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## Inflection vs. derivation: How split is Latvian morphology?<sup>1</sup>

*"But if we do not understand how the systems themselves work, how can we find out whether their workings conform to our putative general claims?" (ARONOFF 1994: 166)*

### Abstract

This article investigates the proposed distinction between inflectional and derivational morphology in Latvian, concluding that the division is not valid for this language. Most of the morphological processes surveyed here cannot be arranged on a continuum between typical inflection and typical derivation, and any border that one might draw would be arbitrary. This can be interpreted as a characteristic feature of agglutinative languages. Further parameters showing that Latvian morphology is split between the fusional and the agglutinative type are also discussed.

### 1. Introduction

The term "split morphology" has been used by linguists with two different meanings. To my knowledge, it was first coined by STEPHEN ANDERSON (1982) to express the claim that morphological theory must distinguish between morphological processes operating in the lexicon and those which are connected to syntactic rules (cf. also PERLMUTTER 1988). Essentially, this is a way to incorporate the traditional distinction between derivation and inflection into a formal theory of grammar. Recently, FRANS PLANK (1999) has used the same term to describe the fact that parts of a language's morphology can be of a fusional type, while other parts meet criteria that characterize agglutination. In this paper, I will deal with "split morphology" in both senses. The majority is devoted to the question of how inflectional and derivational processes may be distinguished in Latvian. In section 5, I will deal with the characteristics of fusional and agglutinative morphology that are found in Latvian. Furthermore, I will show that the two divisions – the two readings of "split morphology" – are related. The distinction between inflection and derivation is not the same and, especially, it is not of equal importance in languages of different types. This fact is probably common knowledge in some parts of the linguistic world (cf. PERCOV 1996: 42; PLUNGIAN 1994), but it has been largely ignored in others.

Basically, the distinction between inflection and derivation is lexicological, as it is concerned with what forms (as part of concrete utterances) belong to which lexeme, i.e., abstract lexical unit. Inflectional processes create stems and wordforms associated with one lexeme, while the output of derivational processes belongs to a different lexeme than the input. Now

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the notion of lexeme and the division between inflectional and derivational processes are mutually dependent and cannot be used to define one another; otherwise the definitions would be circular. For this reason, among others, linguists started to search for criteria that would allow classifying a given process as inflectional or derivational, without presupposing a delimitation of lexemes. At the same time it has been questioned whether dividing morphological processes into those inflectional and those derivational was at all important for the grammatical analysis, and if so, what the exact nature of the division was and how it should be handled. The subject has been much debated in the 1980s and 1990s in several fields of linguistics (cf. BEARD 1998; BOOIJ 1998; BYBEE 1985; DRESSLER 1989; PERCOV 1996; PLANK 1994; STUMP 1998; WURZEL 1984: 40–51). Despite some fundamental challenges and alternative views, the majority of linguists still seem to agree that the division is useful and should be kept. Among typologists, further points of consent apparently are:

- (i) The distinction is gradual and not categorical, that is, a given process may be "more" or "less" inflectional/derivational; this view may involve the notion of prototypicality (BAUER 1988: 86 f.; DRESSLER 1989; PERCOV 1996).
- (ii) The division is language specific, i.e., what is (more) inflectional in one language may be (more) derivational in another; there are however categories which are crosslinguistically more likely to be expressed by inflection than others (see esp. BYBEE 1985).
- (iii) The difference between inflection and derivation can be described by a number of parameters with opposite values, for example productivity, regular meaning, obligatoriness. To my knowledge, the most extensive list of such parameters (namely, 28) has been given by PLANK (1994). Each single parameter may also be disregarded in some languages, but in sum, they will define inflection and derivation as opposing end points of a scale (cf. also PERCOV 1996, who gives counterexamples for almost all parameters).

In my eyes, it is an important question whether all these assumptions should hold universally or not. Some linguists have discussed parameters distinguishing inflection and derivation for a single language (see e.g. BASSARAK 1985 for a thorough investigation of Turkish verb forms). In most of the discussion, however, a variety of languages is taken into consideration, and it is assumed that the same parameters will be valid for the inflection/derivation distinction in any language.

