The West South Slavic verbal *nV/ne* is a diminutive affix with a theme vowel

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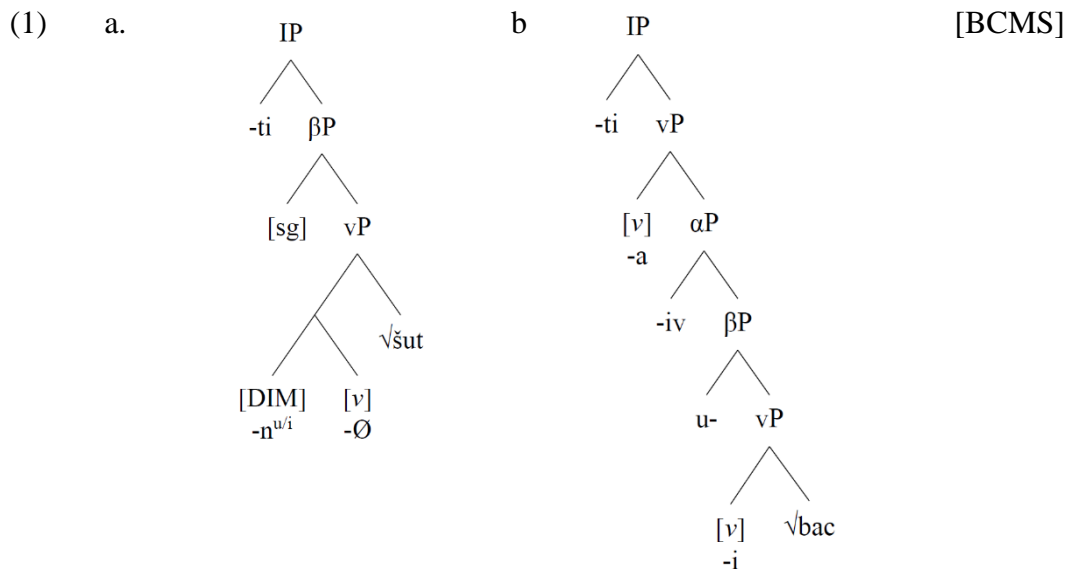boban.arsenijevic@uni-graz.at

We present arguments for analysing the formant *nV/ne* (e.g., *mah-ni-ti* in Slovenian, *mah-nu-ti* in BCMS 'to wave once') as a sequence of a diminutive affix which contains a floating vowel and the theme vowel ∅/e.

In traditional descriptions, *nV/ne* is typically analyzed as a monomorphemic theme vowel (TV) defining its own conjugation class (Breznik 1934: 116, 124, Ivšić 1970: 253, Toporišič 1992: 49, 2000: 364, Barić et al. 1997: 235, Stevanović 1986: 331). The alternative analysis, whereby *-n* is a separate morpheme, is usually discarded on the ground that there is no independently motivated TV class defined by the vowels following *-n* (i.e., *i/e* in Slovenian and *u/e* in BCMS). In syntactic approaches, the semelfactive suffix (SfS) *nV/ne* is typically analysed as either a perfectivizer (e.g., Borer 2005), or a verbalizer with a perfectivizing effect/feature (Svenonius 2004, Biskup 2021). The former view does not explain its complementary distribution with TVs, while the latter view fails to explain why *nV/ne* is a unique verbalizer with a perfectivizing function. To capture this 'dual' behaviour of *nV/ne*, Kwapiszewski (2020) proposes that it is an exponent of a complex head realizing (fused) verbal and quantity features. His analysis is based on complementary distribution of *nV/ne* with both TVs and secondary imprefectivizing suffixes (SIs) in Polish. However, this analysis does not extend to BCMS, since there *nu/ne* can combine with SIs (e.g. in *nadah-nu-ti* 'inspire.PFV' *nadah-nj-iva-ti* 'inspire.IPFV'), and even with already quantized predicates. Markman (2008) also relies on complementary distribution of *nV/ne* and SIs (in Russian) but proposes that they are both light verbs with an atelic effect (following Smith 1991's analysis of semelfactives as atelic perfectives). Markman's view faces the same problem as Kwapiszewski's (at least when applied to BCMS but see also Biskup 2021 for Czech). The proposed atelic role of the SfS *nV/ne* is also difficult to defend. Łazorczyk (2010) treats *nV/ne* (in both semelfactives and degree achievements (DAs)) as bi-morphemic, with the telicity suffix *-n* accompanied by a TV, but she does not provide a detailed analysis. Wiland (2019) and Taraldsen Medová & Wiland (2019) also argue that *nV/ne* is a complex morpheme, proposing that *-n* spells out a light verb (*get* in DAs, *give* in semelfactives), while the remaining segment is a TV, which together with the base (adjectival in DAs, nominal in semelfactives) spells out a verbal structure (unaccusative in DAs, unergative or transitive in semelfactives). This approach does not cover the full range of uses of *nV/ne*, which easily combines also with verbal bases, and even with other suffixes (e.g., BCMS *bol-uc-nu-ti* 'hurt a bit', and Slovenian *stop-ic-ni-ti* 'make a small step' where *-uc* and *-ic* are diminutive suffixes).

