

ЯЗЫКОЗНАНИЕ

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THE COMPARATIVE AND THE SUPERLATIVE IN UDMURT AND HUNGARIAN



Удмуртский и венгерский языки относятся к уральской языковой семье, в которой широко представлены деривационные и флективные аффиксы. В настоящей работе проводится сопоставительный анализ сравнительной и превосходной степеней сравнения имени прилагательного в удмуртском и венгерском языках. Компаративный суффикс удмуртского языка *-гес (-гем)* может сочетаться практически с любой частью речи. Венгерский суффикс сравнительной степени *-bb*, с его многочисленными алломорфами (образующимися в силу действия сингармонизма), ведет себя в некоторых случаях оригинальным образом, располагаясь между корневой морфемой и деривационным суффиксом, хотя и является флективной морфемой. Довольно редко он может сочетаться также с существительными, но при этом субстантив берет на себя функции адъектива и выражает свойство, качество лица, например при метафорическом переносе в зоонимах. В удмуртском *-гес (-гем)*, сочетаясь с существительными и глаголами, может выражать компаративное значение; в аналогичных случаях в венгерском – компаративным аффиксом *-bb* маркируется прилагательное или наречие, определяющее это существительное или глагол; при этом значение словосочетания в целом передает аналогичное значение. В сочетании с послелогом суффикс *-гес (-гем)*, как правило, не несет компаративного значения, а отражает уменьшение/увеличение меры, степени и других признаков, без компонента сравнения. Аналогичное значение проявляется в сочетании и с другими частями речи, в том числе с прилагательными, когда образуется значение неполноты, недостаточности признака, таким образом *-гес (-гем)* выполняет совершенно иную, умеренную функцию. Показатель суперлатива в венгерском – конфикс *leg-...-bb*, постпозитивной частью которого является компаративный суффикс. В удмуртском отсутствует синтетический способ выражения превосходной степени, вследствие чего некоторые ученые постулируют отсутствие самой суперлативной степени имени прилагательного. В обоих языках образуются повторы прилагательного, которые не несут значения сравнения, а выражают интенсивность признака, качества; в венгерском к этому добавляется варьирование степени интенсификации в зависимости от используемой интонации.

Ключевые слова: удмуртский язык, венгерский язык, имя прилагательное, наречие, компаратив, суперлатив, умеренный, интенсивный.



Comparison is traditionally considered to be a feature of adjectives and adverbs. The comparative can be expressed by means of different strategies in the languages of the world ranging from analytic constructions, which are prominent mostly in isolating languages such as Chinese, to affixation, which occurs in fusional or agglutinative languages and involves the use of prefixes, suffixes and even circumfixes. Uralic languages fall into the latter category with their rich derivational and inflectional morphology, including the use of a vast locative noun case system. In this article we compare and contrast the use of the comparative suffix in the Udmurt and Hungarian languages, both being members of the Finno-Ugric language family.

One notable feature of both languages is the flexibility of the comparative suffix when it comes to word classes. Due to the fact that the Udmurt comparative suffix can appear with virtually any word of any part of speech [Кельмаков, Ефремов 1997], some linguists consider it more of a particle, rather than a suffix [Kozmács 2002, 524]. In this text, however, we are going to refer to the comparative as a suffix, since a detailed comparison and contrast of morpheme features and questions of morpheme classes are beyond the scope of this essay.

The comparative suffix in Udmurt is *-зес* (-ges) or *-зем* (-gem). Apart from nominals, the Udmurt comparative suffix can be added to verbs and participles as well, although the actual meaning of the morpheme varies based on the semantics of the clause. The Hungarian equivalent of the comparative suffix is *-bb*, with a variety of allomorphs which are selected on the basis of vowel harmony.

