DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 135 221   FL 008 371

AUTHOR   Plewes, S. Frank
TITLE   On the Morphology of Transitivity and Intransitivity
              in Czech Verbs.
PUB DATE   29 Dec 75
NOTE   15p.; Paper presented at the National Meeting of the
              American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East
              European Languages (Chicago, Illinois, Dec 29,
              1975)

EDRS PRICE   MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Case (Grammar); Contrastive Linguistics; *Czech; Deep
              Structure; Descriptive Linguistics; Form Classes
              (Languages); Grammar; *Morphology (Languages);
              Russian; Semantics; *Sentence Structure; Slavic
              Languages; Surface Structure; Syntax; Transformation
              Generative Grammar; Transformations (Language);
              *Verbs
IDENTIFIERS   Intransitive Verbs; Transitive Verbs

ABSTRACT
              This paper examines the formal means by which Czech
distinguishes transitive and intransitive verbs, and specifically the
role of the particle "se" in the process usually called "derived
intransitivization." "Se" is shown to perform a number of functions
which preclude its being called simply an "intransitivizing
particle." By way of comparison, a study by Babby is cited which,
using Russian data, transformationally introduces the
intransitivizing particle "-sja" onto verbs whose object noun phrase
has been preposed, deleted, or otherwise vacated. Parallel examples
are drawn from Czech illustrating reflexive, passive, and middle
voice constructions, and special attention is paid to middle voice
forms in Czech which fail to introduce "se." Furthermore, examples of
Czech active voice verbs using "se" which take apparent "direct"
objects in the accusative case are discussed. The suggestion is made
that in some cases there is competition between verbs occurring with
the particle "se" and those taking "si" (the enclitic dative
reflexive), and specifically that the presence of "se" (like "si") is
sometimes felt as merely a modality element, a point of reference, or
a means of emphasis. It is concluded that the sources for Czech "se"
are more varied than those for Russian "-sja," and the attempt is
made to describe some of these other sources. (Author/AM)

S. Frank Plewes
Dept. of Slavic
   Lang. and Lit.
642 Williams Hall
Univ. of Pa.
Phila., PA 19174

The following paper was read at:

West Slavic Linguistics Section
Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers
       of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL)
Chicago, Illinois
29 December 1975

On the Morphology of Transitivity and Intransitivity

in Czech Verbs

One of the areas where English differs markedly from

Slavic languages is in the formal means of expressing transi-

tivity and intransitivity in verbs. English verbs are quite

versatile to the extent that a single form can often be used

in contexts that are quite distinct semantically, as in these

sentences:

   (1) John <u>stood</u> in the corner. (intransitive, stative)

   (2) John <u>stood</u> his skis in the corner. (transitive,
                                          causative)

   (3) John <u>stood</u> in line. (in the sense 'got in line,'
                                      intransitive verb of
                                      body-position change)

and (4) John <u>stood</u> when the guests entered. (in the sense
                                      'arose,' another intransi-
                                      tive verb of body-position
                                      change, where the motion is
                                        vertical [in (3) it was hor-
                                        izontal])

The fact that Czech would employ a different verb to express
each of thes four concepts of 'standing' (using the verbs
stát, postavit, stoupnout si, and vstát in that order) in-
dicates that Czech has the formal means of expressing certain
semantic distinctions that English verbs do not always make.
The purpose of this paper will be to point out some of these
means.

Many intransitive verbs in Czech occur with the particle
se, which historically is an enclitic accusative of the
reflexive pronoun, so it is important first of all to discuss
the various types of se-verbs in Czech.

Se can express passive voice, as the examples at (1)
on the handout show. When the underlying direct object of
the active sentences is preposed into subject position after
the underlying subject-agent (if one is present in deep
structure) has been postposed and marked with the instrumental
case (or od + genitive), se appears. Se can also express true
reflexivity, as in the sentences at (2). When in these sen-
tences the underlying direct object, being coreferential with
the subject, is reflexivized, se appears. A similar situation
obtains for reciprocal verbs with se, which are illustrated
in (3).

