

LEXICALIZATION & MARKEDNESS
Synthetic versus analytic comparatives in Ukrainian

INTRODUCTION Ukrainian comparative adjectives come in two forms: synthetic (1) and analytic (2). Synthetic comparatives are derived with the comparative suffix *-iš* (1a) or *-š* (1b), while analytic ones are derived with the marker *biljš* and the positive degree adjective (2).

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| <p>(1) a. tepl-<i>iš</i>-yj
 warm-CMPR-AGR
 'warmer'</p> <p>b. dešev-<i>š</i>-yj
 cheap-CMPR-AGR
 'cheaper'</p> | <p>(2) a. biljš tepl-yj
 more warm-AGR
 'warmer'</p> <p>b. biljš dešev-yj
 more cheap-AGR
 'cheaper'</p> |
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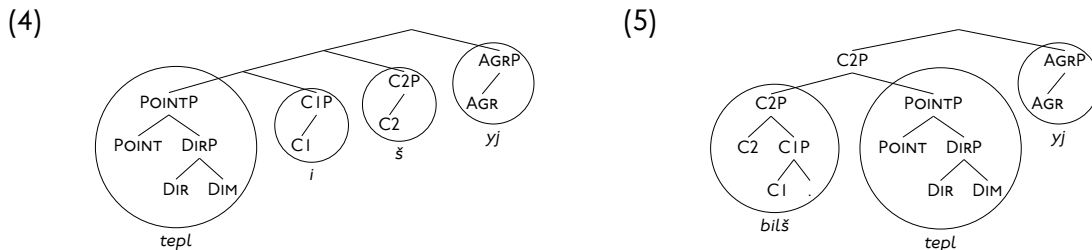
In this talk, we analyze these forms from the point of view of Nanosyntax (Caha 2009, Starke 2009). Lexicalization in Nanosyntax proceeds according to the Lexicalization Algorithm (LA), a series of operations applied in a fixed order. A simplified version of the LA is given in (3).

- (3) **The Lexicalization Algorithm:** After merging a (projecting) feature F:
- a. lexicalize FP;
 - b. if that fails, move (the spec of) the complement of F and lexicalize;
 - c. if that fails, Merge FP as a (projecting) complex left branch and lexicalize;

Analytic comparatives correspond to step (3c) of the LA: the comparative marker *biljš* lexicalizes a complex left branch (De Clercq and Vanden Wyngaerd 2018). Synthetic comparatives on the other hand involve step (3b): the adjectival root undergoes evacuation movement to the left, so that the comparative suffix can spell out the remaining part of the structure (Caha et al. 2019). The LA works strictly deterministically: steps are followed in a fixed order, and once an option is successfully chosen, later options are no longer attempted. This would seem to suggest that the forms in (2) should be ruled out: they represent a later step in the LA than the synthetic forms in (1) and so should never surface, contrary to fact. In this talk, we explore the hypothesis that when the algorithm chooses a non-optimal option—when it skips a step as it were—the result is not necessarily ungrammatical, but might simply be a more marked lexicalization option. We confirm two predictions raised by this hypothesis using an acceptability judgment experiment.

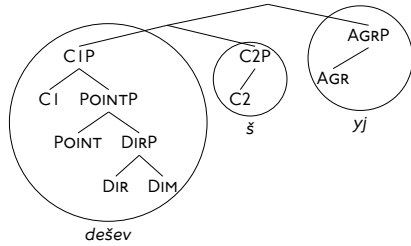
ANALYSIS We take a decompositional approach to adjectives. Following Vanden Wyngaerd et al. (2020), we propose that AP is comprised of three different projections: (1) Dimension (DIM), such as velocity, size, or color, (2) Direction (DIR), which introduces a scale, and (3) Point (POINT), which introduces the contextual standard. In turn, the comparative head is comprised of two heads: C1 and C2 (Caha et al. 2019). In both adjectival forms, the (internally complex) agreement head is realized by the agreement marker *-yj*.

