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## Adverbial Superlative Forms Outside the Degree System: Lexical and Operational Units

### Abstract

The article seeks to determine the status of adverbial superlative forms which do not express the superlative and which thus fall outside the degree system in contemporary Polish. Some of these expressions have become lexicalized and have entered two classes of units: particles (e.g., *najpewniej* ‘surely’, *najwidoczniej* ‘apparently’, *najwyraźniej* ‘clearly’) and adverbial meta-predicates (e.g., *najspokojniej* ‘calmly’, *najzwyczajniej* ‘simply’, *najlepiej* ‘the best’). Others have become elements of idiomatic expressions or performatives such as, e.g. *najmocniej przepraszam* ‘I sincerely apologize’, *najserdeczniej witam* ‘I cordially welcome (you)’, *najuprzejmiej dziękuję* ‘I kindly thank (you)’, *najgoręcej namawiam* ‘I highly recommend’. However, there are also superlative forms which act as the domain of several interesting operations, see, e.g., Bogusławski (1978, 1987, 2010a), the latter being of a grammatical, rather than lexical nature. One such operation results in the creation of expressions such as *jak najszybciej* ‘in the quickest possible way’, *jak najweselej* ‘in the most enjoyable way’, *jak najdłużej* ‘in the longest possible way’, etc. Another important operation yields such constructions as *najpóźniej w środę* ‘on Wednesday at the latest’, *najdalej 20 kilometrów od centrum* ‘at most 20 km away from the centre’, *najrzadziej raz do roku* ‘at least once a year’, *najgrubiej na pół centymetra* ‘half a centimeter at the thickest’, etc. Contrary to the view held by Grochowski (2008), it is argued here that the superlatives which occur in these constructions should not be regarded as independent lexical units. Nor should the metatextual comments such as *najkrócej <mówiąc>* ‘to put it briefly / briefly put [lit. <speaking> most briefly]’, *najogólniej <rzecz biorąc>* ‘most generally <speaking>’ be regarded as such, though for a different reason. In these comments, the superlatives – referring to the act of speaking – retain their standard meanings (cf. *krótko / krócej <mówiąc>* ‘<speaking> succinctly / more succinctly’, *ogólnie / ogólniej <rzecz biorąc>* ‘generally / more generally <speaking>’).

A number of pragmatic effects associated with the use of superlative forms also deserve individual treatment; they include, for instance, metonymic shortcuts (*najlepsi* ‘the best’ [pl.], *najbogatsi* ‘the richest’ [pl.]) or conversational implicatures (*wypadł nie najgorzej* → *wypadł całkiem dobrze* ‘he did not do so badly / he did not do so bad’ → ‘he did pretty well’).

### Keywords

Polish adverbs, comparison, superlative, comparative constructions, grammatical categories, lexical units, operational units

### Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest określenie statusu przysłówkowych form superlatywnych, które nie wyrażają superlatywu, a tym samym pozostają we współczesnej polszczyźnie poza opozycją stopnia. Część tego rodzaju wyrażen zleksykalizowała się i zasiła głównie dwie klasy jednostek: partykuły (np. *najpewniej*, *najwidoczniej*, *najwyraźniej*) i metapredykaty przysłówkowe (np. *najspokojniej*, *najzwyczajniej*, *najlepiej*). Inna część wchodzi w skład idiomów lub zwrotów performatywnych typu: *najmocniej przepraszam*, *najserdeczniej witam*, *najuprzejmiej dziękuję*, *najgoręcej namawiam*. Są jednak i takie formy superlatywu, które jako operandy uczestniczą w kilku interesujących operacjach, zob. Bogusławski (1978, 1987, 2010), mających raczej charakter gramatyczny niż leksykalny. Produktami jednej z takich operacji są na przykład wyrażenia: *jak najszybciej*, *jak najweselej*, *jak najdłużej* itp. Efekty innej ważnej operacji to konstrukcje typu: *najpóźniej w środę*, *najdalej 20 kilometrów od centrum*, *najrzadziej raz do roku*, *najgrubiej na pół centymetra* i tak dalej. Wbrew temu, co na ten temat sądzi Grochowski (2008), występujące w tych konstrukcjach formy superlatywne nie powinny być traktowane jako niezależne jednostki leksykalne. Z innego względu nie są nimi również komentarze metatekstowe typu: *najkrócej <mówiąc>*, *najogólniej <rzecz biorąc>*, w których formy superlatywne, jakkolwiek odniesione do mówienia, zachowują swe standardowe znaczenia (por. *krótko / krócej <mówiąc>*, *ogólnie / ogólniej <rzecz biorąc>*). Odrębnego potraktowania wymagają również rozmaite pragmatyczne efekty użycia form superlatywnych, takie jak metonimiczny skrót (*najlepsi*, *najbogatsi*) czy implikatury konwersacyjne (*wypadł nie najgorzej* → *wypadł całkiem dobrze*).

### Słowa kluczowe

polskie przysłówki, stopniowanie, superlativus, konstrukcje komparatywne, kategorie gramatyczne, jednostki leksykalne, jednostki operacyjne

## Introduction

This article offers an analysis of certain categories of expressions which formally resemble superlative adverbs, but whose form is misleading since they have little in common with superlative meanings in the strictest sense. When used in Polish utterances, these expressions perform various functions and – although, admittedly, they are to some extent related to comparison – their linguistic description requires a separate set of concepts and analytical tools. Below are several examples which illustrate the use of such

forms, excerpted from the National Corpus of the Polish Language (henceforth: NKJP):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *Idź za głosem syreny (o ile w wichurze zmęczone ucho go wyłowi), gdy wiatr nim kręci, a ściany skalne **najrozmaiciej** odbijać będą...* [NKJP]  
‘Follow the mermaid’s voice (provided your tired ear can fish it out despite the wind), when it is swirled by the wind, and when the rocky walls echo it **in various ways**...’
- (2) *Taki był **najwidoczniej** styl życia nowej czarnoksiężskiej siły, z którą Teofil zetknął się po raz pierwszy.* [NKJP]  
‘Such was **apparently** the lifestyle of the new magical spirit which Teofil encountered for the first time.’
- (3) *Niezależnie od tego, jak bardzo jesteś empatyczny i współczujący, po pewnym czasie masz **najzwyczajniej** dość.* [NKJP]  
‘No matter how emphatic and sympathetic you are, after a while, you (will) have **simply** had enough.’
- (4) ***Najmocniej** przeproszam, że ośmielam się zaczepiać pana profesora na ulicy – rozpoczął Popielski.* [NKJP]  
‘Professor, I am **terribly** sorry for taking the liberty of talking to you in the street, said Popielski.’
- (5) *Postaram się **jak najdokładniej** powtórzyć to, co usłyszałam.* [NKJP]  
‘I’ll do my best to repeat what I heard **as faithfully as possible**.’
- (6) *Przelew miał być zrealizowany **najpóźniej w ciągu dwunastu godzin.*** [NKJP]  
‘The transfer was to be made within twelve hours **at the latest**.’

This study focuses on expressions that are analogous to *najrozmaiciej* ‘in various ways’, *najwidoczniej* ‘apparently’, *najzwyczajniej* ‘simply’, *najmocniej* ‘terribly’, *najdokładniej* ‘as faithfully as possible’, *najpóźniej* ‘at the latest’, which are found in relevant contexts in examples (1)–(6). The nonstandard functions of Polish comparative and superlative forms have been addressed in several seminal papers by Grochowski (2008, 2011, 2014, 2018a, in press). However, to date, neither the empirical nor the theoretical aspects of this issue have been exhaustively discussed. In the analysis presented below I argue against some of the claims advanced by Grochowski, as well as suggest an alternative account of some of the empirical data.

The article is structured as follows. Section 1 provides an overview of the main problems associated with the description of the degree system in Polish,

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<sup>1</sup> The Polish examples included in this article have been rendered into English by a professional translator under a POB Heritage Grant from the Jagiellonian University to *Studies in Polish Linguistics* (2022–2023). The translational equivalents are given here in single quotation marks.

with special emphasis being placed on the comparison of adverbs. As is known, the forms of comparison and their meanings do not receive the same treatment in all Polish grammar books and other descriptions. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an overview, even if it is brief, of the major accounts of the three-form paradigm: positive – comparative – superlative. In Section 2, I focus on the uses of the comparative and the superlative of Polish adverbs and adjectives that depart from, or seem to depart from, the standard uses. To this end, I present examples of the comparative and – above all – the superlative which have been lexicalized and which, in contemporary Polish, operate as independent lexical units or comprise stable word combinations. Finally, I turn my attention to such structures which need to be described in terms of metonymic shifts or other pragmatic effects.