When it comes to adjectives and adverbs, the comparative suffix behaves similarly in both languages, however, there is a noticeable difference between Udmurt and Hungarian from the point of view of derivation. In Udmurt adjectives and adverbs may look formally identical, i.e. there is no further derivation needed in order to turn an adjective into an adverb, whereas in Hungarian a lexeme can only fall into one of the two lexical categories. This difference is significant when assigning the comparative suffix to adjectives or adverbs. In both languages the comparative can appear on both adjectives and adverbs, however, when in Hungarian the adverb is a derivate of an adjective, the comparative suffix must be added before the derivation would take place. Compare the following clauses in (1):

(1)

UDM: <i>кочыш жӱоз-зес бызе</i>	HUN: <i>a macska gyors-abb-an fut</i>
cat fast-COMP run.3SG	the cat fast-COMP-ADV run.3SG
‘the cat runs faster’	‘the cat runs faster’

Comparison is a feature of inflectional morphology, however the Hungarian suffix *-bb* shares some similarities with derivational morphemes (see for example [Korchmáros 2006, 90]). In Hungarian, as it is the case in many other languages as well, there is a strict order in which derivational and inflectional morphemes can follow one another: an arbitrary amount of derivational suffixes can be attached to the word stem, each derivational suffix following the other, but if an inflectional morpheme is added, then there is no possibility for further derivation. The inflectional suffix *-bb* seemingly breaks this rule: it is attached directly to the stem, but it can also



be followed by other derivational suffixes which would eventually change the lexical category of the word. Consider the following example:

(2)

UDM: **пичи-я-т-э**

small-VERB-CAU-PRES.SG3

'shrinks'

HUN: **kis-ebb-ít**

small-COMP-VERB

'shrinks'

In the case of both sentences, the final outcome is a verb with identical meaning, but significant morphological differences. The Udmurt verb is a derivate of an adjective but it does not contain any trace of the comparative. The Hungarian verb also started as an adjective, however, before undergoing derivation, the comparative suffix has been added. Any other order of suffixes would result in an ungrammatical lexeme. The suffix *-bb* can not be attached to anything other than an adjective or an adverb, but once it has been added, the lexical category can be changed through derivation. As opposed to this, in Udmurt the flexibility of the comparative is much higher, as it can stick to words of different word classes without further derivation. For example, if there is a finite verb, the suffix *-zec* can be added as a final morpheme:

(3)

UDM: ... *мыным со-лэн сяська-ос-ыз кельи-о-зес...* [Матвеев 1995, 177].to.me it-GEN flower-PL-3PL **like-3PL-COMP**

'... I like its flowers more...'

HUN: *nekem az ő virág-ai jo-bb-an tetsz-enek*

to.me the it flower-3PL good-COMP-ADV like-3PL

'I like its flowers more'

In example (3) the comparative is added directly to the verb, whereas in many other languages (Hungarian included) this notion would be expressed by means of an adverbial, which may include the comparative suffix, as demonstrated above.

A common feature of both languages is that other nominals, such as nouns and pronouns can take the comparative suffix as well, however they are often used to express different meanings. What happens in Hungarian with the noun is that those qualities which are considered prototypical or characteristic to an object, animal or person are used as a point of reference. This linguistic strategy makes it possible to compare a set of qualities with each other, rather than comparing only two. For example, if we consider the qualities one can associate with a good physician (reliable, professional, expert in their field, approachable, knowledgeable, etc.), we can express that a person is better in all those characteristics in comparison to another by adding the comparative suffix to the noun 'doctor'. In other cases, the noun can act as a substitute for an adjective in a metaphorical way. In example (4) the word 'fox' is used metaphorically for 'cunning', a trait often associated with this animal in tales, fables and anecdotes. The first noun, which has the comparative suffix, embodies the quality of cunning and thus the saying itself implies that the referee is more cunning than a fox by using 'fox' as a point of reference.



(4)

róká-bb a róká-nál

fox-COMP the fox-ALL

‘more fox than a fox’ i.e. ‘more cunning than a fox’

In Udmurt, the comparative suffix has a slightly different meaning when used with nouns; it expresses that something is more true or more relevant to the referee in question. Whereas the comparative noun can be a predicate in Hungarian, as we have seen in (4), in Udmurt sentences the noun has to be accompanied by a predicate or adverbial in order to set the context for the meaning.

(5)

... райсовет-э бырыы-тоз-я-зы, сяюл-э-гес кариськ-оно [Перевощиков 1994, 265].

council-ACC elect-ADV-POSS-3PL shadow-ILL-COMP act-PART

‘until they elect the regional council, one should rather stay in the shadows’

