

Some Notes on the Degrees of Explicitness of Pragmatic Meaning in One Type of Caused Motion Construction: An English-Czech Comparison

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Abstract

This paper examines the differences in verbal meanings between English and Czech in caused motion constructions of the type “John walked Mary to the station” – “Jan doprovodil (/zavedl) Marii na nádraží”. The paper shows that English displays a relatively low degree of pragmatic explicitness; the meaning of the construction is thus determined by a more or less firmly established situational frame associated with the construction in question. By contrast, the Czech equivalents are more explicit (needless to say, the reason for this lies in the systemic differences between the two languages).

Keywords: English secondary agent constructions, Czech equivalents, situational frames, pragmatic meaning.

1. Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to look into the differences between English and Czech in terms of the degrees of explicitness of the meanings of verbs used in caused motion constructions of the type *John walked Mary to the station* (in Czech: *Jan dovedl (/doprovodil/ zavedl) Marii na nádraží*). This issue lies at the syntax-lexical semantics-pragmatics interface and shows clearly that, as Tárnyiková (1985, 171) points out, “adequate language description m u s t take pragmatics into account”. The discussion offered will, among other things, testify to the role of pragmatic-semantic aspects in the formation of the meanings of this type of construction and, therefore, to the necessity of interpreting the meanings of motion situations against given situational backgrounds.

2. Secondary agent constructions: their causative pattern and the verbs they admit

The caused motion construction under analysis is of a very specific type. It involves the external causation of a self-agentive locomotion carried out along a volitional axis (Cruse 1972). This situation can be exemplified by sentences of the type *John walked Mary to the station, John danced Mary around the ballroom, John swam the cattle across the river* or *John jumped the horse over the fence*. In these constructions, the subject position is taken up by an animate causer who induces an animate causee to carry out a self-agentive locomotion, and the direct object position is taken up by an animate causee who acts as a volitional executor of the motion encoded in the verb. These constructions thus effect “the splitting of verbal action into two components, causation and the particular verbal action, dissociated between the two participants” (Dušková 1976, 175). In a similar vein, Kubišová, Bázlik and Votruba (2009, 89) assign the participant in the subject position the causative role and the participant in the object position the performing role. In Levin (1993, 31) these constructions are treated under the heading of “induced action alternations”. I refer to them as “secondary agent constructions” (henceforth “SA constructions”); in coining the term I was inspired by that of the “secondary agent” used in Langacker (1991, 412–413) to designate a causee that is “secondary in the sense of being downstream from the original energy source, yet agentive in the sense of having some initiative role”. In other words, the causee represents a second energy source (on this see e.g. Shibatani and Pardeshi 2002).

Given the specific causative pattern as encoded in SA constructions, verbs that enter into them are those that are “normally” used in intransitive constructions (e.g. Kubišová, Bázlik and Votruba 2009, 89). SA constructions with human causees employ the verbs *walk, run, march* (used in the sense ‘to walk in a military manner, with a regular and measured tread’), *dance, swim* and *waltz* (the usability of the verb *waltz* in SA constructions can be explained by the fact that this verb may be used to designate the more general ‘dancing’, i.e. it may lose reference to certain concrete physical features that make up what is called ‘waltzing’).

All these verbs designate the basic, most neutral types of self-agentive locomotion. They are devoid of additional, modifying features (be it purely physical features or features referring to the inner self of the mover). SA constructions are thus barred for verbs such as *stride, tread, pad, crawl, strut* or *wander*. (This apparent correlation between the degree of descriptivity of self-agentive locomotion verbs and the range of syntactic constructions into which the verbs may enter is treated in Boas 2003, 2006 and in Kudrnáčová 2008, *inter alia*.)

