

The Role of the Particle *po-* in the Comparison of Adjectives in Štokavian Dialects

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Abstract The use of the particle *po-* with adjectives in positive, comparative, or even superlative forms is fairly common in Slavic languages. It is present in Slovak, Czech, and Russian, as well as in Macedonian and Bulgarian. In the Štokavian dialects, the usage of the particle *po-* encompasses a wide range of meanings. This article presents all the variants of the usage of the particle *po-* in these dialects, aiming to establish the boundary between dialects that use this particle and those that do not. A substantial effort was made to determine if there is any parallel between the shift from synthetic to analytic comparison in these dialects.

Keywords Adjective gradability. Analytic comparison. Synthetic comparison. Serbo-Croatian language. Štokavian dialects. Balkan linguistic.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Comparison and its degrees. – 3 The morpheme *po-*. – 4 The morpheme *po-* in the Štokavian dialects. – 5 Conclusion



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1 Introduction

The use of the morpheme *po-* with adjectives (and adverbs) in either positive or comparative or even superlative form is fairly well present in Slavic languages. In Slovak, for example, it is mostly used with terms for colors, carrying the meaning 'less' or 'somewhat' e.g. *pobelavý* 'whitish, somewhat white', while in Czech it can either modify the meaning similar to the one in Slovak e.g. *pobělavý* 'whitish, somewhat white', or it can be used with a comparative degree, carrying the meaning 'less, slightly less' e.g. *postarší člověk* 'slightly less old man'. On the other hand, in Russian, it carries the meaning 'more, even, slightly more, even more', e.g. *po-nteresnee*.even more-interesting.N.SG.COM 'even more interesting', *po-staršaja*.even more.old.F.SG.COMP 'even older'. At the very south of the territory of Slavic languages, i.e. in the Macedonian and Bulgarian languages, the usage of the morpheme *po-* is the only way of creating a comparative degree of adjectives (and adverbs), although there are some exceptions (see chapter 4.3).

In this paper, we examine the morpheme *po-* in the Štokavian dialects¹. The paper is divided into three chapters. The first one discusses gradation and the ways languages form comparative degrees. The second one discusses the etymology of the morpheme *po-* and its status within parts of speech. In the third part, we will present the situation in the Štokavian dialects which will help us establish the borders of the phenomenon within the territory of the Central South Slavic language (CSS)². We will also see its relation to the situation in Macedonian and Bulgarian languages, trying to find possible connections between these languages and the adjacent dialects of the Central South Slavic language. The result of this research will also answer a question whether the shift from synthetic to analytic comparison is linked to the other changes which the Prizren-Timok dialect experienced.

Dialectal material will be taken from papers and monographs dealing with different varieties of the Štokavian dialects. The collected material spans over 100 years, so it is possible that some varieties

¹ We are aware that the most common spelling of the name of this dialect is Shtokavian, and Čakavian instead of Čakavian, but for the sake of consistency of the text, the forms with diacritics will be used.

² Even though we are completely aware that the more common terms are Serbo-Croatian language or BCMS, in this article we will use the term Central South Slavic language. The first two terms carry sociolinguistic meaning. We consider the term Serbo-Croatian somewhat outdated, since this standard language split into four. The term BCMS refers only to standard varieties of the ex-Serbo-Croatian language, i.e. Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian. On the other hand, Central South Slavic geographically defines the territory between Slovenian to the west and Macedonian and Bulgarian to the south and east, thus including all the dialects spoken on the territory, and not only the dialect(s) which the standard languages were based on, and it does not carry the political burden, unlike some of the other terms.

changed in form since then, but it is unlikely that the change was radical. Also, not every possible local variety was covered and because of that some results may vary.

2 Comparison and its degrees

Adjective comparison is a linguistic manifestation of a cognitive process in which two or more things are compared by either quality or quantity. The relation can either be a similarity or a difference between those entities about a more or less specific aspect of quality (de Kreij 2021, 19-20). In the Central South Slavic, only descriptive adjectives can be graded.

Every comparison structure has four constituents that make the expression complete. These are:

- a. comparee, that is, compared entity;
- b. standard of comparison, that is, the entity which the comparee is compared to;
- c. aspect of comparison, that is, the predicate denoting the property that comparee and standard share;
- d. marker of standard, that is, the element that relates comparee to the standard and identifies the construction as a comparison (de Kreij 2021, 20).

To put it in perspective, in the sentence ‘My house is bigger than Peter’s’ *My house* is a comparee, *is bigger* is an aspect, *than* is a marker, and *Peter’s* is a standard of comparison.

The property and the relationship between the two compared entities can vary, and accordingly, the degree of comparison can also vary, but these degrees can be summarized in four categories:

- a. positive
- b. equative
- c. comparative
- d. superlative.

Even though most classical grammars describe *positive* as a first (or neutral) degree of the adjective gradation (cf. Ultan 1972, 121), it too can be used for gradation. The main difference between positive on the one hand and equative, comparative and superlative degrees on the other is the fact that positive degrees are not marked most of the time, whereas the remaining three are (Ultan 1972, 121). However, the lack of morphological or lexical markedness is, in this case, substituted by the means of syntax. In these cases, it can bear the meaning of comparative as is shown by example 1 from the Serbian language:

- (1) *Ti si dobar u poređenju*
 2.SG.NOM be.2.SG.PRES good.M.SG.NOM in comparison.N.SG.LOC
s njim.
 with 3.M.SG.INST
 ‘You are good in comparison to him’ = ‘You are better than him’.

Because of that, we can say that positive is also a degree of comparison, as long as it includes all four of the aforementioned constituents of the comparison structure.