I am skeptical of this assumption. A list of possible parameters as given by PLANK (1994) is useful for language comparison in providing some framework for the discussion (to ensure we are talking about similar phenomena in languages of different types). But the validity and relative importance of the parameters is dependent on the structural properties of the individual language and will differ for languages of different types. Also, the "poles" of the continuum (if there is a continuum), or the typical cases of inflection and derivation, should be determined on language specific grounds.

In this paper, I will therefore begin by singling out these typical cases in Latvian; this will be done without much justification, though tacitly assuming some of the recurrent arguments in the linguistic discussion. From these typical cases, I will derive the parameters that are of importance for Latvian morphology. In section 3, several processes that seem to be neither typical inflection nor derivation will be surveyed, and the parameters elaborated in section 2 will be used to determine their position relative to the typical instances of inflection and derivation. After having tired the reader with a lot of details, I will sum up my con-

clusions in section 4. My major claim will be that the division into inflectional and derivational processes is not relevant for Latvian morphology and syntax. We can neither draw a border line that divides the two areas in a non-arbitrary way, nor does it make sense to arrange all morphological processes on a continuum between typical inflection and typical derivation. The second claim, that all this has to do with morphological typology and the mixed fusional-agglutinative nature of Latvian, will be explained rather sketchily in section 5, drawing on some ideas expressed by VLADIMÍR SKALIČKA (SKALIČKA 1979 [1966]).

## 2. Typical instances of inflection and derivation

### 2.1. Basic concepts

To start, some explanations of my terminology as well as some basic facts about the make up of Latvian words will be necessary. I will consider here only the major parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. All general claims should be read as referring to words of these classes only (which make up the major part of the lexicon).

A basic distinction is that between the **lexeme**, an abstract unit associated with a meaning and a set of potential forms, and the **wordform**, a word as it appears in spoken and written text, realizing a lexeme. Wordforms consist of a **stem** and an **ending**. The ending is usually the last segmentable part (the last suffix) of a wordform (exceptions are found in forms of reflexive verbs, see section 3.3). In some instances, I will assume zero-endings (2SG and 3rd person present of some verbs, adverbial ending after comparative suffix). A stem may be morphologically simple or complex. A simple stem consists of the root only, a complex stem contains the root plus one or several suffixes, and/or a prefix, or may involve more than one root. For the present purpose, only suffixes will be of importance. Examples:

simple stem + ending:	<i>aktier-is</i> 'actor, nom.sg.'; <i>las-u</i> 'read, 1SG, present tense'
complex stem + ending:	<i>dziedā-tāj-s</i> 'singer' (root + suffix ('agent') + nom.sg [m])
	<i>ap-kaun-o-j-oš-a</i> 'shameful'(see ex. (3))
	1 2 3 4 5 6
	1 prefix 2 root ('shame') 3 suffix (verbalizer)
	4 glide 5 suffix (present participle) 6 ending (nom.sg.f)

I will use the term **suffix** as a cover term for all non-lexical morphemes that follow the root; hence, endings are suffixes, too. Suffixes which are not endings will be called **stem-deriving** suffixes, as they attach to a stem (simple or complex) and create another stem (complex).

In this paper, I follow the common usage of citing verbs with their infinitive form, nouns and adjectives by their nominative singular forms. To facilitate the recognition of the part of speech, I will use the following conventions: the citation form of verbs will not be segmented, for example *vilkt* 'to pull' (the final *-t* marks the infinitive); for nouns, I will divide the stem and the nominative singular ending, e.g. *gald-s* 'table', *galv-a* 'head', and for adjectives, I will give both masculine and feminine singular endings of the citation form, for example *lab-s, -a* 'good'.

The traditional part of speech labels **noun**, **verb**, and **adjective** will be used solely with reference to **lexical categories**, that is, classes of lexemes (not of wordforms). The categorization is based on inherent properties of the lexemes and not on the syntactic behavior of their wordforms. Therefore, a given wordform is "verbal", as long as it is understood as belonging to a lexeme of the category verb, regardless of its syntactic function and morphological marking (in other words: participles aren't adjectives). The term **syntactic category**, on the other hand, will be used in a much narrower sense than usual. Here, it is wordforms that are categorized, based on syntactic criteria such as distribution, agreement, and government. For example, the English wordforms *sings*, *sung*, *singing* belong to three different syntactic categories in my terminology. An example of a syntactic category in Latvian (as well as in English) is "finite verb".