Given the relevance of the notion of ‘operational unit’ to my discussion, in Section 3, I invoke the notion of ‘operation’ referred to in numerous works by Bogusławski (see, e.g., 1978, 1987, 1994, 2010a), in addition to providing several examples of the type of operation with a segmental exponent, whose domain includes comparative and superlative forms. Against this background, in Section 4, I offer a more thorough discussion of the series of expressions exemplified in utterance (6). I argue that these expressions are not, as one might suppose (see, e.g., Grochowski 2008: 66), lexicalized forms of the superlative, but rather outputs of a certain semantic operation as defined by Bogusławski. Seen in this way, they are an interesting phenomenon which, from a diachronic point of view, could be described in terms of the grammaticalization of units which at a certain point in time became part of the lexicon. My goal is then to characterize the operation which is of interest here, that is to specify the class of its outputs, to indicate the properties or formal markers and, finally, to provide a representation of its meaning. I argue that the expression used in utterance (6), as well as other similar expressions, irrespective of their individual senses, convey a certain general meaning which is more related to the comparative than to the superlative.

## 1. Comparison of Polish adjectives and adverbs: Sources of controversy

The category of degree (or comparison) – which in Polish applies to certain classes of adjectives and adverbs – involves three-term paradigms of a semantic nature. The degree system is marked with morphological exponents operating as the base for synthetic forms (e.g., *śmiały* – *śmielszy* – *najśmielszy* ‘brave – braver – the bravest’; *śmiało* – *śmielej* – *najśmielej* ‘boldly – more boldly – the most boldly / boldliest’) or syntactic devices with the help of

which one can form analytic comparative and superlative constructions (*zdecydowany / zdecydowanie – bardziej zdecydowany / zdecydowanie – naj-bardziej zdecydowany / zdecydowanie* ‘resolute / resolutely – more resolute / more resolutely – the most resolute / the most resolutely’. A similar characterization of comparison is offered in Jurkowski (1976: 11–26), Grochowski (2014, 2021) and Bałabaniak (2007, 2013: 38–46). As regards synthetic constructions, at the level of form everything (obviously excluding stem alternations and suppletivism) is very regular: markers of the comparative include *-szy* and *-ejszy* for adjectives (e.g., *szybszy* ‘faster’, *wolniejszy* ‘slower’) and *-ej* for adverbs (*szybciej* ‘faster’, *wolniej* ‘slower’), whereas markers of the superlative of both adjectives and adverbs include the prefix *naj-* preceding the segment which is identical with the comparative form (adjectives: *najszybszy* ‘the fastest’, *najwolniejszy* ‘the slowest’; adverbs: *najszybciej* ‘the fastest’, *najwolniej* ‘the slowest’).

Complications arise when we consider the meanings of the comparative and the superlative in relation to their base forms. Firstly, not all adjectives and adverbs fall into the degree system. Comparison applies only to qualitative characteristics; adjectival and adverbial names of the relation (e.g., *lniany* ‘linen’, *warszawski* ‘pertaining to Warsaw’, *lotniczo* ‘by air’) are not at issue here.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, in the case of these expressions, the relation between the equative and the comparative and, accordingly, the superlative, is neither obvious nor unambiguous. It depends on the meaning of a given item, as shown, e.g., in Wierzbicka (1972: 82), engaging in a dialogue with Sapir (1944: 93–94), as well as in Bogusławski (1975), Laskowski (1977), Grzegorzczkowska, Laskowski, Wróbel (1984: 446) and Zuber (1984, 1997).

Free from controversy are those adjectives and adverbs which the authors of *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego [Grammar of Contemporary Polish]* (Grzegorzczkowska, Laskowski, Wróbel 1984, 1999) refer to as non-relative, e.g. *słodki* ‘sweet’, *brutalny* ‘brutal’, *okrutny* ‘cruel’. In this case, the forms of the degree situate the property of a given item (as compared with other objects), at different points on a scale of sweetness, brutality or cruelty. If Y is described as more brutal than X, and Z as the most brutal, this means that all the three individuals are brutal, although this property has different values. A different picture emerges in the case of adjectives and adverbs referred to as relative, represented mainly by parametric and evaluative expressions such as *wysoki* ‘tall’ or *mądry* ‘wise’. In this case, the sentence *Y jest wyższy niż X* ‘Y is taller than X’ is not unambiguous: from the speaker’s point of view, both X and Y, although the difference between the two is noted, may, in comparison with other individuals, be described

<sup>2</sup> A detailed description of the semantic restrictions pertaining to degree can be found in Grochowski (2015, 2018a: 84–85).

as tall, of medium height, or both may also be perceived as relatively short or, finally, X may be regarded as short or of medium height, and Y described as tall. An analogous complication can be seen in the case of superlative meanings. Laskowski (1977) also identifies the presence of adjectives (which naturally applies to the relevant adverbs, too) whose comparative form refers to a lower value of the property described by the antonym of a given expression, e.g., *zdrowszy* 'healthier' means the same as *mniej chory* / *mniej niezdrowy* 'less ill / less unhealthy', *pełniejszy* 'fuller' – *mniej pusty* 'less empty', *szczelniej* 'more tightly' – *mniej nieszczelnie* 'less untightly'.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly unequivocal are the logical consequences of various uses of the superlative which may have an absolute meaning (*najniższa możliwa temperatura* 'the lowest possible temperature') or which may distinguish a certain object in relation to other items in the designated set (*najstarszy spośród trzech znanych mi chłopców* 'the oldest of the three boys known to me'). What is more, it cannot be ruled out that in a given set of phenomena more than one element has been described with the use of an adjective or adverb in the superlative, cf. unambiguous sentences such as *Jakie modele suszarek do włosów sprawdzają się najlepiej?* 'Which models of hairdryers work the best?', *Jakie fasony dżinsów są w tym sezonie najmodniejsze?* 'Which types of jeans are the trendiest this season?'. If we discussed, for instance, the meaning of the expression *najwyższy* 'the tallest' / 'the highest', we would be dealing with the juxtaposition of *such that all other entities are lower*, e.g. *najwyższy szczyt w pewnym kraju* 'the highest peak in a certain country' and 'such that no other entity is higher', e.g. *jeden z dwóch najwyższych szczytów w pewnym kraju* 'one of the two highest peaks in a certain country' (cf. Bogusławski 2010b: 44).

This formal regularity, on the one hand, and the complications regarding the meaning, on the other, divide scholars on the linguistic status of the comparison of adjectives and adverbs. Some linguists classify synthetic comparative and superlative forms under word formation (see, e.g., Laskowski 1984: 57; Grzegorzczkova, Laskowski, Wróbel 1984: 437–441, Wróbel 2001: 200–201; Kallas 1999: 502–505 and Grzegorzczkova 1999: 534–535), others, in turn, see comparison as inflection (see, e.g., Misz 1967; Tokarski 1973: 150–153; Saloni 1974; Szupryczyńska 1980; Bogusławski 1987, 2010a, b; Nagórko 1987; Saloni, Świdziński 1998; Bańko 2002 and Grochowski 2014, 2015). Obviously, the reasons for the respective classifications differ.

The scholars who favour the semantic perspective agree in principle that the comparative is the marked element of the degree system, regardless of whether it is classified as representing word formation or inflection. The

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<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive discussion on the complicated antonymic relations in the Polish lexicon can be found in Markowski (1986).

generally accepted way of describing the comparative and the superlative relies on the reference to the pragmatic norm, that is the average value of a given property, determined within a certain range (see, e.g., Bartsch, Vennemann 1972: 67; Markowski 1986: 40; Kallas 1999: 505; Nagórko 1998: 147), which means that, for instance, *wyższy* ‘taller’ describes someone whose height is above the norm or above average.