3

Thus far the appearance of se has been conditioned by

vacating a deep structure object noun phrase. In this sense

the facts of Czech are in agreement with similar processes

which occur in Russian. The Czech particle se corresponds

to the Russian affix -sja, and a recent transformational

analysis of Russian -sja verbs by L. Babby has suggested

that -sja is predictably introduced onto a verb whenever

its deep structure object noun phrase is preposed, deleted,

or otherwise vacated. Briefly stated, Babby argues that

fulfilling the conditions for object vacating is a function

of a particular verb's distinct and unpredictable subcate-

gorization feature; that is, a statement in the Lexicon

that describes the subject and object arrays that can be

used with a particular verb. In the passive sentences

discussed a moment ago, the subcategorization feature of

the given verb (for example, vyjadřovat in the second pair

of sentences) allows the deep structure subject to be vacated

by postposing, concomitantly marking it [+ Instr]. The

resultant intermediate structure then allows the deep

object to be preposed into subject position, and the vacated

object slot triggers se-introduction onto the verb. In the

4

derivation of the reflexive and reciprocal sentences there

is neither postposing nor preposing but rather only the

deletion of the object noun phrase when reflexivization

occurs. Se is again predictably introduced by the Babby

Transformation.

Let us now turn our attention to the so-called _middle_

voice, where the facts of Czech present a somewhat different

picture. Many verbs permit the option of either filling the

underlying subject noun phrase or leaving it unfilled. If

it is filled, a subject-agent is present and the result is

a normal transitive sentence, as in (4):

Přestěhoval jsem rodinu do nového bytu.
'I moved the family to a new apartment.'

If no overt subject-agent occurs in the underlying sentence,

the deep object (rodina) is preposed into subject position,

se is introduced, and the result is a middle voice sentence

which is non-committal about who actually did the moving:

Rodina se přestěhovala do nového bytu.
'The family moved to a new apartment.'

A similar situation obtains in the second pair of sentences,

with se being introduced in the intransitive, middle voice

version:

5

Lékař uzdravil nemocného.
'The doctor cured the sick man.'

Nemocný se uzdravil.
'The sick man recovered (got cured).'

Difficulties arise with the next two pairs of sentences,

however, for the agentless derivative of

Končíme práci v pět hodin.
'We stop work at five o'clock.'

is not the expected *Práce se končí v pět hodin but rather

simply Práce končí v pět hodin 'work stops at five o'clock.'

Likewise, the verb začínat/začít 'begin' makes no formal

distinction between active and middle voices in modern

literary Czech (although analogous forms with se can be

found, they are perceived as archaisms). Czech verbs be-

having this way are of high enough frequency that they de-

serve special treatment, and the allowances that must be

made to describe them do not seriously undermine the analysis

of middle voice se-introduction mentioned earlier. Since

se-introduction cannot operate for these verbs, the subject

noun phrase of a sentence occurring with any of them must

obligatorily be filled at the level of deep structure in order

to block any possible preposing of an object noun phrase and

thereby fulfill the requirements for se-introduction. Therefore,

the subcategorization feature of this small group of verbs
must indicate that they always occur with overt subjects at
underlying levels, whether or not these subjects are semantic
agents, patients, or instruments. This is indeed an anomaly
when viewed against the general tendency of Czech formally .
to distinguish transitive and intransitive verbs, but it is
clearly more economical to describe them in terms of an
idiosyncratic subcategorization feature than to have to
amend and thus weaken the se-introduction transformation
(as would be the case if we were to say that for verbs like
končit in middle voice sentences, preposing does take place
but for some reason se-introduction does not occur).