Besides lexemes and wordforms, stems may also be classified: based on the range of endings which may attach to it, each stem can be assigned to a **stem category**. Roughly, there are five stem categories in Latvian. They are associated with the lexical categories and named after these: nouns have stems of category N which take case+number endings, adjectives have stems of category A which take two sets of endings expressing case+number+gender plus an adverbial ending. Verbs have several stems. Three of them are exclusively verbal and do not (or not necessarily) contain a stem-deriving suffix; these are traditionally called present, past and infinitive stem. I will also refer to them as V1, V2, and V3, respectively, or as first, second and third stem, to avoid confusion of the "infinitive stem" and the "infinitive" as a form. In addition, verbs have derived stems of type A which turn up in the participles (see section 3.2).

## 2.2. Setting the poles

Processes which are undisputedly inflectional in Latvian are: (i) case and number inflection of nouns, (ii) case, number, gender inflection of adjectives, (iii) person inflection in verbs. Example paradigms:

### Noun inflection: case and number *gald-s* 'table'

	Class 1, m. a-decl.	
	singular	plural
Nominative	<i>gald-s</i>	<i>gald-i</i>
Genitive	<i>gald-a</i>	<i>gald-u</i>
Dative	<i>gald-am</i>	<i>gald-iem</i>
Accusative	<i>gald-u</i>	<i>gald-us</i>
Locative	<i>gald-ā</i>	<i>gald-os</i>

### Adjective inflection: case, gender and number *lab-s, -a* 'good'

	masculine		feminine	
	singular	plural	singular	plural
	<i>lab-s</i>	<i>lab-i</i>	<i>lab-a</i>	<i>lab-as</i>
	<i>lab-a</i>	<i>lab-u</i>	<i>lab-as</i>	<i>lab-u</i>
	<i>lab-am</i>	<i>lab-iem</i>	<i>lab-ai</i>	<i>lab-ām</i>
	<i>lab-u</i>	<i>lab-us</i>	<i>lab-u</i>	<i>lab-as</i>
	<i>lab-ā</i>	<i>lab-os</i>	<i>lab-ā</i>	<i>lab-ās</i>

Note: There are 6 different declension classes for nouns (but only one for adjectives). The adjective paradigm given here is also called the indefinite paradigm. For the corresponding definite forms, see section 3.3.

Verb inflection: person and tense

vilkt 'to pull, draw'

	present tense	past tense	future tense
1sg pl	velk-u velk-am	vilk-u vilk-ām	vilk-š-u vilk-s-im
2sg pl	velc velk-at	vilk-i vilk-āt	vilk-s-i vilk-s-iet
3	velk	vilk-a	vilk-s

skatīt 'to look at'

	present tense	past tense	future tense
1sg pl	skat-u skat-ām	skatīj-u skatīj-ām	skatī-š-u skatī-s-im
2sg pl	skat-i skat-āt	skatīj-i skatīj-āt	skatī-s-i skatī-s-iet
3	skat-a	skatīj-a	skatī-s

It is less obvious what the most typical cases of derivation are. I chose the following three, one for each part of speech:

- (i) Derivation of nouns by the suffix *-ib-*: *bērn-s* 'child' > *bērn-ib-a* 'childhood'; *person-a* 'person' > *person-ib-a* 'personality'; *bagāt-s,-a* 'rich' > *bagāt-ib-a* 'riches, wealth'; *vadū* (first stem: *vad-*) 'to lead, direct' > *vad-ib-a* 'leadership, guidance'.
- (ii) Derivation of adjectives by the suffix *-ig-*: *draug-s* 'friend' > *draudz-ig-s,-a* 'friendly'; *person-a* 'person' > *person-ig-s,-a* 'personal'; *apaļ-š,-a* 'round' > *apaļ-ig-s,-a* 'roundish'; *smaidīt* 'to smile' > *smaid-ig-s,-a* 'smiling'; *redzēt* 'to see' > *redz-ig-s,-a* 'sharp-eyed'.
- (iii) Derivation of causative verbs by the suffix *-inā<sup>2</sup>-*: *augt* 'to grow (itr.)' > *audz-inā-t* 'to educate'; *raudāt* 'to weep, cry' > *raud-inā-t* 'to move to tear'; *glud-s,-a* 'smooth' > *glud-inā-t* 'to iron, to press'; *god-s* 'honour' > *god-inā-t* 'to do homage'.

