

# Multiverb expressions in Czech

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## Abstract

Light verb expressions are distinguished from analytical verb forms (forms with auxiliary verbs) and from full verbs. In this paper, I show some multi-verb expressions in Czech which seem to be candidates for complex predicates with light verbs. First, I describe the analytical forms of verbs, as they are traditionally described and understood in grammar books.

Further, I show some constructions with verbs *být* 'be', *mít* 'have' and *dát* 'put' with infinitive that show some properties of complex predicates. It will be necessary, however, to subject them to further testing which will show whether these verbs are light verbs. In this paper, I show typical examples of use of these complex predicates, discuss restrictions imposed on the tense of the construction, on the verb in infinitive and on its arguments.

## Types of constructions

First, we try to find morphological and syntactic criteria for distinguishing analytical forms with auxiliaries from other types of verb constructions.<sup>1</sup> In Czech, a verb can occur in three or two tenses, depending on whether it is perfective or imperfective, respectively. The tense and aspect system in Czech is shown in Table 1.

		<b>past</b>	<b>present</b>	<b>future</b>
imperfective <i>jet</i> 'go (ride)'	1.Sg	jel <b>jsem</b>	jedu	pojedu
	2.Sg	jel <b>jsi</b> , jels	jedeš	pojedeš
	3.Sg	jel	jede	pojede
imperfective <i>brát</i> 'take'	1.Sg	bral <b>jsem</b>	beru	budu brát
	2.Sg	bral <b>jsi</b> , brals	bereš	budeš brát
	3.Sg	bral	bere	bude brát
perfective <i>vzít</i> 'take'	1.Sg	vzal <b>jsem</b>	→	vezmu
	2.Sg	vzal <b>jsi</b> , vzals	→	vezmeš
	3.Sg	vzal	→	vezme
both aspects <i>soustředit se</i> 'concentrate'	1.Sg	soustředil <b>jsem</b> se	soustředím se	budu se soustředit
	2.Sg	soustředil <b>ses</b>	soustředíš se	budeš se soustředit
	3.Sg	soustředil se	soustředí se	bude se soustředit
copula <i>být</i> 'be'	1.Sg	byl <b>jsem</b>	jsem	budu
	2.Sg	byl <b>jsi</b> , byls	jsi	budeš
	3.Sg	byl	je	bude

Table 1: Tense and aspect in Czech

The past tense of both perfective and imperfective verbs is an analytical form compound by a present form of the verb *být* 'be' and the past participle of the full verb.<sup>2</sup> The present tense exist only for imperfective verbs, as

<sup>1</sup>It is necessary to mention that in Czech grammars, the term auxiliary verb is used not only for the forms occurring in analytical verb forms but also for the verb *být* 'be' in passive and also for modal and phase verbs. In my paper I try to make a distinction between "purely" auxiliary verbs and other "support verbs".

<sup>2</sup>In the third person, the form of the verb *být* disappeared and the bare past participle is

it has in fact a progressive or habitual meaning. Perfective verbs can also have the morphological form of present tense, but this form has the meaning of the future tense. The future tense of imperfective verbs is either a simple future or an analytical form compound by a future form of the verb *být* and infinitive of the full verb. The analytical future is the productive form; the simple future only exists for the verb *být* and for the verbs of motion. For some verbs of motion, the simple future is the only grammatical possibility to make the future tense (*jedu — pojedu* 'go (ride)', *jdu — půjdu* 'go (walk)'), for others, there is a choice between the simple and analytical form, though the simple form is preferred (*běžím — poběžím, budu běžet* 'run', *plavu — poplavu, budu plavat* 'swim', etc.).

