

SELF-SUPERLATIVES*

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Self-superlatives are a phenomenon that has gone largely unnoticed in the literature. They express the idea of superlativity using an emphatic reflexive pronoun instead of a specialized degree word like *most* in English. This paper describes the properties of *self*-superlatives contrasting them with *most*-superlatives and proposes an analysis of *self*-superlatives based on the interaction of the emphatic reflexive pronoun, a definite determiner and a positive degree operator. The data to examine the phenomenon come mainly from Russian, which has both *self*-superlatives and *most*-superlatives. The last section of the paper discusses *self*-superlatives in other languages.

1. The properties of *self*-superlatives

The two strategies¹ to express superlatives in Russian are illustrated in (1). *Most*-superlatives, as in (1-a), are formed with the degree morpheme *naibolee* ‘most’, which is a combination of the comparative morpheme *bolee* ‘more’ and the prefix *na-i-* ‘on-and’. In *self*-superlatives, instead of *naibolee*, the emphatic reflexive pronoun *sam* ‘self’ is used, see (1-b). Note that *sam* agrees with the noun in gender, number and case.

- (1) a. *nai* - *bolee* *interesn* - *aja* *kniga* (*most*-superlative)
pref - more interesting - f.sg.nom book-f.nom
‘the most interesting book’
b. *sam* - *aja* *interesn* - *aja* *kniga* (*self*-superlative)
*self*_{emph} - f.sg.nom interesting - f.sg.nom book-f.nom
‘the most interesting book’

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¹ Russian also has synthetic superlatives, which are formed with the suffix *-ejš*:

- (i) *interesn* - *ejš* - *aja* *kniga*
interesting - *ejsh* - f.sg.nom book-f.sg.nom
‘the most interesting book’

Brandner (1999) argues that historically, *-ejš* is derived from the comparative morpheme **-ejš* and is no longer productive in modern Russian (it has phonological restrictions). I will assume *-ejš*-superlatives to be a variant of *most*-superlatives.

There is a number of properties of *self*-superlatives that differentiate them from *most*-superlatives. First of all, as already mentioned, *self*-superlatives use an emphatic reflexive pronoun instead of a degree word. Russian, like other Slavic languages, as well as Romance and most Germanic languages (except English), makes a formal distinction between reflexive anaphors and emphatic pronouns, see König et al. (2001). Compare (2) with (3), in which *a*-examples illustrate reflexive anaphors and *b*-examples emphatic pronouns. It is the emphatic pronoun that is used in *self*-superlatives in Russian.

- (2) a. Martha saw **herself**. (Stern, 2004)
 b. Abigail **herself** didn't know the answer.
- (3) a. Pierre **se** déteste. (Weiss, 2006)
 Peter hasst **sich**.
 Petr nenavidit **sebja**.
 'Peter hates **himself**.'
 b. Pierre va nous présenter son exposé **lui-même**.
 Peter wird uns sein Paper **selber** präsentieren.
 Petr **sam** predstavit nam svoj doklad.
 'Peter **himself** is going to read us his paper.'

Secondly, *self*-superlatives can co-occur with synthetic superlatives, whereas *most*-superlatives and synthetic superlatives are in complementary distribution:

- (4) a. samyj lučšyj čelovek
 self_{emph} best person
 'the best person'
 b. *nai - bolee lučšyj čelovek
 pref - more best person
 'the best person'

It is possible, however, to combine just the prefix *nai-* with a synthetic superlative:

- (5) nai - lučšyj čelovek
 pref - best person
 'the best person'

The third property of *self*-superlatives, also already mentioned, is that *sam* has an obligatory adjectival inflection, see (6), unlike *naibolee*, which is invariable similar to other degree words in Russian, such as *očen'* 'very', *dostatočno* 'enough' and *sliškom* 'too'.² Table 1 shows the gender and number agreement in *self*-superlatives and table 2 shows the case agreement paradigm.

² There is one degree word *tak* 'so' in Russian, which also has an adjectival agreement when it modifies an adjective in the attributive position. However, it has no agreement when it modifies a short-form adjective in the predicative position. *Sam* which is ungrammatical with short-form adjectives (see the discussion of the fourth property of *self*-superlatives).