SA constructions with animal causees are open for verbs that cannot be used in SA constructions with human causees. Horses, for example, can be “trotted”, “jogged”, “cantered”, “paced”, “jumped”, “ambled”, “galloped” and “pranced”. These verbs can enter into SA constructions with animal causees owing to the fact that they are deprived of the information about the inner state of the executor of the movement, which testifies to the specificity of animal agency.

The meaning of SA constructions is complex in that these constructions do not merely encode the simple causative pattern ‘the causer causes an animate causee to move somewhere’. This pattern represents a mere skeletal causative frame to which a variety of

additional aspects of meaning are added. In other words, SA constructions encode meanings that are not a mere result of the interaction between grammatical and lexical features of the sentences in question (on pragmatic inferencing see e.g. Ariel 2008 and Filipović 2007). Poldauf (1970, 123) thus rightly points out that Halliday's description of the transitive *march* in *He marched the soldiers* as 'cause to march' is too simplistic (Halliday 1967, 43–47).

3 English SA constructions in comparison with their Czech equivalents

3.1 Constructions with human causees

Consider some examples first:

- (1) The trainer ran the athletes round the track.
- (2) The general marched the soldiers to their tents.
- (3) The nurse walked the patient around the ward.
- (4) John danced her round the ballroom.
- (5) John swam her to the other end of the swimming-pool.

Although these sentences do not encode coercive caused motion scenarios (i.e. the causee is not explicitly forced to move against his will), the force-dynamic schema is not fully balanced (on force dynamic patterning see especially Talmy 1988). In concrete terms, the causer assumes a controlling position and the causee assumes a subordinate, controlled position. In English, this aspect of meaning is borne by a given semantic-syntactic configuration, i.e. by a given verb and a given syntactic pattern ('NP-VP-NP-PP', i.e. a condensed pattern used for lexical causatives). Czech equivalents of these sentences are more explicit in encoding the type of force-dynamic relationship between the causer and the causee. This is especially the case whenever periphrastic constructions with causative verbs denoting varying degrees of inducement are resorted to. Consider:

- (6) The trainer ran the athletes round the track. – Trenér nechal atlety běžet (/nařídil atletům, aby běželi) kolem závodní dráhy.
- (7) The trainer swam the trainees to the other end of the swimming-pool. – Trenér nechal své svěřence (/nařídil svým svěřencům) plavat na druhý konec bazénu.
- (8) The general marched the soldiers to their tents. – Generál nechal vojáky (/nařídil vojákům) napochodovat ke stanům.

Apart from periphrastic constructions, Czech, with its rich morphology, uses transitive forms of verbs that express, with sufficient explicitness, the types of situational frames in which caused movements are set. Consider the Czech verbs *dovést* (*doprovodit*, *přivést*, *zavést*) in examples (9) and (10), in which the causer induces the causee to walk and acts as a co-mover (and most probably does so in order to help the causee, to lead him on the way, to show him his positive attitude towards him, etc.):

- (9) John walked her to the car. – Jan ji dovedl (/doprovodil/ přivedl/ zavedl) k autu.
- (10) John walked her to the station. – Jan ji doprovodil (/dovedl/ zavedl) na nádraží.

The caused motion situation expressed in ‘walking a causee somewhere’ may, depending on the context, convey other pragmatic meanings, e.g. ‘to keep the causee healthy’. The classic example of this type of scenario is the sentence with an animal causee: *John walks the dog every day*. The Czech equivalent is quite explicit: *Jan venčí psa každý den*. Or, to give an example of another situation, the phrase *to walk somebody to a hotel* may mean ‘to send a person to another hotel’ – cf. the more explicit Czech variant *být ubytován v jiném hotelu (být dopraven do jiného hotelu)*.

This is not to say, however, that the situation expressed in ‘walking a person somewhere’ always involves a helping or an accompaniment scenario. One may *walk somebody out of the pub*, for example. The Czech equivalent will most probably be *vyvést někoho z hospody* – the verb *vyvést* grasps the imbalance in the force-dynamic schema more explicitly than its English counterpart.

