On the dynamism of aspectual pair formation in Czech

François Esvan

1. *Introduction*

In this contribution, I would like to make a few remarks on the current evolution of the aspectual pair formation system in Czech, more precisely on the trends that can be evidenced from a systematic research on neologisms using the Web as a corpus. My aim is to evaluate the dynamism of the two basic systems of aspectual pair formation in Czech that are: 1) perfectivisation from a simplex imperfective verb with a so called "empty" prefix; 2) secondary imperfectivisation from a prefixed perfective verb. I will not discuss here the legitimacy of the concept of "empty" prefix about which there is a variety of opinions in Czech linguistics[1]. Traditionally, there are two schools of thought:

- The one represented by Ivan Poldauf (1954) and František Kopečný (1956), dating back to the fifties, who believe that prefixes may have a purely morphological value of perfectivisation. The test for recognizing an "empty" prefix is the absence of a secondary imperfective, or, in case it exists, the secondary imperfective must be synonymous with the simplex imperfective verb. This hypothesis was echoed by Lebeďová (1980) in her study on verbs of foreign origin, which, as discussed in detail below, very quickly tend to be prefixed, thereby losing their biaspectual character. According to Lebeďová, this trend evidences the morphological character of prefixation in aspectual pair formation.
- In contrast, Miroslav Komárek (1984) is strongly opposed to the principle of "empty" prefixes, because prefixes always keep, according to him, some semantic value.

What I would like to emphasize here is that the discourse on the value of prefixes paradoxically leads to a discussion about suffixation, namely around the existence or non-existence of secondary imperfectives. For the supporters of

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[1]   About secondary imperfectivisation in Czech see also: Berger (2011), Esvan (2005; 2007; 2010), Štícha (2004).

the concept of "empty" prefixes, it is the presence of these that is abnormal. According to František Kopečný, the presence of secondary imperfectives is due to two reasons: (i) the pressure of the system, (ii) the need to maintain some semantic nuance existing in the prefixed perfective verb (Kopečný 1962: 94). For the supporters of the semantic value of prefixes it is, on the contrary, the lack of secondary imperfectives which is an anomaly. It can be explained, according to Vladimír Komárek, by the principle of economy. The absence of secondary imperfective is, however, very difficult to predict, as it depends on frequency and use (Komárek 1984: 264).

What I propose in this contribution, then, is to revisit the issue by evaluating the dynamism of secondary imperfectivisation on the Internet, with all the pros and cons of this method. The advantages of the Internet over the tools offered by the Czech National Corpus Institute are: (i) the dimensions, which are much larger than the one of SYN, the largest corpus of the Czech language[2]; (ii) the Internet contains a lot of spontaneous linguistic productions, which are unfiltered by the publishing houses. The major drawbacks of the Internet are: (i) its shifting nature; (ii) the lack of lemmatization; and (iii) its unrepresentative character, with a strong predominance of certain topics (computer science, sex) (Esvan 2005).

I will first address the case of the verbs of Czech origin and then that of the verbs of foreign origin.

2.   *Verbs of Czech origin*

How many verbs of Czech origin have an "empty" prefix in the more restrictive sense, i.e. without a secondary imperfective? At first glance, they should be less numerous in contemporary Czech than in past stages of the language, since it is traditionally assumed that various secondary imperfective verbs fell out of use more or less recently. Kopečný (1956: 87) reported that some verbs featured in the large nine-volume dictionary of the Czech language (*Příruční slovník jazyka českého*, 1935-1957), as *napisovat* or *oholovat*, were no longer in common use at the time he wrote (1956); other verbs like *udělávat* did exist in old Czech, but fell out of use much earlier and are not found in the dictionary. According to the inventory drawn up by František Uher (1987), there would be, at the most, fifty verbs of Czech origin with an empty prefix and without a secondary imperfective. He considers this number too low to be taken as evidence of the morphological nature of prefixation in aspectual pair formation. Apart from these statistical considerations, he is of the opinion that prefixes always keep a semantic value and that all non-existent secondary imperfectives should deserve to exist, because they could contribute a semantic nuance which is not present in the simplex verb. For

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[2]   The corpus SYN contains 2,000,000,000 words, which is a huge figure, but still insufficient for searching occurrences of rare forms.

instance, *uviďovat* (from *uvidět*) would have the meaning of "entering the visual field" (Uher 1987). We will return to this particular example later with concrete occurrences.

