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Copular clauses in English and in Czech

Abstract

Copular clauses, i.e. clauses with a verbo-nominal predicate comprising a copular verb and a subject complement, are used in both English and Czech to ascribe a quality, property or value to the subject. While both languages make use of the copular verbs *be* and *become* (*být*, *stát se*, respectively, in Czech), which have little semantic content, the repertoire of copular verbs is much broader in English, making it possible to distinguish between various types of attribution (e.g., verbs of 'seeming', attribution based on perception, verbs of 'remaining' etc.). The question then arises what means are employed in Czech to express such 'modified attribution' and, on the other hand, what the constructions used in Czech can suggest of the meaning of the respective copular verbs in English.

Using a parallel translation corpus of Czech and English, we focus on English copular verbs other than *be* and *become* and their Czech counterparts. Several types of corresponding constructions have been identified, depending on the verb itself, the type of complementation (non/clausal, AdjP, NP, PP), on the in/animate nature of the subject, etc. For instance, resultative copular verbs are typically paralleled by Czech verbs whose prefix indicates the initial or final phases of the action, manifesting a more general tendency to express various aspects of the verbal action on the finite verb itself, e.g. *Daddy's gone mad, hasn't he?* – *Tatínek se zbláznil, vid'?* The Czech counterparts with *mít* (*have*) as the verb and an object corresponding semantically to the English copular verb support the treatment of *have* as a near-copular verb, e.g. *Harry felt as though the bottom had dropped out of his stomach.* – *Harry měl pocit, jako by mu u žaludku upadlo dno ...* (cf. also *feel hungry* – *mít hlad*). Where the verbal counterpart is *být* (*be*) or *mít* (*have*), the attendant semantic features of the copular verb may be lost. However, Czech often makes use of the free dative (e.g., *mu* – *to him*) referring to the participant whose evaluation is presented in the copular clause, or to the affected participant, e.g. *The cut had turned a nasty shade of green.* – *Rána mu ošklivě zezelenala.* This appears to be related to the role of copular verbs as devices available to the speakers to present their opinion on or evaluation of the content conveyed.

We hope the results will not only help us understand better copular clauses in the two languages, but also illustrate some ways in which parallel corpora may be employed in contrastive research.