- (6) sam - *(aja) interesn - aja kniga
 self_{emph} - f.sg.nom interesting - f.sg.nom book-f.nom
 ‘the most interesting book’

Table 1: Gender and number agreement in *self*-superlatives

	‘self’	‘most’	
F.S.NOM	sam- aja	naibolee	interesn- aja kniga ‘the most interesting book’
M.S.NOM	sam- yj	naibolee	interesn- yj fil’m ‘the most interesting movie’
N.S.NOM	sam- oe	naibolee	interesn- oe sobytie ‘the most interesting event’
PL.NOM	sam- ye	naibolee	interesn- ye knigi ‘the most interesting books’

Table 2: Case agreement in *self*-superlatives

	‘self’	‘most’	
NOM	sam- yj	naibolee	interesn- yj fil’m ‘the most interesting movie’
GEN	sam- ogo	naibolee	interesn- ogo fil’ma ‘the most interesting movie’
DAT	sam- omu	naibolee	interesn- omu fil’mu ‘the most interesting movie’
ACC	sam- yj	naibolee	interesn- yj fil’m ‘the most interesting movie’
INS	sam- ym	naibolee	interesn- ym fil’mom ‘the most interesting movie’
LOC	sam- om	naibolee	interesn- om fil’me ‘the most interesting movie’

The three properties above suggest that *sam* in *self*-superlatives is not a quantifier that ranges over degrees of the gradable predicate. The third property (adjectival agreement) also points to the hypothesis that *sam* modifies a noun (or a noun phrase) rather than an adjective. This hypothesis is supported by the fourth property of *self*-superlatives: they are ungrammatical with short-form (SF) adjectives, which occur only in the predicative position in Russian. By contrast, *most*-superlatives combine freely with SF-adjectives, as shown in (7) (see also Matushansky 2008).

- (7) a. *Etot vopros sam(yj) važen. Matushansky, 2008
 this question self_{emph} important-sf
 ‘This question is the most important.’
 b. Etot vopros naibolee važen.
 this question pref-more important-sf
 ‘This question is the most important.’

It has been widely accepted now that long-form (LF) adjectives in Russian are derived from SF-adjectives and are necessarily attributive (that is to say, even in the predicative position they modify a null noun), see Siegel 1976, Matushansky 2008, Babby 2010, among many others. Both *self*-superlatives and *most*-superlatives are well-formed with LF-adjectives, as we saw in (1) and as illustrated in the modified example in (8), in which the LF-adjective is in the predicative position.

- (8) a. Eta kniga sam-aja interesn-aja.
 this book-f.nom self_{emph}-f.sg.nom interesting-f.sg.nom (= LF)
 ‘This book is the most interesting.’
 b. Eta kniga nai-bolee interesn-aja.
 this book-f.nom pref-more interesting-f.sg.nom (= LLF)
 ‘This book is the most interesting.’

The contrast in (7) is expected if *sam* in *self*-superlatives modifies a noun phrase, while *naibolee* in *most*-superlatives is an adjectival modifier, insensitive to the presence/absence of a noun head.

The last property that distinguishes *self*-superlatives from *most*-superlatives is that *self*-superlatives are unidirectional, in the sense that they lack a *least*-correspondent. The pair in (9) shows that *most*-superlatives can express both the relations ‘greater than’ and ‘less than’ - the possibility absent in *self*-superlatives.

- (9) a. nai - bolee interesn - aja kniga
 pref - more interesting - f.sg.nom book-f.nom
 ‘the most interesting book’
 b. nai - menee interesn - aja kniga
 pref - less interesting - f.sg.nom book-f.nom
 ‘the least interesting book’

To recapitulate the discussion above, we have seen that *self*-superlatives differ from *most*-superlatives in that they do not quantify over degrees and modify a noun rather than an adjective. The properties that distinguish *self*-superlatives from *most*-superlatives are summarized in table 3.³ In the next section, I propose an analysis of *self*-superlatives that accounts for their properties.

