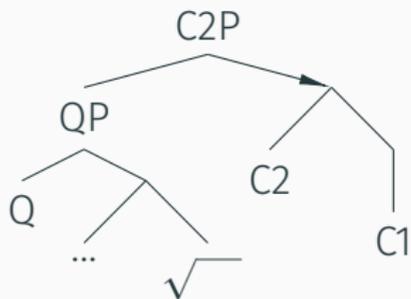
Root	C1	C2	S1	S2
strozh				
strozh			-ajsh-	

Root	C1	C2	S1	S2
krasiv				
krasiv		-ej-		
krasiv		-ej-	-sh-	

Partial overwrite of *strozh*

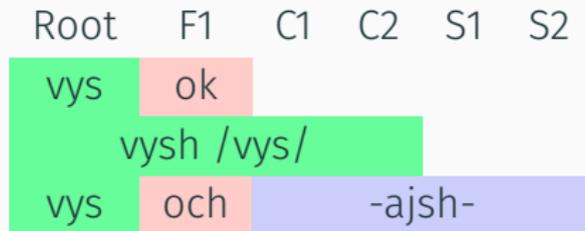
I assume the partial overwrite analysis of root shrinking phenomena (Blix 2021)

L-tree for *strozh-*



An unsolved problem

vys-ok-yj – vysh-e – vys-och-aj-sh-yj



Other adjectives like this: *shyr-ok-yj* 'wide', *uz-k-iy* 'narrow', *slad-k-iy* 'sweet, and many more'

An unsolved problem

But: not all *-k-* adjectives work like that. Some exhibit smth. like affix shrinking?

jar-k-ij – *jar-ch-e* – *jar-ch-aj-sh-yj*

Root	F1	C1	C2	S1	S2
jar	-k-				
jar	-ch- /k/				
jar	-ch-		-ajsh-		

No idea what to do with *-(o)k-* adjectives

Summing up three puzzles

Puzzle one: two different patterns of suppletion encoding result in two different set of judgements

Puzzle two: *nai-* requires a built comparative structure, *samyj* does not

Puzzle three: some adjectival roots allow root shrinking, but there is a problem with *-ok* adjectives, not sure what to do with them

Thank you!

Slides and general information available at
github.com/antidanyar

References i

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