

***NEBOGATI HORA, NEGOLJAM GRAD, NELOŠ REZULTAT:* THE GOLDEN MEAN FROM A BULGARIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract. This article presents the outcomes of a corpus-based study of a subgroup of deadjectival adjectives formed with the negative prefix *ne-* that includes adjectives like *nevisok* (neither tall, nor short) < *visok* (tall). The corpus consists of fragments of text showing how negative adjectives that can refer to mid-range properties have been used in Bulgarian writings since the 19th century. The author establishes the inventory of negative non-extreme adjectives, explores their semantic and prosodic characteristics and the types of relations they maintain with their source adjective and its antonym. The system of negative non-extreme adjectives which came into being in the 19th century took standard Bulgarian one incremental step away from its Balkan neighbours and simultaneously strengthened its ties to the Slavic-speaking world.

Keywords: Standard Bulgarian, language change, intellectualization, negative adjectives, non-extreme semantics

1. INTRODUCTION

This article – an homage to my friend Virginia Hill offered in recognition of our shared philological roots – aims to establish the inventory of adjectives that exhibit non-extreme semantics, outline their characteristic properties and track their rise in standard Bulgarian.

Bulgarian has hundreds of adjectives derived with the negative prefix *ne-* from other adjectives, many of which have not been included in Bulgarian dictionaries, not even in the largest Bulgarian multivolume dictionary RBE (*Rečnik na bālgarskija ezik*). The tandems such adjectives form with their source adjectives may assume different positions in the lexicon depending on the relationship of the source adjectives to pre-existing adjectives with opposite semantics. Upon derivation, the source adjective *S* and its negative counterpart *ne-S* form a binary opposition: everything that is not *S* is subsumed under *ne-S*. The ability to express such broad semantics stays with *ne-S* formations throughout their use and resurfaces every time speakers need it. Speakers, however, more often refer to a specific point on the scale rather than the entire *ne-S* portion of it. Their attention is often attracted to the two marked areas of the *ne-S* portion of the scale: its negative extreme, on one hand, and the area in the middle of the scale that comes closest to *S*, on the other. If the

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source adjective does not already have a contrary opposite that speakers can use to refer to the negative extreme, the *ne*-S formation will most likely take on this function. If there is a contrary opposite in place, the *ne*-S formation can be employed to refer to the gray area between the poles that is inherent in any gradual opposition. Since a contradictory opposite covering a greater portion of the scale is vaguer than its more direct and outspoken contrary counterpart, it can be used by speakers as a euphemism or an understatement. Such pragmatic functions justify the continued side-by-side existence of contradictory and contrary opposites. The ability of the same *ne*-S adjective to have different readings in different contexts blurs for speakers the boundaries between logically different oppositions.

2. GOALS, DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The *ne*-S adjectives that refer to the middle ground between poles are illustrated in the typical, difficult to translate phrases cited in the title *nebogati hora* (people of average prosperity)², *negoljam grad* (middle-sized city) and *neloš rezultat* (not a bad result), which contain the adjectives *nebogati* < *ne-* + *bogati* (rich), *negoljam* < *ne-* + *goljam* (big) and *neloš* < *ne-* + *loš* (bad). Such adjectives have been only partially and at times misleadingly represented in lexicographic sources. For instance, RBE defines *negoljam* so: “which is not sufficiently big, which is not as big as it usually, normally should be” but its use in definitions of other words in the same dictionary gives no inkling that the size of the object described as *negoljam* is in fact insufficiently big. Thus, RBE defines *otkās* (fragment) so: *otdelna, obosobena, obikn. negoljama čast ot nešto* (a separate, detached, usually moderately big part of something). There are no entries in RBE for *nesilen* < *silen* (strong, loud), *nedebeľ* < *debeľ* (thick), *needār* < *eđār* (large; coarse) and *nejarāk* < *jarāk* (bright) but the authors use them in their definitions of other words, for instance *ednoobrazen, nesilen šum* (monotonous, moderately loud noise) under *žuža* (to buzz) and its synonym *brāmča, nedebeľo dārvo* (a moderately thick [piece of] wood) under *vārľina* (pole), *goljama kolkoto needra kokoška* (as big as a relatively small hen) under *ľiska* (a species of waterfowl) and *slaba, nejarka svetľina* (weak, somewhat dimmed light) under *māždeliv* (flickering). Although the adjective *neloš* (fair, not bad) lacks its own entry in RBE, it is listed among examples in the RBE entry on the prefix *ne-*.