The examples given in (5) on the handout illustrate
a Czech phenomenon that has no parallel in modern literary
Russian, and that is the apparent use of a se-verb as a
logical and grammatical transitive with a direct object
in the accusative case. There is no way of predicting the.
occurrence of se in these examples using the mechanism dis-
cussed earlier if we consider them transitive, and it would
therefore be impossible to call the se in these instances
an intransitivizing particle since these verbs appear to be

7

transitive. It is interesting to note, however, that

coexisting with the accusative government of these verbs

is oblique case government, for example 'učit se + dative.'

The dative government here is generally felt by most speakers

to be older although not archaic, and perhaps corresponding

more to the norms of spisovná čeština than 'učit se + accu-

sative.' If we accept 'učit se + dative' as correct for at

least one variety of Czech, its behavior is explainable as

a middle voice se-verb like přestěhovat se in (4) on the

handout. Here is why: The subcategorization feature of

the verb whose stem is uč-i 'teach' allows it to occur with

an optionally filled subject node. When the node is filled,

as in the sentence

    Helena učí žáky angličtině.
    'Helen teaches the pupils English.'

we have a normal transitive sentence with an overt agent

(Helena). Underlying the middle voice sentence

    Žáci se učí angličtině.
    'The pupils learn (get taught) English.'

is a deep structure with an empty subject node; the verb

uč-i 'teach;' an underlying accusative direct object žáky;

and the oblique (dative) secondary object angličtině. The

8

presence of the empty subject node allows the accusative

object to be preposed, giving the agentless sentence Žáci

se učí angličtině.

This seems to leave us with something of a contradiction,

namely a transitive, active voice sentence Žáci se učí

angličtinu (acc) and an intransitive, middle voice sen-

tence Žáci se učí angličtině (dat), both of which we have

translated identically: 'The pupils learn English.' There

are several ways of explaining this. One is to say that

these two sentences never coexist on the same style level

in Czech, so they cannot be compared. Assuming that they

do coexist in the idiolect of an individual speaker, however,

the 'učit se + acc' sentence offers two alternative inter-

pretations. In one reading, the subject of the sentence

Žáci se učí angličtinu is felt to be a true agent; that is,

the perceived instigator of the action of learning rather

than the preposed patient of a middle voice sentence. Thus

although the active and middle voice sentences might have

identical translations in English, there should be some

slight stylistic coloration between them concerning the re-

lationship between subject and verb, namely the impression

that the subject of _Žáci se učí angličtinu_ is a true agent.
In this case the _se_ cannot be derived by movement transfor-
mation and must be assumed to be a part of the lexical entry
for the verb. Alternatively, we can simply acknowledge the
possibility that the verb _učit_ 'teach' can have two objects
in the accusative case (one direct/animate; one indirect/in-
animate), and when the deep structure subject node is not
filled, the animate accusative object can be preposed into
subject position and _se_-introduction will be triggered. This
will give us a middle voice verb with a secondary accusative
object. Although double accusative government such as this
is unusual for Slavic, it is well-attested for other Indo-
European languages such as Latin.

I would like to mention briefly one further and much
less thoroughly investigated use of _se_ in logically transi-
tive but grammatically intransitive sentences, for which
several examples have been given at (6) on the handout.
This is the so-called 'modal _se_' which is often associated
with the expression of purpose, intensification or heightened
involvement on the part of the subject in the action expressed
by the verb. These pairs of verbs lend themselves to no easy

classification, and I offer the examples in (6) as illus-
trations only.

Finally, many verbs in Czech distinguish transitive
and intransitive pairs built on similar derivational bases,
expressing the familiar stative-causative distinction. A
few of these are given in (7). These verbs present no
particular problems of description, unlike verbs in se,
which I have tried to treat in more detail above and which
remain one of the most varied and problematic verb groups
in Czech and, indeed, in all of Slavic.

11

Abstract of Paper

S. Frank Plewes
Dept. of Slavic
    Lang. and Lit.
642 Williams Hall
Univ. of Pa.
Phila., PA 19174

On the Morphology of Transitivity and Intransitivity

in Czech Verbs

It is the aim of this paper to outline the formal
means employed in Czech to distinguish transitive and
intransitive verbs, and more specifically to examine the
role of the particle se in the process usually called
'derived intransitivization.'   It is demonstrated that
se performs a number of functions that preclude its being
called simply an 'intransitivizing particle' in a synchronic
description of Czech.