The *equative* degree includes situations when both the comparee and the standard of comparison obtain a property to the same extent (de Krejž 2021, 20) (example 2):

- (2) *Ova kuća je velika kao tvoja.*
 this.F.SG.NOM house.F.SG.NOM be.3.SG.PRES big.F.SG.NOM as yours.F.SG.NOM
 ‘This house is as big as yours’.

The *comparative* degree marks relative qualitative inequality between subjects of comparison. This means that the property of the comparee is inferior or superior to the standard. In this case, the standard of comparison does not include all the members of the group comparee belongs to (Ultan 1972, 123) (example 3):

- (3) *Moja kuća je veća*
 my.F.SG.NOM house.F.SG.NOM be.3.SG.PRES bigger.F.SG.COMP.NOM
od tvoje.
 than yours.F.SG.NOM
 ‘My house is bigger than yours’.

The *superlative* degree indicates absolute inequality between the subjects of comparison. In this case, the property of comparee is inferior or superior to the standard, but the standard includes all the members of the group comparee belongs to (Ultan 1972, 124) (example 4):

- (4) *Moja kuća je najveća od svih*
 my.F.SG.NOM house.F.SG.NOM be.3.SG.PRES big.F.SG.SUP.NOM of all.F.PL.GEN
u ulici.
 in street.F.SG.LOC
 ‘My house is the biggest of all in the street’.

As we can see, qualitative disparity is common for the two latter degrees of comparison. Both constructions represent binary comparisons, and the difference between them lies in the fact that the comparative is explicit while the superlative is implicit. So, semantically, comparatives and superlatives are slightly different aspects of the

same concept (Ultan 1972, 124). That is why there is often partial or even total formal uniformity of degree and/or standard markers in these constructions. One of the languages that show this phenomenon is Albanian, where the distinction between comparative and superlative is expressed only by a marker (examples 5 and 6):

- (5) *Petriti* *është* *më* *i* *vjetër*
 Petrit.M.SG.DEF.NOM be.3.SG.PRES more.COMP.PTCP ART.M.SG.NOM old
se unë
 than 1.SG.NOM
 ‘Petrit is older than me’.

- (6) *Petriti* *është* *më* *i* *vjetër*
 Petrit.M.SG.DEF.NOM be.3.SG.PRES more.COMP.PTCP ART.M.SG.NOM old
në fshatin tonë³.
 in village.M.SG.ACC our.M.SG.ACC
 ‘Petrit is older (= the oldest) in our village’.

Similarly, in other Indo-European languages, e.g. all Romance languages, the difference between comparative and superlative is expressed rather partially: the superlative differs from the comparative in the use of the definite article (with the exception of some adjectives): *fre plus beau* : *le plus beau*, *por mais lindo* : *o mais lindo*, *rom mai frumos* : *cel mai frumos* ‘more beautiful : the most beautiful’.

There is no language unable to express comparison, but the means every one of them uses may vary. According to the means the languages use to construct comparative, they can be categorized into four main groups:

1. comparative without a marker – instead of using a marker, in these languages, the comparison is made by putting two positive adjectives in the juxtaposition with antonymic meaning: A (is) small, B (is) big = A is smaller than B. This type of comparison is common among isolating languages (Lehmanni, Cuzzolin, 2004, 1215);
2. optional lexical morpheme – in this type, the adjective has no marker of comparison, while the standard often occurs in non-nominative cases; the most common is genitive, ablative or dative. This type is the most common among agglutinative languages (Lehmanni, Cuzzolin 2004, 1215);

³ Formal distinction between comparative and superlative can be reached by substantivization of an adjective, i.e. by attaching the nominal definite article to it: *Petriti është më i vjetri në fshatin tonë* (see Agalliu et al 2002).

3. the use of affix – these languages use different affixes to form comparative, and according to the type of affix, these languages can be separated into three subgroups:
 - 3.a languages that use the suffix – this is a common way of expressing the comparative degree of an adjective, for example in most of Slavic languages, where the suffix is derived from proto-Slavic suffixes *-ějъ or *-jъ for masculine, *-ějъši or *-jъši for feminine and *-ěje or *-je for neuter genders⁴,
 - 3.b languages that use circumfix – the use of circumfix is one of the ways of making comparison in Kartvelian languages. In Georgian, the circumfix u-...-es *lamezi* ‘beautiful’ *ulamezesi* ‘more beautiful’,
 - 3.c use of transfix – Semitic languages (mostly in Arabic), the root /CaCi:C/ switches to /aCCaC/ to denote the relative, which is used both as comparative and superlative /kabi:r/ : /akbar/ ‘big : bigger/the biggest’, /gami:l/ : /agmal/ ‘pretty : prettier/the prettiest’ (Lehmanni, Cuzzolin 2004, 1215-16).

As mentioned, some Indo-European languages have synthetical forms of degrees of comparison instead of affixes; the comparative form is constructed analytically, i.e. lexically, using the adverb ‘more’. The same thing is present among Semitic languages, e.g. Hebrew (see Amir Coffin, Bolozky 2005, 196-7) and Amharic (Leslau 1995, 783-96).

1. the use of verbs – the fourth group uses verbs as a marker of comparison and can be divided into two subgroups:
 - 1.a using the verb with the meaning ‘surpass’ or ‘overtake’
 - 1.b the parameter of comparison is the verb itself (Lehmanni, Cuzzolin 2004, 1217).

This type of comparison is present in languages in which adjectives fall into the verbal category, in contrast to Indo-European languages where adjectives are within the nominal one. The phenomenon is frequent among isolating languages or languages with a low degree of synthesis (Lehmann, Cuzzolin 2004, 1217).

Non-equative constructions are constructions that represent disparity between two or more compared things, and the comparison can go in two directions: comparison of majority or superiority means that the property of a comparee surpasses the property of a standard, while comparison of minority or inferiority means that property of a comparee falls behind the property of a standard (Treis 2018, 3).