Dictionaries are therefore not a dependable basis for the study of this group of adjectives. Considering the alternatives, I decided that rather than relying on my own native-speaker intuitions about *ne*-S adjectives, I will lean on the explicit textual signs pointing at their intended reading that other native speakers have left behind. The reason for this choice is that, on one hand, not all such *ne*-S adjectives are part of my idiolect and, on the other, since speakers of other Slavic languages could not always agree when asked to assess which such derivatives really existed (Sokołowski 1983b, 1983a), I can expect similar divergency of opinions in the Bulgarian realm. Thus, a speaker of Bulgarian denies *nerjadāk* < *rjadāk* (rare), *nemalāk* < *malāk* (small), *nenisāk* < *nisāk* (low, short), *nehubav* < *hubav* (nice) and *negrozen* < *grozen* (ugly) the right to exist (Petrova 1997: 67), an opinion

² All translations of Slavic data into English are mine. The cited Bulgarian and Serbian texts have been transliterated according to the UN 1977 standard, and the Russian ones according to ISO/R 9 1968, see Pedersen s. a.

that my corpus confirms only regarding *nenisǎk*. Another Bulgarian speaker declares that the entire group of negative adjectives sounds artificial to him (Burov 1987: 25), an opinion that has also been expressed regarding Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian non-extreme adjectives (Grickat 1961–1962: 122).

My study of the Bulgarian material is informed by research on grading scales and negative adjectives in other, especially Slavic, languages and most importantly by Sapir 1944; Němec 1969; Křížková 1974; Jurkowski 1976: 54–60; Lyons 1977: 284–290; Reiter 1979: 30–46 and Apresjan 1995: 286–313. In line with previous research, I distinguish in my analysis among contrary, non-extreme and contradictory opposites as shown in Figure 1 below.

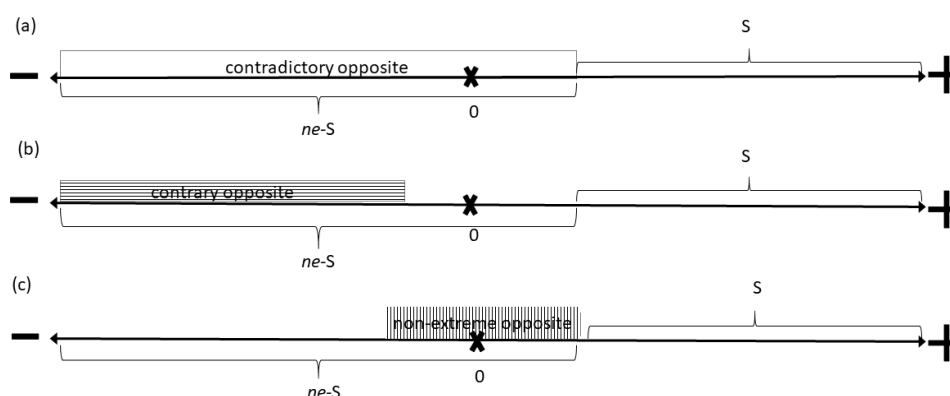


Figure 1.
Types of *ne-S* adjectives

The existence of the Bulgarian non-extreme *ne-S* adjectives has been recognized and is illustrated in the linguistic literature with a few examples, usually outside context (see, for instance, Todorova 1979: 84; Rusinov 1980: 47–48; Penčeva 1996: 15; RBE, 10: 699; Zidarova 2009: 143), but attempts at explanation that rely on their lexicographic presentation such as Sokołowski 1983a, 1983b are on shaky ground. This situation is in stark contrast with that in other Slavic languages where the counterparts of these Bulgarian adjectives have been the target of numerous detailed studies.

Based on a corpus of over 850 illustrations excerpted from writings of different genres (fiction, memoirs, biographies, correspondence, academic texts, journalistic reports and essays, public speech, interactions on social media, etc.) from the 19th through to the 21st century, I have identified 24 Bulgarian non-extreme *ne-S* adjectives. RBE dedicates entries to only seven of them, namely: *něbogat* (of average prosperity), *nědalěčen* (relatively near), *nědālǎg* (of average length or duration), *něgoljam* (of average size), *němalǎk* (relatively big), *nerjǎdǎk* (not uncommon) and *něvisok* (of average height)³. The following adjectives are missing from RBE: *nebǎrz* (relatively slow), *neblizǎk* (relatively

³ Bulgarian orthography does not require that stress be routinely marked. As the prosody of *ne-S* adjectives is not a trivial matter, I provide information about it only to the extent to which it is present in my sources.

remote), *nedālbok* (of average depth), *nedebel* (almost thin), *needār* (relatively slight in build), *negāst* (somewhat scattered, patchy, sparse), *neglupav* (not unintelligent), *negrozen* (ordinary-looking, homely, plain), *nejarāk* (somewhat pale in hue), *nelek* (of average weight), *neloš* (not bad), *nemlad* (no longer young, middle-aged), *nesilen* (relatively weak), *neskāp* (reasonably priced), *neširok* (slightly on the narrow side), *netežāk* (of some weight but not really heavy) and *netruden* (relatively easy to do). My list includes only *ne-S* adjectives sufficiently attested in texts and only if I could find examples such as (1) and (2), in which there is explicit contextual indication of non-extreme semantics.

