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## Inhalt / Contents

Vorwort / Preface ..... 9

### I. Plenarvorträge / Keynote Speeches

**Bruno Strecker:** Korpusgrammatik zwischen reiner Statistik und „intelligenter“ Grammatikografie ..... 23

**Douglas Biber / Bethany Gray:** Is conversation more grammatically complex than academic writing? ..... 47

**Mirjam Fried:** Grammatical analysis and corpus evidence ..... 63

**Françoise Gadet:** What can be learned about the grammar of French from corpora of French spoken outside France ..... 87

### II. Korpusgestützte Grammatikforschung / Corpus-based Grammar Research

**Christa Dürscheid / Stephan Elspaß / Arne Ziegler:** Grammatische Variabilität im Gebrauchsstandard: das Projekt „Variantengrammatik des Standarddeutschen“ ..... 123

**Reinhard Fiehler:** Korpusbasierte Analyse von Univerbierungsprozessen ..... 141

**Hagen Hirschmann:** Eine für Korpora relevante Subklassifikation adverbialer Wortarten ..... 157

**Franziska Münzberg:** Korpusrecherche in der Dudenredaktion: Ein Werkstattbericht ..... 181

**Per Bærentzen:** Einige neue Regularitäten im Gebrauch der Pronominalformen *deren* und *derer* ..... 199

**Geert Stuyckens:** Zum Wesen der Subjektlücken in Verbzweitkoordination auf der Grundlage eines deutsch > niederländischen Übersetzungskorpus ..... 213

<b>Elma Kerz:</b> The role of low-level schemas in English academic writing. A usage-based constructionist approach.....	229
<b>Markéta Malá:</b> Copular clauses in English and in Czech – a comparative corpus-based approach .....	253
<b>Svetlana Gorokhova:</b> The role of frequency effects in the selection of inflected word forms: A corpus study of Russian speech errors.....	267
<b>Francesca Strik Lievers:</b> Constructing Judgments. The Interaction between Adjectives and Clausal Complements in Italian .....	287
<b>Lisa Brunetti / Stefan Bott / Joan Costa / Enric Vallduví:</b> A multilingual annotated corpus for the study of Information Structure.....	305

### **III. Methodologie korpuslinguistischer Grammatikforschung / Methodologies of corpus-linguistic Grammar Research**

<b>Holger Keibel / Cyril Belica / Marc Kupietz / Rainer Perkuhn:</b> Approaching grammar: Detecting, conceptualizing and generalizing paradigmatic variation .....	329
<b>Oliver Mason:</b> Reconciling Phraseology and Grammar .....	357
<b>Milena Hebal-Jeziarska / Neil Bermel:</b> Frequency and oppositions in corpus-based research into morphological variation .....	373
<b>Stella Neumann:</b> Contrasting frequency variation of grammatical features.....	389
<b>Thomas Herbst / Susen Faulhaber:</b> Optionen der Valenzbeschreibung. Ein Valenzmodell für das Englische.....	411
<b>Amir Zeldes:</b> On the Productivity and Variability of the Slots in German Comparative Correlative Constructions.....	429
<b>Cyril Belica / Marc Kupietz / Andreas Witt / Harald Lungen:</b> The Morphosyntactic Annotation of DeReKo: Interpretation, Opportunities, and Pitfalls .....	451

#### **IV. Einblicke in die aktuelle Forschung / Insights into current studies**

<b>František Štícha:</b> Der kommunikative und der systembezogene Status grammatischer Phänomene mit niedriger Häufigkeit .....	473
<b>Said Sahel:</b> Monoflexion als Erklärung für Variation in der Nominalphrasenflexion des Deutschen .....	485
<b>Georg Albert:</b> Innovative Sprachverwendungen: Verbreitung und Kontext.....	495
<b>Eva Breindl / Maik Walter:</b> Kausalverknüpfungen im Deutschen. Eine korpusbasierte Studie zum Zusammenspiel von Konnektorbedeutung, Kontexteigenschaften und Diskursrelationen.....	503
<b>Manfred Stede / Uwe Küßner:</b> Kausale Konnektoren in der Automatischen Textanalyse.....	513
<b>Julia Richling:</b> Diachrone Analyse eines Newsgroup / Webforum-Korpus .....	521
<b>Tomas By:</b> The Prolog version of the Tiger Dependency Bank.....	531
<b>Silke Scheible / Richard Jason Whitt / Martin Durrell / Paul Bennett:</b> Investigating diachronic grammatical variation in Early Modern German. Evidence from the <i>GerManC</i> corpus.....	539
<b>Christopher Cox:</b> Quantitative perspectives on syntactic variation: Investigating verbal complementation in a corpus of Mennonite Plautdietsch .....	549
<b>Silvia Hansen-Schirra:</b> Empirical profiling of LSP grammar .....	557
<b>Olga O. Boriskina:</b> Noun Cryptotype Analysis as an Approach to Corpus-driven Modelling of N+V Collocations .....	567
<b>Siaw-Fong Chung / Yu-Wen Tseng:</b> Learning Prepositions: A Corpus-based Study in Taiwan EFL Contexts.....	575
<b>Svetlana Savchuk:</b> The <i>Russian National Corpus</i> as a Tool for Research on Grammatical Variability.....	585
<b>Ruska Ivanovska-Naskova:</b> Italian-Macedonian parallel corpus .....	599

