

Bi-aspectual verbs or aspectless verbs in Czech: Do all Czech verbs express grammatical aspect?

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As other Slavic languages, Czech distinguishes both grammatical – perfective (Pf) and imperfective (Ipf) – and lexical aspect (cf. Schmieďtová – Flecken, 2008). Aside from Pf and Ipf verbs, there is a specific group of so-called bi-aspectual (BA) verbs which can be classified as both Pf and Ipf (Komárek, 2002) because they can occur in contexts that are incompatible either with Pf verbs (e.g. combination with a phasal verb), or Ipf verbs (e.g. combination with *až* ‘when’) (cf. Veselý, 2008).

The main hypothesis we will present in the paper is that the BA verbs are in fact aspectless, i.e. there is no real evidence that they do have grammatical aspect. This hypothesis is supported by four self-paced reading experiments we conducted so far. In the main experiment, we examined the differences in reading times (RTs) of sentences that were distinguished only by their main clause verb. Every verb appeared in one of three forms: a BA verb (e.g. *akceptovat* ‘to accept’), or its Pf equivalent (e.g. *přijmout* ‘to accept’), or its Ipf equivalent (e.g. *přijímat* ‘to accept’). The verbs were followed by *dokud* ‘until’ which is not compatible with Pf verbs.

In the experiment, we used 12 sentences with durative BA verbs (or their equivalents) and 12 sentences with punctual/iterative BA verbs (or their equivalents) as experimental items (see Examples below) and 72 filler sentences. All verbs were transitive, they were in past tense and had plural objects. Thus, the experiment tested the compatibility of 4 types of predicates with *dokud*: BA durative, and BA punctual/iterative, Pf verbs, Ipf verbs. Our main question was if there is a difference in RTs of different predicate types. We tested 82 subjects. Based on linear mixed-effects model, we found significantly higher RTs on *dokud* in sentences with Pf verbs than Ipf or both types of BA verbs. These findings suggest that BA verbs are processed differently than Pf verbs. In the other two experiments, we found that there are differences between processing of punctual/iterative BA verbs and Ipf verbs. The fourth experiment is focused on processing of BA, Pf and Ipf verbs used in sentences with *až* ‘when’ clause which is not compatible with Ipf verbs.

On the basis of these experiments, it seems that BA verbs in Czech do not behave the same as Pf or Ipf verbs. From the processing point of view it thus makes sense to count them as grammatically aspectless. A less strong claim would be that they are aspectually underspecified. This is in accordance also with the fact that there are no structural constraints for using BA verbs (in comparison with Pf and Ipf verbs) and that most BA verbs are borrowings which later in their evolution tend to acquire one aspect: either Ipf, or Pf (Jindra, 2008).

Word count: 458

Item Examples

- (1) Tolerantní podnikatel **akceptoval/přijal/přijímal** změnu právního předpisu,
tolerant businessman accepted change legal regulation,

dokud firma vytvářela vysoké zisky.
until company produced high incomes.

- (2) Pražský radní **koncipoval/navrhl/navrhoval** plány dalšího rozvoje,
Prague councillor outlined plans future development,
dokud primátorka slibovala rozsáhlé změny.
until mayor promised vast changes.

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