

Perfective Doublets in Czech

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In Czech there are many aspectual doublets of the type *vytrhat^p/vytrhnout^p* “to tear out”; *uřezat^p/uříznout^p* “to cut off”, *zapíchat^p/zapíchnout^p* “to stick in”. The first perfective verb in each group profiles a plurality of instantiations of the predicate. The second verb profiles a single instantiation of the predicate.

- 1a. *vytrhat^p* listy ze zápisníku; *vytrhat^p* dlažbu, koleje; dát si *vytrhat^p* zuby (SSJČ)
tear out sheets from a notebook; tear out pavement, tracks; have one’s teeth pulled
- 1b. *vytrhnout^p* lístek z bloku; *vytrhnout^p* si vlas; *vytrhnout^p* zub (SSJČ)
tear a sheet out from a notepad; tear out a hair; pull out a tooth

These verbs are the result of prefixation of unprefixated aspectual pairs. When *trhatⁱ/trhnout^p*, *řezatⁱ/říznout^p*, and *píchatⁱ/píchnout^p* are prefixed, the result is two perfective verbs – the original imperfective member of the pair, when prefixed, profiles many instantiations of the predicate. The original perfective member of the pair, when prefixed, profiles a single instantiation. As Vey (1948) and Dickey (2001) point out, Czech has not limited this phenomenon only to aspectual pairs with perfectives in *-nout*, as in the examples above. Verbs such as *strkatⁱ/strčit^p* “to push, shove”, *skákatⁱ/skočit^p* “to jump”, when prefixed, also result in perfective doublets.

- 2a. *děvče odskákal^p* na jedné noze (SSJČ)
the girl hopped away on one leg
- 2b. *odskočil^p* za strom, za roh; *odskočili^p* od sebe (SSJČ)
to jump behind a tree, behind a corner; they jumped away from each other

There are, however, “holes” in the system. Prefixation of *bodatⁱ/bodnout^p* “to stab”, *nabodat^p/nabodnout^p* “to spike, impale”, and *probodat^p/probodnout^p* “to pierce” all are examples of perfective doublets. However, we find only *ubodat^p* “to stab to death” and do not find **ubodnout*. In addition, we find differences in the way that the plurality of the predicate is expressed. In ex. 3 the verb profiles an action which is performed by a multitude of subjects. This contrasts with ex. 2a, where one subject performing the predicate many times.

3. *Vojáci vyskákali z aut.*
The soldiers jumped out of the cars.

This paper presents an analysis of these perfective doublets at the level of a system as a whole. It specifically focuses on the meaning of prefixes, especially differences in the meaning of prefixes between members of the doublets as well as the above mentioned “holes” in the system. In addition, it proposes potential motivations for differences in the expression of plurality of the predicate.

Bibliography

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