

Towards a contrastive functional grammar for non-native learners: A comparative corpus-based approach to possession in Czech and Polish

Possession can be expressed in a number of ways even in a single language, let alone cross-linguistically; what still remains to be worked out in sufficient detail is the exact nature of the variation and the relationships among the variants. (Fried 2009: 213)

Many types of possessive constructions (Haspelmath 1999; Heine 1997; Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2003, 2006) are attested also across Slavic languages (Fried 2009; Stefan 2016). Interestingly, even languages within the West Slavic subfamily differ in the distribution of these constructions. Hence, L2 learners of a language closely related to their L1 often stumble at such differences (Amenós-Pons et al. 2019; Dušková 1984). Typical differences, reflected also in the production of non-native speakers, include the use of dative adjuncts or possessive forms of names in Czech, where Polish prefers postmodifiers in the genitive case. As the differences in the linguistic category of possession for Czech and Polish have not been investigated in comparison, except in passing and without the benefit of a corpus-based analysis (Lotko 1997: 45), we aim to fill the gap by analysing ways of expressing possession (i) within a noun phrase – as an attribute or as an argument of a participle – or (ii) as an argument of a verb within a clause.

Our key research questions are: What are the main similarities and dissimilarities between Czech and Polish in expressing possession? What are the differences in their distribution in both languages? How are they reflected in non-native written production? What are the methodological suggestions for teaching expressions of possession in Czech and Polish as a second language?

Our analysis of the differences in the usage of the possessive constructions between Czech and Polish is based on standard reference corpora (<https://www.korpus.cz/>, <http://nkjp.pl/>) and parallel corpora (<https://intercorp.korpus.cz/>); the acquisition patterns of L2 learners, based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis, including error analysis, are studied in learner corpora, i.e. CzeSL (<http://utkl.ff.cuni.cz/learncorp/>) and PoLKO (<http://utkl.ff.cuni.cz/teitok/polko/>). The Czech and Polish data and the proficiency levels in terms of CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) are analysed separately. Using the evidence from the learner corpus data, complemented by data from the reference and parallel corpora, we identify and analyse contexts where possessives are used to find which lexicogrammatical patterns are used in which communicative functions.

The analysis is followed by systematic descriptions of the functions together with the corresponding patterns. The result serves as a preliminary of a larger project aimed at building a contrastive functional grammar to support Polish and Czech learners of Czech and Polish. We use the term *functional* to describe an approach that treats linguistic phenomena in terms of their communicative functions as defined in CEFR.

The comprehensive analysis of the functions helps to elucidate problems faced by non-native learners. Applying a corpus-based approach, the functions are evaluated in a large data set of authentic linguistic texts, where patterns, articulating specific functions, provide a firm ground for comparison. An added value in using learner corpora is the information about weaknesses in non-native production. This information will be used to form appropriate descriptions in the planned grammar to make grammar users aware of the most likely pitfalls they might encounter in specific communicative contexts.

References

- Amenós-Pons, J., Ahern, A., & Guijarro-Fuentes, P. (2019). Feature reassembly across closely related languages: L1 French vs. L1 Portuguese learning of L2 Spanish Past Tenses. *Language Acquisition*, 26(2), 183–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10489223.2018.1508466>
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dušková, L. (1984). Similarity — an aid or hindrance in foreign language learning? *Folia Linguistica*, 18(1–2), 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.1984.18.1-2.103>
- Fried, M. (2010). Plain vs. situated possession in Czech: A constructional account. In *Plain vs. Situated possession in Czech: A constructional account* (pp. 213–248). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110213232.213>
- Haspelmath, M. (1999). External possession in a European areal perspective. *Typological Studies in Language*, 39, 109–136.
- Heine, B. (1997). *Possession: Cognitive sources, forces, and grammaticalization*. *Cambridge Studies in Linguistics*, 83. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Koptjevskaja-Tamm, M. (2003). Possessive noun phrases in the languages of Europe. In F. Plank (Ed.), *Noun Phrase Structure in the Languages of Europe* (pp. 621–722). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110197075.4.621>
- Koptjevskaja-Tamm, M. (2006). Possession, Adnominal. In *Encyclopedia of languages and linguistics* (2nd ed., pp. 765–169). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Elsevier.
- Lotko, E. (1997). *Synchronní konfrontace češtiny a polštiny*. Olomouc: Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého.
- Stefan, A. (2016). *Struktury posesywne i partytywne w języku polskim i słoweńskim*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.