- (1) Ot sāvremenna gledna točka v maštābite na cjalata zemna povārhnost promenenite ot čoveka učastāci zaemat sravnitelno *negoljam* djal, a ošte po-malāk e tozi djal po otnošenie na strukturnite izmenenija v prirodnata sreda (Apostolov et al. 1974: 86). (From a present-day point of view, the areas changed by humans occupy a relatively *small* [lit. *ne-big*] share on the scale of the entire surface of the earth, and this share is even smaller when it comes to structural changes in the natural environment.)
- (2) Boingāt na LOT izletja ot Sofija kām obed. Te, kato opitni pātņici, se otkazaha ot predloženata hrana i spečelili simpatiite na *negroznite* stjuardesi (“Baš hubavite letjat za Štatite,” objasni Gogo na po-vāzrastnija si spātņik), polučiha neograničen dostāp do po-dobrata čast ot predlaganite alkoholi (Ikonov 2006: 246). (LOT’s Boeing took off from Sofia around noon. As experienced passengers, they gave up the food on offer and, having won the good will of the *unostentatious* [lit. *ne-ugly*] flight attendants (“The really pretty ones fly to the States,” Gogo explained to his older companion), gained unlimited access to the better part of the offered alcohol.)

In (1) the share transformed by humans is assessed as being *sravnitelno negoljam* (relatively *ne-big*) on a global scale and *ošte po-malāk* (even smaller) if we take only structural changes into account. The speaker clearly shows that *negoljam* refers to an average value situated between the extremes *goljam* (big) and *malāk* (small). The non-extreme reading of *negroznite* in (2) is made explicit by the opposition between *negroznite stjuardesi* (the *ne-ugly* flight attendants) and *baš hubavite* (the really pretty ones).

3. SEMANTIC AND PROSODIC CHARACTERISTICS

Since non-extreme adjectives, defined as being neither S, nor its antonym A, refer to properties bounded at both ends, they should be expected to collocate with adverbs such as *sāvsem* (utterly) (Boguslavskaja 2014: 160) and my corpus, which includes tokens similar to (3) illustrating most of them, shows that they do.

- (3) ...otdelen i *sāvsem nelek* e vāprosāt, kakvo šte se razbira pod „dāržava” konkretno-istoričeski (Kutov 1990: 60). (...it is a separate and *far from simple* [lit. utterly *ne-lightweight*] question what will be understood under “state” in specific historical circumstances.)

Furthermore, as non-extreme adjectives refer to mid-of-the-scale properties, their ability to collocate with adverbs that denote incompleteness like *počti* (almost) or its counterparts such as the colloquial *kaži-reči* (very nearly) should be limited (Křížková

1974: 139–140). For the same reason, one would not expect non-extreme adjectives to be modified by adverbs that denote excessiveness (Křížková 1974: 130) and collocations with *izvānredno* (exceedingly) or *bezkrājno* (infinitely) and their colloquial expressive synonyms like *adski* (infernally), *strašno* (awfully), *užasno* (terribly) should not be possible. And indeed, collocations such as **počti nerjadāk* (lit. almost *ne*-rare) or **izvānredno nerjadāk* (lit. exceedingly *ne*-rare) only exceptionally appear in my corpus and, when they do, the speakers usually strive for humorous effect as in (4) and (5).

- (4) Šteše da e počti neloš komentar, ako ne bjaha omesvani imena na politici ot minaloto (BVS). (It would have been an *almost so-so* commentary if names of politicians from the past had not been mixed up.)
- (5) 51-godišnjat peruanski prezident idva ot severnija rajon Kahamarka, pročut sās zlatnite si mini i izvānredno nebogati obitateli (Sega). (The 51-year-old Peruvian president comes from the northern region of Cajamarca, famous for its gold mines and inhabitants of *exceedingly average* prosperity.)

