



Universals in Comparative Morphology: Suppletion, Superlatives, and the Structure of Words (Current Studies in Linguistics)

By Jonathan David Bobaljik

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This groundbreaking study of the morphology of comparison yields a surprising result: that even in suppletion (the wholesale replacement of one stem by a phonologically unrelated stem, as in *good-better-best*) there emerge strikingly robust patterns, virtually exceptionless generalizations across languages. Jonathan David Bobaljik describes the systematicity in suppletion, and argues that at least five generalizations are solid contenders for the status of linguistic universals. The major topics discussed include suppletion, comparative and superlative formation, deadjectival verbs, and lexical decomposition. Bobaljik's primary focus is on morphological theory, but his argument also aims to integrate evidence from a variety of subfields into a coherent whole. In the course of his analysis, Bobaljik argues that the assumptions needed bear on choices among theoretical frameworks and that the framework of *Distributed Morphology* has the right architecture to support the account. In addition to the theoretical implications of the generalizations, Bobaljik suggests that the striking patterns of regularity in what otherwise appears to be the most irregular of linguistic domains provide compelling evidence for Universal Grammar. The book strikes a unique balance between empirical breadth and theoretical detail. The phenomenon that is the main focus of the argument, suppletion in adjectival gradation, is rare enough that Bobaljik is able to present an essentially comprehensive description of the facts; at the same time, it is common enough to offer sufficient variation to explore the question of universals over a significant dataset of more than three hundred languages.

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Editorial Review

Review

This brilliant investigation of the morphology of comparatives and superlatives in a wide sample of languages illustrates the necessity of using sophisticated theoretical proposals to do cogent typological research, and persuasively makes the case that typologically absent patterns of suppletion are absent for structural reasons. The monograph is a model of clarity of argumentation and presentation of data, and will also serve as an excellent introduction to the theory of Distributed Morphology.

(Jason Merchant, University of Chicago)

Jonathan Bobaljik's book studies how comparison is expressed in different languages. *Universals in Comparative Morphology* is based on a detailed investigation of over three hundred languages and includes novel contributions to the understanding of many important issues in morphology, syntax, and semantics.

(Morris Halle, Institute Professor and Professor of Linguistics, Emeritus, Department of Linguistics, MIT)

This book is a triumph. It sets a new standard for morphosyntax by exploring a deep explanatory principle--the Containment Hypothesis--in a broad but meticulously documented empirical base.

(Edwin S. Williams, Professor of Linguistics, Princeton University)

About the Author

Jonathan David Bobaljik is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Connecticut, Storrs.

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