The situation, in the light of data available on the Internet, is summarized in the table below, which presents the results for the most typical aspectual pairs with an "empty" prefix. In the first two columns it indicates whether the verb is found in the large dictionaries of the last century (PSJČ and SSJČ); the third column (K) shows the number of records in the lexicographical archive of the Institute of the Czech Language, which contains more than twelve million records and was used to realize the dictionaries in question; the last column reports the approximate number N of occurrences of the secondary imperfective found through Google.

Table 1.

Secondary imperfectivization for verbs of Czech origin

			PSJČ	SSJČ	K	Google (09/15)
ženit se – oženit se	*oženovat se*	get married			1	10<N<100
solit – osolit	*osolovat*	salt	x		2	100<N<1000
dělat – udělat	*udělávat*	do			1	N>1000
slyšet – uslyšet	*uslýchat* *uslyšovat*	hear			0 0	N <10 N <10
číst – přečíst	*přečítat*	read	x	x	70	N>1000
vidět – uvidět	*uviďovat*	see				N <10
cítit – ucítit	*uciťovat*	feel			0	10<N<100
psát – napsat	*napisovat*	write	x	x	31	100<N<1000
holit – oholit	*oholovat*	shave	x	x	1	100<N<1000
dívat se – podívat se	*podívávat se*	look at			0	10<N<100
ptát se – zeptat se	*zeptávat se*	ask	†	†	0	10<N<100
vařit – uvařit	*uvářet* *uvařovat*	cook			0 0	0 0
šít – ušít	*ušívat*	sew			0	0

As we can see, it is possible to find on the Internet many secondary imperfective verbs which are ignored by dictionaries, as *uviďovat* or *podívávat*, but not necessarily: *uvařovat* or *ušívat* have, for instance, no occurrences. These results call for the following comments.

1. Drawn occurrences are relatively few, if we take into account (i) the size of the corpus considered, (ii) the fact that the aspectual pairs we analyzed (*dě-*

lat – udělat, psát – napsat, vidět – uvidět etc.) have a very high frequency. The phenomenon must be, therefore, considered marginal[3].

2.   These "new" verbs are very diverse in nature and are perceived unequally by native speakers, with a broad rating scale that goes from "agree" (i.e. in the case of *udělávat se* with a particular meaning that I will discuss further below), to "strongly disagree" for verbs like *uviďovat* or *podívávat se*. The users, as we shall see in concrete examples, are often fully aware of the transgressive character of these forms, as they place them between quotation marks. The desired effect may be then irony or provocation.

3.   These verbs are frequently used in iterative contexts, but not necessarily. They may also have a processual value or denote single concluded actions, in these particular contexts I called "tabular present" (Esvan 2015).

Let us now consider some examples to illustrate.

The case of the verb *udělávat* is particularly interesting. As I already mentioned, it did exist in Old Czech, but disappeared thereafter. Consequently, the aspectual pair *dělat – udělat* has become the most quoted example of "empty" prefix in the grammars of modern Czech. An Internet search can provide examples of the ancient use of the verb *udělávat* in the Bible of Kralice[4]:

(1)   *Nedávejte již více slámy lidu k dělání cihel jako prvé; nechať jdou sami a sbírají sobě slámu. Však [touž] summu cihel, kterouž **udělávali**[1] prvé, uložte na ně.* (Bible kralická, Starý zákon, Exodus, Kapitola 5)
      'You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which **they made** before (*lit.* this quota of bricks, which they made before, lay on them).'

But it also provides many examples where the verb *udělávat*, in the reflexive form *udělávat se*, is the secondary imperfective from *udělat se* which has the vulgar meaning of "having an orgasm, masturbate", in English "to come, cum", as in example (2):

(2)   *Mám menší problém s udržením sebekontroly při sexu, strašně rychle **se udělávám**[1].*
      'I have a little problem with maintaining self-control during sex, **I come** very quickly.'

It is interesting to note that the substitution of the secondary imperfective *udělávat* by the simplex verb *dělat* is, in this case, impossible. We have therefore here a new aspectual pair *udělat se – udělávat se* for a particular meaning of the verb *udělat* in the reflexive form.

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[3]   In comparison, the review of the records from the lexicographical archive is interesting: the four-volume dictionary from the sixties (SSJČ) contains 37,000 verbs (from a total of 190,000 words), but we can see on the table that these verbs are sometimes attested by only one or two records.

[4]   A translation from the late 16th century in a rather archaic language.