The non-extreme adjectives have noteworthy prosodic properties. Considering them, one should recall that as opposed to the Bulgarian sentential negative particle *ne*, which does not carry stress, in phrasal negation the negative particle is under stress (Penčev 1984: 63), as in the idiomatic expression *nè po vrāt, a po šija* (there is no difference), lit. “not on the nape but on the neck”. Most adjectives derived with *ne-* that have moved to acquire a contrary meaning are invariably stressed on the stem: *nespokōen* (restless), *neprijāten* (unpleasant), *neznačitelēn* (insignificant), *neučtiv* (impolite), *nenūžen* (unnecessary), *nemilosārdēn* (ruthless), *nepoznāt* (unfamiliar), *nemiren* (unruly), *nepredpazliv* (careless), *neogrāničēn* (unlimited) and many others. Non-extreme adjectives however are most frequently pronounced with double stress: *nèglūpav*, *nègrōzen*, *nèdebēl*, *nèdālbōk*, *nèlèk*, *nèlōš*, *nèsilen*, *nèskāp* etc. Reference sources inconsistently present their stress but this inconsistency may be a reflection of speakers’ fluctuations. As shown above, out of the seven non-extreme adjectives RBE has entries for, five are stressed on the negative prefix, one on the stem and one carries double stress. In its entry on the prefix *ne-* RBE defines the type that interests us here so “adjectives and adverbs denoting partial absence, incompleteness, insufficient manifestation of the property expressed by the stem” and notes that the prefix is usually stressed. A reviewer of the 1982 Bulgarian orthographic dictionary remarks that the dictionary should have recognized as acceptable not only *nerjadāk* but also *nèrjadāk*. Then he goes on to discuss adverbs formed with *ne-* presented inconsistently in the dictionary and states that when speakers pronounce forms derived with *ne-* they typically stress two different syllables (Ničev 1984: 527). Others also claim that negative adjectives such as *nèaktuālen* (irrelevant), *nèakurāten* (inaccurate), *nèapētiten* (unappetizing, unappealing), carry double stress (Bojadžiev et al. 1998: 188). That however is not a stable state being affected by the level of semantic cohesion of the stressed parts: the closer the components work together towards a single meaning, the more probable it is that the word will have a single lexical stress; and, vice versa, the more autonomous they are, the more likely it is that they will each preserve their stress (Bojadžiev et al. 1998: 199, 209). The accentual differences are most probably indicative of semantic differences as in the denominal contradictory *nèčoveški* (non-human) versus contrary *nečoveški* (inhuman) < *čoveški* (human) < *čovèk* (person, human being) (Penčeva 1996: 14). RBE however lists

both meanings under *nečověški* and it also has just one entry of the deverbal adjective *nenasiten* < *nasitja* (to satiate, to saturate), that includes both “insatiate, empty” (of a person) and “pale, pastel, soft-hued” (of colour) although the latter is most often pronounced in context as *nènasiten*. The hypothesis that the contrast between different readings of adjectives formed with *ne-* carries prosodic repercussions deserves further exploration.

4. TIMELINE

The negative Bulgarian adjectives belong to a productive model that has allowed Slavic languages to form denominal, deadjectival and deverbal adjectives ever since the Proto-Slavic period. It remains to be investigated which of them can indeed be traced all the way back to Proto-Slavic and, if so, what their meanings were but ĚSSJa (24: 90–234; 25: 5–94) lists a large number and even some structurally similar to those on my list, formed by just adding the negation **ne* to primary adjectives, see **nevelikъ(jь)* (lit. *ne*-great), **nemalъ(jь)* (lit. *ne*-small), **nedobrъ(jь)* (lit. *ne*-good) and **nemōdrъ(jь)* (lit. *ne*-wise). It is assumed that the vast majority of Proto-Slavic derivatives with **ne* had strong unfavorable connotations (Grickat 1961–1962: 118–120). For adjectives it would mean that they must have been contrary opposites to their respective source forms.

The early-modern Bulgarian vernacular texts of the 17th and the 18th centuries only contain *ne-S* adjectives with contradictory meanings sliding towards contrary as the available glossaries demonstrate (Děmina et al. 2012; Mladenova and Velčeva 2013). To the best of my knowledge, there are no examples of non-extreme *ne-S* adjectives in other texts from the very end of the 17th and the 18th centuries to which no glossaries have yet been published or the least-studied, most recent writings by Iosif Bradati and his circle of collaborators.

My attempts at chronology, as tentative as they are, highlight the years between 1847 and 1980 as the period during which *ne-S* adjectives came to the fore. In brackets after the adjective is the year in which my earliest token of it is dated, regardless of its meaning, which may well be a contradictory one: *nebǎrz* (1887), *neblizǎk* (1894), *nebogat* (1873), *nedalečen* (1878), *nedǎlǎg* (1874), *nedǎlbok* (1890), *nedebeľ* (1902), *needǎr* (1900), *negǎst* (1980), *neglupav* (1890), *negoljam* (1847), *negrozen* (1943), *nejarǎk* (1961), *nelek* (1897), *neloš* (1894), *nemalǎk* (1859), *nemlad* (1922), *nerjadǎk* (1869), *nesilen* (1881), *neskǎp* (1893), *netežǎk* (1959), *netruden* (1891), *neširok* (1897) and *nevisok* (1874).