This approach has, however, been criticized by Bogusławski (1975), who presents a range of valid counterarguments. In his view, parametric adjectives and adverbs (e.g., *długi* ‘long’ or *wysoki* ‘tall’ / ‘high’), as well as those which are evaluative (e.g., *mądry* ‘wise’ or *uprzejmy* ‘polite’), as opposed to other semantic groups which belong to these parts of speech (e.g., *czerwony* ‘red’ or *okrutny* ‘cruel’), implicate comparative meanings (*dłuższy* ‘longer’ / *wyższy* ‘taller’ / ‘higher’ / *mądrzejszy niż* ‘wiser than’), but their point of reference is not the “norm” or “average value”, which may not be unambiguously determined, but a *secundum comparationis* to which one may easily refer by relying on the conceptual frame: “other than that which would be unnoticed, which would not attract attention”. What is more, the comparative form *więcej* ‘more’ was of key importance in Bogusławski’s (2010b) reflection on the relation between the equal and the unequal cardinality of sets, and, by extension, the meanings of many expressions of comparison and approximation. Empirical data supports the author’s claim that equal cardinality is secondary and that it represents a conjunction of negations of meanings of unequal cardinality, namely “not less and not more than” (cf. Bogusławski 2010b: 34–35). Worthy of note in this context is also the fact that the idea of juxtaposing the meaning in question with what would not be noticeable, was applied by Bogusławski not only in his analysis of parametric and evaluative adjectives, but also in that of several other expressions, including the Russian prefix *po-* marking comparative forms (e.g. *pogłubże*, *podlinnee*, *poostrożnee*, etc.). Differing in his views from those held by Boguslavskij and Iomdin (2009), Bogusławski maintains that the prefix *po-* is monosemic and that its meaning may be generalized with the use of double negation: “not unnoticeable” or “such / in such a manner that there is no unnoticeable difference” (cf. Bogusławski 2010b: 44–52). The gloss of the expression *trochę* ‘a bit’ was created in a similar vein; it has the form of: “not much more than what would be unnoticeable” (cf. Bogusławski 2010b: 66).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bogusławski’s account of comparative forms served as the foundation for the descriptions of two other important categories of expressions in Polish, namely units of volume measurement proposed in Linde-Usiekiewicz (2000) and exclamative structures described in Danielewiczowa (2015).



## 2. Lexicalized forms of the superlative

Even those researchers who regard the comparison of adjectives and adverbs as word formation would not be able to deny that some groups of lexemes classified as the parts of speech under consideration in this article – which may be characterized in general terms and not just through enumeration – lend themselves to the regular formation of the comparative and the superlative. If we were to consider the fact that units which are characterized, on the one hand, in non-relative and, on the other, in relative terms, form regular three-term paradigms, we have to admit that this regularity – within the individual semantic groups which come into play – pertains not only to form, but also to meaning. That the linguistic facts under discussion are subject to certain restrictions governing the formation of comparatives and superlatives, is not decisive because even within series which are commonly considered inflectional, specific restrictions may apply.<sup>5</sup> The regular and categorial nature of degree becomes particularly visible when we acknowledge the existence in Polish of expressions whose form resembles the comparative or the superlative, but whose semantics does not indicate any relation to comparison.

A group of such expressions was reportedly presented by Laskowski in the 1970s in an unpublished paper entitled “Defektywne paradygmaty stopniowania” [Defective paradigms of comparison], as noted in Grochowski (2014: 49–50). These items include *dalej* ‘further’, meaning “ciągle, wciąż, nadal” ‘still’ (e.g. *Dalej pada* ‘It’s still raining’ or *Uciszam, a studenci dalej w najlepsze gadają* ‘I’m asking them to be quiet and the students are still talking as if nothing’s wrong’), as highlighted by Grzegorzczkova, Laskowski, Wróbel (1984: 464–466, 1999: 534). The following words: *później* ‘later’, synonymous with the adverb *potem* ‘later’, *wcześniej* ‘earlier’ and *dawniej* ‘long ago’ fall outside the degree system; for discussion of this phenomenon, see e.g. Grzegorzczkova (1974, 1975: 109) and Grochowski (in press). It is necessary to classify as an independent lexeme, unrelated to the forms of the adverb *dobrze* ‘well’, the meta-predicate *lepiej / najlepiej* ‘you’d better [lit. better / the best]’ which I discussed in detail in Danielewiczowa (2011b) and which can be seen, e.g., in the sentence: *Lepiej / najlepiej zamilknij!* ‘You’d better shut up!’ (vs *Piotr śpiewa dobrze, Jan śpiewa lepiej niż Piotr, a Paweł – najlepiej z nich trzech* ‘Peter sings well, John sings better than Peter, and Paul – sings the best of the three / them all’). Operators taking the form of an adverbial comparative were thoroughly examined in Grochowski (2011).

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<sup>5</sup> The regularity of comparison is in no way contradicted by the semantic and formal restrictions which may be unambiguously characterized, or the clear asymmetry between them, as pointed out by Grochowski (2014, 2018a).



Let us, however, return to superlatives. In terms of meaning, the adjectives *najróżniejszy* ‘different / various’ and *najprzeróżniejszy* ‘different / various’, which have been thoroughly analyzed in Grochowski’s (2014) article referred to above, have nothing to do with the superlative. The words *różny* ‘different’ and *przeróżny* ‘various’, as aptly noted by the author, do not fall within the degree system. The superlative form is supposed to emphasize the diversity of their referents. The sentences excerpted from the NKJP by Grochowski (2015) are an illustration of this: *Szeptano, że kryje się za tym jakaś osobista tragedia, snuto najróżniejsze przypuszczenia* ‘It was rumoured that some personal tragedy lay behind it, various speculations were being made’; *Wnet pojawiły się tace zastawione najprzeróżniejszymi lakociami oraz omszałymi butelkami* ‘Before long trays full of various sweets and mossy bottles appeared / came into view’. These adjectives, naturally, have their adverbial equivalents, that is *najróżniej* ‘in various ways’, *najprzeróżniej* ‘in various ways’, as in:

- (7) *Kreatywności najróżniej* *pojmowanej wymaga się od menedżerów i agentów ubezpieczeń, sprzedawców, dziennikarzy, nauczycieli i psychologów.* [NKJP]  
 ‘Creativity, conceived **in a number of ways**, was required from managers and insurance brokers, salespersons, journalists, teachers and psychologists.’

Grochowski’s (2018a) article mentions other adjectives in the superlative which fall outside the degree system, including e.g.: *najukochańszy* ‘the most beloved’, *najulubieńszy* ‘the most liked’, *najczcigodniejszy* ‘the most venerable’, *najprzewielebniejszy* ‘the most reverend’, *najnormalniejszy* ‘the most normal’ and *najzwykleszy* ‘the most usual’. These items may be thought of as products of lexicalization. The lexicalization of meanings is conceptualized slightly differently by researchers who describe language from a synchronic perspective and by those who approach the same linguistic data diachronically.<sup>6</sup> Over the last 20 years this phenomenon (and the related notion of grammaticalization) has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention both in foreign and Polish literature (see, e.g., Kosek 2001; Pastuchowa 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Filar and Łozowski 2018).

When referring to products of lexicalization in this article, I acknowledge the existence in the language system, within a certain timeframe, of lexical units which formally resemble elements of specific paradigms, but which at the same time possess – both at the level of form and at the level of meaning – unrelated properties. Given this understanding of the lexicalization of comparative and superlative forms, two groups of units merit attention: a) those which constitute a kind of lexical doublet with the co-existing paradigmatic forms

<sup>6</sup> A range of facets which are addressed in diachronic studies of lexicalization are presented by Pastuchowa (2011a: 245–246), drawing on Brinton and Traugott (2005).

(e.g., *najpewniej* ‘most certainly’ in the sentence *Najpewniej pociąg zwiększy opóźnienie* ‘Most certainly the delay of the train will be longer’ vs *Który jeździec trzyma się w siodle najpewniej?* ‘Which rider remains in the saddle most confidently?’) and b) those which do not have their paradigmatic counterparts, but which are formed with the use of markers typical of the superlative and the comparative (e.g., the items referred to above: *najróżniejszy* ‘different / various’, *najprzeróżniejszy* ‘different / various’, as well as *najrozmaiciej* ‘in the most diverse ways’ and *najpierw* ‘first / in the first place’). The items which belong to group a) should not, in my view, be described in terms of lexical homonyms of the actual comparative or superlative of adjectives and adverbs. As can be seen, they differ in principle from their counterparts, which mark degree by way of prosody. Thus, they do not meet the criterion of formal equivalence with the other items. A great many of them – such as the particle *najpewniej* referred to above – are, by contrast to the superlative forms, words which are inherently unstressed (i.e. they repel non-corrective sentence stress).<sup>7</sup> What is more, lexicalized forms with superlative markers do not enter into full contrast with related equative and comparative forms, a fact which should also be regarded as a formal difference, see, e.g. 8

- (8) *Pewnie / Najpewniej / \*Pewniej pociąg zwiększy jeszcze opóźnienie vs Ten jeździec trzyma się w siodle pewnie, tamten jeszcze pewniej, a instruktor obu tych osób – najpewniej.*

‘**Certainly** / **most certainly** / **\*more certainly** the delay of the train will be longer’ vs ‘This rider remains in the saddle **confidently**, that one – even **more confidently**, and the instructor of the two riders – **the most confidently**.’