⁴ The use of one of these two types of suffixes was determined by the accent type of a noun (see Šekli 2018, 67).

The cognitive point of view shows us that describing entities that are *larger* or *smaller* is the primary way of expression, in comparison to expressing things that are *less large* or *less small*, thus the comparison of superiority is more frequent than the comparison of inferiority (Lehmann and Cuzzolin 2004, 1213). This may be the reason why there are languages that express the comparative degree of superiority with affixes, but there is no language which constructs a comparative degree of inferiority by the same means (Bobaljik 2012, 210).

As it will be shown in the next chapter, the morpheme *po-* can be used with all the degrees of disparity, i.e. comparative and superlative, but only as long as they represent the disparity of superiority and can also be used with a positive degree.

3 The morpheme *po-*

In the CSS, it could appear as:

1. preposition
 - 1.a with the accusative case bears the following meanings: the goal of the verb action - *Idem po vodu*. 'I am going to take water', duration - *Spava po ceo dan*. 'He / She sleeps all day long.', multiplicity or distributivity - *Po čitavi gradovi su ostajali bez struje*. 'Whole cities were left without electricity.'
 - 1.b with the locative case bears the distributive meaning of place(s) where the verb expression takes the action - *Sede po sobama*. 'They are sitting in rooms.', family and other ties - *braća po majci* 'brothers from the same mother, uterine/maternal half-brothers', time right after the moment expressed with the noun in the locative case - *po ponoći* '(right) after midnight', *po ponedeljku* '(right) after Monday' (cf. Vujančić et al. 2011, 438).
2. prefix
 - 2.a a noun with the prefix only partially fills the meaning - *pomajka* 'step-mother', *pobratim* 'blood brother', *posestrima* 'blood sister'
 - 2.b with verbs, it bears the meaning of: the start of an action - *potrčati* 'to start running', completion of an action - *pokupovati* 'to buy', an action that lasted for just a short period of time - *poigrati se* 'to play (for a while)', *porazgovarati* 'to talk, to discuss', action carried out by multiple subjects - *posedati* 'to sit' (cf. Vujančić et al. 2011, 438-9);
 - 2.c with adjectives and adverbs, it bears the meaning which "moderates" the meaning of an adjective or an adverb - *podobar* 'pretty good', *poveliki* 'pretty big'.

The latter is present in almost all Slavic languages with meaning that either moderates or enforces the original meaning of an adjective, and in some, like Ukrainian, it can be used only with the positive grade of an adjective, while in Russian it is used only with comparative, in some dialects of the CSS it can be used with positive, comparative and superlative degrees, while in Bulgarian and Macedonian, as well as some dialects of the CSS it is used to form the comparative degree (cf. Kopečný 1973, 187, Bezljaj 1995, 64, Anastasov et al. 1996, 394). In those idioms that allow the use of the *po-* with positive, comparative, and superlative degrees, it plays a role similar to that of the flat and sharp tones in the musical scale, filling the gaps between degrees (cf. Jović 1968, 115). Thus, it acts like a semi-degree, by either *almost* or *too*. So, depending on the dialect of the CSS, for example, *podobar* can mean either ‘almost / quite good’ (still not meeting the requirement of the established parameter of good) or ‘very good’ (but not enough to be called *better*). When it comes to the other parts of the West South Slavic subbranch of the South Slavic languages, nowadays it does not appear in any of Slovenian dialects, and as it seems, it is not present in Kajkavian and Čakavian dialects either (cf. Hraste 1940; Moskovljević 1950; Jedvaj 1956; Valenčić 2011; Malnar Jurišić 2017). Nevertheless, Slovenian-German Dictionary from the 19th century shows that this meaning existed in the Slovenian language, too: *III. praef. A) adv. in front of adjectives have moderate meaning: počrn blackish*⁵ (Pleteršnik 2010)⁶ In this usage, the particle *po-* appears in the Church Slavonic texts, i.e. *īīīāāòù* ‘richer’. This leads to the conclusion that the *po-* developed from the proto-Slavic **po*.

The suffix with almost the same meaning also exists in the Baltic part of the Balto-Slavic language group, where *pa-* is used to moderate the original meaning of a word, like in lat *pasarkans* ‘redish’ or lit *pājoudis* ‘blackish’, *pósūris* ‘salty-ish’ (Bezljaj 1995, 65).

According to the aforementioned, PSI **po* (and *po-*) / *pa-*⁷, lit *pa-*, are related to gre *πoτί*, ave *paīti*, Oldp *paity* (which all have the adverbial suffix **-ti-*), and probably alb *tosk pas*, geg *mbas* ‘after, behind’ < pie. **pa* ‘to, towards, at’ (Bezljaj 1995, 65). The development of the meaning ‘-ish, less, pretty’ of the morpheme *po-* out of the PIE **po* which had lative meaning, can be explained by the semantic shift, meaning that someone who is *podobar* or *povisok*, is not as tall as the

⁵ Orig. *III. praef. A) adv. pred prilogi v pomanjševalnem pomenu (poredkoma): počrn, schwärzlich [...]*

⁶ For the material from the other Slavic languages, and the different usage of the *po* see Kopečný 1973, 178-89.

⁷ PSI **pa-* is a product of the lengthening of the /o/ sound **po > *pō > *pa*, which has the meaning ‘weaker, worse, false’: hr. and sr. *patvōriti* ‘to forge, to make something fake’, *pārožak* ‘prong, tine’ (horn-like object) (Gluhak 1993, 490). While *po* can be either preposition or prefix, the *pa-* is only prefix (Skok 1972, 692).

