Marijana Marelj (Utrecht U.) & Ora Matushansky (CNRS/U. Paris 8)

NO WINNER TAKES IT ALL: AB(B)A PATTERNS IN SLAVIC DEADJECTIVAL CHANGE-OF-STATE VERBS

Slavic Linguistics Society (SLS) 21, Seoul, August 12–14, 2026

1 INTRODUCTION: DEGREE ACHIEVEMENTS – THE BANE OF ASPECTUAL CLASSIFICATION

Degree achievements (DAs) do not form a uniform aspectual class under either Vendler's (1967) or Bach's (1986) classification: the same verb may receive both telic and atelic interpretations (Dowty 1979, Abusch 1986, Hay & Kennedy & Levin 1999, a.o.):

(1) a. The soup cooled for an hour. = became cooler
b. The soup cooled in an hour. = became cool

The alternation reflects scalar change: these verbs encode change along a scale supplied by the adjectival core; a telic reading arises when a bound on the measure of change can be identified —be it compositionally, lexically, or contextually—and this bound need not coincide with the scale maximum (Hay et al. 1999; see also Kennedy & Levin 2008).

NB1: Our discussion is restricted to deadjectival DAs. We use *degree achievement* in Dowty's original aspectual-semantic sense. Deadjectival verbs arguably constitute the largest subclass, but denominal DAs (e.g., *age*) and basic scalar verbs (e.g., *increase*, *grow*) also exist.

NB2: The Slavic languages clearly demonstrate that deadjectival verbs can be built not only on roots but also on full-fledged adjectival stems. Consequently, we use the term 'core' here, for convenience.

A second well-studied property of DAs is the relation between their comparative interpretation and comparative morphology. Some DAs are transparently built on comparative stems; others lack comparative morphology but retain comparative semantics:

(2) a. The conditions bettered. became better
b. The river widened. became wider

If the comparative of an adjective has a suppletive stem, the corresponding DA must be built on that suppletive stem:

(3) a. dobar 'good' → **bol-j-**i 'better' → po-**bolj**-š-ati (se) 'to improve' Serbo-Croatian
b. plox-oj 'bad-MSG' → **xuž**e 'worse' → u-**xud-š**-it^{j} (s^{j}a) 'to worsen' Russian
c. bad → worse → worsen/*badden

This interplay between their morphology & semantics led to the formulation of **Comparative Change-of-State Generalization (C$_{\Delta}$G)** (Bobaljik 2012)

(4) If the comparative degree of an adjective is suppletive, then the corresponding change-of-state verb is also suppletive (i.e., with respect to the positive adjective)

Bobaljik derives the C$_{\Delta}$G from a containment structure in which all deadjectival DAs contain the comparative:

(5) [[ADJ] COMP] V$_{\Delta}$] 'become X-er'

Our proposal: what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG)

- C$_{\Delta}$G correctly characterizes the comparative-stem pathway but does not characterize deadjectival DAs as a class: some degree achievements are built on comparative stems, others on positive stems;
- The scalar semantics of the latter is supplied by their adjectival core, rather than by covert comparative morphology or by prefixation;
- Capturing the totality of the empirical domain requires distinguishing two structurally distinct types of deadjectival DAs: inchoative *e-/nu*-verbs and (anti)causative *i*-verbs (see Marelj & Matushansky 2025, 2026);
- While diachronic instability can reshape suppletive paradigms, it does not replace a synchronic account

The empirical domain of deadjectival DAs is populated by two distinct structural types. In both, scalar semantics is determined by the adjectival core: WYSIWYG.

2 SLAVIC DEADJECTIVAL DOUBLETS

Slavic languages provide multiple **ABA/ABB doublets**: two DAs associated with the same adjectival **comparison/gradation paradigm**; one built on the comparative stem and the other on the positive stem. The two members need not instantiate **exactly the same sense(s) of the adjectival core**.

(6) a. xoroš-ij ‘good’ → **luč-še** ‘better’ Russian, Bobaljik 2012:188
b. u-**lučš**-it^{j}(s^{j}a) ‘to make/become better’
c. xoroš-et^{j} ‘to become prettier’

(7) a. dobar ‘good’ → **bol-j**-i ‘better-MSG’ Serbo-Croatian, Bobaljik 2012:195
b. po-**bolj**-š-ati (se) ‘to make/become good’
c. pro-dobr-iti se ‘to become (morally) good’

(8) a. **dobr**-y → ‘good’/**lepsz**-y ‘better’ Polish, Bobaljik 2012:189, 204
b. u-**lepsz**-yć ‘make better’, po-**lepsz**-yć (się) ‘make/get better’
c. **dobrz**-eć ‘get better (=recover)’

General treatments in the literature: ABA cases are treated as marginal, semantically drifted or narrowed, or inceptive rather than as scalar DAs. Two structural accounts of the ABA cases have been proposed.

General challenge: The ABA/ABB doublet pattern is too extensive and systematic to be dismissed as marginal (see §4).

2.1 Bobaljik 2012: Two Paths to Change-of-State Semantics

Bobaljik 2012, Despić 2019: positive-stem cases instantiate an alternative inceptive structure (‘start to be X’), rather than the comparative structure (‘become X-er’).

(9) a. Mne plox-o. Russian, Bobaljik 2012:198
me.DAT bad-NSG
‘I’m sick.’/‘I don’t feel good.’

b. Mne po-plox-e-l-o.
me.DAT PFX-bad-TH-PST-NSG
‘I suddenly felt sick/felt worse.’