³ The synthetic superlative morpheme *-ejš* shares with *most*-superlatives the first two properties. Properties three and four are not applicable to *-ejš* as it is a bound morpheme. With respect to the last property, *-ejš* is unidirectional like *self*-superlatives; however, this is, arguably, also due to its status as a bound morpheme. Synthetic superlatives (and comparatives) lack a *least*-correspondent in many languages.

Table 3: Properties of *self*-superlatives vs. *most*-superlatives

property	<i>self</i> -superlative	<i>most</i> -superlative
1. is derived from comparative	no	yes
2. can co-occur with synthetic forms	yes	no
3. agrees with the noun	yes	no
4. can modify short-form adjectives	no	yes
5. is unidirectional (no <i>least</i>)	yes	no

2. Analysis of *self*-superlatives

To understand the difference between *self*-superlatives and *most*-superlatives, it would be instructive to look at *most*-superlatives first. The next section reviews the standard approach to *most*-superlatives.⁴

2.1 The standard approach to *most*-superlatives

Most-superlatives are usually treated like comparatives with a universally quantified ‘than’-argument, i.e. the tallest person is a person who is taller than anyone else is, see Szabolcsi 1986, Heim 1999, Stateva 2002, Matushansky 2008, Aihara 2009, Bobaljik 2012, among others. To arrive at the compositional analysis of superlatives, we need to make a number of assumptions about the meaning of the gradable predicate. Following Creswell (1976), we assume that a gradable adjective expresses a relation between an object and a degree, see (10-a), and following Heim (1999), that this relation is downward monotonic, see (10-b) (the monotonicity requirement requires a person who is 5’7” tall to be also 5’6”, 5’5”, etc. tall):

- (10) a. $[[\textit{tall}]](d)(x) = x$ is tall to degree d
 b. A relation between objects and degrees is downward monotonic iff
 $\forall x, d, d' [R(x, d) \wedge d > d' \rightarrow R(x, d')]$

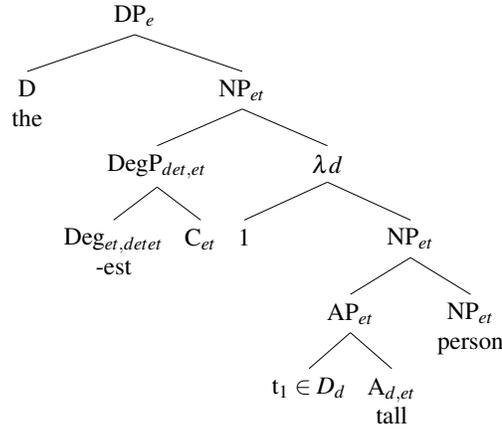
The superlative quantifier *-est* takes the gradable predicate R as one of its three arguments. The two other arguments are an external argument x and a domain argument C , which is specified by the context. Heim (1999) argues that there are two restrictions on C : i) x must be a member of C and ii) all members of C must have some degree of R -ness. These restrictions are realized as presuppositions in the lexical entry for *-est* in (11) (based on Heim 1999):

⁴ This discussion abstracts away from the division of superlatives into absolute and comparative.

- (11) $\llbracket est \rrbracket(C)(R)(x) = 1$ iff
 $\exists d[\mathbf{R}(d)(x) = 1 \wedge \forall y [y \neq x \wedge y \in C \rightarrow \mathbf{R}(d)(y) = 0]]$
 undefined unless:
 (i) $x \in C \wedge \exists y [y \neq x \wedge y \in C]$
 (ii) $\forall z [z \in C \rightarrow \exists d' [\mathbf{R}(d')(z) = 1]]$

Putting the pieces together, the computation of *the tallest person* is shown in (12), based on the LF in (12-b), in which *-est* is QR-ed to the edge of NP. (Note that the requirement that R is downward monotonic ensures that if y is not d -tall, it cannot be tall to the degree higher than d .)

- (12) a. the tallest person
 b.