- (10) *pó* *davaš* (Belić 1905, 440);
more.PTCP.COMP to give.2.SG.PRES
'you give more'
- (11) *pó* *đavo* *od* *Vuka* (Belić 1905, 440).
more.PTCP.COMP devil.M.SG.NOM than Vuk.M.SG.NOM
'more devil than Vuk' = 'more naughty than Vuk'

Aside from the previously mentioned, as we saw in the first chapter, creating comparative degree with an affix is already very rare and is chiefly characteristic of the Indo-European languages (at least of those that retained it), but neither among them nor among those that shifted from the synthetical to analytical means of expressing the comparison, there is or was evidence of the use of prefix for forming the comparative (cf. Keydana, Hock, Widmer et al. 2021). This would mean that the phenomenon of prefixation of an adjective for forming the comparative would occur only in Macedonian, Bulgarian, Prizren-Timok dialect and the adjacent local varieties of the Kosovo-Resava dialect, which is, in our opinion, very unlikely.

All of the presented examples speak in favor of the morpheme *po-* as a free particle rather than as an affix⁸, but all of the examples are from the old *Štokavian* dialects, i.e. Torlak (or Prizren-Timok) and some regional varieties of Kosovo-Resava, where in the former the synthetic comparison was completely replaced by the analytic one, with the exception of a few adjectives (See Belić 1905), and the morpheme *po-* took the role of the comparative marker, while in the latter, it has undergone the same change in regional varieties adjacent to the Prizren-Timok dialect. On the other hand, neo-*Štokavian* dialects, as well as some of the old-*Štokavian*, i.e. Zeta-South Sandžak dialect, still retain synthetic comparison and the morpheme *po-* is in a different context with sometimes different meanings.

4 The morpheme *po-* in the *Štokavian* dialects

The territory of the Central South Slavic is consisted of three dialects or dialect groups named by the interrogative pronoun *what*: Kajkavian 'kaj', Čakavian 'ča', Štokavian 'što (or šta)'. Since the Kajkavian and Čakavian dialects do not use the morpheme *po-* for any type of comparison (cf. Hraste 1940; Moskovljević 1950; Jedvaj

⁸ The similar fate occurred to the verb *to want* where the 3rd person present of the verb mac *ke*, bul *uče*, alb *do*, 'will, shall' all of them developed from the 3rd person singular of the verb *to want*, but are not considered as a present form of the verb, but rather a particle that marks the future tense.



Figure 1
The map
of Štokavian dialects
(Lisac 2003, 160-1).

1956; Valenčić 2011; Malnar Jurišić 2017), we will focus solely on the Štokavian dialects.

The Eastern Herzegovinian dialect of the Štokavian dialectal group is also used as a basis for all of today's standard languages, or more precisely, the regional variety of Dubrovnik of the Eastern Herzegovinian dialect is the basis for the Bosnian, Croatian and Montenegrin standard languages, while Serbian has two standard varieties, the *ijekavian* one, based on the same dialect as the other three languages, and the *ekavian* one, based on the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect (Ivić 1956, 69-70). The use of morpheme *po-* in standard languages is permitted but only with the positive degree of an adjective, and the particle always moderates the adjective (see Jahić, Halilović, Palić 2000, 240; Piper, Klajn, Dragičević 2022, 144). The use of the morpheme *po-* with the other types of speech, i.e. nouns and verbs in standard language, is not permitted.

Štokavian dialect group is consisted of Younger Ikavian, Eastern Bosnian, Eastern Herzegovinian, Slavonian, Zeta-South Sandžak, Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect (which can be further divided into Northern Serbian⁹ and Vojvodina subdialects), Kosovo-Resava dialect (with the Smederevo-Vršac dialect transitional to Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect), Prizren-Timok or Torlak dialect (which can be further divided into Prizren-South Morava, Svrlijig-Zaplanje and Timok-Lužica subdialects) (see Ivić 1956; Brozović, Ivić 1988; Lisac 2003) [fig. 1].

⁹ The term in Serbian is not *srpski* but *srbijanski* and in this case it means *northern part of the territory of the Republic of Serbia south of the Sava and the Danube rivers*.

4.1 Grouping of the Štokavian dialects

All these dialects can be grouped differently, according to different parameters:

- a. into *Ekavian*¹⁰, *Ijekavian* and *Ikavian* according to the reflex of the psl. *ě, in *ekavian*, psl. *ě yielded *e* psl. *lěpъ, *město > *ekavian*. *lep*, *mesto* ‘beautiful, place’, in *ijekavian* psl. *ě, *ě yielded *ije* and *je* psl. *lěpъ, *město > *ekavian* *lijep*, *mjesto* ‘same’, in *ikavian*, the *ě yielded *i* psl. *lěpъ, *město > *ekavian* *lip*, *misto* ‘same’ (Ivić, 1956, 56; Okuka 2008, 45); according to this criterium, Šumadija-Vojvodina, Kosovo-Resava and Prizren-Timok dialects are *ekavian*, Eastern Herzegovinian, Eastern Bosnian and Zeta-South Sandžak are *ijekavian* while Younger *Ikavian* and Slavonian¹¹ are *ikavian* (see Ivić 1956, 56-57, Lisac 2003, 29);
- b. into old and neo-Štokavian according to the number and quality of the accents:
 - 1 old Štokavian dialects can be subdivided into
 1. a. archaic - Slavonian, which retained old three-accent system: \tilde{V} , \hat{V} , \check{V}
 1. b. old - Zeta-South Sandžak, Eastern Bosnian, where the quantity of the two long accents was eliminated, or more precisely, \tilde{V} was equated with \hat{V} , so these dialects have two accents: \hat{V} \check{V} (see Ivić 1956, 58-60, Lisac 2003, 29).
 - 2 neo-Štokavian dialects are Eastern Herzegovinian, Šumadija-Vojvodina and Younger *Ikavian*. These dialects experienced metatony, so accents moved one syllable towards the beginning of the word, resulting in a four-accent system (\check{V} , \hat{V} , \tilde{V} , \acute{V}) where falling accents can appear exclusively on the first or the only syllable of a word (see Ivić 1956, 58-61; Lisac 2003, 29).
 - 3 The Prizren-Timok dialect experienced the greatest changes. In it, all quality and quantity oppositions were eliminated, resulting in only one pitch accent \acute{V} (Ivić 1956, 58)¹².