Both analytic and synthetic comparatives are comprised of the abovementioned features. The division of labour differs: in synthetic comparatives, comparative suffixes lexicalize the comparative heads (4),(6), while in analytic ones they are lexicalized by *biljš* (5), (7).

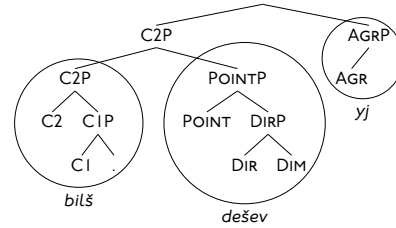


Moreover, Ukrainian adjectives come in different sizes, i.e. they can lexicalize different numbers of features (Vyshnevskaja 2025). Smaller roots, like *tepl* in (4) lexicalize the structure up to POINT and require two comparative morphemes, *-i* and *-š*, to lexicalize the two comparative heads. On the other hand, bigger roots like *dešev* in (6) lexicalize the structure up to C1P and require only one comparative morpheme *-š*.

(6)



(7)



HYPOTHESES As show in (5) and (7), analytic comparatives involve step (3c) of the LA. This goes against the ordering inherent in the LA: in both cases there was an earlier step in the algorithm available that led to a different lexicalization (i.e. a synthetic comparative). If such step-skipping in the LA can lead to marked lexicalizations, it would mean that analytic comparatives should be marked in Ukrainian compared to their synthetic counterparts:

(8) **Hypothesis #1: synthetic vs. analytic comparatives**

Analytic comparatives are judged less acceptable by native speakers of Ukrainian than their corresponding synthetic comparatives.

At the same time, the two structures in (5) and (7) differ in the degree to which they go against the LA. Adjectives like *teplyj* ‘warm’ can only lexicalize the structure up to POINTP, while *deševyj* ‘cheap’ can also realize CIP. This means that at the point when the complex left branch is introduced, the derivation in (5) skips only one step—it could have chosen option (3b), but instead chose option (3c)—the one in (7) skips two: it foregoes both whole-sale lexicalization of CIP and evacuation movement of POINTP. If this difference is reflected in the degree of markedness of the resulting lexicalization, we thus predict:

(9) **Hypothesis #2: -š- vs. -iš-adjectives**

Analytic comparatives based on -š-adjectives are judged less acceptable by native speakers of Ukrainian than analytic comparatives based on -iš-adjectives.

EXPERIMENT We conducted an acceptability judgment task in which 162 respondents from across Ukraine rated 64 critical stimuli on a 7-point Likert scale. We tested the effects of Mode (synthetic vs. analytic), Adjective Type (-š vs. -iš), and their interaction.

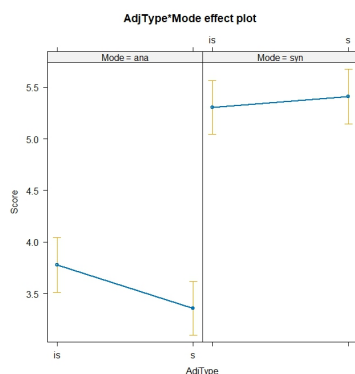


Figure 1: Two-way interaction between Adjective Type and Mode

The results are provided in Fig. 1. We saw a robust main effect of Mode ($\beta = 1.52$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = 9.46$, $p < .001$), indicating significantly higher acceptability scores in the synthetic condition. The main effect of Adjective Type was also significant ($\beta = -0.42$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = -2.63$, $p = .009$), with -š-class adjectives judged less acceptable than -iš-class adjectives. Crucially, the interaction between Adjective Type and Mode was significant ($\beta = 0.53$, $SE = 0.24$, $t = 2.17$, $p = .03$), indicating that the reduced acceptability of š-class adjectives is specific to analytic constructions.

CONCLUSIONS This study has argued that the coexistence of synthetic and analytic comparatives in Ukrainian can be naturally accounted for within a Nanosyntactic framework. Both comparative types can be derived by the Lexicalization Algorithm, but because analytic comparatives are skip a step in the LA, they are more marked. This approach also correctly predicts that analytic comparatives based on -š-class adjectives are even more marked than those based on -iš-class adjectives.

References

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