(10) a. Ovaj lopov se po-boljšao.
this thief REFL PFX-better.PST
‘This thief got better (more adept).’

b. Ovaj lopov se pro-dobrio. SC
this thief REFL PFX-good.PST
‘This thief became (morally) good.’

NB: SC *pro-dobriti* also exhibits semantic narrowing to the moral-goodness sense

Doublets? Only ‘skin-deep’ under this analysis: Since (10a) instantiates (11a), while (9b) and (10b) instantiate (11b), the ABA instances do not constitute a challenge. Rather than DAs, these are inceptives.

(11) a. [[ADJ] COMP] V_{Δ}] ‘become X-er’ cf. Bobaljik 2012:196
b. [PFX INCEPTIVE [A V_{STATE}]] ‘start to be X’

Challenges (to be discussed in detail later):

- Contra (11b), unprefixed positive-stem deadjectival verbs are dynamic, rather than stative (§3.1);
- Moreover, though Slavic has a canonical inceptive prefix marking the onset of both states and events, it is neither *po-* (9b), nor *pro-* (10b) (§§3.1, 4)
- Some of these ABA instances unambiguously encode scalar change (§3.1)

In other words, positive-stem deadjectival verbs do not align with the predictions of (11b)

2.2 Dees + VanDyne ± Romaniuk: The inchoative/(anti)causative divide

Dees & VanDyne & Romaniuk (2024); Dees & VanDyne (2025): the Polish doublets differ in verbal structure reflected by the choice of the verbal suffix:

- positive-stem forms correspond to inchoatives (*e*-verbs);
- comparative-stem forms correspond to causatives and their derived anti-causatives (all *i*-verbs), with the latter marked by SE$_{CL/AFF}$ morphology (*się* in Polish);
- the *e-*/*i*-labels correspond to the exponents of the respective verbal suffixes.

Hence **different verbal suffixes are linked to different structures**

(12) a. dobr-y ‘good’ lep-szy ‘better’
b. mał-y ‘small’ mniej-szy ‘smaller’

(13) a. po-lep-sz-**y**-ć (się) ‘to make/get better’, u-lep-sz-**y**-ć ‘to make better’ (anti)causative
b. dobrz-**e**-ć ‘to get better (=recover)’ inchoative

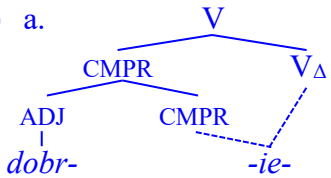
(14) a. z-mniej-sz-**y**-ć (się) ‘to make/get smaller’ (anti)causative
b. mal-**e**-ć ‘to get smaller’ inchoative

Comparative-stem forms start as transitive causatives; decausativization is morphologically marked (SE$_{CL}$ – *się* in Polish). Positive-stem forms are basic intransitives. Crucially, Polish *e*- and *i*-verbs differ sharply in their interaction with **prefixes**: whereas positive-stem verbs do not require a prefix to be grammatical, comparative-stem verbs always require one.

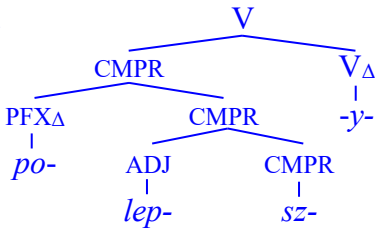
(15) a. polepszyć (się)/*lepszyć (się) ‘to make/get better’ (anti)causative
b. (wy)dobrzeć ‘to get better (=recover)’ inchoative

Doublets?

(16) a.



b.



The ABA pattern arises with *e*-verbs: the suffix (*-ie-* in Polish) realizes the CMPR-V$_\Delta$ span and no prefix intervenes to disrupt the locality (16a)

The ABB pattern arises with *i*-verbs (realized with the suffix *-y-* in Polish) because a prefix disrupts the locality required for spanning (16b), forcing overt realization of the comparative.

Challenges (to be discussed in detail later):

- ➢ Prefixed positive-stem *e*-verbs are attested;
- ➢ Comparative-stem (anti)causatives do not invariably require prefixation

In other words, **both prefix-based predictions have counterexamples** (§3.2)

2.3 Taking Stock & Moving Forward: Converging Insights

- **The availability of distinct structural routes: Bobaljik (2012) and Despić (2019)** propose that comparative- and positive-stem verbs involve distinct structural routes. Building on their proposal of two structural routes, we argue that both give rise to scalar degree achievements. The contrast is therefore not between an inceptive vs. a degree-achievement route, but between two types of scalar change-of-state (COS) verbs.

- **Two structural types in the deadjectival COS domain: Dees et al. (2024) and Dees & VanDyne (2025)** identify an independently motivated structural contrast between inchoative *e*-verbs and (anti)causative *i*-verbs and relate it to the ABA/ABB doublets. We build on this structural insight while showing that the contrast cannot be reduced to the presence versus absence of a prefix: prefixation neither determines nor reliably diagnoses the two structural types.