We propose an analysis where the formant *nV/ne* (at least in West South Slavic) is bimorphemic and consists of the element n^v/n^i (with a floating vowel, which surfaces only when this improves the syllable structure) and the TV ∅/e. Our analysis is further confirmed by a categorical absence of verbs ending in *-nti* both in the ∅/e class and in West South Slavic in general.

This analysis appears to go against important generalizations about verbal suffixes in Slavic. First, all verbal derivational suffixes derive imperfective or biaspectual verbs, while n^v/n^i derives perfectives (except for few DAs). Second, all other suffixes take the TVs *a/a, a/je* or *i/i*, while n^v/n^i takes the TV ∅/e, otherwise typical for root verbs.

We argue that these properties follow from the special status of the affix n^v/n^i. In the nominal domain, a special status is argued to be held by diminutive suffixes, which unlike other derivational suffixes may adjoin directly to the category head (de Belder et al. 2014, Kramer 2015). The reasoning is that the category head specifies the classifier, i.e., the unit of counting (Arsenijević 2017) and the diminutive suffix operates on this meaning. For this reason, diminutive suffixes show behaviour atypical for nominal derivational suffixes. We propose that the analogous holds for the suffix n^v/n^i in the verbal domain. While other (i.e., non-diminutive) suffixes attach to already categorized structures (Simonović et al. 2021), n^v/n^i carries the diminutive feature, which enables its adjunction to the category head. This is shown in (1) where n^v/n^i in *šutnuti* 'kick.PFV' is compared to the secondary imperfectivizer *-iv* in *ubacivati* 'throw in.IPFV'.

(1) a.

```
          IP
         /  \
       -ti   βP
            /  \
         [sg]   vP
               /  \
              /    √šut
          [DIM]  [v]
          -n^{u/i} -Ø
```

b.

```
        IP                          [BCMS]
       /  \
     -ti   vP
          /  \
        [v]   αP
        -a   /  \
           -iv   βP
                /  \
              u-    vP
                   /  \
                 [v]   √bac
                 -i
```

The semantic effect of n^v/n^i is in restricting the units of counting of the described event to the finest granularity, with three possible families of cases. If the predicate is homogeneous, the suffix imposes events with pointy intervals as atoms. If the predicate is quantized, it reduces it to the subset of atoms with minimal duration. In both cases, this derives a semelfactive from a verb of another aspectual class. With verbs that already have semelfactive interpretation, it yields a diminutive or hypocoristic component.

The diminutive nature and head-adjunction to the verbal category account for all the special properties of the suffix $n^v/n^{i.}$. Its perfectivization effect comes from the fact that it imposes an atomic unit of counting in *v*. It is also predicted by our account that n^v/n^i readily combines with other diminutive affixes, as this is widely attested with 'traditional' diminutive affixes. This combinability derives from the fact that there are multiple Dim projections available (see de Belder et al. 2014). Finally, by adjoining to the category head, n^v/n^i does not intervene between the TV realizing the category feature and the root, which hence enables the realization of the TV *Ø/e* which requires locality with the root. The emergent general picture is that of a system in which all verbal suffixes condition the insertion of a specific TV in the adjacent v position. The special structural properties of n^v/n^i, its partially abstract segmental content and the atypical TV selection licensed by these properties are the reason why this is not immediately obvious in its case.

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