How to be Positive

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1. Summary. Recent literature has seen the rise of interest in *ABA patterns. These constrain form identity between three (or more) categories. For instance, [1] observes that in the triplet positive–comparative–superlative (POS–CMPR–SPRL), POS and SPRL are never the same to the exclusion of CMPR. [1] (and much related work) interprets these patterns in terms of structural containment: if the structure of SPRL properly contains CMPR, and if CMPR contains POS, *ABA follows. However, [2] argue that there are more ways to derive *ABA patterns, and that a careful study of containment patterns is crucial. Our paper revisits Bobaljik's original case for containment (adjectival degree morphology), and suggests that a more symmetric view on the relationship between POS and CMPR is needed, crucially without giving up the possibility of deriving *ABA. Our starting point is the universal in (1), which, if true, would provide a strong support for containment.

(1) *The POS-CMPR Asymmetry* (PCA; [3], p. 133])
Universally, the comparative form of a gradable adjective is derived from or identical to its positive form.

We provide data from Slovak and Czech which violate (1). We argue that the facts require the adoption of the non-containment structures in (2), where a common gradable base is elaborated upon in different directions in the positive and in the comparative. We assume a syntactic POS head (well-known in the semantic literature, e.g. [4]), which features in the positive degree, but is not found below CMPR in the comparative.

(2) a. $[_{\text{POSP}}$ POS $[_{\text{AP}}$ A]] b. $[_{\text{CMPRP}}$ CMPR $[_{\text{AP}}$ A]]

2. Data. a. Comparatives. Slovak and Czech feature three different classes of adjectives. Class 1 adjectives are underived adjectives, and unremarkable in every respect. Class 2 and Class 3 adjectives are complex, consisting of a root and an additional marker, which comes in three different forms: *-k-*, *-ok-*, and *-n-* (henceforth ADJ). ADJ behaves in two different ways in the CMPR. In Class 2, ADJ disappears, yielding a pattern that violates the PCA. In Class 3, ADJ is preserved, and the CMPR marker *-(ej)š* stacks on top of ADJ. This situation is summarised in (3), with some actual examples (from Czech) in (4).

(3)

	POS	CMPR
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$-	$\sqrt{1}$- *-(ej)š*
Class 2	$\sqrt{2}$-ADJ	$\sqrt{2}$- *-(ej)š*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$-ADJ	$\sqrt{3}$-ADJ-*(ej)š*

(4)

POS	CMPR	gloss
star-(ý)	star-š-(í)	'old'
šir-ok-(ý)	šir-š-(í)	'wide'
div-ok-(ý)	div-oč-ejš-(í)	'easy'

b. Causatives. In both languages, deadjectival causatives show (overwhelmingly) a pattern where the causative is built by suffixing *-i* to the same base to which the CMPR *-(ej)š* attaches, see (5) for Czech and (6) for Slovak. Specifically, if ADJ is missing in

CMPR, it is also absent in CAUS, and vice versa. The only exception to this is found with a subset of Class 2 adjectives, labelled Class 2b. In Czech, they have the CMPR marker *-š* preceding the causative *-i*. In Slovak, the very same adjectives show ADJ instead of *-š*.

(5)

	POS	CMPR	CAUS
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$ -Ø	$\sqrt{1}$ - *-(ej)š*	$\sqrt{1}$ - *-i*
Class 2a	$\sqrt{2a}$ -ADJ	$\sqrt{2a}$ - *-(ej)š*	$\sqrt{2a}$ - *-i*
Class 2b	$\sqrt{2b}$ -ADJ	$\sqrt{2b}$ - *-(ej)š*	$\sqrt{2b}$ - *š -i*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$ -ADJ	$\sqrt{3}$ -ADJ-*(ej)š*	$\sqrt{3}$ -ADJ-*i*

(6)

	POS	CMPR	CAUS
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$ -Ø	$\sqrt{1}$ - *-(ej)š*	$\sqrt{1}$ - *-i*
Class 2a	$\sqrt{2a}$ -ADJ	$\sqrt{2a}$ - *-(ej)š*	$\sqrt{2a}$ - *-i*
Class 2b	$\sqrt{2b}$ -ADJ	$\sqrt{2b}$ - *-(ej)š*	$\sqrt{2b}$ -ADJ-*i*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$ -ADJ	$\sqrt{3}$ -ADJ-*(ej)š*	$\sqrt{3}$ -ADJ-*i*

The presence of ADJ in Slovak Class 2b violates a potential universal, proposed in [1], to the effect that CAUS is always derived from CMPR. Despite the complex nature of the data (which violates two candidate universals), they can be derived using Nanosyntax [5] and the symmetric structures in (2). Below, we simplify the spellout part of the discussion for the ease of exposition, focussing on the insights rather than the technical detail.