- c. $\llbracket \text{DP} \rrbracket = \iota x. \exists d [\text{person}(x) \wedge \text{tall}(d)(x) = 1 \wedge \forall y [y \neq x \wedge y \in C \wedge \text{person}(y) \rightarrow \text{tall}(d)(y) = 0]]$
 d. the unique x s.t. x is a taller person than any other person in C

With the modification that Russian does not have definite articles, the account presented above can be straightforwardly extended to Russian *most*-superlatives, as shown in (13):⁵

- (13) a. nai-bolee interesnaja kniga
 pref-more interesting book
 'the most interesting book'
 b. $[_{NP} [_{DegP} \text{naibolee } C]_1 [_{NP} [_{AP} t_1 \text{ interesnaja}] [_{NP} \text{ kniga}]]]$
 most interesting book
 c. $\llbracket \text{NP} \rrbracket = \lambda x. \exists d [\text{book}(x) \wedge \text{interesting}(d)(x) = 1 \wedge \forall y [y \neq x \wedge y \in C \wedge \text{book}(y) \rightarrow \text{interesting}(d)(y) = 0]]$
 d. an x s.t. x is a more interesting book than any other book in C

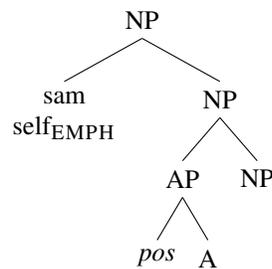
⁵ To transform a property-like NP into an argument of type e , we can use an \exists -closure or a Chierchian (1998) \cup -operator.

The superlative morpheme in *most*-superlatives performs three functions: i) it introduces the restrictions on the *C* domain via two presuppositions; ii) it precludes all other elements in *C* from having the gradable property to the same degree as the external argument and iii) it saturates the *d*-argument of the gradable adjective. In the next section, I show that these three functions are separated in *self*-superlatives, each being assigned to a different part of the structure.

2.2 The decompositional analysis of *self*-superlatives

As we saw above, the properties of *self*-superlatives suggest that *sam* ‘self_{emph}’ is not a degree operator and modifies a noun phrase rather than an adjective. This leads us to the following picture: as the adjective in *self*-superlatives is in its positive form, the *d*-argument is saturated by the *pos*-operator and *sam* adjoins to the noun phrase like a regular emphatic pronoun would do, see (14). Below, I will show that *sam* is the component that provides the ‘exclusive’ meaning in *self*-superlatives.

(14)



In addition, I will argue that the obligatory adjectival inflection on *sam* functions as a definite determiner, restricting *C* to the set of familiar entities. The interaction of these three components - *sam*, *pos*, and AGR - brings about the superlative meaning.

2.2.1 *Sam*

It has gone largely unrecognized in the literature that *sam* in Russian superlatives is, in fact, an emphatic reflexive pronoun.⁶ Weiss (2006) mentions this fact in his study of Russian and Polish emphatic pronouns situated in the cognitive framework. Emphatic pronouns come in different flavours. Apart from a ‘pure’ emphatic meaning, as in (15-a) (note that in this example *sam* can adjoin either to the subject or to the reflexive anaphor in the object position, disambiguated by the agreement), they can express the idea of great importance - (15-b), ‘no-help’ - (15-c), or be logophoric, as in (15-d).

⁶ More recently, I have been working on yet another use of *samyj* ‘self’, which seems to have more common features with *samyj* in superlatives than emphatic reflexive does. I dubbed those uses ‘mental deixis’ and leave them for a different paper.

- (15) a. On sam / samogo sebja ne slušaet. (Klenin, 1980)
 he self_{emph}-SF / self_{emph}-acc self_{anaph}-acc not listen
 ‘He does not listen to himself.’
 b. Sam Bog ne znal by otveta na takoj vopros.
 self_{emph} God not knew cond. answer on such question
 ‘God himself would not know the answer to such a question.’
 c. Malen’kij Miša pozvonil sam - on mog by menja poprosit’.
 little Misha called self_{emph} he could cond. me asked
 ‘Little Misha himself telephoned. He could have asked me to do it.’
 d. Govorili o plohom kačestve ego raboty i o nem samom.
 spoke about poor quality his work and about him self_{emph}-acc
 ‘They spoke about the poor quality of his work, and then about him.’

