
Jan Křivan
Charles University in Prague

Frequency and Gradience: The Case of the Morphological Structure of the Czech Comparative

Termin

AG Nr., AG-Titel, Raum

The paper deals with the role of frequency in explaining the morphological structure of the Czech comparative (synthetic forms of adjectives) and, more generally, it concerns the relation of frequency to gradience.

In the crucial part of the paper, I show selected outcomes of the detailed frequency analysis of all attested comparative forms from the Czech National Corpus (written corpora). Based on functional usage-based approaches (Bybee 1995, 2007; Haspelmath 2008b), seven specific hypotheses concerning the frequency effects (Bybee 2007) were tested. I come to two major conclusions about the role of frequency: (a) there is a significant role of the reducing effect (reduced comparative forms tend to show very high token frequency and, simultaneously, their type frequency is very low), (b) frequency turns out to account for formal relations within individual types (classes of comparative forms).

Subsequently, I relate the data in (1) to the notion of gradience and discuss its suitability for language modelling (Aarts 2004).

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|---|
| (1) | <i>dobr-ý – lep-ší</i> | ‘good – better’ | suppletive ~ close to the lexicon |
| | <i>krátk-ý – krat-ší</i> | ‘short – shorter’ | reduced suffix <i>-ší</i> ~ close to derivation |
| | <i>ostr-ý – ostr-ější</i> | ‘sharp – sharper’ | non-reduced suffix <i>-ější</i> ~ close to inflection |

I suggest a metalinguistic model of relations that hold between frequency, language, cognition and gradience. Concerning the two notions examined in this paper, I conclude that frequency turns out to be a variable which indicates why individual language structures are the way they are, whereas gradience is a metalinguistic instrument which facilitates our grasping and understanding of language structures and their use.

References

- Aarts, Boas (2004): Modelling linguistic gradience. *Studies in Language* 28:1, 1–49.
Bybee, Joan (1995): Regular morphology and the lexicon. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 10, 425–455.
Bybee, Joan (2007): Introduction. In: Bybee, Joan: *Frequency of Use and the Organization of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5–22.
Haspelmath, Martin (2008b): Creating economical morphosyntactic patterns in language change. In: Good, Jeff (Ed.): *Linguistic Universals and Language Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 185–214.