3. Analysis. a. Modeling the presence vs. absence of ADJ by phrasal spellout. A central part of our proposal is that the absence of ADJ is a consequence of phrasal spellout. We take the functional sequence of a gradable adjective in the positive to consist of four heads: $\sqrt{}$, little *a* (which turns the root to an adjective), Q (which contributes gradability), and POS. The ADJ marker is a realisation of either just POS, the span Q + POS, or *a* + Q + POS. Its absence in the Class 1 adjectives is due to phrasal spellout: Class 1 roots lexicalise the entire sequence, as shown on the first line of (7). The differences between the four classes follows from a (lexical) difference in the size of the root. Class 1 roots are the largest (size POSP), whereas Class 2a, 2b and 3 ones are smaller (size QP, *a*P and $\sqrt{}$P): these need an additional exponent (ADJ) to realise POS (and/or Q and *a*; see (7)).

(7)

	$\sqrt{}$	*a*	Q	POS	AGR
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$				*-ý*
Class 2a	$\sqrt{2a}$			ADJ	*-ý*
Class 2b	$\sqrt{2b}$			ADJ	*-ý*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$			ADJ	*-ý*

(8)

	$\sqrt{}$	*a*	Q	CMPR
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$			*-š*
Class 2a	$\sqrt{2a}$			*-š*
Class 2b	$\sqrt{2b}$			*-š*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$		ADJ	*-š*

b. Comparatives. The fact that comparatives lack POS (see (2)) leads automatically to the PCA-violating disappearance of ADJ in Class 2a (see (8)). ADJ disappears also in Class 2b, which is of size *a*P, i.e. cannot realise Q. We propose that ADJ disappears in Class 2b because *-š* can realise the sequence Q-CMPR, which it does in Class 2b. It only spells out a part of its specification (CMPR) in Classes 1, 2a, 3. This assumption concerning *-š* (namely that it spells out Q + CMPR) will also account for its emergence in Czech causatives.

c. Causatives have the same structure in Czech (9) and Slovak (10). The reason why Class 2a roots lack ADJ in the causative is because CAUS, like CMPR, lacks POS. With POS gone, ADJ markers need to spell out only Q and *a* heads, where needed. This makes ADJ disappear in Class 2a, but not Classes 2b and 3.

(9)

	$\sqrt{}$	*a*	Q	CAUS
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$			*-i*
Class 2a	$\sqrt{2a}$			*-i*
Class 2b	$\sqrt{2b}$		*-š*	*-i*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$		ADJ	*-i*

(10)

	$\sqrt{}$	a	Q	CAUS
Class 1	$\sqrt{1}$			*-i*
Class 2a	$\sqrt{2a}$			*-i*
Class 2b	$\sqrt{2b}$		ADJ	*-i*
Class 3	$\sqrt{3}$		ADJ	*-i*

The Czech-Slovak difference is that in Class 2b, Q is lexicalised by *-š* in Czech, but by ADJ in Slovak. This is not surprising because both ADJ and *-š* can spell out Q, i.e. they both contain it in their lexical entry. Therefore, they compete for Q, and different winners emerge. We link this difference to slightly different entries of the Czech and Slovak ADJ.

4. Conclusion. The crucial point is that once we drop the POS head in the comparative (and the related causative), an explanation for the complex pattern of ADJ distribution becomes possible under the Nanosyntactic assumptions. In the talk, we further show why asymmetric structures (with POS fully contained in CMPR) cannot capture the pattern.

[1] **Bobaljik 2012**. *Comparatives in Universal Morphology*. [2] **Bobaljik & Sauerland 2018**. ABA and the combinatorics of features. *Glossa*. [3] **Grano & Davis 2017**. Universal markedness in gradable adjectives. *NLLT*. [4] **Kennedy & McNally 2005**. Scale structure, and the semantics of gradable predicates. *Language*. [5] **Starke 2018.** Complex left branches, spellout, and prefixes. In *Exploring nanosyntax*. OUP.