The present form of the verb *být* used in the past tense and the future form used in the future tense are usually classified as auxiliaries, though they differ in several aspects. The future form in the future tense behaves as a copula rather than an auxiliary. The comparison of the auxiliary and the copula is done in Table 2. Auxiliaries have different morphological and phonological properties than the full verb *být*: some forms differ, auxiliaries are always clitics (i.e. they are unstressed and they are placed in the clitic cluster at the second position in a clause), they don't take the negation prefix.

	past tense 'sleep'	passive 'be beaten'	nominal predicate with copula 'be healthy'
2.Sg	spal <b>jsi</b>	<b>jsi</b> bit	<b>jsi</b> zdrav
	<i>nespal</i> <b>jsi</b>	<i>nejsi</i> bit	<i>nejsi</i> zdrav
	tys spal	?tys bit	?tys zdrav
	spals	??bits	??zdravs
	*ty <b>seš</b> spal	ty <b>seš</b> bit	ty <b>seš</b> zdravý (colloquial forms)
3.Sg	on spal	*on bit	*on zdrav
	*on <b>je</b> spal	on <b>je</b> bit	on <b>je</b> zdrav

Table 2: Comparing the auxiliary with the full verb

Now, after we showed the properties of auxiliaries, we can proceed to the main topic of this paper, which are constructions of potential light verbs with infinitive.<sup>3</sup>

## Complex predicates

We will examine four types of constructions which are formed by a light verb and infinitive.

sometimes considered as a simple form of the past tense. In this paper, we will consider it an analytical form with zero morpheme.

<sup>3</sup>For discussion on light verbs and their definition see Butt and Lahiri (2002).

## Completed action expressed by the verb *být* and infinitive

This construction is mainly used in the past tense, the use in present tense is questionable, and the use in future is nearly impossible (the form would be homonymous with the future tense for imperfective verbs or it would sound ungrammatical for perfective verbs). This type of constructions was described by Dokulil (1949) and it is characterized as a type similar to constructions with motion verbs. However, they differ from motion verbs in that they are “*marked (they express all phases of an activity, its completeness), while constructions with motion verbs are unmarked (completeness of the activity is not expressed)*”. These constructions express a move to a different place, performance of an activity and return back, or at least leaving the place where the activity was performed.

- (1) a. Byli jsme se (vy)koupat.  
Be.1.Pl.Past REFL bathe.Inf  
‘We went for swimming (and really did it).’
- b. ? Děti jsou plavat.  
Child.Pl be.3.Pl.Pres swim.Inf  
‘Children are swimming (somewhere else).’
- c. ? Děti jsou koupat se .  
Child.Pl be.1.Pl.Pres bathe.Inf REFL  
‘Children are swimming (somewhere else).’
- d. Budeme plavat.  
Be.1.Pl.Fut swim.Inf  
‘We will swim.’
- e. Já přijdu a ty budeš zase někde  
I come.1.Sg.Fut and you be.2.Sg.Fut again somewhere  
nakoupit.  
buy.Inf  
‘I am afraid that if I come you will be somewhere making shopings again.’

The sentence (1a) is the normal case of this type of construction: it describes an action which took place in the past. Both perfective and imperfective verbs can be used. The fact that the verb used in the example is reflexive plays no role in grammaticality or feasibility of the sentence—the only remarkable thing is that the reflexive particle climbs to the clitic cluster at the second position of the clause.

The use of this construction in present tense is questionable, though Dokulil claims that it is possible. In example (1c) we can observe that the reflexive particles behave differently in the present tense (they do not climb to the clitic cluster). In the case of the future tense, if the verb is imperfective (like in 1d) the construction is understood as the analytical future. The example with a perfective verb in (1e) is taken from Dokulil, but I have doubts that it would be accepted by contemporary speaker.

According to my survey (Skoumalová, 2003), this construction (in past tense) is accepted by nearly all speakers (1021 out of 1030 agreed with the sentence (2a)). In the following sentences, I explored what restrictions hold for the infinitive verb.