Another important difference between the two languages is that in Udmurt the comparative suffix can be added to postpositions as well, which is not possible in Hungarian. Although it is true that in both languages the postpositions can be traced back to adverbial roots with a certain spacial meaning. The two forms may look formally similar or even identical, but the difference is that the adverbs are able to get the comparative in Hungarian, whereas postpositions cannot. For example *alul* ‘down there’ is an adverb, which can take the comparative and become (the slightly irregular) *alább* ‘more downwards’. However, this latter word is not identical to the postposition *alá* ‘under sth’ with the *-bb* suffix. Even though the two would look formally the same, a sentence with such a postposition would be ungrammatical (e.g. **az asztal alább* ‘more under the table’). In Udmurt a comparative postposition is completely grammatical:

(6)

Отын ик, сэрег сьӧр-ы-гес кариськ-ыса, пирожки-ос-ме си-и

[Красильников 1991, 209].

there INT corner behind-ILL-COMP act-GER pirog-PL-1SG.ACC eat-PAST.1SG

‘Right there, moving more behind the corner, I ate my pirog.’

This construction is similar to the one we have seen with verbs, where other languages would express the same notion through analytical constructions. In these last examples, instead the prototypical comparative meaning of the suffix *-гес*, a rather contextual meaning is conveyed, where there is no real ground for comparison, but rather the intensity of action or the quality is adjusted, usually towards the negative side (*less* and not *more*). This moderative meaning of the suffix is absent from Hungarian (where a dedicated suffix exists to express moderation), but it is widely used in Udmurt, not only with adjectives but also with adverbs. As it is demonstrated in the example below, there is no comparative meaning of the word *ничигес*, it only reaffirms the quality of the room being small, probably inconveniently small.



(7)

Пичи-гес гинэ комната-ын куинь кук-о жёк [Валишин 1974, 243].
 small-COMP only room-INE three leg-ADJ table
 ‘In the smallish room there is a three-legged table’

When it comes to the superlative, Hungarian employs a circumfix (the only one in Hungarian), with the suffix being the same as the comparative, but this time together with the prefix *leg-*. The prefix is hardly ever used on its own, there are only a few adverbs where the comparative suffix cannot be added, such as *legfelül* (‘on top’), *legalul* (‘on the bottom’), *legelől* (‘in front’), *leg hátul* (‘at the end’) [Keszler 2000, 218].

In Udmurt there is no affix to express the superlative, this meaning is conveyed by means of analytic constructions. For this reason some linguists claim that the superlative is morphologically non-existent in Udmurt, the meaning is only conveyed through syntax [Ушаков 1990, 171].

(8)

UDM: **самой вакчи-ез** **туж-гес но вакчи-ез**
 most short-DES very-COMP INT short-DES
 ‘the shortest’

HUN: **a leg-rövid-ebb**
 the SUP-short-COMP
 ‘the shortest’

Both languages make use of reduplication, but not for the same purpose. In Udmurt reduplication may express a positive moderation, in which sense it serves a similar purpose as the adverbial *туж* ‘very’. In Hungarian, however, reduplicated adjectives usually have an implicit negative meaning to them; the speaker acknowledges the existence of the quality, but it is also implied that it is not overwhelmingly so. It is usually accompanied by a specific intonation pattern in Hungarian. This meaning also exists in Udmurt when a given intonation pattern is employed. Consider the following two expressions:

(9)

UDM: **чебер-чебер** HUN: **szép-szép**
 beautiful-beautiful beautiful-beautiful
 ‘extremely beautiful’ ‘beautiful indeed [but not wonderful]’

In Hungarian another level of comparison also exists, which is often called ‘exaggerated’. It usually expresses that the speaker is emotionally attached to the thing or person in question whose qualities they are describing. The exaggerated level is basically a reinforced superlative, on the one hand it uses the same circumfix, but with a reduplicated prefix *legesleg-* and the same comparative suffix *-bb*, on the other hand the two can be used interchangeably in a sentence. The Udmurt language can express a similar emotional attachment by repeating the word *туж* ‘very’ arbitrary



times before the adjective, even though the sense of the superlative would be lost in this case.