Chosen as a term of comparison is a recent proposal
by Babby, using Russian data, which transformationally intro-
duces the intransitivizing particle -sja onto verbs whose
object noun phrase has been preposed, deleted, or otherwise
vacated. Parallel examples are drawn from Czech illustra-

ting reflexive, passive, and middle voice constructions,

and special attention is paid to middle voice forms in

Czech which fail to introduce se. Furthermore, examples

of Czech active voice verbs using se which take apparent

'direct' objects in the accusative case are discussed.

The suggestion is made that in some cases there is com-

petition between verbs occurring with the particle se

and those taking si (the enclitic dative reflexive), and

specifically that the presence of se (like si) is some-

times felt as merely a modality element, a point of

reference, or a means of emphasis. It is concluded that

the sources for Czech se are more varied than those for

Russian -sja, and the attempt is made to describe some of

these other sources.

Reading time: 15 minutes
A handout with all examples,
   translated into English, is
   supplied.

On the Morphology of Transitivity
and Intransitivity in Czech Verbs

S. Frank Plewes; Dept. of Slavic Lang.
642 Williams Hall; Univ. of Pennsylvania
Phila., PA 19174

1. Passive se

Věc se ████ - ████ích
        dnech.

The matter wil'   ecided in the
        next few days.

Úsměv vyjadřuje radost.
Radost se vyjadřuje úsměvem.

A smile expresses pleasure.
Pleasure is expressed by a smile.

Koupí se maso a udělají se
        řízky.

Meat will be bought and cutlets
        will be made.

2. Reflexive se

Helena se ráno myje.
V zimě se musíš teple oblékat.

Helena washes (herself) in the morning.
In winter you must dress (yourself)
        warmly.

Připravujte se na nejhorší.

Prepare (yourself) for the worst.

3. Reciprocal se

Už jsme se seznamili.

We've already gotten acquainted (with
        each other).

Radili se o dalším postupu.

They conferred (with each other) about
        further progress.

Sejdeme se ve středu třetího.

Let's meet on Wednesday the third.

4. Active Voice vs. Middle Voice

Přestěhoval jsem rodinu do
        nového bytu.

I moved the family to a new apartment.

Rodina se přestěhovala do
        nového bytu.

The family moved to a new apartment.

Lékař uzdravil nemocného.
Nemocný se uzdravil.

The doctor cured the sick man.
The sick man recovered.

Končíme práci v pět hodin.
Práce končí v pět hodin.

We stop work at five o'clock.
Work stops at five o'clock.

Předseda začal schůzi.
Schůze začala.

The chairman began the meeting.
The meeting began.

5. Se with accusative

Jiří se učí angličtinu.
Dozvěděli jsme se brzy výsledky
        zkoušek.
Nebude nám těžko se domyslit
        ostatní otázky.

George studies English.
We quickly found out the results of
        the examinations.
It won't be difficult for us to infer
        the remaining questions.

14

6. <u>Se expressing modality or intensity</u>

dožadovat úřad o povolení	petition authorities for permission
dožadovat se schválení	clamor for approval
chapat někoho za rukav	pull someone by the sleeve
chapat podstatu věci	grasp the basis of a matter
chapat se zloděje	catch a thief
chapat se otěží	grab the reins
chapat se příležitosti	seize an opportunity
držet opratě, květiny, dítě	hold the reins, flowers, a child
držet se zábradlí, něčí ruky	cling to a railing, someone's hand
držet se zásad, zákonů	adhere to principles, laws

7. <u>Statives vs. causatives</u>

viset (be hanging) — věšet (věsit)/pověsit (cause to hang)
stát (be standing) — stavět/postavit
sedět (be sitting) — usazovat/usadit
ležet (be lying) — klást/položit

15