Expressions which “pretend” to be the superlative forms of various adverbs are, as noted earlier, numerous in the set of particles operating as metatextual units and, though to a lesser extent, in the set of adverbial meta-predicates, which has already been duly highlighted in Grochowski (2008).<sup>8</sup> This does not come as a surprise since the borderline between adverbs, on the one hand, and particles and adverbial meta-predicates, on the other, is fuzzy<sup>9</sup> and, diachronically, we may observe a steady movement: specific categories of adverbs are becoming the basis for the semantic derivation of expressions which are part of the *metalanguage*. Such expressions subsume, apart from *najpewniej*, metatextual units in (9)–(14) and meta-predicative units in (15)–(22), which are highlighted in the following examples excerpted from the NKJP:

<sup>7</sup> For more about the reasons behind the inappropriate identification of homonymy and polysemy, see Danielewiczowa (2011a).

<sup>8</sup> Building on Wajszczuk’s (1997, 2005: 105–121) work, I suggested detailed criteria for distinguishing metatextual from meta-predicative expressions in Danielewiczowa (2012: 115–150).

<sup>9</sup> See Wajszczuk (2005: 50–71).

- (9) *Najprawdopodobniej do eskalacji konfliktu nie dojdzie.* [NKJP]  
‘**In all probability the conflict will not escalate.**’
- (10) *Moda na miłe psy dotarła najwyraźniej i do tego zacisza.* [NKJP]  
‘**Apparently**, having a nice dog has become fashionable even in this quiet neighbourhood.’
- (11) *Marian milczał, najwidoczniej mało zainteresowany tematem.*<sup>10</sup> [NKJP]  
‘Marian was silent, **apparently** he had little interest in the topic.’
- (12) *Nastroje te nie są najoczywściej dziełem bezrobotnych ani mieszkańców przytułków noclegowych.* [NKJP]  
‘**Most obviously**, these sentiments do not result from the actions of the unemployed or the residents of shelters.’
- (13) *Śmierć, czymże i w czym jej śmierć zmienić może bieg ich życia, ich myśli? W niczym. Najwyżej zakłóci porządek kilku dni!* [NKJP]  
‘Death, in what way and how can her death affect the course of their lives, their thoughts? In no way. It will **at most** disrupt their regular activities for a couple of days!’
- (14) *Najpierw powiem – zabrał głos Aleksandrowski – jak ta sprawa w ogóle trafiła na moje biurko...*<sup>11</sup> [NKJP]  
‘I will **first** explain – said Aleksandrowski – how this case ended up on my desk...’
- (15) *Gdybyśmy mieli czcić jakieś egipskie bóstwo, to już najprędzej Imhotepa, mędrca i architekta, który wznosił dla Dżesera pierwszą piramidę, a po śmierci został w Memfis otoczony kultem jako syn boga Ptaha.* [NKJP]  
‘Were we to worship some Egyptian deity, this would **most probably** be Imhotep, the wise man and architect who erected the first pyramid for Djoser, and who was worshipped in Memphis after his death as the son of Ptah.’
- (16) *Ma pan szanowny najzupelniej rację.* [NKJP]  
‘You are **quite** right, sir.’
- (17) *To nieprawda, że chcę coś ukryć. Może najzwyczajniej pozazdrościłam Beacie?*<sup>12</sup> [NKJP]

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on *najwidoczniej* and *najwyraźniej*, see also Grochowski et al. (2014: 53–56).

<sup>11</sup> Also noteworthy is the fact that the lexicalization of *najpierw* is more advanced than that of the other expressions discussed here. An average user of contemporary Polish is not aware of its relation to *najpierwej*, which represents an earlier stage in the development of the Polish language. The same applies to the particles *więc* and *raczej*, which are simplifications of the metatextual uses of *więcej* and *radszej / radniej*. For more about comparative and superlative forms in older Polish, see Greszczuk (1988) and Kleszczowa (2004).

<sup>12</sup> The meta-predicate *najzwyczajniej* may be used with the extension *w świecie*. The same applies to the meta-predicative unit *najzwyczajnie*, illustrated in (18) and *najspokojniej* exemplified in (19). The meta-predicative functions of *spokojnie / najspokojniej*, *zwyczajnie / najzwyczajniej* were addressed in Danielewiczowa (2012: 185–195, 195–207).

‘It is not true that I want to hide something. Maybe I **simply** envy Beata?’

- (18) Zgorzelczanie **najzwykłej** w świecie przeżywali kryzys formy. [NKJP]  
 ‘The residents of Zgorzelec were **quite simply** going through a crisis of being in bad shape.’
- (19) Joanna **najspokojniej** w świecie gotowała obiad. [NKJP]  
 ‘Joanna was cooking dinner **as if nothing had happened**.’
- (20) Całość zaś **najnormalniej** w świecie... wieje nudą. [NKJP]  
 ‘All of this is **simply** ... terribly boring.’
- (21) Wszelka zbieżność nazwisk oraz zdarzeń opisanych w niniejszym tekście jest **najzupelniej** przypadkowa i nie ma żadnego związku z rzeczywistością. [NKJP]  
 ‘Any similarities between the names and events described in this text are **completely** accidental and bear no relation to reality.’
- (22) Ich występy są zawsze szalonym widowiskiem, jako że Barnes potrafi zużyć podczas jednego koncertu trzy szafy ubrań – **najchętniej** jego dziewczyny – lub po prostu pojawić się na scenie nago. [NKJP]  
 ‘Their shows are always crazy spectacles, since Barnes can use during one concert three closets full of clothes – **preferably** those of his girlfriend – or simply appear on the stage naked.’

Superlative forms are likewise found in metacommentary which may be classified as a spontaneous, transparent metatext, as, e.g., in: *najogólniej* < *biorąc* > ‘generally <speaking>’, *najkrócej* < *mówiąc* > ‘<to put it> briefly / briefly <put>’, *najprościej* < *rzecz ujmując* > ‘<to put it> simply / simply <put>’, *najogólniej* < *przedstawiając sprawy* > ‘<speaking> in most general terms’, with the angle brackets indicating the optional component, which, admittedly, is often present, but is not indispensable (cf. Stępień 2014: 144–173). Let us take note, however, of the fact that in the examples referred to above, the superlative is not, as might seem, lexicalized. It performs its ordinary function with the exception that the relevant property in its maximum intensity refers to the act of speaking. The degree system is in such contexts preserved, as attested by equally appropriate uses such as *ogólnie* / *ogólniej biorąc* ‘generally / more generally speaking’, *krótco* / *krócej mówiąc* ‘to speak succinctly / more succinctly’, *prosto* / *prościej rzecz ujmując* ‘to put it simply / more simply’, *ogólnie* / *ogólniej mówiąc* ‘speaking generally / more generally’. Quite a different matter is that of the actual lexical unit whose form includes the marking of the superlative and which also represents a transparent metatext, namely with the unit *najlepsze* < *jest to* >, *że* ‘the best <thing is that>’. In this case, the element *najlepsze* ‘the best’ cannot be replaced with *dobre* ‘good’ or *lepsze* ‘better’:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Let us note that the forms *najważniejsze*, *że* and *najciekawsze*, *że* (functionally similar to *najlepsze*, *że*) are metatextual constructions that include ordinary superlatives which are in

- (23) *Dzieje się w Polsce, dzieje. Najlepsze / \*Lepsze / \*Dobre, że z dnia na dzień zarabiamy więcej – tak się kruszy złotówka.*  
 ‘Things are happening in Poland, they really are. The **best** / **\*better** / **\*good** thing is that we earn more and more day by day – in this way the zloty is crumbling.’