5. SYSTEMIC RELATIONS WITHIN THE LEXICON

Non-extreme *ne-S* adjectives may belong to one of three groups, to be defined below: Group A, consisting of eleven three-member sets, Group B, consisting of seven four-member sets and Group C, consisting of three four-member sets. Members of the sets are the source adjective S, its contrary opposite A and any adjectives formed with *ne* from them. Since the group membership is contingent on data on the use of *ne-S* adjectives, it would be subject to change should new data become available, however the validity of the groups appears to be out of doubt.

The non-extreme adjectives *nebogat* (of average prosperity), *nebърз* (of moderate speed), *nedълбок* (of average depth), *nedълъг* (of medium length or duration), *nedebeł* (solidly built, substantial), *negъst* (relatively compact; somewhat viscous), *negłupav* (of some intelligence), *nejarък* (soft, mellow), *nerjadък₂* (repeated at intervals, periodic), *neширок* (of average breadth) and *nevisok* (of medium height) participate in the three-member sets of Group A that have the structure presented in Figure 2. The set structure varies reflecting whether the source adjective is situated on the positive or on the negative side of the scale. Only sets in which there were virtually no adjectives formed with *ne-* from the contrary opposite A (or *ne-A* adjectives) were included in Group A. The zero in the list stands for no tokens of the respective *ne-A* adjective found and I marked with ≈ 0 the sets for which I have found only one or two tokens of the respective *ne-A* adjective which leave the impression of ad-hoc formations.

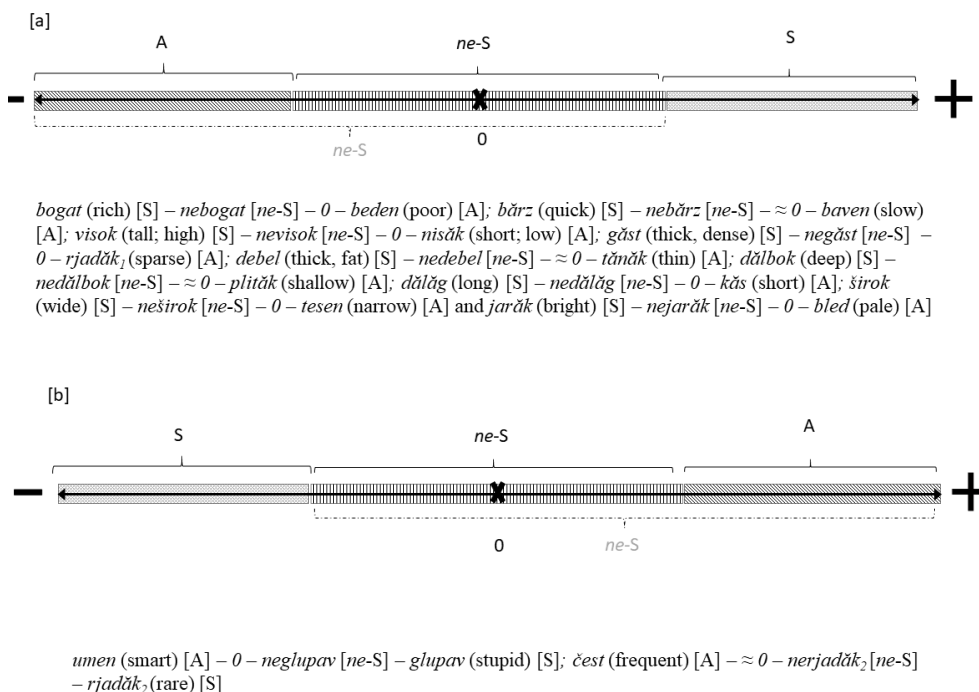


Figure 2.
Structure of the Group A three-member sets

In context the respective *ne-S* adjective may display not only a non-extreme meaning but also its initial contradictory meaning. The ability of *ne-S* adjectives to perform these two functions is presented in Figure 2 by marking out two segments of the scale as the territory of *ne-S* adjectives: the middle ground and the entire non-S portion of the scale. I have collected instances of both meanings made explicit in context for all analyzed negative adjectives, see for example the contradictory meaning of *nedълbok* in (6) that together with *dълbok* covers the entire range of feelings.

- (6) I tákmo telesnite (vătřešnite) useštaniija, koito sšstavjvat pri čuvstvoto pridružavaštata predmetnost, služat kato osnova na delitbata na čuvstvata na dălboki i nedălboki (Bănkov 1939: 299). (And it is precisely the bodily (internal) sensations, which constitute the accompanying tangibility of a feeling and serve as a basis for the division of feelings into deep and *non-deep* ones.)