- (2) a. Včera jsme byli plavat na plovárně.  
 Yesterday be.1.Pl.Past swim.Inf at swimming bath.  
 ‘We were swimming in the swimming bath yesterday.’
- b. Minulý týden jsme se byli opalovat  
 Last week AUX.1.Pl REFL be.PastP.Pl sunbathe.Inf  
 na louce.  
 on meadow.  
 ‘Last week, we were sunbathing on the meadow.’
- c. Večer jsme byli čekat na tetičku na nádraží.  
 Evening be.1.Pl.Past wait.Inf for aunt on station.  
 ‘In the evening, we were waiting for the aunt at the station.’
- d. Včera jsme byli na louce vyhlížet  
 Yesterday be.1.Pl.Past on meadow look\_out.Inf  
 první vlašťovku.  
 first swallow.  
 ‘Yesterday, we went to the meadow to look out for the first swallow.’
- e. Odpoledne jsme byli stát ve frontě na lístky.  
 Afternoon be.1.Pl.Past stand.Inf in line for tickets.  
 ‘In the afternoon, we were standing in a line for the tickets.’
- f. V úterý jsme byli plavat, ale plovárna  
 On Tuesday be.1.Pl.Past swimm.Inf but swimming bath  
 byla zavřená.  
 be.3.Sg.Past closed.  
 ‘On Tuesday, we went for swimming but the swimming bath was closed.’
- g. Byli jsme se opalovat celý den.  
 Be.1.Pl.Past REFL sunbathe.Inf whole day.  
 ‘We were sunbathing for the whole day.’

As it was said already, this construction are supposed to express a completed action that took place in a different place. In sentences (2b), (2c), (2d) and (2e) I was exploring what can be understood as activity. Sentences (2b) and (2d) were accepted by vast majority of informants, which suggests that sunbathing and looking for someone are understood as activities, though rather passive ones. What was surprising was that even the sentences (2c) and (2e) were acceptable for more than fifty percent of the informants, but I also got many comments from those who rejected these sentences.

In the sentence (2f), I tested whether the activity must be realized. In this case, the results of the survey were even more surprising: 81% of the informants accepted this sentence, but the rest complained in comments

about the conflict between closed swimming bath and realization of swimming.

The last sentence was supposed to show whether we can express the duration of the action, as the action is supposed to be finished. Most informants accepted this sentence, but again, those who rejected this sentence did so because of the conflict of duration vs completeness.

### Impersonal constructions with verbs of perception

Verbs of perception and cognition (*vidět* 'see', *slyšet* 'hear', *cítit* 'feel' or 'smell', *poznat* or *znát* 'recognize', *rozumět* 'understand') can form impersonal constructions with the copula *být* 'be'. These constructions are usually described as a special form of passive. For verbs that require an object in accusative (all except *rozumět*), there are two possibilities of the realization:

- (3) a. Odtud je vidět  
 From here be.3.Sg.Pres see.Inf  
 Sněžka / Sněžku.  
 Sněžka.F.Sg.Nom / Sněžka.F.Sg.Acc  
 'Sněžka can be seen from here.'
- b. Odtud je vidět Říp.  
 From here be.3.Sg.Pres see.Inf Říp.MI.Sg.[Nom/Acc]  
 'Říp can be seen from here.'

The structures of the two possible realizations are rather different: in the sentence where the argument of the verb is in nominative, it is the subject of the whole sentence and the infinitive can be understood as the "nominal" part of the predicate. In the other case, where the argument of the verb is in accusative, the whole infinitive clause is the "nominal" part of the predicate and the sentence has no subject. The structures (expressed by means of the dependency grammar) are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Two structures of impersonal constructions

However, the two sentences are synonymous and their semantic representation should be only one. The underlying structure in Functional Generative Description (Sgall et al., 1986) is shown in Figure 2.

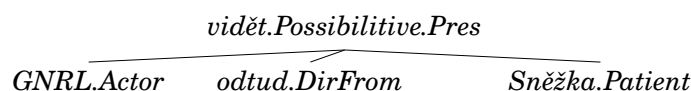


Figure 2: Underlying structure

On the underlying structure, the root of the tree is the verb *vidět* with grammatememes *Possibilitive* and *Present tense*. The verb has a general Actor and *Sněžka* is Patient. The free modification *odtud* is a Direction From.

### Slavic accusative with infinitive and verbs of perception in impersonal constructions

In Slavic languages, there exist constructions similar to English constructions with Exceptional Case Marking. In Slavic languages, these constructions are only possible with the verbs of perception. There are disputes whether these constructions are also cases of ECM, or whether the verbs are control verbs, but this is not so important for us, now.<sup>4</sup> What I want to show is whether the impersonal constructions with verbs of perception can be combined with this “Slavic accusative with infinitive” constructions and whether we can also observe the move in use from accusative to nominative.