Another type of stable superlative forms, sometimes alternatively referred to as equative, is to be observed in polite formulae which are of a performative nature, e.g.: *najmocniej przepraszam* ‘I most sincerely apologise’ vs *\*mocno / \*mocniej przepraszam*; *najpokorniej / pokornie proszę, błagam* ‘I (most) humbly ask, beg’ vs *\*pokorniej proszę, błagam...*; *najuniżeniej / uniżenie kłaniam się, rączki całuję...* ‘I am your (most) humble servant’ vs *\*uniżeniej kłaniam się, rączki całuję...*; *najserdeczniej / serdecznie dziękuję, witam, pozdrawiam, zachęcam, życzę, gratuluje...* ‘I (most) sincerely thank, welcome, greet, encourage, wish, congratulate (you)...’ vs *\*serdeczniej dziękuję, witam, pozdrawiam, zachęcam, ściskam, zapraszam, całuję, życzę, gratuluje...*; *najuprzejmiej / uprzejmie proszę, witam, dziękuję...* ‘I (most) kindly ask, greet, thank, ...’ vs *\*uprzejmiej proszę, witam, dziękuję, ...*; *najgoręcej / gorąco dziękuję, wzywam, zapewniam, błagam, pragnę, ...* ‘I (most) sincerely thank, call, ensure, beg, desire, ...’ vs *\*goręcej dziękuję, wzywam, zapewniam, błagam, pragnę, ...*

When declaring the lexical independence of comparative and superlative expressions, it is essential to be cautious so as not to commit the sin of multiplying unnecessarily the number of existing linguistic entities. Let us focus on the comparative forms in the following sentences:

- (24) *Bogatsze kraje pomagają biednym.*  
 ‘The richer countries are helping the poorer ones.’
- (25) *Lepsi uczniowie dostaną się zapewne na studia.*  
 ‘Better achieving students will most probably get admitted to university.’
- (26) *Sprzedawca wyeksponował kształtniejsze pomidory, a ukrył mniejsze i mniej dojrzałe.*  
 ‘The shopkeeper displayed the regular-shaped tomatoes and hid the smaller and less ripe ones.’

As noted by Bogusławski (2010b: 47), it would be inappropriate to describe such forms in terms of lexical homonymy. What we are dealing with in this case is not the lexicalization of the comparative, but a regular usage of metonymy (in this instance a shortening metonymy),<sup>14</sup> which is common in natural language. Its effects include as well, as I see it, expressions referring to people such as *najmłodszy* ‘the youngest’ [pl.], *najstarszy* ‘the oldest’ [pl.],

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a standard relation to the comparative: *ważniejszy, że, ciekawszy, że* and the equative: *ważny, że, ciekawy, że*.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on the common use of metonymy, see Bogusławski (2021: 200–210).

*najzdolniejsi* ‘the smartest’ [pl.], *najwytrwalsi* ‘the most persevering’ [pl.], etc.<sup>15</sup>

It does not make sense either to regard as unrelated to the standard meanings of the superlative its negated forms in such combinations as: *nie najlepszy uczeń* ‘not the best pupil’, *nie najzdrowszy tryb życia* ‘not the healthiest lifestyle’, *nie najmiłszy sąsiad* ‘not the nicest neighbor’, *nie najpiękniejszy widok* ‘not the most beautiful view’, *nie najmądrzej odpowiadałaś* ‘you responded in not the smartest possible way’, *śpiewam nie najpiękniej* ‘I sing not particularly well’, *nie najwygodniej się tu siedzi* ‘sitting here is not the most comfortable’, etc. Such euphemistic uses have numerous attestations in the Polish language corpora, e.g.:

(27) *Do lokalu wszedł zamyślony Paweł. Prezentował się nie najlepiej z podkrążonymi oczami, nie ogolony, w pogniecionym ubraniu.* [NKJP]

‘Paweł, deep in his thoughts, entered the establishment. He did not look the best / too good with dark circles under his eyes, unshaven, and in crumpled clothes.’

(28) *Wiązał długi, złocisty krawat ojca – służył mu nie najgorzej podczas matury i przyniósł trochę szczęścia.*

‘He was tying his father’s long, golden tie – it was quite useful during the school-leaving exams and it brought him some luck.’ [NKJP]

We may infer from the sentence in (27) that the person being referred to looked worse rather than better, and from that in (28), on the contrary, that the tie served the speaker well. This, however, is a pragmatic effect which arises regularly in such contexts and which may be explained in terms of Grice’s conversational implicature.<sup>16</sup>

The superlative of an adverb or an adjective in its ordinary meaning is found also in combination with the meta-predicate *możliwie* ‘possibly’, alternating with the equative or the comparative, e.g. *zjawić się w pracy możliwie wcześnie* / *możliwie wcześniej niż zwykle* / *możliwie najwcześnie* ‘to possibly come to work early’ / ‘to possibly come to work earlier than usual’ / ‘to come to work as early as possible’; *spać możliwie krótko* / *możliwie krócej niż wczoraj* / *możliwie najkrócej* ‘to possibly sleep for a short time’ / ‘to sleep possibly little’ / ‘to possibly sleep less than yesterday’ / ‘to sleep possibly less than yesterday’ / ‘to sleep as little as possible’; *wspiąć się na drzewo możliwie wysokie* / *możliwie wyższe niż ta topola* / *możliwie najwyższe* ‘to possibly climb a tall tree’ / ‘to climb a tree that is possibly tall’ / ‘to climb a tree that is taller than this poplar’ / ‘to climb what is possibly the tallest

<sup>15</sup> A different view on this issue seems to be represented by Szupryczyńska (1980: 270), who in one of the footnotes in her article refers to Saloni and Tokarski’s comments on the “nominal” uses of the superlative in terms of polysemy.

<sup>16</sup> Other interesting examples of euphemistic uses of the comparative can be found in Janus (1995).

tree' / 'o climb a tree that is possibly the tallest'. It does not matter that from somebody's point of view this does not have to mean, respectively: to come quickly, to sleep for a short time or to climb up a tall tree, because what we are dealing with here are relative properties, although their highest possible value is expected, higher than that which is indicated, or simply other than that which would be unnoticeable.

### 3. Operational units in Bogusławski's approach

The constructions referred to above are conceptually very similar to the output of a certain interesting operation in which *jak* is a segmental marker, and whose domain only comprises, as opposed to expressions created by the addition of *możliwie*, superlative forms of adverbs and adjectives. This applies to structures such as *jak najszybciej* 'in the quickest possible way', *jak najlepiej* 'in the best possible way', *jak najdokładniej* 'in the most precise manner', *jak najweselsi* 'as joyful as possible', *jak najmiłsi* 'as nice as possible' in utterances of the kind illustrated in (29):

- (29) *Tomek był umówiony z Karoliną i chciał jak najszybciej dostać się do Tomaszowa.*  
[NKJP]  
'Tomek had a date with Karolina and he wanted to get to Tomaszów **as quickly as possible.**'

That the above-mentioned *jak* should not be functionally equated with *możliwie* is supported by numerous attestations in the NKJP, in which these elements co-occur, but do not result in a pleonasm, as in e.g.:

- (30) *Niech pan zbierze możliwie jak najwięcej ludzi, ściągnie, kogo się da, byle z bronią.*  
[NKJP]  
'Please get together as many people as possible, bring anyone you can get hold of, but with guns.'

The items *możliwie* and *jak*, referred to above, differ in terms of their linguistic status as well. While *możliwie* is a legitimate lexical unit, in my understanding a meta-predicative adverb, *jak* is merely a marker of the operation as defined by Bogusławski (see, e.g., 1978, 1987, 1994, 2010a).