¹⁰ There is also *ekav-ikavian* subgroup, where the psl. *ě yields *i* in some morphemes, as for example in the dative case of the feminine -a stem nouns: psl. *žena* : *ženě* sr. *žena* : *ženi*, kosovo-resava: *žena* : *žene* dialect ‘woman.NOM : woman.DAT’ (Ivić 1956, 56).

¹¹ Even though the *i* reflex of the yat is the most spread, there are also varieties with *ikavian-ekavian* reflexes of it, as well as some varieties with unchanged yat - *ę* - i.e. yat with closed articulation (see Lisac 2003, 32-3).

¹² For the comparison of dialects according to this criterium with examples see Šekli 2018 (369-71).

- c. the eastern-western division is the oldest one of these dialects, and the criterium is the reflex of the psl. *šč and *žž firstly retained in Western Štokavian, and then changed into šć, žž, psl. *pryščb > Slavonian *prišč* 'rash' while in Eastern Štokavian it yielded št and žd psl. *pryščb > Šumadija-Vojvodina *prišt* 'rash' (see Šekli 2018). According to this parameter, Younger Ikavian, Eastern Bosnian and Slavonian dialects fall into the category of the Western Štokavian dialects, while Eastern-Herzegovinian, Zeta-South Sandžak, Šumadija-Vojvodina, Kosovo-Resava and Smederevo-Vršac as well as Torlak dialects fall into the Eastern group. At the same time, for this research, the most important divide appears to be this one.

4.2 Examples of the appearance of the particle *po* in Štokavian dialects

In this part, we will show examples of the use of the free particle *po* in Štokavian dialects, according to the eastern-western divide.

4.2.1 Western Štokavian dialects

Local varieties of the Slavonian dialect we used in the research do not use the particle *po-* with adjectives (cf. Sekereš 1966; Sekereš 1977).

Varieties of the Eastern Bosnian dialect use the particle *po-* with adjectives (cf. Meša 2021), while in the basin of the Lašva River, it is rarely used (cf. Mustabašić 2015). The occurrence of the free particle *po-* in this dialect could also be due to the fact that the local varieties we used in the research are adjacent to the Eastern Herzegovinian dialect.

Younger Ikavian – the particle *po-* is present in its western part, around the city of Bihać, where examples like *poljut* 'quite angry', *pomlad* 'quite young', *pomiran* 'quite quiet', *ponajveći* 'somewhat the biggest' are documented (Peco 2007, 210). It is not present in the variety of the dialect spoken by Bunjevci in Vojvodina (cf. Crnković 2015) or in Livno (cf. Ramić 1999). Its presence in the Bihać region could result from the fact that it is completely surrounded by the Eastern Herzegovinian dialect.

4.2.2 Eastern Štokavian

Eastern Herzegovinian – the particle *po-* is present in all of its local varieties, and is mostly used with adjectives and adverbs: *pòboljī* 'quite good', *pògorī* 'quite bad', *pòvišī* 'quite high', *pòredī* 'quite rare', *pòmładī* 'quite young' – Old Herzegovina (Vušović 1927, 50); *pòvelikī*

'quite big', *pòmālī* 'quite small', *pòjeftinā* 'quite cheap' – Užička Crna Gora (Marković 2011, 550), but there are also examples of the usage of the particle *po-* with a noun, though with the modified meaning e.g. *pòsiròma* 'quite poor' (Vušović 1927, 50, Marković 2021, 550). Vušović shows an example of a word with two accents: *pòdòbri* 'quite good', *pònèsretan* 'quite unlucky' (2012, 550), while Nikolić gives some more examples (12 and 13). In these cases, the particle *po-* moderates the meaning of an adjective.

(12) *Ìmala sam jèdnu pòzlu snà u.* (Nikolić 1991, 415);
have.F.SG.PTCP be.3.SG.PRES one.F.SG.ACC evil.F.SG.ACC daughter-in-law.F.SG.ACC
'I had a quite evil (=bad) daughter-in-law.'

(13) *Jèdna žèna pòkrúpna ìmala je*
One.F.SG.NOM woman.F.SG.NOM large.F.SG.NOM have.F.SG.PTCP be.3.SG.PRES
đècē pò dosta (Nikolić 1991, 415).
child.N.PL.ACC a lot
'A quite large woman had quite a lot of children.'

On the other hand, it can be used with both comparative and superlative degrees of an adjective (examples 14 and 15):

(14) *Ìmō vākō malo pòvišē imánje* (Nikolić 1991, 416);
have.M.SG.PTCP like this a bit high estate.N.SG.ACC
'So, up there, he had an estate.'

(15) *ponā jbliži do mēne* (Nikolić 1991, 416).
near.M.SG.NOM.SUP to 1.SG.GEN
'nearest one to me'

An interesting occurrence appears in the variety of Piva and Drob-njaci, where depending on the accent, the particle *po-* and the adjective can form a single phonetical word, or both can retain their own accent:

- a. if the adjective following the particle has the short falling accent, the entire phrase is pronounced as one phonetical word, with the short falling accent: *pò dòbar* > *pòdobar* 'quite good', *pò bòlji* > *pòbolji* 'quite better', *pò vèci* > *pòveći* 'quite bigger';
- b. if the adjective following the particle has the short rising accent, the phrase consists of two separate words: *pò màlen* > *pò màlen* 'quite small', *pò šìrok* > *pò šìrok* 'quite wide', *pò dèbeō* > *pò dèbeō* 'quite fat' (Vuković 1938, 296).