The non-extreme *ne-S* adjectives *needăr* (of compact build; consisting of medium-sized particles), *negrozen* (relatively good-looking), *neloš* (not bad), *nemlad* (middle-aged), *nesilen* (of moderate strength), *neskăp* (reasonably priced) and *netruden* (feasible) are part of the four-member sets of Group B which have the structure schematically presented in Figure 3 in two variants, depending on the position of the S adjective on the scale.

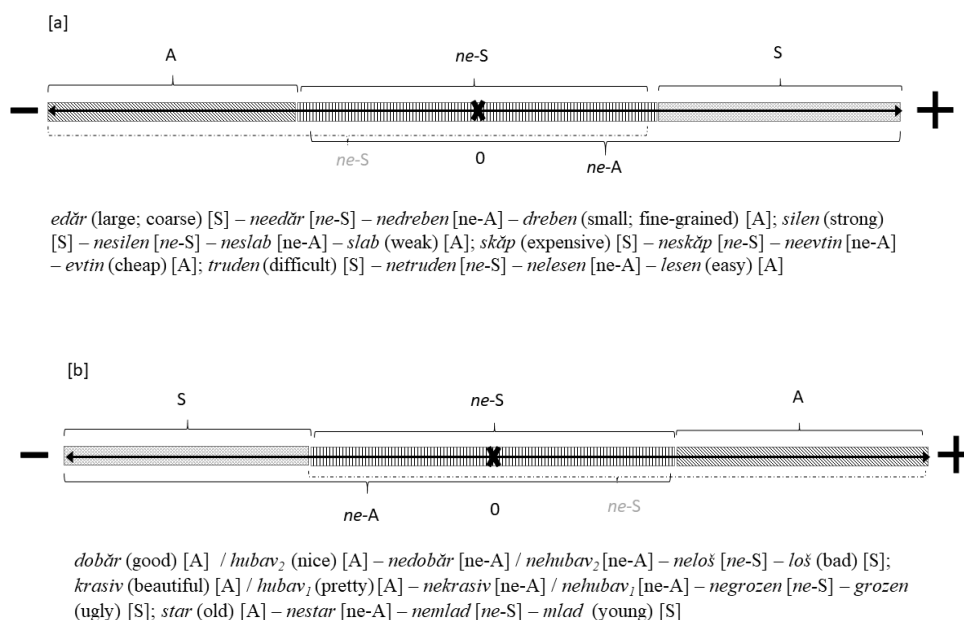


Figure 3.
Structure of the Group B four-member sets

As opposed to the non-extreme adjectives of Group A, those of Group B function in sets that also include the *ne-A* adjectives formed from the contrary opposites of the respective source adjectives. The *ne-A* adjectives were first attested between 1806–1812 and 1935: *nedobăr* (1806–1812), *nedreben* (1886), *neevtin* (1899), *nehubav₁* (1870), *nehubav₂* (1895), *nekrasiv* (1873), *nelesen* (1906), *neslab* (1899) and *nestar* (1935). Their chronology pushes back the rise of negated primary adjectives to the beginning of the 19th century. Still, some early 19th-century authors like Elena Muteva (1829–1854) never used such adjectives while next-generation speakers seem to have relished them judging by Ivan

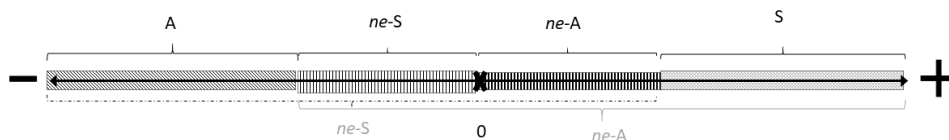
Vazov (1850–1921) whose work offer tokens of *nebogat*, *nedalečen*, *neevin*, *needār*, *neglupav*, *negoljam*, *nehubav*, *nekrasiv* and *nerjadāk*.

The *ne-A* adjectives in this group are contradictory opposites – see (7) – whereas the *ne-S* adjectives continue to be able to be both the non-extreme and the contradictory opposite of their respective S adjectives.

- (7) ... dosta e za edno prosveteno Sābranie, kako e segašnoto, koeto e izvāršilo mnogo hubavi₂ raboti, da izvārši edna *nehubava*₂ rabota i da hvārli sjanka na svojata dejatelnost (Popkonstantinov 1895: 315). (... it is enough for an enlightened Assembly, such as the present one, which has done many good deeds, to do one *bad* [lit. *ne-good*] deed, and to cast a shadow over its activity.)

The relations within two of the Group B sets are complicated by the fact that *hubav* (pretty; nice) functions as a synonym of *krasiv* (beautiful), on one hand, and *dobār* (good), on the other, with all the consequences that stem from that.

