

Light verb constructions in non-native Czech

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In my talk I would like to present the results of my recent research focusing on light verb constructions (hereafter LVC) in Czech of non-native speakers, based on corpus and empirical studies. A light verb construction is a collocation of a semantically weak verb with a predicate noun that determines the semantic and syntactic properties of the collocation, e.g. *dělat na někoho dojem* ('to make an impression on sb. '), *mít vliv na něco* ('to have an effect on sth. '), *dát přednost něčemu* (lit. to give a preference to sth. 'to prefer sth. '), *dostat strach z něčeho* ('to get scared of sth. '), *provést pokus o něco* (lit. to carry out an attempt, 'to make an attempt'), *uzavřít sňatek* (lit. to conclude a marriage, 'to get married'). In Czech, light verb constructions are very numerous and include a wide range of light verbs.

The first part of my talk introduces the concept of 'light verb construction', which in the Czech linguistic tradition is usually called 'analytical predicate', 'complex predicate' or 'verbo-nominal predicate with a categorial verb'. It gives a brief overview of the Czech literature on the subject (Radimský, 2010; Kettnerová, 2017 and others), which is surprisingly scarce given the number of LVCs in Czech and the attention that LVCs have received in the international context, and summarises the main features of these constructions and the reasons for their difficulty for non-native speakers (Altenberg & Granger, 2001).

The second part of the talk presents the results of my research on LVCs over the last year, based on the acquisition corpus of non-native Czech, i.e. CzeSL-SGT. So far, there have been only a few attempts to describe LVCs in L2 (e.g. Nesselhauf, 2005; Hasselgård, 2019; Du 2022) and none for L2 Czech. The recent study was therefore the first attempt to get an idea of the nature of LVCs in non-native Czech. The study came to the following conclusions: 1) non-native speakers are similar to native speakers in that they know which words go together (cf. Durrant & Schmitt, 2010), 2) the mastery of LVCs improves with increasing level of proficiency, both in terms of light verbs and predicative nouns, 3) at the beginner level, learners limit themselves to a few core verbs and collocations and only later on allow for more creativity, which was found also in my previous study (Hudousková, 2023).

LVCs are a typical example of a linguistic phenomenon between lexicon and syntax. Therefore, the constructionist approach (Goldberg, 1995, 2006, 2019; Herbst, 2018, 2020), which seems to be an efficient tool to focus on the lexico-grammatical continuum, is used to describe constructions with light verbs and their mutual relations. The third part of the talk contains examples of such an analysis and underlines its usefulness in the field of second language acquisition and especially in the teaching of Czech as a foreign language. It is shown that the data from both the representative synchronic corpus of Czech (SYN2020) and the acquisition corpus of L2 Czech (CzeSL-SGT) can help us to understand the frequency and structural relations of individual LVCs, light verbs and predicative nouns and also to elucidate the process of language acquisition.

The fourth part of the talk is devoted to a recent experiment with bachelor's and master's students of Czech for foreigners, who are supposed to be at the B2-C1 level of the CEFR. The aim of the study was to find out whether the frequency and structural relations between lexical items, collocations and constructions in the language are reflected in the language competence of non-native speakers. The results of a questionnaire in which the students were asked to fill in the blanks with either a light verb or a predicative noun, led to the conclusion that non-native speakers are aware of both the frequency of LVCs and their collocates and the relative tightness of the collocation, as well as their structural relations to other competing collocates or constructions. Finally, it is argued that these findings have implications for the teaching of Czech LVCs at different levels of proficiency and that language corpora, both learner and representative, are a valuable source of relevant data, which may be useful for the improvement of teaching materials as well as referential CEFR descriptions of Czech.

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