3 OUR PROPOSAL: WYSIWYG

- **Scalar semantics of deadjectival verbs is independent of comparative morphology**: The contrast is not one of scalarity: both the positive- and comparative-stem members of the doublets are DAs.
- **Scalar semantics of deadjectival verbs is independent of prefixation**: As far as deadjectival DAs examined here are concerned, prefixation does not introduce change-of-state meaning; rather, it interacts with independently provided event structure.
- **Scalar semantics is supplied by the adjectival core, consistent with Hay et al. (1999) and Kennedy & Levin (2008)**.
- **Two independently motivated structures are required for deadjectival DAs**. The differences between *e*- and *i*-verbs go way beyond ABA/ABB patterns and prefixation. Although conjugation class (*e*- vs. *i*-) correlates with the two patterns (ABA vs. ABB), the correlation is imperfect.
- **Rather than states vs events (in Vendler's sense), both *e*- and *i*- verbs encode dynamic events**, though their event structures differ (see Marelj & Matushansky 2025, 2026 for discussion and elaboration).

3.1 Positive-stem DAs and the inceptive route

3.1.1 Baseline: inceptives built on statives

(9b) and (10b) differ from canonical inceptives built on stative verbs in two crucial respects:
- Aspectual class
- Prefix choice

'Wrong' aspectual class of the unprefixed deadjectival verb: once the prefix is removed from such inceptives, the remaining verb is stative (18), as predicted by (11b). Positive-stem deadjectival verbs, however, are dynamic without a prefix (17) and are therefore inconsistent with (11b).

(17) Sižu pod kabinetom i čuvstvuju, čto mne plox-e-et.
sit.1SG under office and feel.1SG that me.DAT bad.TH.PRES.3SG
'Here I sit by the office and feel that I'm feeling worse.'

Prefix choice – 'suspect': stative verbs give rise to an inceptive reading when combined with *za-*, consistently described in the Slavic literature as canonically/typically expressing the beginning of an event or a state (**Dickey 2000, Braginsky 2008, Łaziński 2020**, among others):

(18) a. (za)voleti 'to (start to) love', (za)mrzeti 'to (start to) hate' Serbo-Croatian
b. (za)voždelet^{j} 'to (start to) lust for', (za)vladet^{j} 'to (start to) own' Russian

Unlike canonical statives, however, positive-stem deadjectival verbs combine with *po-* and *pro-*, prefixes that are not typically used for constructing inceptive events (inceptive aspect) in the relevant languages; none of the doublet-examples combines with *za-*.

Importantly, this is not due to a categorical restriction on the type of stem: deadjectival verbs can combine with *za-* and receive an onset-of-an-event reading, such is, for example, SC *živ-e-ti* 'live; be alive' → *za-živ-e-ti* 'come to life; begin to live; flourish/revive'; cf. also the color verbs in §3.1.2 below.

Positive-stem verbs such as (9b) and (10b) are nevertheless DAs, although the scalar change they encode need not be incremental. On the relevant reading, they may be endpoint-oriented and not encode progression through intermediate degrees. In the case of the Serbo-Croatian *prodobriti se*, this interpretation is consistent with the non-existence of its imperfective counterpart, whether primary (**dobriti se*) or secondary (**pro-dobravati se*; cf. Despić 2019). This non-incremental construal may also underlie the speakers' intuition (Bobaljik 2012:198) that (10b) describes a sudden/abrupt change rather than a gradually developing one, although this interpretation may also come from the (obligatory) prefix, making the verb perfective.
NB: This intuition is not shared by all speakers and may, in fact, be due to the prefix. Unlike in Serbo-Croatian, the imperfective form describing gradual change is possible (17) in Russian.

Finally, positive-stem DAs are not uniformly non-incremental and endpoint-oriented. The SC verbs built on the positive stem of *velik* 'big' and the positive root of *visok* 'tall' form secondary imperfectives (*uveličavati*, *povisivati*), a fact that is at least consistent with an open/unbounded, incremental construal. Positive-stem DAs can therefore instantiate both non-incremental, endpoint-oriented change and incremental scalar change:

(19) a. velik 'big', već-i 'bigger', (u)**velič**-a-ti, but *(u)**već**-a-ti 'enlarge' Serbo-Croatian
b. visok 'tall', viš-i (vis-j)-i 'taller', po-**vis**-iti, %po-**viš**-i-ti 'increase'

See also Marelj & Matushansky [under review] for additional information

3.1.2 Apparent counterexamples: the essive readings

Restricted **apparent stative counterexamples** come from color *e*-verbs:

(20) a. Vdali zelenel les. Russian, RNC
in.the.distance green.PST.MSG forest
'Far away the forest shone green.'

b. On byl černym, kak smola, beleli tol^{j}ko zuby.
he was black.INS as tar whiten.PST.PL only teeth
'He was pitch-black, only his teeth shone white.'

(21) a. Dan se beleo. Serbo-Croatian
day SE whiten.PTCP.MSG
'The day was glisteningly white.'

b. Šuma se zelenela.
forest SE green.PTCP.FSG
'The forest was beamingly green.'

In Serbo-Croatian stative readings require SE-marking

In Russian SE-marking on essive *e*-verbs used to be possible, remains marginally available:

(22) a. lužok zelenelsʲa, točno vymytyj RNC, up to the 19th c.
meadow green.PST.MSG.SE as.if washed
'The meadow shone green, as if freshly washed.'

b. Inej belelsʲa na ee šubke. RNC, up to the 20th c.
hoarfrost whiten.PST.MSG.SE on her fur coat
'Hoarfrost glistened white on her fur coat.'

