

## THE BETTER AS THE ENEMY OF THE GOOD (DEGREE ACHIEVEMENTS)

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### 1 INTRODUCTION: THE OLD PUZZLE OF DEGREE ACHIEVEMENTS

Dowty 1979, Abusch 1986, Hay, Kennedy and Levin 1999, etc.: degree achievement verbs are often ambiguous between a telic and an atelic readings:

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

They also differ morphologically, with some clearly built on the comparative stem and others lacking comparative morphs, but the semantics can still be comparative:

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

Bobaljik 2012: the Comparative Change of State Generalization (CAG):

- (3) 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)

I.e., if the comparative of an adjective has a suppletive stem, deadjectival degree achievements must be derived from it:

- (4) a. dobar 'good' → **bol-ji** 'better' → po-**bolj**-š-ati (se) 'to improve' Serbo-Croatian  
b. plox-oj 'bad-MSG' → **xuže** 'worse' → u-**xud**-š-itj (sja) 'to worsen' Russian  
c. bad → worse → worsen/\*badden

Adjectives whose comparatives are not suppletive form deadjectival degree achievement verbs from the positive stem

Why CAG?

Bobaljik 2012: all deadjectival degree achievements are derived from the comparative stem (semantics from Hay et al. 1999):

- (5) [[ADJ] COMP] V<sub>Δ</sub> ] 'become X-er'

Our proposal: some deadjectival degree achievements are built on the comparative stem, some, on the positive stem (WYSIWYG); also compatible with the semantics from Hay et al. 1999

Our primary evidence: deadjectival degree achievement doublets and exceptions:

- (6) a. *mnogo* 'many, much' → *bolše* 'more', *bole* (underlying *bol-ej-e*) 'more' Russian  
b. *množit'*/*umnožit'* 'to multiply (incl. arithmetical meaning), increase'

The structure of the argument:

1. deadjectival degree achievement verbs derived from the positive form despite the existence of a suppletive comparative (ABA patterns, cf. Bobaljik 2012) require an alternative structure
2. there is evidence for two structures (inchoative and (anti)causative)
3. the proposed reductions of the ABA pattern to an underlying comparative base fail
4. the persistence of ABA patterns requires a principled solution
5. diachronic development of suppletion in (some) deadjectival degree achievements

Minimal conclusion: evidence from suppletive deadjectival degree achievement verbs cannot be straightforwardly extended to all deadjectival degree achievement verbs

There is clear evidence for two types of deadjectival degree achievements: inchoative (*e*-verbs) and (anti)causative (*i*-verbs), somewhat correlated with the comparative/positive bases

## 2 SLAVIC DEADJECTIVAL DOUBLETS

Slavic languages provide multiple exceptions to CAG (as noted by Bobaljik 2012 himself):

- (7) a. xoroš-ij ‘good’ → **luč-še** ‘better’ Russian, Bobaljik 2012:188  
 b. u-**lučš**-iti(sja) ‘to make/become better’  
 c. xoroš-etj ‘to become prettier’
- (8) a. dobar ‘good’ → **bol-ji** ‘better.MSG’ Serbo-Croatian, Bobaljik 2012:195  
 b. po-**bolj**-š-ati (se) ‘to make/become good’  
 c. pro-dobr-iti (se) ‘to make/become (morally) good’
- (9) a. dobr-y ‘good’/lepsz-y ‘better’ Polish, Bobaljik 2012:204  
 b. u-lepsz-yć ‘make better’  
 c. dobrz-eć ‘get better (=recover)’

Also Despić 2019 for Serbo-Croatian, Dees and VanDyne 2025 for Polish, Vyshnevskaja 2025 for Ukrainian

General attitude: these are exceptions to be explained away (as in Bobaljik 2012:188):

- non-scalar semantics, e.g., ascriptive (‘to belittle’, Ru *umalitj*) or essive (cf. SC *beleti se* ‘to be white’)
- semantic drift towards a narrower meaning, e.g., Ru *udobritj* ‘to fertilize’ or (7c), which should be related to *krasivyy* ‘beautiful, pretty’ rather than to ‘good’ (but see section 4)

### Our objection: too many inexplicable exceptions

#### 2.1 ABA cases as inchoatives (inceptives)

Some ABA cases are clearly degree achievements with no semantic drift:

- (10) 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-PAST-NSG  
 ‘I suddenly felt sick/felt worse.’