There are quite a lot of such derivational suffixes in Latvian, especially for the derivation of nouns. There is also a subsystem of word formation for international words of Latin or Greek origin which I will not consider in this paper (cf. METUZĀLE-KANGERE 1985).

## 2.3. Deriving parameters

By comparing these typical cases of inflection and derivation, we can conclude parameters which may characterize the opposition between the two spheres in Latvian.

First, we can consider the **output** of the processes:

- (1) The typical inflectional processes create **wordforms**, while the derivational processes cited create **stems**.
- (2) The wordforms created by the typical inflectional processes come in sets. The forms and the endings that define them stand in opposition to other forms and endings; therefore, the processes can be called "**paradigm-creating**". The stems created by derivational processes are not in paradigmatic opposition to other stems.

<sup>2</sup> There is evidence for splitting this suffix up into *-in-* (causative) + *-ā-* (stem building element, not in the present stem); for simplicity, I follow the Latvian tradition and treat it as a single suffix.



The input of a morphological process is less easy to determine; for all examples so far, it seems to be stems (rather than roots or lexemes or wordforms).

The next parameters concern **categories**. It is often said that inflectional processes never "change the category" of a word, while derivational sometimes do. To make sense of such a statement, we have to state more precisely what is meant by "category", and what is the standard of comparison for claiming a "change". The part of speech or lexical category is of limited use here; inflectional processes by definition create wordforms belonging to one and the same lexeme, so they cannot alter the lexical category and it would be redundant to state that. It is also not clear to me whether stems alone can be assigned to a part of speech, which would be a prerequisite for judging a change when a suffix is added. With the prerequisites laid out above, the following statements hold:

- (3) Typical derivational suffixes determine the **stem category** of the stem they derive. Inflectional suffixes attach only to a stem that belongs to a certain category, while a typical derivational suffix attaches to stems of various categories.
- (4) The **syntactic category** (e.g. "finite verb") is determined by the ending of a wordform. Only wordforms belong to a syntactic category: neither stems nor lexemes do. Therefore, inflectional endings "create" rather than "change" the syntactic category. Derivational processes that are stem-deriving can influence the syntactic category only indirectly, by determining the stem category.

In addition, we may regard the semantic category, such as, for example, object, quality, action, state:

- (5) The **semantic category** of a word is determined by the stem. Within a derived stem, typical derivational suffixes determine the semantic category – for example, while *draug-s* 'friend' denotes a person, *draudz-ig-s* 'friendly' refers to a manner or quality. A typical inflectional ending does not change the semantic category of the stem.

To distinguish inflectional from derivational processes reference is often made to **grammaticality**. But this is either a very vague notion or it is a complex that has to be split up into several independent, though probably related, parameters, some of which are themselves rather vague, e.g. "abstractness". There is also a danger of circularity (a category is grammatical if it is expressed by inflection, and inflectional categories are grammatical). The notion of "obligatoriness", which can be considered an important part of "grammaticality", lacks precision, too (cf. MASLOVA 1994; PERCOV 1996).

In Latvian, we can avoid these notions which are vague and difficult to handle because there is one which is unambiguous and easy to apply:

- (6) The categories case, number, gender and person, which are expressed by the inflectional processes, are all subject to **agreement**; i.e., they are either agreement categories in the sense of ANDERSON (see e.g. ANDERSON 1985; ANDERSON 1988a), as gender in adjectives, person in verbs; or they have to be marked on several elements of the phrase, as case and number in nouns, adjectives and determiners.