Most linguists, who have looked at emphatic pronouns, agree that all these uses can be unified under the idea of ‘comparison’, ‘exclusion’ or ‘unexpectedness’ (e.g. Klenin 1980, Reinhart and Reuland 1993, König et al. 2001, Stern 2004, Weiss 2006).⁷ I will adopt Weiss’ (2006) proposal to attribute the ‘exclusive’ meaning to *sam*, formalized in (16):

$$(16) \quad \llbracket sam \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda x. P(x) \wedge \neg \exists y [y \neq x \wedge P(y)]$$

With respect to syntax, it has been argued in the literature that emphatic pronouns are full NPs that adjoin to an NP or a *v*/VP (e.g. Klenin 1980, Reinhart and Reuland 1993, König et al. 2001).⁸ The derivation of a simple sentence with an emphatic pronoun in Russian is shown in (17). The sentence in (17) says that little Misha made a call and there is no other person who made this call. If we substitute the intransitive (in this case) predicate with a gradable adjective, it is easy to see that *sam* performs the ‘exclude others’-function, the function that is usually performed by *most* in *most*-superlatives.

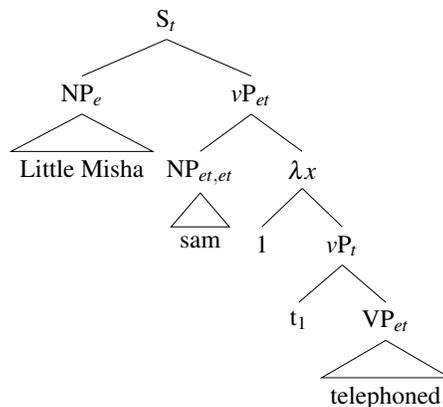
- (17) a. Malen’kij Miša pozvonil sam.
 little Misha called self_{emph} asked
 ‘Little Misha himself telephoned.’

⁷ This brings *sam* close to focus particles. However, I will not adopt the focus analysis for *sam*, because first of all, *sam* is not usually used as a focus marker. In addition, it can occur alone in an argument position, whereas focus particles cannot. See also König et al. (2001) for arguments that emphatic pronouns in different languages should not be treated as focus particles.

⁸ For the present moment, I will ignore the internal structure of *sam*. Reinhart and Reuland (1993) distinguish between *se*- and *self*-anaphors, arguing that *se* occupies the specifier position in NP like pronouns (but unlike pronouns they lack ϕ -features), whereas *self* is a head:

- (i) [NP Pron/*se* [N’ *self*]]

b.



- c. $\llbracket sam \rrbracket(\llbracket 1 t_1 telephoned \rrbracket)(\llbracket little Misha \rrbracket) = 1$ iff
little Misha made a call $\wedge \neg \exists y [y \neq \text{little Misha} \wedge y \text{ made that call}]$
- d. Little Misha made a call and there is no other person who made this call.

2.2.2 AGR

The next component I want to look at is the agreement (AGR). As already mentioned, *sam* in *self*-superlatives agrees with the noun in gender, number and case. The same agreement distinguishes long-form (LF) adjectives from short-form (SF) adjectives in Russian. It is a shared belief among linguists that LF-adjectives in Slavic languages were derived by addition of the 3rd person singular pronoun to a corresponding short form in prehistoric Slavic (e.g. Kramsky 1972, Schmalstieg 1976, Larsen 2007, among others). At that time, if a noun was modified with an LF-adjective, it was interpreted as definite (or more precisely, familiar, see Larsen 2007), SF-adjectives produced an indefinite interpretation. For some time, all Slavic languages enjoyed the definite/indefinite distinction in modified noun phrases. Then, some Slavic languages, including Russian, Czech and (standard) Bulgarian, lost this distinction. In Russian, SF-adjectives became specialized to occur only in the predicative position, whereas LF-adjective - only in the attributive position, see Siegel 1976, Matushansky 2008, Babby 2010.