When referring to this operation, Bogusławski meant a type of regular change which affects the category of expressions that may be described in general terms, and not merely by way of enumeration. The expressions constitute the domain of an operation which always creates a certain effect, either semantic or asemanic, e.g. purely syntactic or stylistic (cf., respectively *w*: *we* 'in', *z*: *ze* 'with', *od*: *ode* 'from', *przez*: *przeze* ... 'by' and *że*: *iż* 'that', *żeby*: *izby* '(in order) to', *aby*: *ażeby* '(in order) to'). These operations may,



though not necessarily, involve certain segmental exponents, namely strings which are not *contrastive syllabic segments* (CSS), i.e., such that their form lacks syllables bearing regular, non-corrective phrase stress, and, therefore, are not amenable to free juxtaposition. This is visible, for instance, in the case of *jak* (cf. *jak najDŁUżej* vs \**JAK najdłużej* vs \**najDŁUżej jak* ‘in the longest possible way’).<sup>17</sup> It should be added as well that the markers of the comparative and the superlative of adjectives and adverbs would most certainly be regarded by Bogusławski as segments which realize a type of suboperation. It is by way of suboperations that, as the author suggests, most inflectional phenomena are realized. According to this theory, a clear distinction is made between the lexicon, which comprises contrastive syllabic segments, and the totality of the operations, which are of a grammatical, rather than lexical nature. The output of Bogusławski’s operational grammar, as he himself notes, correspond roughly to the items in Hockett’s (1954) model of morphological description, that is the *items-and-process* model, as opposed to the *items-and-arrangement* model. It is also possible to find certain similarities between Bogusławski’s account and construction grammar. To observe the relation between the two theories, see Dobaczewski (2021).

The item *jak* is not, obviously, the only segmental exponent of the operation whose domain is composed of forms related to the category of degree. For instance, *coraz* <to> (not to be confused with *co* and *raz*) is yet another element that transforms the comparative of adjectives and adverbs into constructions such as *coraz jaśniej* ‘brighter and brighter’, *coraz dojrzały* ‘more and more mature’, *coraz to mądrzej* ‘more and more wisely’, *coraz to groźniej* ‘more and more dangerously’, etc. The classification of *coraz* as an adverb is a misunderstanding, see, e.g., Bańko (2000). Standard adverbs such as *wesoło* ‘joyfully’, *zgrabnie* ‘deftly’, *natrętnie* ‘intrusively’ are contrastive syllabic segments, while the expression *coraz* lacks this property. Noteworthy within this group of segmental exponents of the operation is the unstressed *co*, which participates in the operation of the comparative of adjectives creating phrases such as *co jaskrawsze (barwy)* ‘the more vivid (colors)’, *co błyskotliwsi (mówcy)* ‘the smarter (speakers)’, *co rozleglejsze widoki* ‘the wider views’, e.g.:

- (31) *W holu Kina Ochota umieszczono co większych i zamożniejszych wystawców.*  
 ‘In the foyer of the Ochota Cinema, the major, more affluent exhibitors were placed.’

A different account of *coraz* and *co*, illustrated in (31), is offered, for instance in Grochowski (2018b: 66) and Grochowski (2021). The author affords these

<sup>17</sup> In these examples the syllables that bear non-corrective stress have been marked with small caps.

expressions the status of lexical units of a meta-predicative nature. It is, however, difficult to accept this view given that neither *co* nor *coraz <to>* are corrective syllabic segments and that their order in relation to the words they select to the right remains unchanged. Thus, they meet the criteria of segmental exponents of the operation.

When discussing *co*, it should also be noted that this segment is used not only in conjunction with the comparative of an adjective, i.e., the part of speech noted by Grochowski. Co-occurrence of *co* with comparative adverbs is also acceptable, as in, e.g.:

- (32) *Margerita błyskawicznie ściągnęła rękawice, w panice rozglądając się po komnacie. „Magicienne Esthetique” wylądowało za kufrem ze sprzętem sportowym, a porzucane na ławce fotografie **co ładniej** zbudowanych zawodników z Boxing Society szybko zakryła mundurkiem.* [NKJP]

‘Margerita quickly took off her gloves, looking around the chamber in panic. “Magicienne Esthetique” ended up behind the chest with sports equipment, while the photographs of **the well-built** players from the Boxing Society which were scattered all over the bench she quickly covered with her uniform.’ [NKJP]

- (33) *Gniew go wzdął. Pragnął **co szybciej** cwałować do domu i nie widzieć żadnych królów.* [NKJP]

‘Anger took hold of him. He wished to gallop back home **as quickly as possible** so as not to see any kings.’ [NKJP]

While it is true that in the NKJP the attestations of the co-occurrence of *co* with comparative adverbs are scarce, this does not change the fact that adverbs also serve as the domain of the operation under discussion. Not all phenomena which occur in a given language are represented in its corpora. See, e.g., the following, fully acceptable forms: *co lepiej urządzone kuchnie* ‘the better decorated kitchens’, *co chętniej uczęszczane szlaki* ‘the more frequently visited trails’, *co precyzyjniej dobierane przykłady* ‘the more carefully selected examples’, *co głośniej krzyczący ideolodzy* ‘the louder ideologists’. The adverbs which represent the outputs of this operation tend to attract passive and active adjectival participles. It should be mentioned, too, that by contrast to the expressions referred to above, *co więcej* ‘what is more’ is an idiom classified as a lexical unit which belongs to metatext, as in e.g.:

- (34) *Galabija opinająca szerokie bary mędrca zdawała się pękać w szwach; **co więcej**, sięgała mu tylko do połowy łydek.* [NKJP]

‘The jellabiya clung to the wiseman’s broad shoulders and seemed to be bursting at the seams; **what is more**, it came down only to mid-calf.’

It would likewise be inappropriate to classify *co* as a preposition (cf. Żmigrodzki 2007–), only because the co-occurring phrases represent different grammatical cases, which, it should be underlined, are governed not

by *co*, but an appropriate verb, cf. *wybierać* ‘choose’ [who(m)? Acc.] *co lepsze tancerki* ‘the better dancers’, *odmówić* ‘refuse’ [who(m)? Dat.] *nawet co lepszym tancerkom* ‘the better dancers’, *zająć się* ‘take care of’ [who(m)? Instr.] *co lepszymi tancerkami* ‘the better dancers’. Highly problematic is the classification of the expression *im...*, *tym...* ‘the (more)..., the (more)...’, commonly described in Polish grammar books as a conjunction. This expression was not classified as a conjunction by Wajszczuk (1997). As seems clear, what we see here is an exponent of another operation, whose output includes adjectives and adverbs in the comparative, e.g., *im szybciej*, *tym lepiej* ‘the quicker, the better’, *im nas więcej*, *tym weselej* ‘the more of us, the merrier’, *im ciemniejszy*, *tym straszniejszy* ‘the darker, the more sinister’, etc. The equation of the exponents of the operation with contrastive syllabic segments, as well as the inclusion of the first in the class of lexemes found in traditional classifications is usually unsuccessful because these are not elements of the lexicon, but rather grammatical markers.

#### 4. Superlative forms under negation delimiting the scalar endpoint

In the final section of this article I take a closer look at the operation (which lacks the segmental exponent – such cases were also addressed within Bogusławski’s theory), whose domain includes adverbial superlative forms, and whose output includes constructions which serve to establish the minimum or maximum degree on the scale representing the size of the measured set. The output of this operation can be seen in the utterance shown in (6) in the introductory part of my discussion; other outputs have been bolded in the following examples excerpted from the NKJP:

- (35) *Będę miał dla niego czas **najwcześniej za dwa tygodnie***. [NKJP]  
 ‘I’ll find time for him **in two weeks’ time at the earliest**.’
- (36) ***Najpóźniej do dzisiejszego wieczora** dostarczone mają być materiały wybuchowe, którymi przewiduje się rozsadzenie kamienia*. [NKJP]  
 ‘The explosives planned for rock blasting are to be delivered **tonight at the latest**.’
- (37) *Składkę płaci się **najkrócej do 18 lat**, a **najdłużej do 25 lat***. [NKJP]  
 ‘The contributions are paid **for at least 18 years**, and **25 years at most**.’ [NKJP]
- (38) *Dozorców w bloku było chyba z pięciu, bo też **ciągnął się blok aż do szosy Możajskiej: najmniej dwadzieścia parę klatek schodowych***. [NKJP]  
 ‘There were, I think, as many as five caretakers in the block of flats, because it went all the way down to Możajska St., **at least twenty-something staircases**.’

