

## Superlative morphology from syntax: the case of Slavic *nai-/naj-*

It has long been noticed that the Slavic superlative prefix *\*nai-* consists of two components: *\*na* + *\*i* (Miklosich 1886). The former can easily be identified with the preposition Sl *na* ‘on(to)’ (cf. Li *nuō* ‘from (above)’, Gr *ἀνά* ‘on, up, through’ etc.) which developed an intensifying meaning when used as a prefix, e.g. R *bol’no* ‘painful’ → *na-bol’no* ‘very painful’. The origin of the second component, however, has not been determined plausibly so far. In etymological dictionaries it is usually related to the particle Av *ī* whose cognates can be found in Gr οὐτος-ί ‘this here’, v̄v-í ‘now’, (Berneker 1908-13, Snoj 2016). However, no such particle can be attested independently for Slavic. Other explanations are limited to single statements linking the second component of *\*nai-* to a demonstrative or relative pronoun without, however, providing a scenario as to how these pronouns became a part of the prefix (Matasović 2008, Bobaljik 2012). In the talk I will, therefore, present a new account that links the second component of the prefix to an element securely attested in Slavic: the definiteness marker *\*j-*.

Drawing upon a typologically common pattern (Bobaljik 2012, Gorshenin 2012), I suppose that at a pre-stage of Slavic the superlative was derived from the comparative with the aid of a definiteness marker. Definiteness of a noun phrase in earlier Slavic was denoted by adding a definiteness marker of pronominal origin to the right edge of the adjective. This construction is shared by Baltic which suggests common ancestry. As data from Old Lithuanian show, the occurrence of the definiteness marker was originally not bound to the position immediately following the adjective. If an adjective/participle was preceded by a prefix/preverb it could be placed between these two elements (Petit 2009, Stolz 2010). I suppose that this state of affairs is also reflected in the Slavic superlative prefix *\*nai-*. In cases where the superlative was further enhanced by the modifier *\*na-* the definiteness marker was placed between the modifier and the comparative. When the modifier merged with the comparative becoming an prefix the definiteness marker ended up being trapped between these two elements. As it is often the case with trapped morphology, it was then subsequently lost (Harris & Faarlund 2006) most probably within the course of its externalization (Haspelmath 1993), leaving, however, a trace in the segment *\*-i-* that was reinterpreted as a part of the prefix.

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