Despić 2019: verbs derived from the positive and the comparative roots mean different things: Though for some people (11b) need not be restricted to moral goodness (Despić 2019:fn.10)

- (11) a. Ovaj lopov se po-boljšao. b. Ovaj lopov se pro-dobrio. SC  
 this thief REFL PFX-better.PAST this thief REFL PFX-good.PAST  
 ‘This thief got better (more adept).’ ‘This thief became (morally) good.’

Despić 2019: the interpretation of (11b) evokes a sudden change of state, lacks the comparative meaning, and disallows the formation of a secondary imperfective (*\*prodobravati se*)

Bobaljik 2012:198, Despić 2019: two structures available for degree achievements:

- (12) a. [[ADJ] COMP] V<sub>Δ</sub> ‘become X-er’  
 b. [PFX INCEPTIVE [A V<sub>STATE</sub>]] ‘start to be X’

The change-of-state semantics of degree achievements based on positive forms is purported to come from the (inceptive) prefix

Their “inceptive” is technically a broader notion than our “inchoative”, since the former denotes the beginning of an action or a state, and the latter, only of a state. Given their semantics, *inchoative* would have suited them better

## 2.2 The inchoative (inceptive)/anticausative divide

Dees, VanDyke and Romaniuk 2024: **ABA verbs in Polish pattern systematically:**

- positive-based forms are inchoative (*e*-verbs)
- comparative-based forms are (anti)causative (*i*-verbs (with the reflexive marker))

Dees et al. 2024 call both of them anticausative, following Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou and Schäfer 2015, with *i*-verbs assumed to project VoiceP (surfacing as a reflexive marker) and *e*-verbs assumed to lack it

- (13) a. *dobr-y* ‘good’                      *lep-szy* ‘better’  
       b. *mał-y* ‘small’                      *mniej-szy* ‘smaller’
- (14) 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
- (15) a. *z-mniej-sz-y-ć* (się) ‘to make/get smaller’ (anti)causative  
       b. *mal-e-ć* ‘to get smaller’ inchoative

Clear evidence for verbal suffixes and potentially, different structures

Dees and VanDyke 2025: **comparative-based (anti)causatives require a prefix:**

- (16) a. *\*(po)-lepszyc się* ‘to make/get better’ (anti)causative  
       b. *(wy)dobrzeć* ‘to get better (=recover)’ inchoative

This is the exact opposite of what Bobaljik 2012:198 and Despić 2019 predict

The prefix requirement also holds in Russian and in Serbo-Croatian

Dees and VanDyke 2025: the prefix is needed to introduce the change-of-state component, but it forces the realization of the comparative morpheme (very technical, see Appendix A)

## 2.3 Intermediate summary

The CΔG requires that deadjectival degree achievements should be derived from the suppletive comparative form when available

The explanation is semantic: degree achievements are constructed from comparatives, whose morphology may be not realized overtly

Problem for CΔG: ABA patterns in some Slavic degree achievements. Moreover:

- ABA degree achievements are systematically inchoative (*e*-verbs)
- comparative degree achievements are systematically prefixed

Two structures are needed for deadjectival degree achievements

**All proposals discussed link the difference to the prefix**

- against Bobaljik 2012:198 and Despić 2019: unprefixed deadjectival *e*-verbs do not have the semantics of statives
- against Dees and VanDyke 2025: prefixed deadjectival *e*-verbs remain *e*-verbs

## 2.4 The role of the prefix

The distinction between inchoatives and (anti)causatives is not limited to suppletive adjectives:

- (17) a. Bassejn o- pust-e-l. inchoative, Russian  
 swimming pool PFX-empty-TH<sub>E</sub>-PAST  
 ‘The swimming pool emptied.’
- b. O-tup-e-l-a sam od bola. inchoative, Serbo-Croatian  
 PFX-blunt-TH<sub>E</sub>-PAST-FSG be.PRES.1SG from pain  
 ‘I got numb with pain.’
- c. Ivan pri-gotov-i-l-sja k drake. anti-causative, Russian  
 Ivan PFX-ready-TH<sub>I</sub>-PAST-MSG-REFL towards fight  
 ‘Ivan got ready for a fight.’
- d. Bazen se iz- prazn-i-o. anti-causative, Serbo-Croatian  
 swimming pool REFL PFX-empty-TH<sub>I</sub>-PAST  
 ‘The swimming pool emptied.’

