

Gender Impoverishment in Czech

Czech adjectival elements agree in gender with 1st- or 2nd-person (1/2) subjects, even though Czech 1/2 pronouns lack any overt gender distinctions. (1) illustrates gender agreement on predicate adjectives, (2) illustrates gender agreement on the adjectival *rad* ‘glad, like’, and (3) illustrates gender agreement on the adjectival past participle. Similar phenomena are observed in Slavic languages, e.g. Polish, and also in Romance languages, e.g., Brazilian Portuguese. Gender agreement with 1/2 subjects in Czech and other languages raises the question of where these gender features come from, since they do not appear to be present on the pronoun. In other words, what do adjectivals agree with? Appeal to ‘pragmatics’ or real-world knowledge is not a sufficient answer to this question. Features of gender must be formally represented in order to enter into a syntactic dependency relationship like agreement (cf. Collins & Postal 2012).

The inherent markedness (‘>’ = ‘more marked than’) of gender on pronouns (pro:+G > pro:-G) is demonstrated typologically. Siewierska (2013) shows that having any pronominal gender distinctions at all is highly marked, occurring in only a third (124/378 = 33%) of the languages in the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS). Furthermore, there are evident markedness interactions with person (1/2 > 3) and number (non-sg > sg) in the WALS languages with gender distinctions on pronouns. About half of them distinguish gender on 3sg only, as in many Indo-European languages (61/124 = 49.1%), while another third have gender on 3sg/non-sg (42/124 = 33.8%). Almost a score distinguish gender on all persons 1/2/3 (18/124 = 14.5%), but only a couple have gender on 1/2 but not 3 person (2/124 = 1.6%). Only one WALS language has gender distinctions on 3non-sg but not 3sg pronouns.

Given such facts, this paper will develop Nevins’s (2011: 430) suggested analysis of gender agreement with 1/2 subjects as resulting from markedness-driven Impoverishment (Bonet 1991; Halle 1997; Noyer 1998; Nevins & Parrott 2010). Because gender features [\pm feminine \pm neuter] are inherently marked, their occurrence on the same terminal node with the marked feature values for 1/2 [+author/+addressee] induces post-syntactic deletion of gender in Czech (4). Impoverishment must take place after agreement with the gender feature of the pronoun has been established in the syntax. Thus, adjectival elements in Czech and other languages may agree syntactically with pronominal gender features, which are subsequently deleted by morphology. Impoverishment entails meta-paradigmatic syncretisms, and as expected, in Czech there are no gender distinctions on 1/2 in any of the six pronominal case declensions (e.g., 1sg Locative *mnou*/**mnoua-Fem*, etc.).

It is possible to extend the gender Impoverishment approach to account for possessive (Poss) pronoun paradigms in Czech and other Slavic languages, though details remain to be worked out. Czech 1/2 Poss pronouns do not show gender distinctions themselves but, like other adjectivals, agree in gender with the possessed noun in all cases (5a-b illustrate Nom). 3sg Poss pronouns show gender distinctions and in Nom case, none agree in gender with the possessed noun (5c); 3Masc and 3pl never agree in any case. However, 3sgFem Poss pronouns agree with [-fem] nouns in all oblique cases. Poss pronouns include gender features, inter alia, and combine with an adjectival head (Adj) containing its own gender features. Gender features are Impoverished from marked 1/2 pronouns but not from unmarked 3 pronouns, which retain a gender features (4). 3 Poss pronouns contain two sets of gender feature on the same terminal, causing a gender markedness ‘overload’. As a first approximation, then, I propose that additional language-specific Impoverishment rules may delete gender features on Adj when they co-occur with marked gender and number features on D. In Czech, gender on Adj is Impoverished if D is [-fem/+pl] (6) and Adj[+fem -neut] is Impoverished if D is [+fem/+nom] (7).

- (1) (Ja) jsem krásný a (ty) jsi talentovaná.
 (1sg-Nom) be-1sg beautiful-Masc and (2sg-Nom) be-2sg talented-Fem
 ‘I am beautiful and you are talented.’ (spoken by a man to a woman)
- (2) (Ja) mám radá pivo a (ty) máš rad čaj.
 (1sg-Nom) have-1sg glad-Fem beer and (2sg-Nom) have-2sg glad-Masc tea
 ‘I like beer and you like tea.’ (spoken by a woman to a man)
- (3) (Ja) jsem plaval a (ty) jsi běhala.
 (1sg-Nom) be-1sg swum-Masc and (2sg-Nom) be-2sg run-Fem
 ‘I swam and you ran.’ (spoken by a man to a woman)
- (4) [±fem ±neut] → [∅ ∅] / [___ +auth/+addr]
- (5) a. Můj/tvůj čaj, moje/tvoje káva/ pivo
 1/2sg-Poss-Nom-Masc tea-Masc 1sg/2sg-Poss-Nom-Fem/Neut coffee-Fem/beer-Neut
 ‘My/your tea, my/your coffee/beer’
- b. Náš/váš čaj, naše/vaše káva/ pivo
 1/2pl-Poss-Nom-Masc tea-Masc 1pl/2pl-Poss-Nom-Fem/Neut coffee-Fem/beer-Neut
 ‘Our/your tea, our/your coffee/beer’
- c. Jeho/ její/ jejich čaj/ káva/ pivo
 3sg-Masc/3sg-Fem/3pl-Nom-Poss tea-Masc/coffee-Fem/beer-Neut
 ‘His/her/their tea/coffee/beer’
- (6) Adj[±fem ±neut] → [∅] / [D_{POSS}[-fem/+pl] ___]
- (7) Adj[+fem -neut] → [∅] / [D_{POSS}[+fem/-nom] ___]

Selected references

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