Hence crucial distinctions from change-of-state *e*-verbs:

- The stative readings require SE in Serbo-Croatian and at earlier stages of Russian;
- Their prefixed variants are restricted to inceptive *za-* (like in true statives (18)!)
- The essive is morphologically marked in Serbo-Croatian, hence not representative of COS verbs generally.
- Moreover, these verbs do not exhibit doublets in either Russian or Serbo-Croatian.

DAs may take more than one route: Non-incremental scalar change still remains scalar change.

Positive-stem members of doublets are DAs even when they denote non-incremental, endpoint-oriented scalar change. This interpretation is not obligatory for positive-stem members: verbs in (19) encode incremental scalar change.

3.2 Testing the prefix-as-intervener account

Dees & VanDyne (2025): a prefix disrupts the locality required for spanning and forces overt realization of the comparative.

Prediction 1: prefixed positive-stem *e*-verbs should not exist – empirically refuted:

(23) a. Bassejn o- pust-e-l. Russian
swimming pool PFX-empty-THE-PST
'The swimming pool emptied.'

b. Bassejn pust-e-l.
swimming pool empty-THE-PST
'The swimming pool was emptying.'

(24) a. Ada je pocrnela. Serbo-Croatian
Ada be.3SG PO.black-THE.PTCP.FSG
'Ada got tanned.'

b. Ada je crnela.
Ada be.3SG black-THE.PTCP.FSG
'Ada was getting tanned.'

Prediction 2: comparative-stem *i*-verbs should require prefixation – empirically refuted:

(25) a. mek 'soft' → mek-š-i 'soft-ER-MSG' → (o)mekšati 'to soften' Serbo-Croatian
b. lak 'light'/'easy' → lak-š-i 'light-ER-MSG' → (o)lakšati 'to facilitate, alleviate'
c. tanak 'thin'→ tan-j-i 'thiner', (s)tan-j-i-ti 'to make thin(ner)'
d. debeo/debela 'fat.MSG/FSG'→ debl^{j}-i 'fatter', (u)deblj-a-ti 'to make fat(ter)'

Further problem: positive-stem *i*-verbs occur both with and without prefixes, confirming that neither adjectival stem choice nor prefixation categorically determines the structural type:

(26) a. Ivan pri-gotov-i-l-s^{j}a k drake. prefixed *i*-verb, Russian
Ivan PFX-ready-TH$_{I}$-PST-MSG-REFL towards fight
'Ivan got ready for a fight.'

b. Ivan gotov-i-l-s^{j}a k drake. unprefixed *i*-verb, Russian
Ivan ready-TH$_{I}$-PST-MSG-REFL towards fight
'Ivan was getting ready for a fight.'

c. Bazen se iz- prazn-i-o. prefixed *i*-verb, Serbo-Croatian
swimming pool REFL PFX-empty-TH$_{I}$-PTCP
'The swimming pool emptied.'

d. Bazen se prazn-i-o. unprefixed *i*-verb, Serbo-Croatian
swimming pool REFL empty-TH$_{I}$-PTCP
'The swimming pool was emptying.'

There is no direct correlation between prefixation and verbal structure (*e*- vs, *i*-verbs)

3.3 Quick summary

Positive-stem degree achievements are not reducible to an inceptive-plus-stative structure.

Semantic narrowing and non-incremental change do not eliminate the COS semantics.

Prefixation does not introduce scalar/COS meaning of DAs that are under consideration here; It interacts with the independently provided event structure.

4 How exceptional are the exceptions?

Usual treatment of ABA/ABB doublets in the literature: ABA cases are treated as exceptions requiring independent explanation.

ABA/ABB deadjectival degree achievement doublets under our analysis: Rather than treat ABA cases as exceptions, our proposal licenses their coexistence without requiring it.

Given our proposal that both positive-stem and comparative-stem verbs encode scalar change, their coexistence is not excluded by the grammar. This does not require every language or adjectival core to realize both DA members. It does, however, yield a conditional expectation: where positive- and comparative-stem derivations are both productively available, ABA/ABB doublets may constitute a systematic pattern rather than remain marginal. Ukrainian appears to instantiate precisely this possibility.

4.1 Doublets as the norm

Vyshnevska (2025): Ukrainian productively derives both positive- and comparative-stem degree achievements from the same adjectival core:
Potentially relevant: the verbalizing suffix (*-a-*) is different here from the historical *e*- and *i*-classes, showing that this is a Ukrainian innovation

(27) a. žovt-(iš)-yj
yellow-CMPR-MSG
'yellow(er)'

b. žovt-i-ty
yellow-TH-INF
'to become yellow(er)'

c. žovt-iš-a-ty
yellow-CMPR-TH-INF
'to become yellower'

Both patterns occur with putative open- and closed-scale stems (examples and judgments from Vyshnevska 2025; Karpilovska 2016:2923 indicates a difference in interpretation):

(28) Putative open-scale adjectival stem

a. Dereva žovt-iš-a-ly, ale vony ne staly žovti. Ukrainian
trees yellow-CMPR-TV-PST but they not become yellow
'The trees were turning more yellow but they did not become yellow.'

b. Dereva žovt-i-ly, ale vony ne staly žovti.
trees yellow-TV-PST but they not become yellow
'The trees were turning more yellow but they did not become yellow.'