From this type of imbalanced caused motion situation it is only a step to fully-fledged coercive caused motion situations, cf. examples (11) and (12):

- (11) John ran Harry to the kitchen. – Jan nahnal (pohnal/ zahnal)
Harryho do kuchyně.
(12) John marched Harry to the kitchen. – Jan nahnal (/pohnal/ zahnal)
Harryho do kuchyně.

As can be seen, the verbs in these sentences lose (to some extent at least) reference to a specific, concrete manner of motion. It cannot be overlooked that the verb’s partial loss of reference to certain physical aspects of the movement serves as a signal of the presence of coercion. (This fact may be taken as evidence of the existence of the “basic sense” of the verb.) The sentences in (11) and (12) mean ‘John forced Harry to walk (probably quickly) to the bathroom’. Generally speaking, whenever a self-agentive locomotion verb gains in the generality of its reference, it is a signal that a given SA construction encodes pragmatic meanings that diverge from the basic, skeletal kinetic frame to a greater degree.

So far we have dealt with English SA constructions whose Czech equivalents employ periphrastic constructions and transitive verbal forms. Let us now consider Czech equivalents which seem, at first sight, to be instances of what Parsons terms “displaced conjunction” (Parsons 1994, 83). A regular pattern with displaced conjunction can be exemplified by the sentence *John walked to the door with Harry (Jan šel s Harrym ke dveřím)*, which can be viewed as a variant of *John and Harry walked to the door (Jan a Harry šli ke dveřím)*. In both these sentences we have fully-fledged agents, which means that their movements are not causally related - consider the following examples:

- (13) He danced her round the ballroom. – Tancoval s ní po tanečním sále.
(14) He waltzed her round the terrace. – Tancoval s ní po terase.
(15) The nurse walks the patient every day. – Sestra se s pacientem prochází každý den.

In the English sentences, the controlling position of the causer and the subordinate position of the causee are encoded in the syntactic patterning itself. Czech, however, lacks a structural counterpart of this sort; therefore whenever intransitive verbs are used the types of roles of the two participants can only be deduced from the situational frame.

3.2 Constructions with animal causees

First, consider the following two illustrative examples:

- (16) John jumped the horse across the ditch.
 (17) John galloped the horse to the edge of the field.

Animals act as agents in that they execute the movements induced by human causers but, due to the absence of a conscious participation in the instigation of the movement and in control over their course, their movements cannot be brought about by means of directly imposing the causer's intention onto the causee's intention as is the case in SA constructions with human causees. From this it follows that the external causation of self-agentive movements of animals prototypically involves some type of manipulative activity on the part of the causer. Let me recall in this connection that SA constructions employ self-agentive locomotion verbs (i.e. those that are primarily used in intransitive constructions) in a syntactic pattern used for lexical causatives. That is, they present caused motion situations as involving the merging of the causing event and the caused event. The upshot is that the presence of some sort of manipulative, coercive activity on the part of the causer is, in English, deducible from a given situational frame, i.e. it is not directly encoded in the grammatical and lexical features of the sentences in question.

The interpretation of pragmatic meanings of SA constructions with animal causees is less dependent on situational frames. In other words, SA constructions with animal causees display a lower degree of pragmatic anchorage. (Admittedly, this is not a hard and fast rule – consider the situation encoded in *John swims the horses every day* and its Czech variant *Jan plave koně každý den*, in which the movement is induced for some well-established, definite purpose.) The reason apparently lies in the fact that the self of the animal and also the animal's position in the network of relations between the participants in given situations is taken as less complex, more simplistic (related to this is the fact that, as already mentioned, the external causation of self-agentive movements of animals prototypically involves some type of manipulative activity on the part of the causer).