The use of the secondary imperfective *udělávat* is not however limited to the vulgar meaning of ex. (2). We can also find on the Internet occurrences in which *udělávat* has the basic meaning of *dělat* "to do, to make", as in (3) and (4):

(3) *Knedlíčky mám moc ráda. My také, a proto vždy **udělávám**[I] větší dávku a dávám zmrazit.*
'I love dumplings. We too, so **I** always **make** more and freeze them.'

(4) *Pěna na holení. Pěna je opravdu super! **Udělává**[I] vám to opravdu dobrou pěnu. [...] Neměla jsem s ní žádný problém.*
'Shaving foam. The foam is really great! **It makes** really good foam. [...] I had no problem with it.'

Unlike (2), where secondary imperfectivization has a clear semantic motivation, examples (3) and (4) arouse a rather negative reaction in native Czech speakers. These forms are perceived as "strange", whereas they were used in an apparently spontaneous and neutral way.

Let us consider now, on the contrary, some examples where the users seem to be clearly conscious of the fact that the forms they use do not belong to the standard. It is the case of the verb *uviďovat* quoted by František Uher, as I mentioned above, to illustrate the expressive potential of secondary imperfectives. In example (5) a young girl is asking a question in a discussion forum; she uses the verb at issue to emphasize its processual value, being aware of its transgressive character, since she placed it in inverted commas:

(5) *A teď k mému dotazu; holím si nohy i podpaží, ale mamčiným strojkem, nemám svůj vlastní. [...] Když mamku prosím o vlastní strojek, řekne jen „**Uvidíme**[P]", ale já už „**Uviďuju**[I]" asi půl roku. Navíc teď přichází léto [...]. Prosím, poraď mi, co mám dělat. Díky.*
'And now to my question. I shave my legs and underarms, but with Mum's razor, I don't own my own razor. [...] When I beg my Mum for a razor of my own, she only says "We'll see", but I've been "seeing" (*lit.* **I see**) for almost half a year. Now summer is coming [...]. Please advise me what I should do. Thanks.'

There are other examples of the ironic use of *uviďovat*, especially in the periphrastic future, as a joking calque of the English "we'll see". It is illustrated in example (6), where a programmer is speaking about his technical problems in a bizarre language full of anglicisms:

(6) *Zatím jsem psal do Atmela emulátor D-star Streamu, respektive RadioHeaderu včetně Sync, FEC, CRC atd., nemám ještě End Frame, ale zato mám pro sebe dost nezodpovězených dotazů, neb jsem programátor amatérský. Proto sháním Help. [...] Tak budeme **uviďovat**[I].*
'So far I wrote on the Atmel emulator, D-Star Stream, and also RadioHeader, including Sync, FEC, CRC, etc. I don't have End Frame yet, but I've got a lot of

unanswered questions for myself, because I am an amateur programmer. That's why I'm looking for help. […] So **we'll see**.'

In example (7), instead, the author takes the example of *budeme uviďovat* to make fun of this anglophile trend in post-revolution Czech.

(7) […] *nejsou z nás dnes trotlové, kteří, když se vrátí po týdnu z Anglie, řeknou místo uvidíme, budeme **uviďovat**[I].*
'[…] we are not among those idiots who, when they come back from a week in England, say *budeme uviďovat* instead of *uvidíme*.'

We can also find examples where verbs have not only an iterative or a processual meaning, as in the examples we have seen so far, but also what I have called the *tabular present*, i.e. a context in which the present denotes concluded actions (Esvan 2015). It is frequently found in diaries and blogs, which are very common on the Internet. In these examples, the secondary imperfective verbs do not belong to the standard language, but are in a certain way contextually motivated:

(8) *A pak už jenom pendolinem do Ostravy a následně osobákem. Kolem půl šesté **uciťujeme**[I] známou vůni a je nám jasné, že jsme doma.*
'Then by Pendolino to Ostrava and ten by passenger train. At around half past five **we smell** a familiar scent, which means we are at home.'

(9) *Sousedi ještě spí, je trošku zimněji než včera a venku nádherně. **Udělávám**[I] si rozcvičku a pak klasicky zermattovský program – hygiena, sehnat vodu [...]*
'My neighbors are still sleeping, it's a bit colder than yesterday and outside it's wonderful. **I do** some warm-up, then my usual activities in Zermatt like washing myself, fetching water […]'

(10) *Zdržujeme se docela dlouho a ujíždí nám poslední autobus do Caen. Co se dá dělat, zkusíme stopovat. **Napisujeme**[I] název Caen na papír a zkoušíme to. Většina řidičů nám pořád něco ukazuje, nakonec nám zastavuje paní a vysvětluje, že jsme na špatné silnici.*
'We stay quite a long time and miss the last bus to Caen. What can you do, we try to hitchhike. **We write** the name of Caen on a piece of paper and try. Most drivers show us something, and finally a lady stops and explains us that we are on the wrong road.'