This is the standard story. However, I would like to argue that the mechanism described above has not been completely abandoned in Russian: there are residual cases, in which AGR plays a role of a definite/familiar⁹ determiner. The role of AGR has been preserved only in contrastive cases, i.e. in cases in which a morpheme ‘has a choice’ to agree with the noun in gender, number and case or not. Adjectives agree obligatorily in Russian, quantifiers do not. Consider the two examples below, which show that the presence of AGR on the quantifier *mnogo* ‘many’ gives rise to a familiar interpretation of the NP (the gen in (18-a) is a genitive of quantification).

⁹ I think of AGR in Russian in terms of Kyriakaki’s (2011) proposal that D can be decomposed into a t -head and a Fam(iliarity)-head. Russian AGR spells out Fam.

- (18) a. Ja znaju mnogo pianistov.
 I know many pianists-gen
 'I know many pianists.'
 b. Ja znaju mnog-ix pianistov.
 I know many-acc.pl pianists-acc
 'I know many (of the) pianists.' = from a familiar set of pianists

(18-b) is infelicitous in the out-of-the-blue context. It is natural in a context in which particular pianists are discussed or during a reception after a piano recital where many pianists are present. The fact that it is, indeed, the AGR that is responsible for the familiarity interpretation is supported by the fact that cases, in which the agreement is obligatory, have only the familiarity interpretation. In (19), the prepositional case must be spelled out. If it is spelled out on *many* (and on the noun), the sentence has the familiarity interpretation, see (19-a). If *many* is in the adverbial form and assigns the genitive of quantification to the noun (blocking the assignment of the prepositional case), the sentence is ungrammatical, see (19-b). To express the indefinite meaning, an amount noun phrase, in which both the adjective and the noun can inflect, is used, instead of *many*, as shown in (20).

- (19) a. Ja rabotaju so mnog-imi pianistami.
 I work with many-ins pianists-ins
 'I work with many (of the) pianists.'
 b. *Ja rabotaju so mnogo pianistov / pianistami.
 I work with many pianists-gen / pianists-ins
 'I work with many pianists.'
- (20) Ja rabotaju s bol'shim količestvom pianistov.
 I work with large-ins amount-ins pianists-gen
 'I work with a large number of pianists.'

The same difference can be found with *neskol'ko* 'several' vs. *neskol'k-ix* 'several-agr' and *skol'ko* 'how many' vs. *skol'k-ix* 'how many-agr'.

I would like to propose that the contribution of AGR is to assert that the entity in question is in the salient set *C* provided by the discourse - this is the role that one of the presuppositions of *most* plays. The denotation of AGR is formalized in (21):¹⁰

- (21) $\llbracket \text{AGR} \rrbracket = \lambda C \lambda R \lambda z. R(z) \wedge z \in C$
 where *C* is a set of entities salient in the discourse

To appreciate the role of AGR, compare the two simple sentences in (23)-
 (24). I assume a standard denotation of *many*, as a large intersection, see (22).¹¹

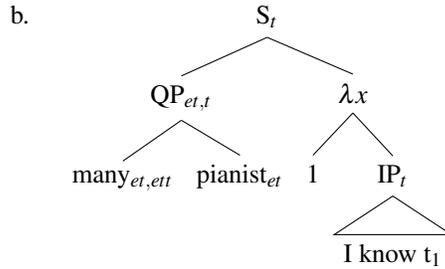
¹⁰ Like *the*, AGR carries the \exists -presupposition. Alternatively, the familiarity restriction can be represented as a presupposition. See Krasikova 2011, who proposes to add such a presupposition to both *many* and *many*-AGR in Russian as a way to construct comparison classes.

¹¹ This is a standard quantificational analysis of *many*, e.g. Partee 1989. For a non-quantificational analysis see, for instance, Solt 2009. \exists -closure can be part of the semantics of *many* or an independent operation.

The only difference between (23) and (24) is that in (24), the pianists whom I know must be from a set salient in the discourse.

$$(22) \quad \llbracket many \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda Q. \exists X [\forall x [P(x) \wedge Q(x) \rightarrow x \in X] \wedge X \text{ is large}]$$

- (23) a. Ja znaju mnogo pianistov.
I know many pianists-GEN
'I know many pianists.'