- (4) a. Vidím                      Honzu                      tančit.  
 See.1.Sg.Pres   Honza.MA.Sg.Acc   dance.Inf  
 ‘I see Honza dancing.’
- b. Honzu                      je                      vidět   tančit   jen zřídka.  
 Honza.MA.Sg.Acc   be.3.Sg.Pres   see.Inf   dance.Inf   only rarely.  
 ‘One can see Honza dancing only rarely.’
- c. ?Hanku                      je                      vidět   tančit  
 Hanka.F.Sg.Nom   be.3.Sg.Pres   see.Inf   dance.Inf  
 celé noci.  
 whole nights.  
 ‘One can see Hanka dancing whole nights.’
- d. Slony                      je                      v noci   slyšet  
 Elephant.MA.Pl.Acc   be.3.Sg.Pres   in night   hear.Inf  
 troubit.  
 trumpet.Inf  
 ‘In the night, one can hear elephants trumpeting.’
- e. ?Vlci                      jsou                      v noci   slyšet   výt.  
 Wolf.MA.Pl.Nom   be.3.Pl.Pres   in night   hear.Inf   howl.Inf  
 ‘In the night, one can hear wolves howling.’

In (4a) we can see the normal case of a sentence with a verb of perception. The sentences (4b) and (4d) are impersonal constructions with accusative and (4c) and (4e) are their counterparts with nominative. My survey showed that in these constructions, the nominative is less acceptable than accusative. However, the sentence (4e) was much more acceptable than the sentence (4c), which was quite surprising.

<sup>4</sup>In my dissertation (Skoumalová, 2001), you can find discussion on this topic.



- (8) a. Tu bábovku se mi nechtělo  
 That cake.F.Sg.Acc REFL I.Sg.Dat want.Neg.N.3.Sg.Past  
 péct.  
 bake.Inf  
 ‘I didn’t want to bake the cake.’
- b. ?Ta bábovka se mi nechtěla  
 That cake.F.Sg.Nom REFL I.Sg.Dat want.Neg.F.3.Sg.Past  
 péct.  
 bake.Inf
- c. Toho pána se mi  
 That gentleman.MA.Sg.Acc REFL I.Sg.Dat  
 nechce potkat.  
 want.Neg.3.Sg.Pres meet.Inf  
 ‘I don’t want to meet that gentleman.’
- d. \*Ten pán se mi  
 That gentleman.MA.Sg.Nom REFL I.Sg.Dat  
 nechce potkat.  
 want.Neg.3.Sg.Pres meet.Inf

In (8b) the change of the case (and therefore of the subject as well) is manifested also in the verb form in the past tense, which may cause why this sentence is less acceptable than the variant with accusative. If the argument of the infinitive is animate then only the variant with accusative is possible—this is demonstrated in sentences (8c) and (8d).

### Constructions with the verb *mít* and infinitive

Sometimes, the verb *mít* (have) is listed together with copula *být* (be). The *Academic grammar* (Daneš et al., 1987) characterizes the constructions of the verb *mít* as follows: *The verb mít is similar to the verb být as for its syntactic functioning. It is also very polyfunctional. ... Unlike the verb být it cannot be considered as sentential component which has only a formal role and which is semantically emptied.* Kopečný (1958) distinguishes several types of copula according to whether they can be expressed by a construction where the original subject turns into object of the verb *mít*. Hausenblas (1963) compares the resultative constructions with the copula *být* and the verb *mít*. In the described constructions with the verb *mít*, the addressee of the utterance is either a possessor or a beneficiary. Examples are shown in (9).

- (9) a. Dnes je hezký den.  
 Today be.3.Sg.Pres beautiful day.MI.Sg.Nom  
 ‘It’s a beautiful day today.’
- b. Dnes máme hezký den.  
 Today have.1.Pl.Pres beautiful day.MI.Sg.Acc  
 ‘It’s a beautiful day today.’

- c. Pokoj je uklizen.  
 Room.MI.Sg.Nom be.3.Sg.Pres clean.PassP  
 ‘The room is/has been cleaned.’
- d. Pokoj mám uklizen.  
 Room.MI.Sg.Acc have.1.Sg.Pres clean.PassP  
 ‘I have cleaned the room.’ or ‘My room has been cleaned.’