MARKÉTA MALÁ

## **Copular clauses in English and in Czech – a comparative corpus-based approach**

### **Abstract**

Copular clauses, i.e. clauses with a verbo-nominal predicate comprising a copular verb and a subject complement, are used in both English and Czech to ascribe a quality, property or value to the subject. While both languages make use of copular verbs *be* and *become* (*být, stát se*, respectively, in Czech), the repertoire of copular verbs is much broader in English, making it possible to distinguish between various types of attribution (e.g., verbs of ‘seeming’, attribution based on perception, verbs of ‘remaining’ etc.). The question then arises of what means are employed in Czech to express such ‘modified attribution’ and, on the other hand, what the constructions used in Czech can suggest of the meaning of the respective copular verbs in English.

The paper is based on the material drawn from a parallel translation corpus of Czech and English fiction texts. We hope it will therefore also illustrate some ways in which multilingual corpora can be employed in contrastive research.

### **1. Introduction**

The present article sets out to explore two areas. First, given the differences between the system of copular verbs in English and Czech, the contrastive approach may reveal the means used to render the meaning of English copular clauses in Czech. At the same time, the paradigms of Czech correspondences can suggest something about the meaning and classification of English copulas. The second goal is a more methodological one: using a bidirectional parallel corpus of Czech and English, we would like to test some of the possibilities translation corpora offer for the study of comparable patterns of usage in different languages.

### **2. The material and method**

The study is based on the material drawn from a parallel Czech – English corpus being put together as a part of a larger project of multilingual corpora:



InterCorp.<sup>1</sup> A pilot bidirectional balanced subcorpus of aligned Czech and English translations (c. 800 000 tokens) was used for the present study (Figure 1, on the methodology cf. also Johansson 2007, Dušková 2004, 2005).

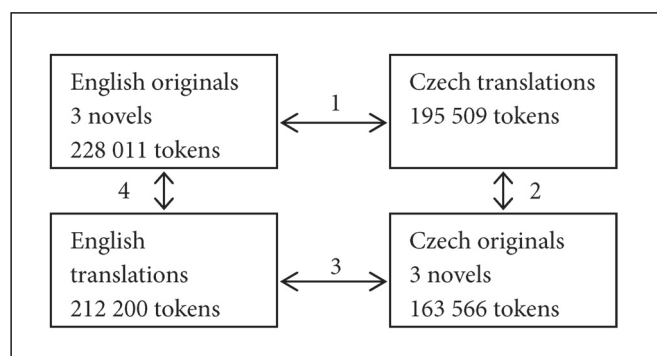


Figure 1: The corpus used in the present study (a sub-corpus of the InterCorp multilingual corpus)

The arrows in Figure 1 show the comparisons that were made: first, we proceeded from the English source texts, looking for the Czech translation counterparts of copular verbs; a pattern of classes of copular verbs became quite prominent after having classified and grouped together the correspondences. While the first step of the analysis focussed on formal correspondences, the use of a bidirectional corpus in the next one made it possible for us to proceed from function to its formal realization. Epistemic adverbials were identified as a frequent means of rendering the modification achieved by the copular verbs *seem*, *appear* and *look* in Czech. The Czech epistemic adverbials were used as query terms in Czech original texts; their English correspondences (step 3), though formally varied, may be considered functionally equivalent due to sharing the same translation counterpart. They all fall within the semantic domain of epistemic modification. The patterns of choice among the constructions available within this domain in English originals were found to be different from those in English translations (step 4).