- c. $\llbracket many \rrbracket(\llbracket pianists \rrbracket)(\llbracket I \text{ know } t_1 \rrbracket) = 1$ iff
 $\exists X [\forall x [pianist(x) \wedge I \text{ know } x \rightarrow x \in X] \wedge X \text{ is large}]$
d. there is a set all members of which are pianists whom I know
and this set is large

(23-c) says that the sentence in (23-a) is true if and only if there is a set all members of which are pianists whom I know and this set is large.

- (24) a. Ja znaju mnog-**ix** pianistov.
I know many-ACC.PL pianists-ACC
'I know many (of the) pianists.' = from a familiar set
b. $[_S [_{QP} \text{ many AGR-C pianist }] [_{\lambda x} I [_{IP} I \text{ know } t_1]]]]$
c. $\llbracket many \rrbracket(\llbracket \underline{AGR C} \text{ pianists} \rrbracket)(\llbracket I \text{ know } t_1 \rrbracket) = 1$ iff
 $\exists X [\forall x [pianist(x) \wedge \underline{x \in C} \wedge I \text{ know } x \rightarrow x \in X] \wedge X \text{ is large}]$
d. there is a set all members of which are pianists familiar from the discourse,
whom I know and this set is large

(24-c) says that the sentence in (24-a) is true if and only if there is a set all members of which are familiar from the discourse pianists whom I know and this set is large. (The contribution of AGR is underlined.)

2.2.3 Pos

The last component of *self*-superlatives is a positive operator - *pos*. For *pos*, I will adopt von Stechow's (2006) proposal according to which *pos* is a universal quantifier over degrees of the neutral segment of the scale of the gradable predicate, see (25):

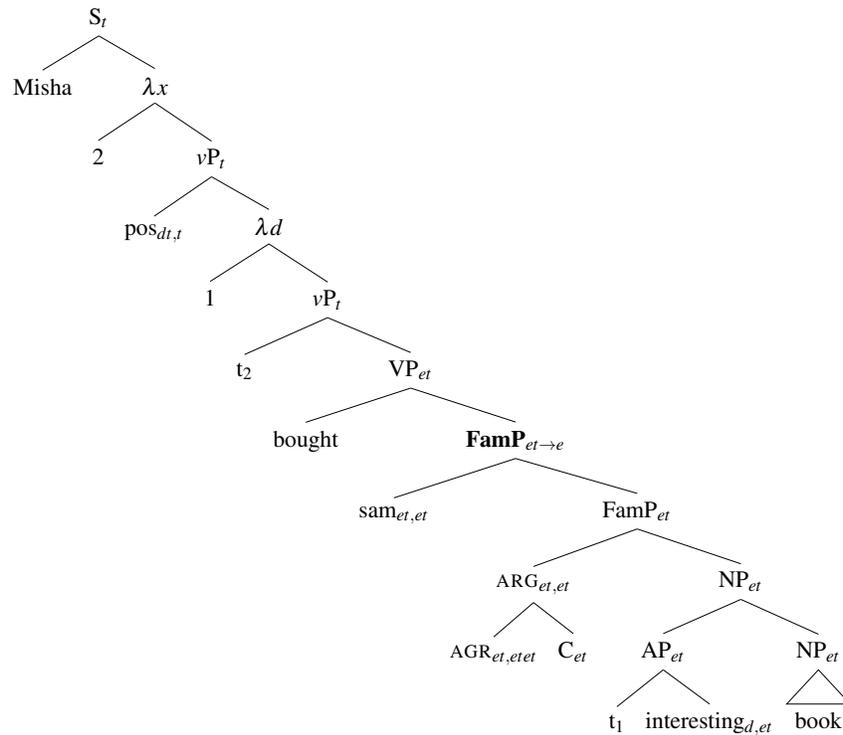
$$(25) \quad \llbracket pos \rrbracket = \lambda A_{dt}. \forall d [d \in N(S) \rightarrow A(d)]$$

In von Stechow's (2006: 6) analysis, *pos* depends on two parameters: 'the contextually relevant initial segment of the [...] scale and a function *N* that gives the neutral segment of the scale.' For instance, on the scale of tallness, a set of men can be divided into three categories: short > neutral > tall. *Pos* requires an external argument (e.g. John in *John is pos-tall*) to have all degrees of the neutral segment. Provided that gradable predicates are downward monotonic (see the discussion above), the result is that John falls into the category of tall men.

