

Abstract submission

The Sixth Annual Meeting of the Slavic Linguistics Society
Université de Provence, Aix-Marseille I, France
1–3 September 2011

Does Czech habitual morpheme *-va-* encode a distant past meaning?

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Key words: habituais, Czech, distant past, time reference points

0. Introduction

The paper deals with the semantic feature of habituality in the verbal domain in Czech. It focuses on the status of imperfective verbs formed by a grammaticalized morpheme *va-* that conveys habitual meaning. First, we show how different habitual meanings can be expressed in Czech and we present a complex model of habituality that in some relevant respects corresponds to the model developed by Klimek-Jankowska (2008) for Polish. The crucial part of the paper concentrates on a prevalent claim in existing literature on habituality in Czech (e.g. Kopečný 1962, Danaher 2003, Filip 2009, among others) that habitual *va-*verbs (in the past tense form) convey a special meaning of a distant past. With support of crosslinguistic evidence from highly distinct languages (Makaa and Choctaw) we argue that in contrast with relevant constructions in the mentioned languages Czech *va-*verbs do not encode any objectively perceivable distant past meaning which would be in opposition to a meaning of a recent past (as it is suggested in Danaher 2003). We propose an alternative account of *va-*verbs in the past form introducing Reichenbach's temporal schema (1966 [1947]) and a specific modal affective-evaluative distinction as a perspective of a speaker. As regards the data, there has not been done any detailed empirical research of Czech *va-*forms and habitual forms in general so far. Danaher (2003) bases his assumptions on an unbalanced set of examples taken mainly from fiction. In our paper, we support our claims with corpus surveys as well as elicitation methods based on judgments of acceptability of *va-*forms and imperfective forms in past contexts.

1. Habituality in Czech

We take habituality (i.e. genericity in verbal domain) to be a phenomenon separated both from tense and aspect systems (for a thorough discussion of this issue see Carlson & Filip 1997) and we claim it is a generalization over iterated (real or potential) events which turns an iteration into a generic habit. We present a complex model of habituality based mainly on the distinction between (a) deductive (in virtue of) habituality involving the epistemic generalization (expressed by the perfective aspect in Czech, cf. ex. (1) below), and (b) inductive (descriptive) habituality which is defined in terms of generalized instantiations of an event (habituality over iterativity of episodes). It can be either non-exceptional – possibly also with the intentional interpretation – (expressed by the imperfective aspect in Czech, cf. ex. (2)), or it can allow for exceptions and sometimes also for the meaning of accidentality (expressed by verbal *va-*forms derived from imperfective verbs in Czech, cf. ex. (3)). In addition, all aspectual meanings can be modified towards inductive habitual interpretation, if Q-adverbials or quantifiers are present, cf. ex. (4). In our paper, we will demonstrate all the necessary features of particular habitual constructions in Czech and their relations with the support of construction formalizations common in a construction grammar framework (cf. Östman & Fried 2005, for example).

- (1) *Pavla si dá-Ø nohy za hlavu.*
Paula:NOM REFL:DAT put-PRS.3SG(PFV) legs:ACC behind head:ACC
“Paula is able to put her legs behind her head.”
- (2) *Pavla si dá-vá nohy za hlavu.*
Paula:NOM REFL:DAT put-PRS.3SG(IPFV) legs:ACC behind head:ACC
“Paula puts (usually) her legs behind her head.”
- (3) *Pavla si dá-vá-vá nohy za hlavu.*
Paula:NOM REFL:DAT put-HAB-PRS.3SG(IPFV) legs:ACC behind head:ACC
“Paula puts (sometimes, occasionally, usually with exceptions) her legs behind her head.”
- (4) *Pavla si někdy dá-Ø nohy za hlavu.*
Paula:NOM REFL:DAT sometimes put-PRS.3SG(PFV) legs:ACC behind head:ACC
“Paula puts sometimes her legs behind her head.”

2. Distant past meaning

It is usually assumed that in the past tense the *va-*forms encode a distant past meaning as in (5). Danaher claims that it is possible to postulate a recent/distant past opposition and that Czech *va-*verbs can express both of these meanings in suitable contexts. The appropriate interpretation is then computed either from a linguistic context (typically from a temporal adverb or a temporal PP) or inferred from an extra-linguistic situation context. According to him, a *va-*verb in

the scope of a temporal adverb *tehdy* (in 5) denotes a distant past meaning whereas a *va*-verb in the sentences like (6) expresses a recent past meaning because the temporal context of the situation reveals that the habit expressed by a *va*-verb held until very recently. We call this account to the interpretation of the past *va*-verbs an *objective perspective interpretation*. Danaher claims that whereas other habitual expressions in Czech can express the recent past meaning, only *va*-verbs express the distant past meaning typically and preferably. He supports this assumption by the set of data in (7)–(10):

- (5) *Tehdy ženy nosí-va-ly krinolíny.*
 At that time women:NOM wear-HAB-PST:(3)PL(IPFV) crinolines:ACC
 “At that time, women used to wear crinolines.”
- (6) *Před měsícem na jejich představení chodí-va-ly davy a dnes je tu prázdkno.*
 Before month on their performance go-HAB-PST:(3)PL(IPFV) crowds:NOM and today is here void.
 “A month ago, many people used to attend their performance but there is no one today.”
- (7) *V dětství jsme často chodí-va-li / chodí-li k babičce.*
 As children AUX:1PL often go-HAB-PST:PL(IPFV) / go-PST:PL(IPFV) to grandmother
 “As children, we often used to visit / visited grandmother.”
- (8) *Loni jsme často chodívali/chodili k babičce.*
 “Last year, we often used to visit / visited grandmother.”
- (9) *Minulý měsíc jsme často ?chodívali/chodili k babičce.*
 “Last month, we often ?used to visit / visited grandmother.”
- (10) *Minulý týden jsme často *chodívali/chodili k babičce.*
 “Last week, we often *used to visit / visited grandmother.”

Danaher claims that the reduced acceptability of *va*-forms in examples (9) and (10) is due to the recent past meaning of the proposition.

3. Proposal

We argue that Danaher’s objective perspective account is essentially wrong and that it does not account for both for empirical evidence and cognitive grounding of the experience properly. We suppose that in contrast to languages that consistently express the distant past meaning by a specific marker, in Czech the distant past meaning is only one of several contextually induced components of a complex meaning of a habitual marker *-va-*, and therefore there is not empirical evidence for establishing a descriptive category labelled as distant past. Following a well-known Reichenbach’s schema (1966 [1947]) we describe the meaning of the *va*-form schematically with time reference points: E (event), S (speech) and R (secondary reference). In the case of *va*-forms, E denotes time when a habit took place, R denotes the moment when a habit ceased to exist, S denotes the time of speech. Usage of *va*-forms in Czech depends on two properties that vary according to cognitive and extra-linguistic conditions: (i) variable of time-span of E, (ii) variable interval between R and S. The properties (i) and (ii) and their relation allows to explain the whole range of habitual usage of *va*-marker in Czech, irrespective of the value of the tense attribute. The usage of the *va*-marker in the past tense specifies the second condition as the presence of an interval signalling non-existence of a habit and often entails some kind of evaluative modal attitude (intensification, affection etc.) of a speaker to the (non)existence of a past habit.

List of abbreviations: HAB – *va*-habituality; REFL – reflexive; NOM – nominative; ACC – accusative; DAT – dative; SG – singular; PL – plural; PRS – present; PST – past; PFV – perfective aspect; IPFV – imperfective aspect;

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