- (39) *Żeby dostać sadzonkę drzewka, trzeba przynieść pięć kilogramów makulatury. Albo więcej. Jednak pamiętajmy, że jedna osoba może dostać **najwięcej pięć drzewek** (czyli że maksymalnie możemy zostać wynagrodzeni za 25 kilogramów papieru).* [NKJP]  
 ‘To get a tree sapling you have to bring in five kilogrammes of wastepaper. Or even more. Let us remember, however, that one person may get **five trees at most** (which means that we may be rewarded for bringing 25 kg of paper).’
- (40) [...] ***najrzadziej raz na każdą zmianę** dyżurny BWP miał obowiązek zmieniać pozycję.*  
 ‘The BWP guardian was obliged to change his position **at least once during every shift.**’ [NKJP]
- (41) *Nawożenie odbywa się **najczęściej dwa razy w roku** – wiosną i jesienią – mówi Krystyna Januszek.*  
 ‘Fertilisation takes place **not more frequently than twice a year** – in spring and autumn – says Krystyna Januszek.’ [NKJP]
- (42) [...] ***najbliższe osiedla mogłyby się znajdować najbliżej w promieniu 30 kilometrów.*** [NKJP]  
 ‘[...] the nearest estates could be located **within minimally a 30-kilometre radius.**’
- (43) *Ukulo się powiedzenie, że każda fotografia musi powstać **najdalej sto metrów od siedziby wydawnictwa.*** [NKJP]  
 ‘We would say that every photograph has to be taken **at the most a hundred metres away from the publisher’s office.**’
- (44) *W styczniu można ją (komórkę) było kupić **najtaniej za 3904 zł.*** [NKJP]  
 ‘In January it (a mobile phone) could be bought **for PLN 3,904 at the cheapest.**’
- (45) *W Polsce **najdrożej za pokój** w hotelu trzeba zapłacić w Krakowie – **średnio 103 euro.*** [NKJP]  
 ‘In Poland, hotel rooms are **the most expensive** in Kraków – **on average EUR 103** per night.’
- (46) *Talerzyk powinien być umieszczony **najwyżej 11, a najniżej 7 cm od końca ostrza grota.***<sup>18</sup> [NKJP]  
 ‘The little plate should be placed **at 11 cm at the highest, and at 7 cm at the lowest from the spearhead.**’

The above examples demonstrate that the adverbs used in them perform functions other than those performed by the appropriate elements of comparison, as evidenced e.g., by the juxtaposition of the contexts in (35)–(36) with the sentences in (47)–(48) and, similarly, (37) and (49):

<sup>18</sup> The idiomatic expression *najwyżej* shown in (13) has a different linguistic status.

- (47) *Ku zgorzeniu woźnych i niewyspanych kancelistów radca dworu zjawiał się w biurze **najwcześniej**, w porze nie licującej z jego wysoką rangą.* [NKJP]  
 ‘The counselor was always **the first** in the office, at a time unsuitable for his high rank, which shocked the janitors and sleepy clerks.’
- (48) *Okazuje się, że melancholik **najpóźniej** ze wszystkich zawiera małżeństwo, ponieważ jest niezdecydowany.* [NKJP]  
 ‘As it turns out, melancholics get married **the latest** because of their indecisiveness.’
- (49) *Pani jest **najkrócej** w załodze? Dlaczego zdecydowała się pani na tę pracę, a nie jakąś inną?* [NKJP]  
 ‘Are you **the most recent** member of the team? Why did you decide on this job, and not some other job?’
- (50) *Karolinę znalazłam **najdłużej**. W przedszkolu byliśmy nierozłączni od etapu krasnali do starszaków.* [NKJP]  
 ‘I knew Karolina **the longest**. In kindergarten we were inseparable, from the time we were ‘dwarves’ till the time we were big kids.’

Examples of use of the actual superlative, in contrast to the contexts shown in (35)–(46) and by analogy to (47)–(50), may of course be easily found in the NKJP.

The expressions *najwyżej*, *najmniej*, *najdalej*, *najpóźniej*, which perform an analogous function to that illustrated in (35)–(46), have already been considered by Grochowski (2008: 66). However, he classified them as lexemes in their own right, belonging to the class of meta-predicative operators. Yet, even the material shown above suffices to demonstrate that the problem is far greater and that its nature is, contrary to the view expounded by Grochowski, operational, that is grammatical, rather than lexical.

Let us take note of the fact that the effect illustrated in (6) and (35)–(46) can be achieved only with the superlative forms of adverbs which belong to a specific semantic class, which, as should be stressed, may be described in general terms and not by way of enumeration. Thus, the following examples cannot be included: *chytrze* ‘slyly’, *marudnie* ‘grumpily’ or *smutno* ‘sadly’, while the following items, in addition to the items referred to above, are appropriate: *głęboko* ‘deeply’, *płytko* ‘shallowly’, *grubo* ‘thickly’, *cienko* ‘thinly’ or *głośno* ‘loudly’. What the elements acting as the domain of the operation discussed here have in common is their reducibility to quantifying expressions. It should be possible for the meaning communicated by the relative adverbs subject to the above operation to be made precise by way of specific numbers, as in, e.g.: *jedzie szybko, tzn. 200 km/h* ‘he is driving fast, i.e., at 200 km/h’; *mieszka wysoko, to jest na jedenastym piętrze* ‘he lives on a top floor, i.e., on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor’; *zeszli głęboko:100 metrów poniżej poziomu morza* ‘they descended deeper: 100 meters below sea

level'; *potrwa to długo, mianowicie osiem tygodni* 'this will last a long time, namely eight weeks'; *wrócę późno, bo po 12.00 w nocy* 'I will be back late, that is after midnight'; *zrobiło się bardzo głośno, tak do 150 decybeli* 'it got very loud, up to 150 decibels'. All and only such adverbs (marked as *Ak*: see the formula below) may participate in this operation. Constructions which involve such adverbs will be perfectly acceptable, even if they are scarcely attested, or even if their attestations are not found in the Polish language corpora, e.g.:

- (51) *Wiem, że zarabiają tam najmarniej / najskromniej sześć tysięcy.* [NKJP]  
'I know that the money they make there is **in the region of at least six thousand.**'
- (52) *Cementu kładź najgrubiej 4 centymetry.* [NKJP]  
'Put **4 cm of cement at the thickest.**'
- (53) *Ciasto należy rozwałkować najcieniej na 5 milimetrów.* [NKJP]  
'You should roll out the dough **as thin as 5 mm.**'
- (54) *Hałas da się wytrzymać najgłośniej do 100 decybeli.* [NKJP]  
'One can bear the noise of **up to 100 decibels.**'
- (55) *Wyniki będą podawane najdokładniej do drugiego miejsca po przecinku.*  
'The results will be **rounded up to the second decimal place.**' [NKJP]
- (56) *Muzeum można w tym samym czasie zwiedzać najliczniej w dwie trzydziestoposobowe klasy.*  
'**Maximally two groups of 30 pupils** can be present at the museum at the same time.'

The significance of the operation under scrutiny, that is establishing the *a quo* or *ad quem* limits, consists in the negation of an appropriate comparative component, as in, e.g. *najpóźniej w sobotę – nie później niż w sobotę* 'on Saturday at the latest' – 'not later than on Saturday'; *najrzadziej raz w tygodniu – nie rzadziej niż raz w tygodniu* 'at least once a week' – 'not less frequently than once a week'; *najpłycej na półtora metra – nie płycej niż na półtora metra* 'at least one and a half metres deep' – 'not less than one and a half metres deep'; *najwięziej na dwa palce – nie więcej niż na dwa palce* 'at least two fingers' width' – 'not less than two fingers' width', etc. A difference exists between various *a quo* expressions (covered roughly by *nie mniej niż* 'not less than'), on the one hand, and *ad quem* expressions (generally through the use of *nie więcej niż* 'not more than'), on the other, as noted by Bogusławski (2010b: 60). The former signal the occurrence of a certain state of affairs, while the latter serve to move out of sight that which does not exist. This difference, however, in my view, is of a pragmatic nature.

Thus, the operation being considered here may be semantically generalized and represented as follows:<sup>19</sup>

$$\frac{Ak}{\text{superlativus } Ak+ wk} \text{ 'nie ---- ej, niż } wk'$$

where *Ak* signifies an adverb which belongs to the class described above, and *wk* stands for an expression which specifies the upper or the lower limit of a given set. Let us note, too, that *wk* depends on the dimensions of the scale associated with a given verb which co-occurs with the superlative form, so, in (51)–(56), we see *zarabiać sześć tysięcy* ‘to earn six thousand’; *kłaść cztery centymetry cementu* ‘to put a four-centimetre layer of cement’; *rozwałkować na pięć milimetrów* ‘to roll out (dough) to a thickness of five millimetres’; *wytrzymać do 100 decybeli* ‘to bear (noise) up to 100 decibels’; *wyniki podawać do drugiego miejsca po przecinku* ‘to present results rounded up to the second decimal place’; *zwiedzać w dwie klasy* ‘to visit (the place) in two groups of pupils’.