Finally, **the form:meaning relationship** can be taken into consideration; here, it is interesting to note differences between nominal and verbal inflection.

- (7) In nouns and adjectives, inflectional suffixes (endings) are **cumulative**, i.e., they express more than one category simultaneously (case+number, case+gender+number).  
In verbs, this is not always so: segmentable parts, such as the personal endings *-u*, *-i*, etc. and the future suffix *-s-* have only one meaning<sup>3</sup>; but within the paradigms of present tense, there are also unsegmentable forms, and here tense and person are marked cumulatively in one form (e.g. *velc* 'pull:prs:2.sg' against *velk* 'pull:prs:3').
- (8) Endings as well as wordforms may have **homonyms**, e.g. within noun inflection, *-u* denotes 'accusative singular' and 'genitive plural'; the first person verb form *augu* of the verb *augt* 'to grow' is the same in present tense and past tense. In many verbs, the 2.SG and 3 in present tense are homonyms, having zero ending, e.g. *strādā* of *strādāt* 'to work'. In noun inflection, there is also considerable **synonymy** of endings, due to declensional classes (thus, 'dative singular' has the morphs *-am*, *-im*, *-um*, *-ai*, *-ei*, *-ij*). In verbal inflection, synonymy of endings is limited to the present tense; for example, depending on conjugation class, the 2.SG can be marked by zero, the suffix *-i* and/or stem alternation. There are no declensional classes and therefore no synonyms in adjective declension.

Summing up, typical inflectional processes in Latvian can be defined as processes creating wordforms that stand in strict paradigmatic opposition to other forms, belong to a syntactic category and express grammatical categories involved in agreement. Within inflectional paradigms, homonymy and synonymy is possible. Nominal inflectional suffixes are cumulative, verbal are not. Typical derivational processes, on the other hand, create stems, for which they determine both stem category and semantic category. They are neither paradigm-creating nor subject to agreement. Typical derivational suffixes attach to different kinds of stems, don't fuse with other morphs, and have neither synonyms nor homonyms.

There are other features that the reader may have felt lacking so far, for example, means of expression, productivity and regularity of meaning. In my eyes, these do not distinguish inflection and derivation in Latvian. The typical means of expression in both cases is suffixation, and suffixes can have the same kind of shape in both inflection and derivation, e.g. V, C, VC, CV (the most popular suffix shape in Latvian is probably VC). Also, typical derivational processes are highly productive in Latvian, and the meaning is quite regular. For inflectional processes, even if they are called "fully productive", there may be exceptions, e.g. there are impersonal verbs that do not inflect for person, and some words are reasonably called nouns although they do not inflect at all (but, for example, have inherent gender). There are probably differences in degree, but this does not make productivity and regularity reliable criteria. They will however be considered in the subsequent discussion.

<sup>3</sup> While in some languages it is justified to see the meaning of 'I' and 'we' as containing two categories, person and number, this is not the case in Latvian (cf. NĀU 1998: 29). What distinguishes the personal pronouns as well as the personal endings in verbs is a single category, namely person, which has five exponents (1. SG, 2. SG, 3, 1. PL, 2. PL).

### 3. Between the poles? Not so typical instances

#### 3.1. Overview

I will now turn to morphological processes that I suspect to be neither typical inflection nor derivation. These comprise all remaining processes traditionally called inflectional as well as some of the processes commonly called derivational. Most of them belong to verbal morphology, which is especially rich in Latvian. The following tables give an overview of the forms that will be discussed in the following subsections. The third column gives the traditional assignment of the process, "F" standing for inflection, and "D" for derivation. The rightmost column names the output (stem or form).

#### Nouns (*bērn-s* 'child'):

Name	Example	Trad.	Output
Diminutive	<i>bērn-iņš</i>	D	stem
Vocative	<i>bērn</i>	F	form

#### Adjectives (*lab-s* 'good')

Comparative	<i>lab-āk-s, -a</i>	F	stem
Adverbial form	<i>lab-i</i>	D	form
Definite paradigm	<i>lab-ai-s, lab-ā</i>	F	?