Šumadija-Vojvodina – the particle is present only in the Northern Serbian subdialect, while in the Vojvodinian subdialect it is not (cf.

Nikolić 1964; Ivić, Bošnjaković, Dragin 1994). In Northern Serbian subdialect it bears the meaning ‘too, much’, while used with comparative and superlative it moderates the meaning of an adjective (Radovanović 2014, 260)¹³ (examples 16, 17 and 18):

(16) *bíla je òna podugàčkā i vè likā* (Radovanović 2014, 260);
be.F.SG.PTCP be.3.SG.PRES 3.F.SG.NOM long.F.SG.NOM and big.F.SG.NOM
‘she was very long and big’

(17) *bíla je vākō i pō lēpa* (Radovanović 2014, 260);
be.F.SG.PTCP BE.3.SG.PRES like this also beautiful.F.SG.NOM
‘so, she was quite beautiful, too’

(18) *bĭō pō veći tāj* (Radovanović 2014, 260).
be.M.SG.PTCP big.M.SG.NOM that.M.SG.NOM
‘that one was somewhat bigger’

Zeta-South Sandžak – in this dialect, it is also mostly used with adjectives (examples 19 and 20):

(19) *Izèdi něšto pō le[p]še pā lèzi* (Miletić 1940, 423);
eat.2.SG.IMP something.N.SG.ACC pretty.N.SG.ACC and lay.2.SG.IMP
‘Eat something somewhat nicer and go to bed.’

(20) *Negō[v]a [j]je kùća pōnā jbliža mō jōj* (Miletić 1940, 423).
his.F.SG.NOM be.3.SG.PRES house.F.SG.NOM near.F.SG.NOM.SUP mine.F.SG.DAT
‘His house is by far the nearest one to mine.’

It can also be used with comparative and superlative and can be both used for moderating and enforcing the original meaning of an adjective *pōljepšī* ‘somewhat more beautiful/much more beautiful’, *pōboljī* ‘somewhat better/much better’, *pōgrđī* ‘somewhat uglier/much uglier’, *pōnajboljī* ‘quite the best/best by far’ (Ćupić 1977, 85)¹⁴.

Kosovo-Resava and Smederevo-Vršac – it is also present in these dialects, but it has two roles depending on the local variant: it either has a meaning ‘quite or much’ (example 21) as in much of the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect and Eastern Herzegovinian (cf. Jović 1968, 115) and can be used with comparative and superlative too (example 22, 23), or can be used as a marker for the comparative, which is significant for the local varieties adjacent to the Prizren-Timok

¹³ See also Radovanović 2006.

¹⁴ See also Barjaktarević 1966.

dialect (example 24 and 25). In the latter, it can also be used with nouns and adjectives (Radić 1990, 29)¹⁵.

- (21) *pogûs* *pasûlj* (Bošnjaković 2012, 153)
 thick.M.SG.NOM bean.M.SG.NOM.
 ‘quite thick bean’ = ‘quite thick bean dip’
- (22) *dâj* *mi* *malo pöbolje* *vîno* (Jović 1968, 115)
 give.2.SG.IMP 1.SG.DAT a bit good.N.SG.ACC.COMP vine.N.SG.ACC
 ‘Give me somewhat better wine.’
- (23) *Bölje* *bi* *bîlo* *da* *mu* *učukam*
 good.COMP be.3.SG.AOR be.N.SG.PTCP conj 3.SG.DAT hammer.1.SG.PRES
pötanji *kö lac* (Tomić 1987, 385)
 thin.M.SG.ACC.COMP stake.M.SG.ACC
 ‘It would be better if I hammered him a quite thinner stake.’
- (24) *bila* *pö* *mâla* *žëna* (Radić 1990, 29)
 be.F.SG.PTCP PART.COMP small.F.SG.NOM woman.F.SG.NOM
 ‘she was a smaller woman’ = ‘she was a rather small woman’
- (25) *pö* *rastežu* *po* *varoš* (Radić 1990, 29)
 PART.COMP stretch.3.PL.PRES over.PREP town.F.SG.ACC
 ‘(they) stretch it more all over the town’

The Prizren-Timok dialect – in this dialect, it is used to mark the comparative degree, and is used by adjectives, nouns, and verbs. It also can be separated from the parts of speech it is related to by other parts of speech, as is shown in these examples:

- (26) *ti* *si* *po-zdrava* *odnas* (Ćirić 1983, 79);
 2.SG.NOM be.2.SG.PRES MORE.PART.COMP-healthy.F.SG.NOM from 1.PL.GEN
 ‘you are healthier than us’
- (27) *od* *njeg* *po-gazda* *neje*
 from 3.SG.GEN MORE.PART.COMP-landlord.M.SG.NOM not.be.3.SG.PRES
- (28) *imalo* (Ćirić 1983, 79);
 have.N.SG.PTCP
 ‘there wasn’t a better landlord than him’

¹⁵ The particle is not present in the eastern part of the dialect, more precisely in the variety of Resava (see Peco, Milovanović 1968).