3.   *Verbs of foreign origin*

The case of verbs of foreign origin is also interesting. I remember that there is a strong tendency in Czech to avoid biaspectualism by allowing prefixation for newly borrowed lexemes. This phenomenon has been studied by Lebeďová (1980) and more recently by Jindra (2008). According to the authors, there should be a three-phase integration process:

i. first step: the simplex verb is biaspectual and the prefixed verb does not yet exist;
ii. second step: the simplex verb remains biaspectual, while the prefixed perfective verb already exists;
iii. third step: the simplex verb is only imperfective and forms an aspectual pair with the prefixed perfective verb.

Actually, Lebeďová and Jindra seem to be unaware of the fact that there exists yet another step, represented by the formation of a secondary imperfective verb, even though this phenomenon also concerns the verbs they are analyzing: all of the eight verbs considered by Jindra in his analysis of lexical integration through prefixation also have a secondary imperfective, most of them with numerous occurrences on the Internet, as shown in the table below, where the last column reports the approximate number N of occurrences of the secondary imperfective found through Google.

Table 2.
Secondary imperfectivization for verbs of foreign origin

		Google (09/15)
demolovat – zdemolovat	*zdemolovávat*	N < 10
dokumentovat – zdokumentovat	*zdokumentovávat*	N > 1000
likvidovat – zlikvidovat	*zlikvidovávat*	10 < N < 100
organizovat – zorganizovat	*zorganizovávat*	100 < N < 1000
orientovat – zorientovat	*zorientovávat*	N > 1000
privatizovat – zprivatizovat	*zprivatizovávat*	N < 10
redukovat – zredukovat	*zredukovávat*	10 < N < 100
registrovat – zaregistrovat	*zaregistrovávat*	N > 1000

A survey of the foreign verbs with the prefix *za-* contained in the neologism database *Neomat*[5] – that is to say 41 verbs such as: *zaaretovat, zaarchivovat, zabetonovat, zabilancovat* etc. – shows that about half of them (20) have a secondary imperfective attested on the Internet: *zaaretovat, zabetonovat, zabivakovat, zablogovat, zabombardovat, zabookovat (zabukovat), zacementovat, zadefinovat, zadokumentovat, zaintubovat, zaindexovat, zalogovat, zaregistrovat, zarezervovat, zasponzorovat, zastabilizovat, zavakuovat, zaverbovat, zazipovat, zazoomovat.*

As in the case of the verbs of Czech origin, I would make some general observations:

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5   Institute of the Czech language of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic: www.neologizmy.cz (april 2016).

1. The secondary imperfectivisation is a widespread phenomenon but it is far from systematic. It also seems difficult to identify parameters that could have a significant influence on the creation of secondary imperfectives (the frequency of the basic verb has for instance no significant influence).
2. As in the case of the verbs of Czech origin, the number of occurrences of these secondary imperfectives is often very limited. Unlike the original Czech verbs discussed above, the secondary imperfective verbs derived from foreign loans, however, never cause major objections from the native speakers consulted.
3. These secondary imperfectives may have, as in the case of verbs of Czech origin, different meanings: processual, iterative or factual. This is important to emphasize, as the suffix -*áv*- used to form secondary imperfectives from prefixed verbs in -*ovat*, is also found in the formation of iterative verbs, which is, as is known, productive in Czech. So we have the same mark for two different systems: *kupovat > kupovávat* (an iterative verb from an imperfective verb) and *zdemolovat > zdemolovávat* (a secondary imperfective verb from a prefixed perfective verb).

Let us consider some examples in context to illustrate what has been said. First of all the variety of meanings, with the processual value in example (11), the iterative in example (12) and the factual in example (13):

(11) *„Hele, další kamión s dvěma. To jsem zvědavá, jestli se zastavějí. Doufám, že jo."*
*A zatímco obrovský kamión opouštěl pomalu dálnici a **zaparkovával**[ᴵ], popadla Mae utěrku a otřela celý pult.*
"Look, another double truck. I'm curious to see if they'll stop. I hope so." While the giant truck **was** slowly leaving the highway and **parking**, Mae took the towel and wiped the counter.'