The structure in (12b) places the change-of-state semantics into the prefix in (17a–b) but not in (17c–d):

- (12) a. [[ADJ] COMP] V<sub>A</sub>] ‘become X-er’ Bobaljik 2012:198, Despić 2019  
 b. [PFX INCEPTIVE [A V<sub>STATE</sub>]] ‘start to be X’

Prediction (incorrect): without the prefix, the verb should be stative (*be X*)

- (18) a. Bassejn pust-e-l. inchoative, Russian  
 swimming pool empty-TH<sub>E</sub>-PAST  
 ‘The swimming pool was emptying.’
- b. Tup-e-l-a sam od bola. inchoative, Serbo-Croatian  
 blunt-TH<sub>E</sub>-PAST-FSG be.PRES.1SG from pain  
 ‘I was getting numb with pain.’
- c. Ivan gotov-i-l-sja k drake. anti-causative, Russian  
 Ivan ready-TH<sub>I</sub>-PAST-MSG-REFL towards fight  
 ‘Ivan was getting ready for a fight.’
- d. Bazen se prazn-i-o. anti-causative, Serbo-Croatian  
 swimming pool REFL empty-TH<sub>I</sub>-PAST  
 ‘The swimming pool was emptying.’

### The change-of-state semantics remains in the absence of a prefix

There exist stative deadjectival *e*-verbs, but these are mostly limited to color verbs (and such stative readings are explicitly marked in Serbo-Croatian)

Also true for *xorošeti* ‘to become prettier’ (which is change-of-state even when unprefixes)

### 3 HOW EXCEPTIONAL ARE THE EXCEPTIONS?

Vyshnevskaja 2025: in Ukrainian, degree achievements can be productively derived from both the positive and the comparative stem

The thematic suffix is (historically) the same for both degree achievements, the surface distinction is phonological

- (19) a. žovt-(iš)-yj b. žovt-i-ty c. žovt-iš-a-ty  
 yellow-CMPR-MSG yellow-TH<sub>E</sub>-INF yellow-CMPR-TH<sub>E</sub>-INF  
 ‘yellow(er)’ ‘to become yellow(er)’ ‘to become yellower’

Karpilovska 2016:2923 (implicit): the comparative stem yields the comparative interpretation

Vyshnevskaya: in both types, the lexical stem provides the same comparative semantics (but it is embedded in different structures, yielding different realization, see Appendix B)

In Ukrainian, two structures are needed for potentially all adjectival stems

But insisting on an underlyingly comparative base is problematic

### 3.1 ABA with no ABB or ABC

In Russian the comparative *bol'she* 'bigger' is also the suppletive comparative form for the non-agreeing vague quantifier *mnogo* 'many, much':

- (20) a. *mnogo* 'many, much' → *bol'she*, *bole* (underlying *bol-ej-e*) 'more' Russian  
 b. *množit'/umnožit'* 'to multiply (incl. arithmetical meaning), increase'

Russian does not have a comparative-based deadjectival degree achievement for this root

The natural question to ask is whether (20b) is interpreted as comparative or as positive:

- (21) a. *Plodites' i raz.množajtes'.* 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 pokončiti s niščetoj, a na dele — u.množil ee.*  
 promised finish.INF with poverty but in reality PFX.multiply.PAST.MSG it  
 'Boris Godunov promised to get rid of poverty but in reality increased it.' (RNC)

Even prefixed examples permit the interpretation 'become/make more'

They can also mean 'become much/many', but they don't have to

Unprefixed examples clearly permit the interpretation 'make more':

- (22) a. *primery viktoriancev [...] možno množit'* 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' suščee bez neobxodimosti.*  
 not required multiply.IPFV.INF existing.NSG without necessity  
 'Entities should not be multiplied without need.'

A comparative degree achievement can arise without a comparative stem and without a prefix

And this is normal for the interpretation of **the progressive of an achievement verb** (Dowty's (1979) imperfective paradox)

### 3.2 The big thing (ABBA)

The adjective denoting 'big' is suppletive in Serbo-Croatian and regular in Russian:

- (23) a. *velik* 'big', *veći* (underlying *vek-j-i*) 'bigger' Serbo-Croatian  
 b. *bol'soj* 'big', *bol'she* (underlying *bol'sh-j-e*) 'bigger' Russian

However, both languages have the verb ‘to increase’ derived from the same root, *-velik-*

- (24) a. povećati/povećavati ‘to increase, rise.PFV/IPFV’ (tr.) Serbo-Croatian  
 b. uveličati/uveličavati ‘to increase, magnify.PFV/IPFV’ (tr.)  
 c. uveličiti/uveličivati ‘to increase.PFV/IPFV’ (tr.) Russian