(29) Closed-scale adjectival stem

a. Kimnata pust-iš-a-la, ale vona ne stala pusta.
room empty-CMPR-TV-PST but she not become empty
'The room was getting emptier, but it did not become empty.'

b. Kimnata pust-i-la, ale vona ne stala pusta.
room empty-TV-PST but she not become empty
'The room was getting emptier, but it did not become empty.'

The Ukrainian data also bear on the structural interpretation of non-culmination: the failure to reach the adjectival endpoint cannot by itself diagnose the absence of a result-state component in Slavic.

The imperfective paradox: Because the imperfective viewpoint does not entail culmination even for telic predicates, non-culmination cannot by itself diagnose the absence of a result-state component.

(30) a. John was drawing a circle. ⊭ John drew a circle. Dowty 1979:146
b. Kim is straightening the rope. ⊭ Kim has straightened the rope. Hay et al. 1999

(31) a. 'The trees were turning yellow' ⊭ the trees have turned yellow
b. 'The trees were turning yellow' ⊨ the trees have become yellower

Crucially, failure to reach the positive-state endpoint is compatible with scalar change and in (31b) actually entails it.

Prefixal delimitation (Filip 2003) creates the converse problem; a prefix **may** bring in event delimitation or bounding without introducing COS semantics; a prefix delimits the event rather than diagnoses the structure of unprefixed stem.

Dočekal & Vlášková (2021): the choice of the prefix may determine whether the culmination corresponds to the natural endpoint of the scale:

(32) a. Čaj vy-chladl za hodinu. Czech, Dočekal & Vlášková 2021
tea from-cooled.MSG in hour
'The tea cooled in an hour.'

b. Čaj o-chladl za hodinu.
tea around-cooled.MSG in hour
'The tea cooled slightly in an hour.'

(33) a. Čaj se o-hladio za sat vremena. Serbo-Croatian
tea SE PFX.cool.PTCP.MSG for hour time
'The tea cooled fully/completely in an hour.'

b. Čaj se pro-hladio za sat vremena.
tea SE PFX.cool.PTCP.MSG for hour time
'The tea cooled slightly/a bit in an hour.'

NB: **Filip (2003):** Three distinct possibilities are attested: prefixes may preserve the telicity of the base, or derive telic verbs from atelic, or derive atelic predicates from telic ones

'The prefixation paradox' captures a bidirectional diagnostic failure in Slavic:

- A prefix may impose an event boundary or induce culmination without introducing COS semantics;
- Conversely, COS semantics may already be present without prefixation.

This view is fully consistent with Hay et al. (1999) and Kennedy & Levin (2008), attributing the change-of-state semantics to the event structure of the verb

Neither the presence nor the absence of a culmination entailment reliably diagnoses a result-state component in the DA stem.

On our WYSIWYG analysis, the comparative interpretation requires neither overt comparative morphology nor a covert comparative operator;

Prefixation and culmination are not reliable diagnostics of the two structures.

4.2 Positive-stem DAs without comparative-stem counterparts

Not predicted either by Bobaljik (2012) or by Dees + VanDyne ± Romaniuk: adjectival stems with a suppletive comparative and a positive-based degree achievement

(34) a. mnogo 'many, much' → bol^{j}še, bolee (underlying bol-ej-e) 'more' Russian
b. množit^{j}/umnožit^{j} 'to multiply (incl. arithmetical meaning), increase'

(35) a. mnogo 'many, much'→ 'više' 'more' Serbo-Croatian
b. množiti/umnožiti 'to multiply (incl. arithmetical meaning), increase'

NB: *mnogo* 'many, much' is a non-agreeing vague numeral rather than a canonical adjective. Yet as Bobaljik includes it systematically in the empirical domain of $C_{\Delta}G$, we follow his lead

Despite the non-comparative form, both prefixed and unprefixed forms of the verb permit the interpretation 'become/make more':

(36) a. Plodites^{j} i raz.množajtes^{j}. Russian
propagate.IMP.PL and PFX.multiply.IMP.PL
'Be fruitful, and multiply." (Genesis 1:28)

b. nauči pravdivogo, i on pri.um.nožit znanie
teach honest.acc and he PFX.PFX.multiply.3SG knowledge
'teach a just man, and he will increase in learning' (Proverbs 9:9)

c. […] obeščal pokončit^{j} s niščetoj, a na dele — u.množil ee.
promised finish.INF with poverty but in reality PFX.multiply.PST.MSG it
'Boris Godunov promised to get rid of poverty but in reality increased it.' (RNC)

(37) a. primery viktoriancev […] možno množit^{j} Russian, RNC
examples.ACC Victorians.GEN possible multiply.IPFV.INF
'More instances of Victorians [who knew many languages] can be provided.'

b. Ne dólžno množit^{j} suščee bez neobxodimosti.
not required multiply.IPFV.INF existing.NSG without necessity
'Entities should not be multiplied without need.'

c. Issledovanija prodolžajuts^{j}a, i gipotezy množats^{j}a.
research.PL continue.PRES.3PL and hypothesis.PL multiply.IPFV.PRES.3PL
'Research is continuing and hypotheses are multiplying.'

(38) a. Botovi su=se umnožili na svim društvenim mrežama. SC
bots AUX=SE PFX.multiply.3MPL on all social networks
'(The number of) bots increased on all social networks.'

b. Kritike se množe.
criticism SE multiply.PRS.3PL
'Criticism is increasing.'

