

# Syntactic Treatment of the Relative Reading with NP Internal Focus in Superlatives

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This study proposes that cross-linguistic differences in the availability of certain relative readings of superlatives stem from different syntactic structures of NPs, specifically the presence vs. absence of D. Following a movement approach of superlatives, I show that the structural difference together with standard locality conditions correctly derives the distribution of relative readings in English-type languages and Slavic-type languages.

**Observation:** Pancheva and Tomaszewicz 2012 (P&T) observe that superlatives in (1) allow three interpretations in Bulgarian, but only two in English (Table 1).

- (1) a. John has the best albums by U2. (English)  
b. Ivan ima naj dobri albumi ot U2. (Bulgarian)  
Ivan has EST good albums by U2.  
“Ivan has the best albums by U2.”

Table 1

	English (1a)	Bulgarian (1b)
<b>Absolute Reading</b> (The U2 albums that John has are better than other U2 albums.)	√	√
<b>Relative Reading with NP External Focus (R<sub>EX</sub>)</b> “John has better U2 albums than others.”(Focus: “John”)	√	√
<b>Relative Reading with NP Internal Focus (R<sub>IN</sub>)</b> “The albums by U2 that John has are better than the albums by others that John has.”(Focus: “by U2”)	*	√

P&T account for the difference by postulating that the definiteness of the Determiner head blocks movement of the superlative morpheme *est/naj* out of the nominal phrase. This is surprising since the superlative DPs with relative readings pattern with the indefinite NPs (Szabolcsi 1986).

**Proposal:** This cross-linguistic difference regarding the availability of R<sub>IN</sub> is derived not from the definiteness but different NP structures, namely the presence (English) vs. absence (Slavic) of a DP projection (Bošković 2008).

I adopt the following assumptions: **i)** Dynamic approach to phasehood (Wurmbrand 2011)—the highest projection of a domain is a phase: NP is a phase in Bulgarian, while DP is a phase in English; **ii)** Phase Impenetrability Condition: Moving out of a phase must occur via the edge of the phase: a phase-adjoined position or the specifier of the phase; **iii)** DP allows at most one specifier; **iv)** the superlative morpheme originates in Spec., DegP, which in turn is the specifier of AP (Bošković & Gajewski t.a.).

The account of (1) is as follows. For the absolute reading, *est/naj* is interpreted in-situ in both languages, (2).

- (2) LF: a. John has [<sub>DP=PHASE</sub> the [<sub>AP</sub> [<sub>DegP</sub> est] [<sub>A'</sub> good [<sub>NP</sub> albums by U2]]]]. (English)  
b. Ivan has [<sub>NP=PHASE</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> [<sub>DegP</sub> naj] good] [<sub>NP</sub> albums by U2]]. (Bulgarian)

For R<sub>EX</sub>, *est/naj* must move to a position below the focused element (*John/Ivan*). In Bulgarian (3b), *naj* originates at the edge of the NP phase (AP is NP-adjoined) and can hence move in one step. In English (3a), AP is not at the phase edge, so *est* must first move to Spec,DP (cf. ii.).

- (3) a. John [est] has [<sub>DP=PHASE</sub> t the [<sub>AP</sub> [<sub>DegP</sub> t] [<sub>A'</sub> good [<sub>NP</sub> albums by U2]]]]. (English)  
b. Ivan [naj] has [<sub>NP=PHASE</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> [<sub>DegP</sub> t] good] [<sub>NP</sub> albums by U2]]. (Bulgarian)

For  $R_{IN}$ , both the focus (*by U2*) and *est* must move out of the DP. Assumptions ii) and iii) prohibit this in English: movements must pass through the phase edge Spec,DP, which can only host one element, hence (4a) is impossible. In contrast, in Bulgarian, the focused PP and the AP are both generated at the edge of the NP phase, thus movement in (4b) is allowed.

- (4) a. \*[by U2]<sub>2</sub> [est]<sub>1</sub> John has [DP=PHASE t<sub>2</sub> the [AP [DegP t<sub>1</sub>] [A' good [NP [NP albums] [t<sub>2</sub>]]]]]. (English)  
 b. [by U2]<sub>2</sub> [naj]<sub>1</sub> Ivan has [NP=PHASE [AP [DegP t<sub>1</sub>] good] [NP [NP albums] [t<sub>2</sub>]]]. (Bulgarian)

Further evidence can be found in constructions in Slavic where the NP internal focus is not adjoined to NP but a complement of N. Complements of phase heads are immobile (Abels 2003). Thus a reading that requires the movement of a complement of a phase head is not possible. In (5), the  $R_{IN}$  is indeed unavailable, like in English. The contrast between (4b) and (5b) follows from the syntactic account provided here but would be unexpected under P&T's account.

- (5) a. Ivan je sreo naj vise studente lingvistike. (Serbo-Croatian)  
 Ivan is meet EST tall students Linguistics-GEN.  
 "Ivan met the tallest students of Linguistics."  
 b. \*[Linguistics]<sub>2</sub> [naj]<sub>1</sub> Ivan met [NP=PHASE [AP [DegP t<sub>1</sub>] tall] [NP students t<sub>2</sub>]]  
 "The Linguistics students that Ivan met are taller than other students Ivan met."

word count: 749

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