

Vrinda Chidambaram (University of California Riverside)

Form in Flux: The development of exceptional degree morphology in Bulgarian and Macedonian

Abstract:

In 2012, Jonathon Bobaljik published his monograph *Universals in Comparative Morphology* in which he revealed a striking finding: an unrestricted and absolute universal principle of morphological structure. He showed, using an astounding array of empirical evidence, that cross-linguistically, superlative degree adjectives are derived from the stem of the comparative degree adjective and not from the adjectival root. His central argument was that comparative adjectives with suppletive stems give rise to superlative degree adjectives with suppletive stems. Consider the German example in (1):

(1) gut – besser – am besten

The superlative stem *bes-* is transparently derived from the suppletive comparative stem and not from the positive adjectival root *gut*. According to Bobaljik's *Containment Hypothesis*, which states that the superlative degree adjective properly contains the comparative degree adjective, this pattern of suppletion should be universal.

There is, however, a surprising exception in Macedonian and Bulgarian.

(2) много	–	повече	–	наймного
<i>mnogo</i>	–	<i>poveče</i>	–	<i>najmnogo</i>
many	–	more	–	most

(Bulgarian)

(3) многу	–	повеќе	–	најмногу
<i>mnogu</i>	–	<i>poveќе</i>	–	<i>najmnogu</i>
many	–	more	–	most

(Macedonian)

In these examples, we see that the suppletive stem occurs uniquely in the comparative and does not get passed up to the superlative degree adjective.

In this talk, I will address the historical origins of these exceptional data starting from the *Trojanska Pritča* (14th century) and show that they represent a frame on the continuum of language change. I offer evidence that this remarkable exception to Bobaljik's Containment Hypothesis arose due to a diachronic shift in the exponence of comparative and superlative degree – a shift which may still be underway.

References:

1. *Trojanska Pritča*. (1345). *The Manasses Chronicle*. MS, Vat.slav.2, 103–146. Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
2. Bobaljik, Jonathan. (2012). *Universals in Comparative Morphology*. Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press.