Caveat: the comparative meaning is logically weaker than (entailed by) the absolute meaning. Yet (36b) and (37b) confirm its existence

4.3 DAs based on short-form adjectives

An additional base for deadjectival verb formation is provided by Russian short forms:

(39) a. bol^{j}šoj 'big', bol^{j}še (underlying bol^{j}š-j-e) 'bigger', naibol^{j}šij 'biggest' Russian
b. u**velič**it^{j}/u**velič**ivat^{j} 'to increase.PFV/IPFV' (tr.)

The Russian *bol^{j}šoj* 'big' has regular (non-suppletive) comparative and superlative forms
Which also have the interpretation 'more' and 'most', respectively, cf. (34a)

What is irregular is its short form, which also serves as the basis for verb formation:

(40) U straxa glaza veliki.
at/by fear eyes big.PL
'Fear makes everything look bigger' (lit. 'Fear has big eyes.')

The short-form positive *velik*, its comparative *bol^{j}še*, and verb *uveličit^{j}* therefore **instantiate an ABBA relation** in Bobaljik's terms.

Its counterpart *malen*ʲ*kij* 'small' also has a suppletive comparative allomorph and an irregular short form (*men*ʲ*še* 'less', *mal* 'small'), as well as two corresponding verbs (*umalit*ʲ 'to belittle' and *umen*ʲ*šit*ʲ 'to make smaller', see Bobaljik 2012:187 for an argument that the former does not involve change-of-state semantics)

Short forms therefore provide an additional source for deadjectival DAs.

4.4 Intermediate summary

Slavic deadjectival degree achievements can be derived from the positive-form stem alongside comparative-stem forms or in their absence.

- Ukrainian shows that both positive- and comparative-stem derivational routes are productive.
- Both Russian and Serbo-Croatian illustrate positive-based scalar verbs without comparative-stem counterparts.
- Russian short forms supply additional positive adjectival sources/bases available to verb formation

The availability of the two routes licenses ABA/ABB doublets without requiring every language or adjectival core to instantiate both members.

In the deadjectival degree-achievement domain, prefixation is neither necessary nor sufficient for COS semantics.

Neither culmination nor its absence can directly diagnose the underlying structure of the DA verb unless the effects of prefixation and perfectivity are taken into consideration.

5 Cross-Slavic variation and diachronic restructuring of suppletive paradigms

The suppletive form used in a deadjectival degree achievement may reflect an earlier stage of diachronic development

Cognate comparative material may participate in a suppletive paradigm in one Slavic language and a non-suppletive paradigm in another:

(41) a. dobr-y 'good', **lep**-sz-y 'better' Polish
b. u-**lep**-sz-yć 'make better'
c. po-**lep**-szy-ć (się) 'to make/get better'

(42) a. dobryj/xorošyj/harnyj 'good', **lip**-š-yj/kraščij 'better' Ukrainian
b. **lip**-š-a-ty 'to get better'

(43) a. **lep** 'beautiful', **lep**-š-i 'beautiful-ER-MSG' Serbo-Croatian
b. u-**lep**-š-ati 'to make prettier'

The shared comparative form in Polish and Ukrainian suggests that both languages innovated a positive form; the verbal stem reflects the older paradigm (while remaining comparative in form, as shown by the comparative suffix -*sz*-/-*š*-)
We hypothesize that the suppletion of the positive form was enabled by the change of the meaning of the original stem -*lep*- from 'beautiful' to 'good' (Berneker 1924:711)

Independent evidence for the cross-linguistic tendency for the replacement of the positive form in the paradigm comes from Germanic (inspired by Bobaljik 2012:106):

(44)	a.	gut	besser	best-	German
	b.	góður	betri	bestur	Icelandic, Neijmann 2021:246
	c.	gut	besər	bestər	Yiddish, Katz 1987:183
	d.	**bra**/god	bedre	best	Norwegian, Strandskogen & Strandskogen 1995:81
	e.	**bra**/god	bättre	bäst	Swedish, Hinchliffe & Holmes 2003:123

A similar effect is obtained with the Slavic root *-gor-*/*-hir-*:

(45) a. zao ‘evil’/rdjav ‘wicked’/loš ‘bad’, **gor**i (gor-j-i) ‘worse’ Serbo-Croatian
b. po-**gor**-š-a-ti ‘worsen’

(46) a. pohan-yj ‘bad’, **hir**-š-yj ‘worse’ Ukrainian, Vyshnevska 2025
b. **hir**-š-a-ty ‘worsen’

(47) a. **gor**^{j}-k-ij ‘bitter, painful’, gor-č-e ‘more bitter’, gor-š-e ‘more painful’ Russian
b. o.**gor**-č-it^{j} ‘to upset’

The positive form has been replaced in those languages that maintained the meaning ‘bad’, but the comparative and the comparative-based degree achievement verb remained
Again, identical replacement patterns from Germanic (Bobaljik 2012:106–107)

Whatever their diachronic sources, **the synchronic coexistence of positive- and comparative-stem DAs cannot be explained away by diachronic development**; the two structural routes reflected in ABA/ABB doublets must still be represented in the grammar.

6 Conclusion

We propose a **what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) analysis** of Slavic deadjectival DAs: the scale is supplied by the adjectival core, while change arises from the event structure of the verb, in line with Hay et al. (1999); Kennedy & Levin (2008). It requires neither overt comparative morphology nor a covert comparative operator and is not introduced by prefixation.