With these observations in mind, let us remember that the expression *najwyżej do połowy* ‘at most up to a half’ in (57) is in no way, contrary to what might seem to be the case, the output of the operation at issue here. This results from the fact that the meaning of the expression *najwyżej do połowy* may not be equated with the gloss “not higher than up to a half”:

- (57) *Plecak Stryckiego stał na skraju jego pokoju, wsparty o krawędź tapczanu, spakowany najwyżej do połowy. ≠ Plecak Stryckiego stał na skraju jego pokoju, wsparty o krawędź tapczanu, spakowany nie wyżej niż do połowy.*

‘Strycki’s rucksack was standing on the side of his room, leaning against the couch, packed at most half full / up to a half.’ ≠ ‘Strycki’s rucksack was standing on the side of his room, leaning against the couch, packed not higher than up to a half.’

The item *najwyżej* used in this example is an actual meta-predicative operator which is also found in the variant *co najwyżej*, which – however lexically independent – is essential to the operation in question. As can be seen, in the constructions analyzed here this unit may, similarly to *maksymalnie* ‘at the highest possible level’, occupy the position of most adverbs indicating the upper limit of a given scale, e.g.: *najczęściej trzy razy do roku* – <co> *najwyżej trzy razy do roku* ‘most frequently three times a year’ – ‘at most three times a year’; *najdłużej do południa* – <co> *najwyżej do południa* ‘no longer than noon’ – ‘at most until noon’; *najdalej do czwartego pokolenia* – <co> *najwyżej do czwartego pokolenia* ‘as far as the fourth generation / furthest up to the fourth generation’ – ‘at most up to the fourth generation’; *najdokładniej*

<sup>19</sup> This system of describing operational units was adopted in one of the appendices to the dictionary survey in Bogusławski and Danielewiczowa (2005).



*do dwóch miejsc po przecinku* – <co> *najwyżej do dwóch miejsc po przecinku* ‘most precisely (rounded up) up to the second decimal place’ – ‘at most (rounded up) to the second decimal place’. This is a kind of a lexical catch-all term, superseding more precise meanings which result from the operation we are considering here.<sup>20</sup> It is also noteworthy that Polish does not have an analogous particle <co> *najniżej* ‘the least’, which could be used to refer to the lower limit of a given scale. This function is performed by *minimalnie* ‘at the lowest possible level’ or <co> *najmniej* ‘at least’, e.g.: *najrzadziej dwa razy do roku* – <co> *najmniej dwa razy do roku* ‘at the minimum twice a year’ – ‘at least twice a year’); *najcieniej na dwa centymetry* – <co> *najmniej na dwa centymetry* ‘two centimeters at the thinnest’ – ‘at least two centimeters’; *najkrócej pięć miesięcy* – <co> *najmniej pięć miesięcy* ‘five months at the shortest’ – ‘at least five months’. The meta-predicates <co> *najwyżej* ‘at most’ and <co> *najmniej* ‘at least’ should not be equated with appropriate outputs of the operation which do not co-occur with *co*, e.g. \**co najrzadziej raz do roku*, \**co najpóźniej do końca miesiąca*, \**co najdalej w kwietniu*, etc.

The different linguistic status of the operators <co> *najwyżej* and <co> *najmniej* when juxtaposed with that of the comparable operation delimiting the scalar endpoint leads to the hypothesis that this operation is an effect of the secondary grammaticalization of the superlative which, obviously, performs a function that differs from its status in the degree system.<sup>21</sup> It cannot be ruled out that the meanings residing in the lexicalized forms <co> *najwyżej* and <co> *najmniej* provided the base form for superlative forms of other adverbs with similar properties, that is those paraphrasable as objectivized quantifiers. This diachronic hypothesis would obviously require verification. The hypothesis, however, seems to be corroborated by the fact that for Polish speakers the uses found in the constructions which are of interest to us here, involving forms which are less common in the operation under discussion, but which are nevertheless within its domain, will be fully comprehensible, as in, e.g., *dobrze* ‘well/satisfactorily’ (*napisał dobrze, to jest na czwórkę* ‘he did well, that is he got a B (for his writing)’); *źle* ‘badly/poorly’ (*uplasował się źle, bo dopiero na 20 miejscu* ‘he was ranked poorly, he came

<sup>20</sup> It should also be briefly noted that <co> *najwyżej* commented on in this part of the article and *najwyżej* shown in (56) are two unrelated lexical units which differ not only semantically, but also formally. The latter form is not used with the extension *co*.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term *grammaticalization* in agreement with the classic definition proposed by Kuryłowicz (1936, 1965: 52), to refer to a situation in which the scope of a given signifier is extended and in which it changes from a lexical to a grammatical unit or from being less grammatical to more grammatical. A similar view, inspired by Kuryłowicz’s work, is presented by Campbell and Janda (2001: 95), Heine (2003: 581) and Joseph (2003: 472). In other words, it is a process by way of which new grammatical categories are being formed (cf. Traugott and Trousdale (2013: 32).

only 20<sup>th</sup>’); *slabo* ‘poorly/loosely’ (*zawiązał buty słabo, tylko na jeden węzeł* ‘he laced his shoes loosely, he tied a single knot only’). Compare:

- (58) *Egzamin ze statystyki uda mu się zdać najlepiej na dostateczny.* [NKJP]  
 ‘He will manage to get a **pass at best** for his exam in statistics.’
- (59) *Można mieć pewność, że najgorzej na dziesiątej pozycji uplasuje się nasz zawodnik.* [NKJP]  
 ‘We may be sure that our competitor will be placed **no worse than in the tenth position.**’
- (60) *Lina musi być zawiązana najslabiej potrójnym węzłem.* [NKJP]  
 ‘The rope must be tied **with a triple knot at least.**’

To conclude the discussion about negation delimiting the scalar endpoint, let us note that it is semantically derived from the ordinary meaning of the superlative in the degree system. To put it in broader terms, the comparative indicates that in a given set there are no such elements which would be assigned a value exceeding that indicated, although – as highlighted in Section 1 – the maximum, or, accordingly, the minimum value, may correspond to more than one element.

## Conclusion

Comparisons of adjectives and adverbs in Polish, despite certain limitations and semantic complications, are of an inflectional nature. In this paper, I have argued that the linguistic status of the superlative forms which do not represent an appropriate element in the degree system, and which were given special consideration by Grochowski, may differ. Firstly, the pragmatic effects should not be equated with those that are strictly semantic. The former include *i.a.* metonymic shortcuts such as *najubożsi* ‘the poorest’ [pl.], *najzdolniejsi* ‘the smartest’ [pl.] or implicatures such as *nie najlepiej zdany egzamin* → *slabo zdany egzamin* ‘an exam which is not too well written’ → ‘a poorly written exam’, *on spisuje się nie najgorzej* → *on spisuje się całkiem dobrze* ‘he is doing not so badly’ → ‘he is doing quite well’. Secondly, one needs to distinguish, on the one hand, lexemes having the form of the superlative, (*najoczywiściej, najpierw, najspokojniej*), idioms (<co> *najmniej*, <co> *najwyżej*), and fixed performative formulae (*najserdeczniej pozdrawiam, najgoręcej zachęcam*) including superlative forms, and, on the other hand, operational units in the sense conceived by Bogusławski, which are of a grammatical, rather than lexical nature. The domain of the operation of such units comprises classes of expressions which may be described in general terms and not through the enumeration of their individual elements. The

operational output also has a single generalized meaning. Several such units, in the case of which the domain of the operation comprises comparative or superlative forms, have been discussed in this article. Adverbial forms of the superlative constitute the domain of the operation with the exponent *jak* (*jak najmocniej*, *jak najcieniej*, *jak najuczciwiej* ‘most sincerely’, ‘most thinly’, ‘most honestly’, etc.), as well as the operation delimiting the scalar endpoint, deprived of the segmental exponent, whose output comprises negated comparative constructions. The latter of the two operations was described in detail in the final section of the article. Careful examination of linguistic data shows that it is essential to be cautious when identifying lexical homonymy. Formal equivalence, which is a defining feature of this semantic relation, on closer inspection oftentimes turns out to be misleading. Such is the case, for instance, with the actual superlative and the forms which have become lexicalized or which have become subject to secondary grammaticalization.

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