

The Chart of Czech NSM Semantic Primes¹

Marie Pavlásková (October 2022)

Due to conjugation, declension and a far-reaching system of agreement, the Czech NSM involves a considerable amount of inflectional allomorphs (cf. Peeters 2006: 21).

Verbal aspect is an obligatory grammatical category in Czech, and as such, it needs to be taken into account in the Czech NSM (similarly to other Slavic languages, cf. Wierzbicka in Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002). Some primes allow only one aspect: mental predicates, primes including the verb *být* ('to be') and the prime ŽÍT ('LIVE') are always imperfective; UMŘÍT ('DIE') is always perfective. As for the rest (action verbs, speech verb ŘÍCT~ŘÍKAT, 'SAY', and the verb DOTÝKAT SE~DOTKNOUT SE, 'TOUCH'), both aspects are needed. Sometimes, the choice of aspect is determined by context, e.g. temporal adjuncts (*for some time* or *often* require imperfective verbs, *in one moment* perfective ones). Otherwise, aspect depends mainly on tense. In the present tense, the imperfective aspect is the unmarked one; in the future and past tenses, infinitives, imperatives or conditionals, the perfective aspect is semantically simpler.

Subject pronouns are usually not overtly expressed in Czech and, as a result, in the Czech NSM. In the chart, they are expressed only for illustration. If they were overtly used in explications, it would imply emphasis ('me/you, not anyone else').

TENTO, 'THIS', can be used interchangeably with TEN; the difference is merely stylistic.

Specifier DRUHÝ (lit. 'second'), allomorph of JINÝ ('OTHER'), serves to refer to one of the members of a group of two (e.g. sides of a river, eyes, hands, two people or things if their number was previously specified or the whole of humanity when conceptualised as two groups: me and everyone else).

The quantifier SOME has three exponents in Czech. NĚKTERÝ combines with countable nouns, NĚJAKÝ with uncountable nouns (specifically DOBA, 'TIME') and TROCHU with mass nouns or indefinite entities (e.g. *some water, some of this something, some of it*). NĚJAKÝ can also combine with MÍSTO, 'PLACE', in contexts where English uses an indefinite article (*a place*) to convey the meaning *in a place somewhere*.

Prepositions PŘED and PO and adverbs DŘÍV and POZDĚJI are realisations of the primes BEFORE and AFTER. However, these primes also feature in adverbial portmanteaus *předtím* and *potom*, lit. 'before-that' and 'after-that', respectively. The choice between adverbs DŘÍV and *předtím* ('before') or POZDĚJI and *potom* ('after') depends on the implicit time frame: when BEFORE or AFTER implicitly refers to now (e.g. *I didn't know this before.*), DŘÍV/POZDĚJI is required ('To jsem dřív nevěděla.'). If it refers to *this time* or *that time* (e.g. *She did it after that.*), portmanteau *předtím* or *potom* is used ('Udělal to potom.'). These two different time frames are also reflected in the doubled examples in the respective sections of the chart.

In the case of PO NĚJAKOU DOBU, the preposition PO is optional.

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Cliff Goddard, whose valuable advice and insight helped improve the Czech NSM considerably. All the remaining errors are my own.

MYSLET ('THINK') should not be used in the phrase *myslet na něco* (lit. 'to think on something'), as it is probably not semantically simple. Instead, a slightly unidiomatic phrase *myslet o něčem* is suggested for the Czech NSM.

DALEKO, 'FAR', seems to require specialised allolexes for referring to the vertical dimension of space and, therefore, for combining with prepositions ABOVE and BELOW. That is why *vysoko nad* (lit. 'highly above') and *hluboko pod* (lit. 'deeply below') appear in the chart.

References

Peeters, Bert (Ed.) (2006). *Semantic Primes and Universal Grammar: Empirical evidence from the Romance languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Goddard, Cliff, & Wierzbicka, Anna (Eds.) (2002). *Meaning and universal grammar: Theory and empirical findings*. 2 volumes. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.