- It follows that both positive- and comparative-stem verbs are scalar DAs. Positive-stem members cannot be generally reclassified as inceptives rather than DAs.
- The deadjectival DA domain contains two independently motivated structural types: inchoative *e-/nu*-verbs and (anti)causative *i*-verbs. The association between these structures and positive- vs. comparative-stem formation is systematic but not one-to-one.
- The availability of the two structural routes allows ABA/ABB doublets to arise without requiring every language or adjectival core to instantiate both members. Ukrainian shows that both routes may be productive, while Russian and Serbo-Croatian also attest positive-stem DAs without comparative-stem counterparts.
- Canonical inceptives provide independent evidence for an inceptive-plus-stative structure, but this structure does not characterize positive-stem DAs generally. The essive readings of color verbs are restricted and may be morphologically marked, and these verbs do not participate in ABA/ABB doublets.

- In the deadjectival DA domain examined here, prefixation interacts with independently provided event structure. the presence of culmination in the prefixed verb and its lack in the imperfective obscure the underlying event structure of the verbal stem.
- Cross-Slavic correspondences are compatible with diachronic restructuring and semantic redistribution. Whatever their diachronic sources, the two structural routes reflected in synchronic ABA/ABB doublets must be represented in the grammar.

Slogan form: No Winner takes it all: BETTER is a winning route. GOOD is another.

7 APPENDIX: THE ALLOMORPHY OF THE COMPARATIVE SUFFIX

As noted by an anonymous reviewer, the derivation of the degree achievement in (4a), repeated in (48a), appears to involve an additional step: the suffix *-š-*:

(48) a. dobar ‘good’ → bol-j-i ‘better’ → po-bolj-**š**-ati (se) ‘to improve’ Serbo-Croatian
b. zao ‘evil’ → gor-i ‘worse’ < gor-j-i → po-gor-**š**-a-ti ‘to worsen’

When, however, compared to (49), this impression is demystified: the suppletive comparative and the verb contain different allomorphs of the comparative suffix, both unproductive:

(49) a. plox-oj ‘bad-MSG’ → **xuž**e ‘worse’ < xud-j-e Russian
b. xud-š-ij ‘worst’, u-**xud-š**-it^{j} (s^{j}a) ‘to worsen’

Strikingly, in Russian the superlative of (49a) is formed with the same comparative allomorph
The original form of the suppletive comparative form also exhibited the *-j-* allomorph (cf. old East Slavic *lučii*, Middle Russian *luče* ‘better’, cf. Berneker 1924:743, Vasmer 1986:536, Shanskij & Zhuravlev 1999:193–194)

The two allomorphs are attested independently in both languages, though usually not with the same adjective:

(50) a. brz ‘fast’ brž-i ‘faster-MSG’ < brz-j-i Serbo-Croatian, the *-j-* allomorph
b. lak ‘soft’ lakš-i ‘softer-MSG’ < lak-š-i the *-š-* allomorph

(51) a. bogat ‘rich’ bogače ‘richer’ < bogat-j-e Russian, the *-j-* allomorph
b. tonkij ‘thin’ ton^{j}še ‘thinner’ < ton-^{j}š-e the *-^{j}š-* allomorph

Proposal: the “intrusive” *-š-* in comparative-based degree achievements is an allomorph of the comparative suffix rather than an additional suffix
Additional assumption: the suppletive stem in SC is *-bol^{j}-* rather than *-bol-* (to explain the palatalization in (48a)); the “(a)” notation reflects the presence of the back yer in the underlying representation of the root

(52) a. √GOOD ⇔ [bol^{j}] / __ [CMPR] Serbo-Croatian
[dob(a)r]

b. [CMPR] ⇔ [j]/ __ {tvrd- ‘hard’, deblj- ‘fat’…;
[bol^{j}- __ INFL], [gor- __ INFL]}
[š]/ __ {lep- ‘beautiful’, mek- ‘soft’, lak- ‘light’/’easy’, bol^{j}-, gor-}
[ij]

(53) a. √BAD ⇔ [xud] / __ [CMPR] Russian
[plox]

b. [CMPR] ⇔ [^{j}j]/ __ {tv^{j}ord- ‘hard’, bogat- ‘rich’…;
[xud- __ INFL]}
[š]/ __ {ton- ‘thin’, …, luč- ‘good’, xud- ‘bad’}
[eje]

The intuition expressed in (52) and (53) is that the *-š-* allomorph is chosen in environments undergoing further derivation (though we have no idea why this should be the case)

Whereas the Serbo-Croatian data are compatible with the hypothesis that the suffix *-š-* is added on top of the comparative stem, the Russian data are not: the comparative involves consonant mutation (/dj/ → [ž]), absent from the superlative and from the derived verb

Historically, the distribution of the two allomorphs of the shorter comparative suffix depended on case and phi-features (Nandris 1969:97–98, Khaburgaev 1986:173, Lunt 2001:60, etc.): in the nominative singular non-feminine it was realized as *-j-* (triggering mutation of the stem-final consonant), all other forms used *-jiš-* (likewise, triggering mutation):

Table 1: Old Common Slavic *-š-/-j-* comparatives (Nandris 1969:98)