(10)

UDM: *чебер ась-ме-лэн гурт-мы, туж чебер*
 beautiful self-1PL-GEN village-1PL very beautiful
 ‘our village is beautiful, very beautiful’

The above sentence is an example for lexical or analytical comparison, when the sense of intensity is not expressed by a single morpheme, i.e. an affix, but by a standalone lexeme. Most languages employ this strategy to convey the notion of absolute comparison, which only enhances the meaning of the word and does not compare its quality or qualities to that of another element. According to Hungarian terminology, analytical comparison is usually considered part of comparison ‘fokozás’ (see [Székely 2001: 433]), whereas the Udmurt terminology considers it to be a separate category, called ‘intensifier’ (see [Тараканов 1996]). The most commonly used lexeme in Udmurt for this purpose is *туж* ‘very’, the Hungarian equivalent of which is *nagyon*. This lexical element is most often an adverb or an adjective whose meaning derives from a subjective perception of the world, or philosophical categories of quantity, time or space [Székely 2001: 435]. The original meaning of these words generally serves a purpose of exaggeration and for this reason these lexemes very often depict negative emotions, e.g. Hungarian *szörnyű* ‘horrible’ but when they are used in such constructions, they simply become the synonym of very and lose their individual meaning. Thus, expressions like Udmurt *кӧшкемыт чебер* (lit. ‘fearfully nice’) or Hungarian *félelmetesen szép* (lit. ‘fearfully nice’) are just intensifying the meaning of very nice without adding a sense of negativity to it. This transformation of meaning has become accepted and used by most speakers, as revealed in a study by Kugler [2014: 131–133].

Lexical or analytical comparison is not restricted only to those parts of speech which we identified in the case of relative comparison, since this type of construction works on the level of syntax, rather than morphology. This means that the syntactic roles of different parts of speech will determine the type of lexeme they can co-occur with, instead of their morphological characteristics (i.e. which types of affixes they can take). Both Udmurt and Hungarian verbs can occur with adverbs, however, there is a wider range of adverbs in Hungarian which can serve as an intensifier. These adverbs generally express some form of astonishment or amusement, e.g. *csodálatosan énekel* ‘sings wonderfully’, *bámulatosan tud* (lit. ‘knows sth. stunningly’), etc. (see [Székely 2005: 315]), but, as we have seen above, their contribution to the construction will be nothing more than expressing that somebody does something in a very nice or a very bad manner. In Udmurt, the two adverbs which are used for this purpose are *чебер* ‘nicely’ and *ушш* (in a bad way).

In summary, the main features of the comparative are similar in the two languages, but the meanings the suffixes cover are different. In Hungarian the only meaning associated with the morpheme *-bb* is comparative, may it be actually comparative or superlative, whereas in Udmurt the notion of comparison is only part of a wider range



of meanings. The suffix *-zec* is rather particular in the sense that it can express seemingly contrastive things; that something possesses more of a given quality compared to something else, while, in other contexts it can also convey that the referee does not possess enough of the given quality.

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Компаратив и суперлатив в удмуртском и венгерском языках

The Udmurt and Hungarian languages belong to the Uralic language group, in which derivational and inflectional affixes are widely represented. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the comparative and superlative degrees of comparison of the adjective in the Udmurt and Hungarian languages. The comparative suffix of the Udmurt language *-ges* (*-gem*) can be combined with almost any part of speech. The Hungarian suffix of comparative degree *-bb*, with its numerous allomorphs (formed based on vowel harmony), behaves in some cases in an irregular way, occurring between the root morpheme and a derivational suffix, although it is a inflectional morpheme. Quite rarely, it can also be combined with nouns, when the substantive takes on the functions of an adjective and expresses personal qualities, for example, metaphorical transference in zoonyms. In Udmurt, *-ges* (*-gem*), combined with nouns and verbs, can express a comparative meaning; in similar cases in Hungarian, an adjective or adverb that defines this noun or verb is marked with a comparative affix *-bb*; at the same time, the meaning of the phrase in general conveys a similar meaning. In combination with postpositions, the suffix *-ges* (*-gem*), as a rule, does not carry a comparative meaning, but reflects a decrease / increase in measure, degree and other characteristics, without the sense of comparison. A similar meaning is manifested in combination with other parts of speech, including adjectives, when the meaning of incompleteness, insufficiency of a trait is expressed, thus the suffix *-ges* (*-gem*) in these cases has a completely different, moderative function. The Hungarian superlative circumfix is a *leg* ... *-bb*, the suffix part of which is a comparative suffix. In Udmurt there is no synthetic way of expressing a superlative degree, as a result of which some scientists postulate the absence of the superlative degree altogether. Both languages feature adjective reduplication, which does not have a meaning of comparison, but expresses the intensity of the trait or quality; in Hungarian, a variation of the degree of intensification is added to it, depending on the intonation used.

Keywords: Udmurt, Hungarian, adjective, adverb, comparative, superlative, moderative, intensive.

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