#### Verbal morphology (ex. *skatīt* 'to look at', where possible; stems: V1: *skat-*, V2 = V3: *skatī(j)-*)

Past active participle	<i>skatīj-is, -usi</i>	F	stem (?)
Past passive participle	<i>skatī-t-s, -a</i>	F	stem
Present active participle	<i>augt</i> 'to grow' > <i>aug-oš-s, -a</i>	F	stem
Present passive participle	<i>skat-ām-s, -a</i>	F	stem
Debitive	<i>jā-skat-a</i>	F	form
Evidential	<i>skat-ot</i>	F	form
Short form	<i>skat</i> 'look!'	D	form
Converb1 (- <i>ot</i> )	<i>skat-ot</i>	F	form
Converb2 (- <i>dam-s</i> )	<i>skatī-dam-s, -a, -i, -as</i>	F	form (?)
Converb3 (- <i>am, -ām</i> )	<i>skat-ām</i>	F	form
Adverbial form (- <i>us</i> )	<i>vilkt</i> 'to pull' > <i>vilkt-us</i>	D	form
Infinitive	<i>skatī-t</i>	F	form
Verbal noun (- <i>šan-a</i> )	<i>skatī-šan-a</i>	D	stem
Actor (- <i>tāj-s, -ēj-s</i> )	<i>skatī-tāj-s</i> 'spectator'	D	stem
Other deverbal nouns	<i>skatīj-um-s</i> 'aspect'; <i>skat-ien-s</i> '(a) look'	D	stem
Reflexive verb	<i>skatīt-ies</i> 'to look at; to stare'	D/F	?

These processes differ from the typical processes in various ways. They may resemble typical inflection in some parameters and typical derivation in others, or neither in still other instances. The list is not exhaustive. As I have restricted my investigation to suffixes, I didn't include verbal prefixation, a very productive device that poses similar problems.

I will now briefly discuss these processes and their status with regard to inflection and derivation. They will be grouped together according to the first parameter, the output. Besides stem-deriving and wordform-deriving processes, there are two that can be grouped with neither: reflexive verbs and the definite endings of adjectives; these will be discussed at the end of the section.



### 3.2. Processes creating stems

Stem-deriving processes are supposed to be derivational and not inflectional. The processes discussed in this section, however, differ in some respects from typical derivation, or they may have features in common with typical inflection. Some of them – the comparative and the participles – are usually thought of as inflectional, the others – diminutives and verbal nouns – as derivational. This division is based on tradition and hardly justified on other grounds.

#### Diminutives

In Latvian, diminutives are very frequent and can be formed from every noun. Diminutives of other lexical categories are possible, but limited in the standard language<sup>4</sup>. I will consider here only noun diminutives. The formation of diminutives is a stem-deriving process, the output is a single stem and it is subject neither to agreement nor government. It differs from typical derivation by the existence of several synonyms, the choice of which is partly determined by declension class: for nouns of class 1 (a-masc.) and 2 (a-fem.), the most common diminutive suffix is *-ī-*, for nouns of class 3 (e-fem.) and 4 (i-masc.), it is *-it-*; examples: *dēl-s* 'son' > *dēl-ī-*, *meit-a* 'daughter' > *meit-ī-*, *pel-e* 'mouse' > *pel-it-e*, *lāc-is* 'bear' > *lāc-it-is*. There are other suffixes which may combine with nouns from various declension classes, e.g. *-el-*, but they are much rarer in the standard language. As the above examples already show, the most frequent diminutive suffixes do not determine gender and declension class which are important parts of the stem category (words with the typical derivational suffix *-īb-* are always feminine and belong to class 2). Nor do they determine the semantic category, which is always the same as without the suffix. As expected, diminutive suffixes have no influence on the syntactic category. With this behavior regarding categories, the formation of diminutives differs from both typical derivation and typical inflection. The only feature it shares with inflection is synonymy due to declension class. In other words: it is less typical derivation without approaching inflection. Perhaps this is connected with the function of the suffix: the category expressed is neither fully semantic, nor is it in any way grammatical. The main function of diminutives is pragmatic: they are used to make speech more friendly or polite, in speaking with children, in ironic speech and other special styles.