2.2.4 Putting the pieces together

The three components discussed above - *sam*, AGR and *pos* - combined together produce a superlative reading as shown below for a simple sentence:

- (26) a. Miša kupil sam-uju interesnuju knigu.
 Misha bought self-AGR interesting-LF.F.ACC book-F.ACC
 'Misha bought the most interesting book.'

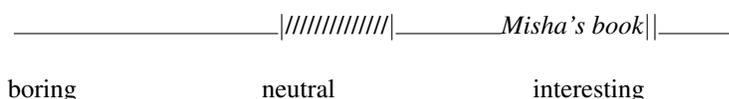


- (27) a. $[[\mathbf{FamP}]] =$
 $\lambda x. book(x) \wedge interesting(x) \geq d$
 $\wedge x \in C$ *adj + noun*
 $\wedge \neg \exists y [y \neq x \wedge book(y) \wedge interesting(y) \geq d \wedge y \in C]$ *contrib. of AGR*
contrib. of 'sam'
 b. a book in a familiar set interesting to some degree and there is no other book in this set interesting to the same degree

Reading from bottom up, the contribution of AGR to the NP ‘interesting book’ is that x is in the set of familiar entities (the second line). Combining *sam* with ‘AGR interesting book’ adds the exclusiveness meaning (the third line). This results in the meaning of FamP as paraphrased in (27-b).

When *pos* combines with the νP , the proposition is embedded under $\forall d \in N(S)$, see (28). This specifies the degree to which the unique book is interesting as being above the neutral segment of the scale of interesting books.¹²

- (28) a. $[[S]] = 1$ iff
 $\forall d \in N(S)[\text{Misha bought } [[\mathbf{FamP}]]]$
 b. the degree to which the unique book is interesting is above the neutral segment of the scale of interesting books
 ... C || ¬C ...



The proposed analysis of *self*-superlatives explains all the properties that differentiate *self*-superlatives from *most*-superlatives. The property that *sam* and *naibolee* have different lexical sources (i.e. *sam* is not derived from a comparative) is straightforwardly explained by the fact that *sam* is treated as an emphatic reflexive pronoun. The analysis argues that *sam* does not quantify over degrees and the degree argument of the gradable predicate is saturated by *pos*. In some cases, the position of *pos* can be taken by the comparative/superlative suffix *-ješ*. In such cases, *sam* will co-occur with the superlative suffix. This is impossible with *naibolee*, which itself ranges over degrees. Using both *naibolee* and *-ješ* will result in double quantification. The presence of *pos* also explains the unidirectional property of *self*-superlatives: there is no *least*-pair for *pos* and as the comparison relation is not encoded in *sam*, we should not find a *least*-pair for *sam*. The properties about the obligatory agreement of *sam* are accounted for by the fact that (contrastive) AGR contributes to the construction of the superlative. Without AGR, the NP in (27-a) will denote the unique interesting book in the universe, which is too strong for a superlative.

3 Self-superlatives in other languages

An interesting fact is that Russian is the only Slavic language, in which both *self*-superlatives and *most*-superlatives are found. Other Slavic languages form superlatives by attaching the prefix *nai* to an adjective, see the Bulgarian example in (29):

- (29) Ivan ima naj-hubavi albumi na/ot U2. Pancheva and Tomaszewicz, 2012
 Ivan has pref-good albums of/by U2
 ‘Ivan has the best albums of U2.’

¹² The use of *pos* in *self*-superlatives predicts that the ‘most’ interesting book is an interesting book, i.e. the positive entailment is not neutralized as in a regular comparative. This means that in a *self*-superlative equivalent of English *This book is the longest in my library, but (in fact) it is short*, C-variable is reset from {x: x is a book in my library} in the superlative to {x: x is a book} in the but-clause.

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