(12) *Podle FBI brala dokumenty ze Smithovy tašky, **ofotografovávala**[ᴵ] je a posléze informace předala Číňanům.*
'According to the FBI she used to take documents in Smith's bag, **photograph** them and send then the information to the Chinese.'

(13) *„Už ve čtvrtek večer jsem **zdokladovával**[ᴵ] státní veterinární správě okolnosti odchovu krávy* [...]*"*
"Already on Thursday evening I provided the documentation on the breeding of the cows to the veterinary services [...]"

As regards the motivation for creating these secondary imperfectives, it must be said that the cases where there is a clear semantic motivation are quite rare. We have an example with the aspectual pair *maturovat / odmaturovat*, where the simplex verb can mean either "to take the exam" or "to pass the exam", while the prefixed verb means only "to pass" (to achieve a passing score on the exam). This difference is illustrated in the following example (14). The secondary im-

perfective verb, which has the same meaning as the prefixed verb, is therefore more precise, and its existence can be regarded as motivated, in agreement with the hypothesis of Kopečný mentioned above.

(14) *„Některý rok jsme rádi, když z distančního ročníku* **odmaturuje**[P] *jeden,“ říká zástupce ředitele Josef Šimána. Na obchodní akademii z šedesáti přijatých* **odmaturovává**[I] *dvacet až třicet lidí.*

"Some years we are happy if only one of the non-attending students **passes the test of the maturita** (school leaving examination)" says the deputy director Josef Šimána. At the Commercial Academy only twenty or thirty from among the sixty students admitted **pass the test (of maturita)**.

In many other cases, however, this semantic motivation does not exist, as in example (15) below, where the two forms (simplex verb and secondary imperfective) seem to be interchangeable:

(15) *Banky* **blokují**[I] *karty. Většina českých bank pro internetové úhrady své platební karty automaticky* **zablokovává**[I].

'Banks **block** credit cards. Most Czech banks automatically **block** credit cards for internet payment.'

4. Conclusions

This investigation, carried out on the Internet as a corpus, has highlighted a double phenomenon that we can summarize in the following way:

In the lexicon of Czech origin the verbs with an "empty" prefix constitute a small group of lexemes which are generally very frequent and oppose a strong resistance to the creation of secondary imperfectives. When this happens, the number of occurrences is negligible compared to the enormous size of the reference corpus and the frequency of the simplex verbs. Except in very special cases, such as the vulgar meaning of the verb *udělat se*, for which there is a clear semantic motivation, the secondary imperfectives created from these verbs are generally perceived as "abnormal" and the use made of them is often playful.

Regarding the verbs of foreign origin, there is an undeniable trend to the creation of secondary imperfectives. However, the phenomenon is not systematic in nature and the newly created forms have relatively little use. Unlike the verbs of Czech origin, these verbs are not perceived by native speakers as particularly abnormal, although there is usually no semantic motivation for their creation.

The dynamism of aspectual pair formation in Czech does not seem to be moving towards a simplification of the system, particularly in the case of the verbs of foreign origin, where we are witnessing the formation of many aspectual triplets. To return to the debate evoked in the introduction, we can add that the results of this survey do not provide decisive arguments in fa-

vor of the hypothesis of "empty" prefixes, nor against it. The "pressure of the system", in Kopečný's words, undeniably favors the creation of new secondary imperfectives, but this trend is at the same time strongly inhibited by the "principle of economy", mentioned by Komárek. How will the future look like? *Budeme uviďovat.*

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Abstract

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On the dynamism of aspectual pair formation in Czech

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the relationship between the two ways of forming aspectual pairs in Czech, i.e. perfectivisation and secondary imperfectivisation. Recent data show a seemingly contradictory dynamism of both systems in the case of loan verbs. On the one hand, there is a strong tendency, after a short phase of biaspectualism, towards the creation of aspectual pairs through perfectivisation, e.g. *bukovat - zabukovat* (*to reserve a flight ticket* from *to book*). On the other hand, the creation of these new perfective verbs does not necessarily conclude the process, since secondary imperfectives like *zabukovávat* are also frequent. The trend in the modern language seems then to aim towards an increase in secondary imperfectivization, a process of which perfectivization should merely be a necessary intermediate step. This development is clearly in opposition to the tendency towards the elimination of secondary imperfectives, which characterized the historical evolution of the Czech language (Šlosar 1981).

Keywords: Czech language, verbal aspect, word formation