#### Comparative

The comparative degree of adjectives is formed by adding the suffix *-āk-* to the stem, followed by the ending; example: *lab-s,-a* 'good' > *lab-āk-s,-a* 'better'. Both indefinite and definite endings are possible. The process thus does not change the stem category, which is A with and without the suffix. It attaches always to stems of this category, i.e. to adjectives and participles. Examples:

- (1) *Naud-as*      *at-mazgā-šan-a*      *Baltij-as*      *valst-īs*      *nav*  
 money-GEN    PFX-wash-VN-NOM    Baltic-GEN    state-LOC.PL    NEG:COP.3  
*iz-platīt-āk-a*                      *kā*      *citur*.  
 PFX-spread-PPP-COMP-NOM.F    than    elsewhere  
 'In the Baltic states, money laundering is not more widespread than anywhere else.'  
 (Diena, 21. 9. 96)

<sup>4</sup> See RŪKE-DRAVIŅA (1959) for details about diminutives in several varieties of Latvian.

- (2) *Vis-latvīsk-āk-ai-s*                      *no*    *vis-iem*    *komponist-iem*    *ir*  
 SUP-Latvian-COMP-DEF-NOM.M    of    all-DAT.PL    composer-DAT.PL    COP:3  
*Alfrēds Kalniņš.*  
 Alfrēds Kalniņš.  
 'The most Latvian of all composers is Alfrēds Kalniņš.'                      (Vasks)

As in many languages, the formation of comparatives is not fully productive in that only a semantically definable subset of adjectives and participles take this suffix. The suffix is found also with other stems, though rarely: the preposition *pēc* 'after' is the base for the adverb *pēc-āk* 'later'.

The only criterion that makes comparatives inflection-like, in my eyes, is the possibility of making up a paradigm, as is done in grammar books, of the positive, the comparative, and the superlative: *lab-s,-a* : *lab-āk-s,-a* : *vis-lab-āk-ais,-ā* 'good : better : best'. However, the opposition between comparative and superlative is not so strong; the prefix *vis-*, which in this paradigm distinguishes the superlative from the definite comparative, is not obligatory; in example (2), it could be omitted with no change of meaning.

### Participles

Participles are notorious for raising problems with lexical categorization, with the delimitation of lexemes and with distinguishing inflection and derivation. In Latvian linguistics, participles are classified as wordforms of a verbal lexeme. By loosening the association to other wordforms of this lexeme, a participle may lexicalize and become a lexeme of its own. Lexicalized participles belong to the lexical category of adjectives. Since the process of lexicalization is gradual, there are often cases of uncertainty about whether a given item is a participle or an adjective.

From the point of view of morphology, participles are sets of wordforms associated with a derived stem. The stem category is A, i.e., there are an indefinite and a definite paradigm consisting of 20 forms each (5 cases x 2 numbers x 2 genders) and an adverbial form with the ending *-i*. If they denote a gradable manner or quality, they can combine with the comparative suffix, too (see ex. (1)). There are four such participles, each with its own stem-deriving suffix: present active participle (*-oš-*), present passive participle (*-am-* or *-ām-*), past passive participle (*-t-*), and past active participle (*-uš-*). Examples:

- (3) *Man-ā*    *biogrāfij-ā*                      *ir*    *ari*    *kād-a*                      *pavisam*  
 my-LOC    biography-LOC                      COP:3    also    some-NOM.F                      entirely  
*apkaunoj-oš-a*                      *epizod-e.*  
 disgrace-PA-NOM.F                      episode-NOM  
 'There is also a very shameful episode in my biography.'                      (Mielavs)
- (4) *Tik*    *ļoti*    *grib-as*                      *pie-ņem-t*                      *lēm-um-u,*                      *kur-am*  
 So    very    want:PRS-3:RFX    PFX-take-INF    decide-NO-ACC    PREL-DAT.M  
*bū-tu*    *uzreiz*    *redz-am-s*                      *rezultāt-s!*  
 COP-SUB    at.once    see-PP-NOM.M    result-NOM  
 'How I long to make a decision which would have an immediate visible result!'                      (Mozgīš)