	***-vys-* 'tall'**	**masculine**	**neuter**	**feminine**
SG	**NOM**	vyš-ii	vyš-e	vyš-iš-i
	GEN	vyš-iš-a		vyš-iš-ę
	DAT	vyš-iš-u		vyš-iš-i
…				

In Modern Russian and Serbo-Croatian the choice between the two (unproductive) allomorphs is determined by the stem
On the development of the contemporary comparative see Pancheva 2025

8 References

Abusch, Dorit. 1986. *Verbs of change, causation, and time. Report 86–50*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, CSLI.
Bach, Emmon. 1986. The algebra of events. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 9, 5–16.
Berneker, Erich. 1924. *Slavisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* 1, A-L. Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung.
Bobaljik, Jonathan David. 2012. *Universals in Comparative Morphology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT press.
Braginsky, Pavel. 2008. The semantics of the prefix *za-* in Russian. Doctoral dissertation, Bar-Ilan University.
Dees, Joshua & VanDyne, Katie. 2025. On the *ABA patterns of Polish inchoative deadjectival change-of-state verbs. (Paper presented at *FASL 34*, Cornell University, May 16–18, 2025).
Dees, Joshua & VanDyne, Katie & Romaniuk, Anna. 2024. The C△G and Polish causative/anticausative deadjectival verbs. *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 9(1) (5698). https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v9i1.5698.
Despić, Miloje. 2019. (Non-)intersective adjectives and root suppletion. *The Linguistic Review* 36 (3), 507–530. https://doi.org/10.1515/tlr-2019-2027.
Dickey, Stephen M. 2000. *Parameters of Slavic aspect: A cognitive approach*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
Dočekal, Mojmír & Vlášková, Lucia. 2021. Evaluativity of degree achievements and verbal prefixes: Evidence from Czech morphology. *Acta Linguistica Academica* 68 (4), 536–552. https://doi.org/10.1556/2062.2021.00427.
Dowty, David R. 1979. *Word Meaning and Montague Grammar*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
Filip, Hana. 2003. Prefixes and the delimitation of events. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 11 (1), 55–101.

Hay, Jennifer & Kennedy, Christopher & Levin, Beth. 1999. Scalar structure underlies telicity in "degree achievements". In Matthews, Tanya & Strolovitch, Devon (eds.). *Proceedings of SALT IX*, 127–144. Ithaca: CLC Publications.
Hinchliffe, Ian & Holmes, Philip. 2003. *Swedish: A Comprehensive Grammar*. London: Routledge.
Karpilovska, Ievgeniia. 2016. Ukrainian. In Müller, Peter & Ohnheiser, Ingeborg & Olsen, Susan & Rainer, Franz (eds.). *Word-formation: An international handbook of the languages of Europe*, vol. 4, 2913–2931. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
Katz, Dovid. 1987. *Grammar of the Yiddish Language*. London: Duckworth.
Kennedy, Christopher & Levin, Beth. 2008. Measure of change: The adjectival core of degree achievements. In McNally, Louise & Kennedy, Christopher (eds.). *Adjectives and adverbs: Syntax, semantics and discourse*, 156–182. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Khaburgaev, G.A. 1986. Staroslavianskii iazyk [Old Common Slavic]. Moscow: Prosveshchenie.
Łaziński, Marek. 2020. Between ingressivity and resultativity: The prefix *za-* in contemporary Polish from a cross-Slavic perspective. *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 65 (2), 249–271. https://doi.org/10.1515/slaw-2020-0013.
Lunt, Horace G. 2001. *Old Church Slavonic Grammar* [7th revised edition]. The Hague/Paris: De Gruyter.
Marelj, Marijana & Matushansky, Ora. 2025. On the structures of intransitive degree achievements. (Paper presented at *Inner Aspect, VP Structure, and the Functional Domain in Slavic Languages (SlavIA-2025)*, Venice, November 6-7, 2025).
Marelj, Marijana & Matushansky, Ora. 2026. Uncausatives and decausatives in Slavic. (Paper presented at *Cyprus Acquisition Team (CAT Lab)*, Nicosia (online), February 25, 2026).
Marelj, Marijana & Matushansky, Ora. [under review]. BETTER should never be the enemy of GOOD: two structures for Slavic deadjectival degree achievements. *Proceedings on FDSL 18*.
Nandris, Grigore. 1969. *Old Church Slavonic Grammar, Part I*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Neijmann, Daisy L. 2021. *Icelandic: An Essential Grammar*. London: Routledge.
Pancheva, Roumyana. 2025. Two types of synthetic comparatives in Old Slavic. In Anastasiia, Vyshnevska & Edoardo, Cavirani (eds.). *Generative Perspectives on Degrees*, 65–97. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111547688-005.
Shanskij, N.M. & Zhuravlev, A.F. 1999. Ètimologicheskij slovar' russkogo iazyka. Vyp. 9: L [Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language, issue 9: L]. Moscow: Moscow State University.
Strandskogen, Åse-Berit & Strandskogen, Rolf. 1995. *Norwegian: An essential grammar*. London: Routledge.
Vasmer, Max. 1986. *Этимологический словарь русского языка [The etymological dictionary of Russian]*. Moscow: Progress.
Vendler, Zeno. 1967. *Linguistics in Philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Vyshnevska, Anastasiia. 2025. Comparative morphology across categories: Ukrainian adjectives, adverbs, and deadjectival verbs. Doctoral dissertation, KU Leuven. Amsterdam: LOT.