Again, due to the systemic differences between English and Czech, Czech counterparts of the sentences in question are more explicit – typically, periphrastic constructions with causative verbs (expressing varying degrees of coercion) are resorted to. Consider:

- (18) John jumped the horse across the ditch. – Jan přiměl koně ke skoku přes příkop.
 (19) John galloped the horse to the edge of the field. – Jan hnál koně tryskem až na kraj pole. (Here, the verb *hnát* expresses coercive manipulation.)
 (20) John cantered the horse across the meadow. – Jan hnál koně klusem (/nechal koně klusat) přes louku.

In contrast to the variant with *hnát klusem*, the variant with *nechat klusat* in ex. (20) expresses a slightly different, less coercive force-dynamic schema (this is also the case in the Czech *pobídnout koně do klusu* as an equivalent of the English *trot the horse*). A similar interpretation is valid for the Czech equivalent of the English sentence in example (21):

- (21) John carefully paced the horse. – Jan pečlivě (/obezřetně) vodil (/vedl) koně v mimochodu.

In actual fact, the movements of horses in the English sentences in (16) – (21) are attributed to the riders by metonymy (on this see Fauconnier and Turner 1996). The causer can be presented as the executor of the movement by metonymy in Czech, too:

- (22) John trotted the horse home. – Jan odklusal s koněm domů.
(23) John pranced the horse back and forth. – Jan skákal s koněm sem a tam.
(24) John jogged the horse home. – Jan odklusal s koněm domů.
(25) John jumped the horse across the ditch. – Jan skočil s koněm přes příkop.

The verb *fly*, in spite of designating a basic type of movement in its class, can, naturally, be used in a very limited set of scenarios expressed by means of a SA construction. Birds that are flown, are not only simply released to fly, but their flight is, in some way or other, under the control of the causer and has a definite purpose. The prototypical scenarios thus include hawks and pigeons, which are flown especially for hunting or racing, cf.:

- (26) I never fly pigeons in bad weather. – Ve špatném počasí holuby nikdy nepouštím (/nevypouštím).

This scenario is quite complex, which is the reason why the Czech equivalent with the verb *pouštět* (or *vypouštět*) also presupposes some background knowledge on the part of the decoder of the message.

4 Conclusion

The discussion has shown that the degree of the explicitness of verbal meaning reflects the degree of the explicitness of pragmatic inferencing. Although English constructions employ primary self-agentive locomotion verbs, the meaning of the entire construction is given by a more or less firmly established pragmatic pattern (or by a set of pragmatic patterns), regularly associated with a given construction. In other words, the decoding of the meaning of the English construction is heavily dependent on situational frames. In the Czech equivalents of the constructions in question, by contrast, the meanings of verbs are, on the whole, much more explicit with regard to the meaning of the construction as used in a given situation.

The high degree of dependence of the meaning of the English construction on the overall situational frame can quite clearly be explained by the high degree of the generality of the verb's meaning. By contrast, Czech self-agentive locomotion verbs do not gain in the generality of their reference (the reason apparently lies in the lack of a structural counterpart for the English SA construction), which is a prerequisite for the expression of a variety of pragmatic meanings with which English SA constructions are endowed.

A final point. The discussion also raises the question, not considered here, but in need of further research, of the relationship between the degree of pragmatic explicitness and the compositionality of constituting the construction's meaning. This problem is linked to the question of what constructional meaning actually is. Generally speaking, constructional

meaning cannot be restricted to the meaning of the verb and the specific structuration in terms of thematic roles (in the case of SA constructions, the causee, in spite of assuming a subordinate position, represents a second energy source, i.e. retains an agentive role). Certainly, it cannot be denied that constructions are endowed with their own meaning; following Goldberg (1995), the meaning of SA constructions may be specified as, roughly, ‘the causer causes a causee to move’. Very often, however, the association of verbal meaning and what is called “constructional meaning” does not capture the meaning of SA constructions in their complexity. The paper has shown that what also comes into play is pragmatic inferencing, i.e. the anchorage of the caused motion event in a specific situational frame.

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