Group C encompasses three four-member sets that include the non-extreme adjectives *neblizāk* (moderately distant), *nedalečen* (moderately close), *negoljam* (moderately small), *nemalāk* (moderately big), *nelek* (moderately heavy or difficult) and *netežāk* (moderately light or easy). The structure of sets is presented in Figure 4. The difference between the non-extreme adjectives of Group C and those of Group B is that in Group C *ne-S* and *ne-A* non-extreme adjectives co-exist within the same sets. This fact has an impact on the relationships among members of the set and on their location on the Group C scale, which at this point starts to resemble to some extent the scale identified for Polish (Perlin 2010): *dobry* (good) – *niezły* (not bad) – *nie najgorszy* (not the worst) – *nie najlepszy* (not the best) – *niedobry* (not good) – *zły* (bad).



goljam (big) [S] – *negoljam* [*ne-S*] – *nemalāk* [*ne-A*] – *malāk* (small) [A]; *dalečen* (distant) [S] – *nedalečen* [*ne-S*] – *neblizāk* [*ne-A*] – *blizāk* (near) [A]; *težāk* (heavy; difficult) [S] – *netežāk* [*ne-S*] – *nelek* [*ne-A*] – *lek* (light; easy) [A]

Figure 4.
Structure of the Group C four-member sets

The presence of negated adjectives in the Polish scale side-by-side with the superlative brings up an important issue. A characteristic of non-extreme as opposed to contrary negative adjectives in the Slavic languages that has been discussed many times is their almost absolute inability to form degrees of comparison (Kžizkova 1974: 127–128; Apresjan 1995: 311). These, however, clearly correlate with both the degrees of comparison of the source adjective and those of its contrary opposite. Thus, both *nemalāk* (moderately big), lit. “*ne-small*”, and *negoljam* (moderately small), lit. “*ne-big*”, correlate with the comparative *po-malāk* (lesser) – see (1) and (8).

- (8) *Nemalki* sa uspehite i v oblastta na humanitarnite nauki. ... Ne *po-malki* uspehi postignaha učeni ot obštstvenite nauki (Radev 1981: 246). (The achievements in the field of humanities are also *befitting*. ... Social scientists have achieved no *lesser* success.)

Non-extreme negative adjectives are frequent equivalents of absolute attenuative comparatives in translation from one Slavic language into another; see, for instance, Czech *chudší* (poorer) versus Russian *nebogatyj* (of average prosperity, relatively poor) in (9) or Serbian *blaži* (milder, lighter) versus Polish *niewielki* (relatively small) in (10).

- (9) Tento spisovatel pochází z *chudší* rodiny. – Ètot pisatel' proisxodit iz *nebogatoj* sem'i (Brandner 2012: 191–192). (This author comes from a *relatively poor* family.)
 (10) Ekonomisti predviđaju *blaži* rast cena. – Ekonomiści przewidyją *niewielki* wzrost cen (Mitrinović 2003: 69–73). (Economists predict a *slight* rise in prices.)

This translation practice has inspired attempts to build a typology of the Slavic languages based on such correlations and the presence or absence of the relative use of superlatives (Gvozdanić 2001). According to it, East Slavic with its non-extreme negative adjectives and the relative use of superlatives opposes West and South Slavic which have developed absolute attenuative comparatives. However, the reality is messier. Bulgarian, for instance, has to date all three devices at its disposal: non-extreme negative adjectives, as we have seen, as well as attenuative comparatives and relative superlatives (Zaharieva 1995; Ćoroleeva 2007: 161–162).

6. CONTEXT, IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

The participation of non-extreme adjectives in three different types of relations within the lexicon signals the presence of variation, the outward sign of an ongoing change. The most numerous Group A three-member sets characterize the initial stage in the rise of non-extreme negative adjectives. The Group B four-member sets at the next stage continue to feature a single non-extreme negative adjective although a second negative adjective also contributes to each set. The Group C four-member sets at the third, final, stage are the only ones that include both a *ne-S* and a *ne-A* non-extreme adjective.

The process of change that has been in progress since the beginning of the 19th century has three aspects to it: first, the expansion of non-extreme negative adjectives as they are formed from a broadening range of source adjectives; second, the gradual saturation of the semantic space previously overrun by such formations with new ones that work in conjunction with them to diversify and refine the tools Bulgarians have at their disposal to talk about properties in-between extremes; and third, the involvement of an ever larger number of speakers into active use of the growing number of non-extreme negative adjectives.