- (29) *jeno* *po-t̃nko* *drvo* (Tomić 1984, 249)
 one.N.SG.NOM MORE.PART.COMP-thin.N.SG.NOM tree.N.SG.NOM
 'a thinner tree'
- (30) *Od njega* *po-veš* *kujundžija*
 from3.SG.GEN more.PART.COMP-skillful.M.SG.NOM silversmith.M.SG.NOM
ne beše (Remetić 1996, 478)
 not be.3.SG.IMPF
 'there was no more skillful silversmith than him'
- (31) *Tvoja* *pucal'ka* *po* *je*
 your.F.SG.NOM shotgun.F.SG.NOM MORE-PART.COM be.3.SG.PRES
glasovita *ze njina* (Remetić 1996; 478)
 loud.F.SG.NOM than 3.PL.NOM
 'your shotgun is louder than theirs'

The above examples show us that phonetical realization may vary from dialect to dialect and that not only in the Prizren-Timok dialect can the particle *po-* be separated from the adjective. Besides that, the possibility of the particle *po-* to have its own stress implies that it is not fully bound to the adjective or an adverb it is related to, which means that it is not a prefix but rather a free particle bearing the meaning 'much' (in the Prizren-Timok dialect and some local varieties of the Kosovo-Resava dialect, being the marker of the comparative degree of an adjective, while in other dialects, it either has a meaning 'quite, pretty' or 'much'. This is another reason the morpheme *po-* should be considered a particle rather than a prefix.

4.3 Relation of the Phenomenon in Prizren-Timok Dialect With the One in Bulgarian and Macedonian

Both Macedonian and Bulgarian languages undergone the complete shift from synthetic to analytic comparison, so there is no trace of the former, at least when it comes to the comparative forms of adjectives of the former synthetic system. Traces could be found in the comparison of adverbs both in standard language as well as in dialects. Standard languages retained the analytic (suppletive) comparative form of the adverb mac. *mnogu* 'a lot, many', bul. *mnogo* 'id'

which is *poveќе* ‘more’ in Macedonian¹⁶ and *poveče* ‘more’ in Bulgarian¹⁷. The same development occurred in the Prizren-Timok dialect.

Even though the particle *po-* had sporadic appearances in older texts (see Haralampiev 2001, 107), it appears that both *po-* and *naj-* as markers for comparative and superlative were firstly used with adverbs (Haralampiev 2001, 107). The shift appears more often in the Macedonian and Bulgarian redaction of the old Church Slavonic from the 12th and 13th centuries onwards. In this period are documented adverbs such as *пмногo* ‘more’, *порано* ‘earlier’. In the *Trojan story* from the 14th century, there are a lot of examples of the use of analytical instead of synthetic comparison (examples 31 and 32):

- (32) *da ne bōdet člověkъ po-bogatъ*
 to.CONJ not be.3.SG.PRES man.M.SG.NOM more.PART.COM-wealthy.M.SG
ot tebe (Haralampiev 2001, 107)
 from 2.SG.GEN
 ‘may there be no man wealthier than you’

- (33) *a ty si počъtenъ gospodinъ*
 and 2.SG.NOM be.2.SG.PRES honest.M.SG.NOM man.M.SG.NOM
i po-dobrъ igrecъ (Haralampiev 2001, 107)
 and more.PART.COMP-good.M.SG.NOM player.M.SG.NOM
 ‘and you are an honest gentleman and even better player’

16 In Kriva Palanka dialect of the Macedonian language there are two more adverbs with synthetic comparative: *više* ‘more’ which is used alongside *veќе* ‘more’, and *brže* ‘faster’ (Stoevska-Denčova, 2014, 82-83). In the Bansko variety of the Strumica dialect of the Macedonian language, the adverb *brže* is also used, but as it appears, it is considered positive and not comparative form: *brže : pōbrže : najbrže* ‘fast, faster, the fastest’ (Cvetanovski et al. 2014, 75).

17 Eastern Bulgarian dialects show traits that most probably developed as a result of the influence of neighboring Turkish and Greek languages. In the Eastern Rup dialects, particle *po-* is absent, and the comparative form of the adjective is expressed only by the preposition *ot* ‘from, than’ (example a), which corresponds to the Turkish construction positive + ablative case (example b):

- a) *Tōi ut mēne stār.* (Vitanova, 6).
 3.SG.NOM from 1.SG.GEN old.M.SG.POS
 ‘He is older than me.’
 b) *O benden yaşlı.*
 3.SG.NOM 1.SG.ABL old.SG.POS
 ‘He is older than me.’

The probability that the trait is developed under the influence of Turkish is even stronger if we consider the fact that in this dialect the morpheme *in* is used rather than *nai* to form superlative (example c), which is a loanword from Turkish *en* ‘the most’ (example d):

- c) *Mōja brat bil in-gol’ām.* (Vitanova, 6).
 my.M.SG.DEF brother.M.SG be.3.SG.PST most.PREP.SUP-big.M.SG.NOM
 ‘My brother was the biggest.’
 d) *Kardeş-im en büyük-tü.*
 brother.SG.NOM-my.SG.NOM most.PREP.SUP big.SG.NOM-be.3.SG.PST
 ‘My brother was the biggest.’

According to Belić, this use of the particle *po-* developed in Prizren-Timok dialects under the influence of Bulgarian and Macedonian dialects, most probably given the fact that there are still several adjectives that have both synthetic and analytic comparisons (Belić 1905, 438).