Serbo-Croatian (24b) seems to be an exception to CΔG (an instance of the ABA pattern)

Russian (24c) might have been taken as an instance of an ABC pattern, were it not for the fact that *velik* ‘big’ also functions as a short form for *bolšoj* ‘big’ (Garde 1998:218):

The same form also has the meaning ‘great’ (as in *Alexander the Great*), but its accentuation is different: unlike ‘big’, which is post-accenting in the short form (cf. the plural *veliki*), ‘great’ is accented (*veliki*)

- (25) U straxa glaza veliki.  
 at/by fear eyes big.PL  
 ‘Fear makes everything look bigger’ (lit. ‘Fear has big eyes.’)

This is a true short form (cf. Garde 1998:218), not something related:

- the adjective *malen’kij* ‘small’ (suppletive comparative *menšje* ‘smaller, less’) also has a suppletive short form, *mal* (cf. *umaliť* ‘to belittle’)
- neither *mal* ‘small.SF’ nor *velik* ‘big.SF’ have alternative long forms with the same meaning (*velikij* ‘great’, *malyj* ‘lesser’)
- both *mal* ‘small.SF’ and *velik* ‘big.SF’ can take on the meaning of excess, i.e., ‘too small’ and ‘too big’, as do other size adjectives in short form (cf. Babby 1975:194)

Russian **short-form adjectives add one more link in potential containment chains**

Derivation from the short form accounts for two more cases

The verb *xorošet’* ‘to become pretty/prettier’ is clearly derived from the short-form adjective *xoroš*, which can also mean ‘pretty’ and has no listed comparative:

Note the comparative in (27): this is in fact the correct suppletive comparative for this positive in Ukrainian

- (26) Golubuška, kak xoroša! Nu čto za šejka, čto za glazki!  
 sweetheart how good/pretty.SF.FSG oh what for neck.DIM what for eyes.DIM  
 ‘Sweetheart, how pretty [you are]! Such a neck, such eyes!’ (Ivan Krylov)

- (27) Xoroša byla Tanjuša, kraše ne bylo v sele.  
 good/pretty.SF.FSG was Tanyusha beautiful.ER not was.NSG in village  
 ‘So pretty Tanyusha was, there was no one prettier in the village.’ (Sergei Yesenin)

The same is true for the verb *solonet’* ‘to become salty or saltier’, derived from the short-form stem *-solon-* rather than the long-form stem *-solon-*

Historically, the long-form adjective was replaced by the passive past participle

### 3.3 Intermediate summary

Slavic languages provide clear evidence that deadjectival degree achievements can be derived from the positive form

Positive-based degree achievements may coexist with comparative ones or replace them

- ABA degree achievements are systematically inchoative (*e*-verbs)
- comparative degree achievements are systematically prefixed (and this seems to be a property of open scales in general)

## Maintaining the CAG seems to be counterproductive

More than one structure is needed, and the change-of-state semantics cannot be reduced to the presence/absence of the prefix

## 4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPLETIVE PARADIGMS

A suppletive paradigm may be non-suppletive in another Slavic language:

- (28) a. **dobr-y** ‘good’, **lep-sz-y** ‘better’ Polish  
 b. **u-lep-sz-yc** ‘make better’  
 c. **po-lep-szy-ć (się)** ‘to make/get better’
- (29) a. **dobryj/xorošyj/harnyj** ‘good’, **lip-š-yj/kraščij** ‘better’ Ukrainian  
 b. **lip-š-a-ty** ‘to get better’
- (30) a. **lep** ‘beautiful’, **lep-š-i** ‘beautiful-ER-MSG’ Serbo-Croatian  
 b. **u-lep-š-ati** ‘to make prettier’

And the root *-bol/-* is part of different suppletive chains in Russian, in Ukrainian and in Serbo-Croatian:

- (31) a. **velykyj** ‘big’, **biljšyj** ‘bigger’ Ukrainian  
 b. **mnogo** ‘many, much’, **bolše** ‘more’, **bole** (underlying *bol-ej-e*) ‘more’ Russian  
 c. **dobar** ‘good’, **bol-ji** ‘better.MSG’ Serbo-Croatian

The positive form may be different for the same comparative/verbal stems:

- (32) a. **zao** ‘evil’/rdjav ‘wicked’/loš ‘bad’, **gori** (*gor-j-i*) ‘worse’ Serbo-Croatian  
 b. **po-gor-š-a-ti** ‘worsen’
- (33) a. **pohan-yj** ‘bad’, **hir-š-yj** ‘worse’ Ukrainian, Vyshnevsk 2025  
 b. **hir-š-a-ty** ‘worsen’
- (34) a. **gor-k-ij** ‘bitter, painful’, **gor-č-e** ‘more bitter’, **gor-š-e** ‘more painful’ Russian  
 b. **ogor-č-itj** ‘to upset’

We have clear **evidence that the positive form can be replaced**:

- the Russian *-velik-* and *-mal-* got replaced by *-bol/s-* and *-malen’k-*
- the Russian *-solon-* got replaced by the participial *-sol’on-*
- the Ukrainian *-pohan-* ‘bad’ (historically from the cognate of *pagan*) vs. the Serbo-Croatian *-zŭl-* ‘evil’, *-loš-* ‘bad’
- also, in Italian, the original *malo* ‘bad’ is getting replaced by *cattivo* ‘bad’ (Maiden and Thornton 2022:377)

Cases where deadjectival degree achievements are linked to comparative stems can be due to the fact that the positive form has been replaced

There is also evidence that the comparative can be replaced (also for ‘good’ across Slavic):

- (35) a. **mnogo** ‘many, much’, **više** (*vis-j-e*) ‘more’ Serbo-Croatian  
 b. **povisiti, povišiti** ‘to increase’  
 c. **mnogo** ‘many, much’, **bolše** ‘more’, **bole** (underlying *bol-ej-e*) ‘more’ Russian  
 d. **množiti/umnožiti** ‘to multiply (incl. arithmetical meaning), increase’

Paradigms can also get regularized, but this seems to be possible in both directions (cf. Russian **bolšoj/bolše** ‘big’ and **dobryj/dobree** ‘kinder’)



While for the Serbo-Croatian *-debel-*, it is the comparative form (*-deblj-*) that has changed (no yer historically in this root), this is not suppletion, this is allomorphy

## 5 CONCLUSION

There are six concepts that systematically form suppletive comparatives: good/bad, big/small, many/few

- In the Slavic languages considered, there's minimally four suppletive chains
- In each language, about half such chains have an ABA degree achievement verb
- In Ukrainian, the ABA pattern appears to be fully productive

There's clear morphosyntactic evidence for (at least) **two syntactic structures associated with degree achievements: inchoative and (anti)causative**

Degree achievements can be based on comparatives or positives independently of suppletion (Ukrainian, Serbo-Croatian, marginally Polish):

Butschety and Mišmaš 2024 claim that these verbs are obligatorily prefixed, but unprefixed uses can also be found

- (36) a. lep 'beautiful' → lep-š-i 'beautiful-ER-MSG' → ulepšati 'to make prettier' SC  
 b. mek 'soft' → mek-š-i 'soft-ER-MSG' → (o)mekšati 'to soften'  
 c. lak 'light'/'easy' → lak-š-i 'light-ER-MSG' → (o)lakšati 'to facilitate, alleviate'

Historical development explains how the existing patterns may have arisen

Dowty's (1979) imperfective paradox predicts the comparative interpretation of positive-based degree achievements in the imperfective

Topic for future research: scale structure and the inchoative/(anti)causative divide:

- in Russian open-scale adjectives mostly form (anti)causative degree achievements (*i*-verbs), while *e*-verbs are preferentially closed-scale
- in Serbo-Croatian the distinction between *e*- and *i*-verbs is being leveled
- in Ukrainian inchoatives are compatible with open-scale comparatives

Plans for the future: the contrast between the *e*-inchoative and *i*-(anti)causative structures and their potential link to scale types (open/closed, comparative/positive)

## Appendix A THE RESULT STATE OF IMPERFECTIVE DEGREE ACHIEVEMENTS

Dees and VanDyne 2025: Polish **comparative-based (anti)causatives require a prefix**:

- (37) a. \*(po)-lep-szy-ć się 'to make/get better' (anti)causative  
 b. (po)dobrzeć 'to get better' inchoative

The prefix introduces the change-of-state component and **disrupts the locality** required for the comparative morpheme and the verbalizer to be expressed by a single vocabulary item (via spanning):

- (38) a. po- lep- sz- y- ć 'to get better' (anti)causative  
 [[Δ [good COMP]] V<sub>Δ</sub>] INF  
 b. dobrz- (i)e- ć 'to get better' inchoative  
 [A [COMP-V<sub>Δ</sub>]] INF