The constructions with the verb *mít* and infinitive do not correspond to any constructions with copula, but what they have in common with the above sentences is that the addressee is a possessor or a beneficiary.

- (10) a. Košili máš viset na šňůře.  
 Shirt.F.Sg.Acc have.2.Sg.Pres hang.Inf on line.  
 ‘Your shirt is hanging on the line.’
- b. ?Košili máš sušit na šňůře.  
 Shirt.F.Sg.Acc have.2.Sg.Pres dry.Inf on line.  
 ‘Your shirt is drying on the line.’
- c. ?Zákazníky máte stát  
 Customers.MA.Pl.Acc have.2.Pl.Pres stand.Inf  
 až na ulici.  
 up\_to on street.  
 ‘Your customers are standing up to the street.’
- d. ??Manžela máš stát na chodbě.  
 Husband.MA.Sg.Acc have.2.Sg.Pres stand.Inf in corridor.  
 ‘Your husband is standing in the corridor.’

These constructions belong to the spoken language only and some speakers consider them obsolete or dialectal. However, I was able to find some occurrences in the Czech National Corpus (SYN2000, 2000), which contains mainly written texts. These constructions are limited to intransitive verbs as in (10a). In (10b), I try to examine whether a derived reflexive (*sušit se* ‘dry (intrans.)’) can be used in these constructions as well. What is puzzling is the fact that the reflexive particle disappeared—normally it can disappear only as a result of haplology when two particles occur side by side as a result of clitic climbing. However, many speakers does not accept this sentence.<sup>5</sup>

Another restriction on these constructions seems to be the requirement that the object of the verb *mít* is inanimate. The sentence (10c) may be more acceptable than (10d) because it is easier (for the shop assistants) to imagine the customers as a sort of material that must be processed. With the husband, this view is more difficult.

<sup>5</sup>This sentence is in fact homonymous with a sentence whose meaning is ‘You should dry the shirt on a line.’ as the verb *mít* is also a modal verb. This reading is preferred by most speakers.

## Constructions with the verb *dát* and infinitive

These constructions represent a sort of a complement to the previous type. They are in fact causatives whose results are the situations described in the previous section.

- (11) a. Košili            ti            dám            schnout na šňůru.  
Shirt.F.Sg.Acc you.Dat put.1.Sg.Fut dry.Inf on line.  
'I will put your shirt on a line so that it dries.'
- b. Košili            ti            dám            sušit    na šňůru.  
Shirt.F.Sg.Acc you.Dat dám.1.Sg.Fut dry.Inf on line.  
'I will put your shirt on a line to dry it.'

In (11a), there is an intransitive verb *schnout* and the interpretation of the construction is unambiguous—it is a causative construction, which can be paraphrased as 'I will cause that your shirt dries on a line.'. The interesting issue in these constructions is in (11b). The question is what is the subject of the infinitive. The sentence can be understood in two ways:

1. The speaker is the subject of a transitive verb *sušit* 'dry'. The sentence then would be synonymous with the sentence 'I will dry your shirt on a line.'
2. The shirt is the subject of the intransitive verb *sušit se* 'dry'. Then the sentence would be a real causative construction, which can be paraphrased as 'I will cause that your shirt dries on the line.' In this case, we encounter the problem of missing reflexive particle, again.

Further investigation on this topic will be necessary.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to list Czech constructions that are possible candidates for the light verb constructions. I showed that the verbs are neither auxiliaries nor full verbs with an argument structure. Their contribution to the complex predicate is in adding some aspectual information, modality, possessivity or causativity. This is only the first step in the research and I hope to continue it in the near future.

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## Abbreviations

1,2,3	person
Sg	singular
Pl	plural
Nom	nominative
Acc	accusative
Dat	dative
F	feminine
MA	masculine animate
MI	masculine inanimate
N	neuter
Pres	present tense
Past	past tense (also analytical form)
PastP	past participle
PassP	passive participle
Fut	future tense
Inf	infinitive
Neg	negation
AUX	auxiliary verb
REFL	reflexive particle