Let us now step back and consider the broader picture. Folk speech is inadequate to perform the communicative functions of a standard language. It is transformed into a standard language through a process of **intellectualization** (among others) that helps it adapt to “the goal of making possible precise and rigorous, if necessary, abstract,

statements” (Havránek 2014: 30–32). The rise of non-extreme negative adjectives is one of the manifestations of the intellectualization that accompanied the creation of standard Bulgarian in the 19th century. It is far from coincidental that so many of the tokens in my corpus come from academic writing, the media and public speech. Of course, Bulgarians were able to assess properties as fair or average prior to the arrival of non-extreme negative adjectives. They had lexical and idiomatic means, but, most importantly, productive models of derivation that are still around. Here belong adjectives formed with the suffix *-ovat* from source adjectives on the negative side of the scale – see *glupovat* (somewhat silly), *groznovat* (somewhat ugly), *tesnovat* (somewhat tight) – diminutives in *-(i)čák* such as *bārzičák* (spry), *visočák* (relatively high in stature), *edričák* (relatively solidly built) and adjectives prefixed with *váz-* – *vázdebel* (somewhat overweight), *vázdālāg* (quite tall), *váznisák* (fairly short) – as well as forms derived with both a prefix and a suffix or with two suffixes: *váztrudničák* or *trudnovatičák* < *truden* (difficult), *vázglupavičák* or *glupovatičák* < *glupav* (stupid), *vázlekičák* or *lekovatičák* < *lek* (light, not heavy). The budding standard Bulgarian language however could not declare itself satisfied with such devices because they add strong expressive connotations to an utterance that are not appropriate in the formal register. It would be unthinkable to replace *negāsti gori* (sparse forests) in (11) with the synonymous *vázredki gori* (*váz*-rare forests) or even more so *vázredički gori* (*váz*-rare-DIMINUTIVE forests) because the latter are colloquial phrases unacceptable in an academic text. An additional jarring note is added by the fact that these formations not so much refer to average values as express the gracious and accommodating attitude of the speaker (Čoroleeva 2007: 80–85).

- (11) Tezi hālmovē sa pokriti s *negāsti gori*, pri tova ežegodno razredjavani ot bradvata na seljanite, koito imat pravo da podrjazvat i režat bezkontrolno dārvetata (Cvetkova 1981: 199). (These hills are covered with *sparse* [lit. *ne*-thick] forests nevertheless annually thinned by the ax of the villagers, who have the right to prune and cut trees as they please.)

The relative absence of non-extreme negative adjectives in eastern South Slavic side-by-side with their complete absence in the non-Slavic Balkan languages (assessed on a lexicographic basis) served as an argument in favour of the treatment of this shared gap in the Balkan languages as a rare, reversed Balkanism (Reiter 1979: 45–46). This study confirms that prior to the 19th century the situation with negative adjectives in Bulgarian was similar to that in Romanian, Greek and Albanian as presented by Reiter (1979). The 19th century however was a time for divergent development in the Balkan languages when they started moving away from their shared Balkan present towards individual futures different for each of them. For Bulgarian, that meant “re-slavization”, to use Orzechowska’s (1979) apt term. The rise of non-extreme negative adjectives is but one facet of that multifaceted process.

It is an open question to what extent Russian influence contributed to this rise. Such a possibility has briefly been mentioned without being supported with evidence (Laškova 1980: 82). Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Polish are indeed the Slavic languages in which non-extreme negative adjectives have the most notable presence (Sokołowski 1983b). Bulgarian is not the only language that was purportedly influenced by Russian in this respect. Czech non-extreme negative adjectives are also supposed to have come about

under Russian influence (Póldauf 1948: 117). In the Bulgarian case, chronology speaks in favour of the hypothetical Russian influence, the 19th and the 20th centuries being a period of intensive contacts between speakers of Russian and Bulgarian. It is easy to see how certain Russian turns of phrase that contain non-extreme negative adjectives may have been literally translated into Bulgarian, but the mechanism through which such disparate ad-hoc expressions would generate the system described here remains to be investigated.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Around the beginning of the 19th century adjectives formed with the negative prefix *ne-* started to come to the fore in Bulgarian. At first, they had contradictory readings and then some developed non-extreme readings. Their proliferation gradually advanced standard Bulgarian's ability to refer to mid-scale properties. Rather than remaining isolated lexical items, these adjectives formed a system that has expanded to include at present 24 adjectives, which possess distinctive semantic and prosodic characteristics and function as both non-extreme and contradictory opposites to their respective source adjectives. Additional contradictory adjectives, also formed with *ne-*, rotate in their orbit and may develop non-extreme meanings in the future. The appearance of non-extreme negative adjectives in addition to the functionally similar devices previously available to speakers is part of the intellectualization of standard Bulgarian. It makes possible reference to mid-scale properties in the formal registers of the standard language. Any speaker of Bulgarian should be able to make sense of the system as such even if they disagreed on the acceptability of individual non-extreme negative adjectives on a list which reflects the consolidated practices of the community of Bulgarian speakers.

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