As we already mentioned in chapter two, Belić named the *po-* a preposition (1905, 438). Etymologically, the particle *naj-* is derived from the preposition psl. **na* and the relative pronoun psl. **jb* (Matasović 2008, 224, see Wandl 2022). But the *naj-* was not fully grammaticalized in the Common Slavic period and was competing with the constructions **prě-* and *вѣсѣхѣ + comparative*. However, it was used more often with adjectives than with adverbs. Since the adverbs used **nai* for forming the superlative degree, the use of this particle spread to the adjectives as well, ousting the other aforementioned means of constructing the superlative degree. We believe that this development opened the way for the particle *po-* to be used with the comparative degree, and then we could presume that there was a time when particles and synthetic comparative markers were used simultaneously to mark the comparative degree. After that, the preposition-derived particles remained the only marker for both comparative and superlative degrees¹⁸. At the time when the particles *po-* and *naj-* got the meaning ‘more’ and ‘most’, they were able to be completely detached from the adjective or adverb they were used with and were able to interact with other parts of speech too. The probability that this thing first happened to the particle *naj-* and after that to the particle *po-* lies in the fact that the particle *naj-* can be used with verbs or even separated from an adjective in those local varieties, while the use of the particle *po-* with other parts of speech was not documented (example 33):

- (34) *nâj* *sam* *mřšavij* *od*
 most.PART.SUP be.2.SG.PRES skinny.F.SG.NOM from
mõjĩ *brãčẽ* *i* *sestárã* (Radovanović 2014, 260)
 my.M.PL.GEN brother.M.PL.GEN and sister.F.PL.GEN
 ‘I am the skinniest of all my brothers and sisters’

¹⁸ The anonymous reviewer of the article reminds that **nai* is grammaticalized as a superlative marker; it has probably lost any connection with prepositions in the speakers’ awareness. Linking it directly to the behavior of prepositions is suspicious. We can agree that the time of the grammaticalization of the particles *po-* and *naj-* as constituents of the comparative and superlative form did not happen simultaneously, but we think that there is no doubt that the existence of the particle *naj-* opened the way, or supported the grammaticalization of the particle *po-* as the constituent of the comparative degree, because of the typologically similar process in their development.

4.4 Periodization and other changes

The switch from the synthetic to analytic comparison is sometimes related to the loss or simplification of the case system (see Asenova 2002). Yet the elision of the case system and complete replacement of case markers with prepositions is not yet completely finished, even in Macedonian and Bulgarian (see Konevski 1996, 155), where the switch from the synthetic to analytic comparison is complete. Besides that, the first results of the change in the case system were visible in the 15th century, approximately one century after the analytic comparison became more present. On the other hand, a local variety of a Smederevo-Vršac dialect, the variety spoken by Gallipoli Serbs, is an example where all the seven cases (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, instrumental and vocative) are retained (Ivić 1956, 158), yet the comparison is completely analytical. Superlative is marked by the particle *naj* + positive, while the comparative is expressed by the particle *još* + positive (example 34) and can also be used with verbs (35):

- (35) *Môj* *brăt* *du menê*
 my.M.SG.NOM brother.M.SG.NOM to 1.SG.DAT
je *jôš* *mlât* (Ivić 1957, 225);
 be.3.SG.PRES more.PART.COMP young.M.SG.NOM
 'My brother is younger than me'

- (36) *Uvî* *drugî* *sîn* *jôš* *znă*
 (Ivić 1957, 225).
 This.M.SG.NOM other.M.SG.NOM son.M.SG.NOM more.PART.COMP know.3.SG.
 PRES
 'This other son knows more.'

The shift was complete, and there is no trace of the synthetic comparison anymore; for example, in the Prizren-Timok dialect, there are still some adjectives and adverbs that retained the synthetic comparison like *stareji* 'older', *mladžeji* 'younger', *bolje* 'better', etc. (Ivić 1957, 226). If we have this in mind, we can argue that the use of the particle *po-* in the Prizren-Timok dialect developed later than in Bulgarian and Macedonian languages, but before the migration of Serbs from this area to Romania, since both Prizren-Timok varieties spoken in Romania, i.e. Karaševo (see Radan, Uskatu 2016) and Svinica (see Tomić 1984) show this trait.

5 Conclusion

It is apparent that the morpheme *po-* is widespread throughout the Slavic world. Depending on the language, it can either mean 'pretty, quite' or 'very' and can be used either with only positive degree like in Czech, or with comparative like in Russian, or with positive, comparative and superlative, as in some dialects of the CSS. On the other hand, in Prizren-Timok dialect as well as in Macedonian and Bulgarian languages it is the only way of making the comparative and superlative degrees.

Out of the three dialect groups of the CSS, only in Štokavian does the free particle *po-* find its place in the system of the gradation of adjectives. But even there, it is not present in all its dialects. The border roughly corresponds to the eastern-wester divide between the Štokavian dialects, which is based on the development of the proto-Slavic clusters *šč and *žž, but with some corrections. It is not present in the Slavonian dialect, nor in the greatest part of the Young Ika-vian dialect. It is present in some parts of the latter and some parts of the Eastern Bosnian dialect, but that could be the result of their proximity to the Eastern Herzegovinian. Besides Eastern-Herzegovinian, it is present in the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect but without the Vojvodina subdialect, and it is present in both Zeta-South Sandžak and Kosovo-Resava dialects, while in Prizren-Timok dialect it is the only way of marking the comparative.

Even though the particle *po-* is often defined as a prefix, we argue that it should be called the free particle since it has a meaning that can modify the word it is related to and can be separated from it without losing its meaning. Going from west to east, the use of it with other parts of speech besides adjectives and adverbs becomes more and more apparent. The use of it as a marker for the comparative degree of an adjective is enabled by the fact that the superlative is created with the particle *naj-* which etymologically is preposition, as well as the particle *po-* and their development was typologically similar.

The switch from synthetic to analytic comparison in the Prizren-Timok dialect was probably due to the influence of the neighboring dialects of Bulgarian and Macedonian languages. Given that some adjectives and adverbs still retain the old way of comparison, we can say that it happened in the Prizren-Timok dialect later than in these two languages.

List of abbreviations

alb	Albanian
ave	Avestan
bul	Bulgarian
CSS	Central South Slavic
eng	English
fre	French
gre	Greek
id	identical
lav	Latvian
lit	Lithuanian
mac	Macedonian
OCS	Old Church Slavonic
oldp	Old Persian
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
por	Portuguese
PSl	Proto-Slavic
rom	Romanian

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