Problem: inchoative deadjectival verbs can be prefixed, but the thematic suffix does not change  
 Potential solution: those prefixes are introduced higher



Problem: prefixes are normally added to verbs, but here we're dealing with a prefix combining with a comparative

Potential solution: those prefixes can also be added to comparatives (definitely, *po-*)

Main objection: elsewhere prefixes introduce the measure of change, not the change itself (and this is very compatible with Kennedy and Levin 2008)

Vyshnevskaya 2025: very similar reasoning, but in nanosyntactic terms, “positive-based” degree achievements contain additionally a ResP:

verb	DIMP	DIR	POINT	C1	C2	RESP	PROC	ASP	INF
‘to get cheaper’	dešev				š			a	ty
‘to get cheaper’	dešev				i				ty

General intuition: positive-based degree achievements culminate

How accidental is it that their result state is precisely the state denoted by the positive form?

Something to test: might the choice of the prefix change the culmination point for positive degree achievements?

## Appendix B UKRAINIAN POSITIVE-BASED DEGREE ACHIEVEMENTS

Vyshnevskaya: there is no semantic difference between positive- and comparative based degree achievements:

### (39) 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.’

### (40) 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.’
- a. 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.’

Problem: this is an effect of imperfectivity

Progressives of telic events need not culminate (Dowty’s (1979) **imperfective paradox**):

- (41) a. John was drawing a circle.  $\nRightarrow$  John drew a circle. Dowty 1979:146  
 b. Kim is straightening the rope.  $\nRightarrow$  Kim has straightened the rope. Hay et al. 1999

Suppose *žovtity* means ‘to turn yellow’ (rather than ‘yellow’):

- ‘The trees were turning yellow’ (39b)  $\nVdash$  the trees have turned yellow
- ‘Mary was eating an apple’  $\nVdash$  Mary has eaten an apple

The imperfective would entail the comparative reading:

- ‘The trees were turning yellow’  $\vdash$  the trees have turned yellower

The perfective should yield culmination:

- ‘turn yellow’ is telic: the telos is being yellow
- ‘turn yellower’ is also telic, but the endpoint is being yellower

The problem is that in the perfective they are all prefixed, and prefixes may add a culmination (rather than reflect the internal telos of an event), cf. Dočekal and Vlášková 2021:

- (42) a. Čaj vy-chladl za hodinu. Czech, *nu*-verb  
 tea from-cooled.3SG in hour  
 ‘The tea cooled in an hour.’
- b. Čaj o-chladl za hodinu.  
 tea around-cooled.3SG in hour  
 ‘The tea cooled slightly in an hour.’

Dočekal and Vlášková 2021: the choice of the prefix determines whether the culmination of a degree achievement is or isn’t its natural endpoint

Vyshnevskaya 2025:183: with a closed-scale adjective and the modifier *completely* comparative- and positive-based degree achievements behave as predicted by the WYSIWYG hypothesis:

- (43) a. \*Kimnata povnistju (o-)pust-iš-a-la. Ukrainian  
 room completely PFX-empty-ER-THE-PAST.FSG
- b. Kimnata povnistju \*(o-)pust-i-la.  
 room completely PFX-empty-ER-THE-PAST.FSG  
 ‘The room emptied completely.’

Vyshnevskaya 2025:183: non-informative because the comparative-based variant is incompatible with this prefix

Perhaps this is because comparative scales are open ones, and the prefix requires a natural endpoint

Vyshnevskaya 2025:185 provides perfectives with the prefix *po-*:

- (44) a. Mykola troxy po-rozum-n-iš-a-v.  
 Mykola a.bit PFX-smart-ADJZ-ER-THE-PAST  
 ‘Mykola has become a bit smarter.’
- b. Mykola troxy po-rozum-n-i-v.  
 Mykola a.bit PFX-smart-ADJZ-THE-PAST  
 ‘Mykola has become a bit smarter.’

The Russian (and Ukrainian) prefix *po-* elsewhere can add the meaning ‘somewhat, a bit’

Which makes the resulting semantics very difficult to distinguish:

- with a comparative: changed a bit towards becoming smarter
- with a positive: changed a bit towards becoming smart

The two meanings entail each other

Possible distinction: a perfective verb derived from a positive closed-scale adjective should be incompatible with denial of reaching the telos (as long as application to subparts is excluded, see Kennedy and Levin 2008)

But this won’t help much with open-scale bases, there’s always plausible deniability there

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