<sup>1</sup> The study is a part of the research project *Czech National Corpus and Corpora of Other Languages* MSM 0021620823, InterCorp, <http://www.korpus.cz/intercorp>. The concordancer used was ParaConc (<http://www.athel.com/para.html>).

### 3. The scope of the study

Both in English and in Czech the repertoire of copular verbs includes the verb *be/být*, which “does not add any semantic content to the predicate phrase it is contained in” (Pustet 2003: 5). Since we are concerned with the types of meaning modification achieved by copular verbs, the verb *be* will be excluded from the present study. Instead, we shall focus on the other copular verbs (‘semi-copulas’, ‘quasi-copulas’ or ‘complex-intransitives’), which display the same syntactic behaviour as the copula *be* but “add meaning to the predicate phrases in which they are contained. This semantic function, while not directly affecting the inner core of the predicate phrase, that is, its lexical nucleus, by altering the intrinsic semantic content of the latter, consist in ‘importing’ ... meaning components into the predicate phrase.” (ibid.: 5-6). In Czech, the only ‘semi-copula’ is *stát se*, a resultative verb equivalent to *become* (cf. Grepl / Karlík 1998: 212). In English, the range of copulas is much broader. For the present study we only selected the basic prototypical members of the two groups of these verbs as listed in Huddleston / Pullum (2002: 263-264): a) verbs with depictive predicative complements (current copulas): *feel, continue, appear, look, keep, seem, smell, remain, sound, stay, prove, taste*; b) verbs with resultative predicative complements (resulting copulas): *become, grow, come, turn, fall, get, go*. The number of copular verbs in the corpus is given in Table 1.

	word-count (tokens)	number of copular verbs	
		absolute	per 1000 tokens
English originals	228 011	1 054	4.6
English translations	212 200	760	3.6

Table 1: The number of copular verbs in the corpus used

### 4. The correspondences between *become* and *stát se*

The system of copular verbs in English and Czech seems to overlap in the resultative verb *become* and *stát se*. However, a closer look at the correspondences of *become* reveals that while there is functional similarity, the two languages differ in the syntactic realization (cf. Teich 2003: 51). *Become* corresponds to *stát se* in 14.7 percent of examples only (Example 1). Although generally the same structural choices are available in the two languages, the patterns of choice differ. Czech appears to prefer focussing on the resultant state, indicating the change by

temporal adverbials (Example 2). There are also two types of correspondences, both more frequent than the copular verb *stát se*, which may be accounted for by the typological differences between the two languages. Czech, being a synthetic language, displays a preference for expressing aspectual modification (including resultativeness) by affixation (cf. prefixes *z-*, *vy-* in Examples 3 and 4). The English resultative copular predication will then be rendered in Czech as a lexical verb whose prefix indicates a change. The lexical verb may be derivationally related to an adjective corresponding to the English subject complement (Example 3, *wise* = *moudrá*) or morphologically unrelated to it (Example 4).

- (1) A small bolt from a cockpit *became* jewellery. (MOE)  
Matice z pilotní kabiny *se stala* šperkem.
- (2) The mountains around the school *became* icy gray ... (JRH)  
Hory kolem školy *byly teď* ledově šedé ...  
“The mountains around the school *were now* icy gray ...”
- (3) You that demon for pleasure who *became so wise*. (MOE)  
Ty, která sis tak potrpěla na zábavu a která jsi tolik *zmoudřela*.
- (4) We do, after all, wish him to *become* someone we can be proud of, don't we? (KIA)  
Chceme přece, aby *vyrostl* v člověka, na nějž budeme moci být hrdí, ne?  
“we ... wish him to grow up into someone ...”

The English copular predication was also found to correspond to a Czech catenative construction *začít (začínat) / přestat být* (i.e. *start / cease to be*) + complement (Example 5). Four correspondences were described as zero counterparts: here the overall semantic equivalence of the sentences is maintained, yet an explicit counterpart of the copular predicate cannot be identified in the translation, e.g. due to a shift in semantic roles and/or clause element functions (Example 6).<sup>2</sup>

- (5) In jail he *became* serene and devious. (MOE)  
Ve vězení *začal být* vážný a nevyzpytatelný.
- (6) “Bulstrode, Millicent” then *became* a Slytherin. (JRH)  
“Bulstrodeovou, Millicent” zařadil klobouk do Zmijozelu.  
“«Bulstrode, Millicent»-object assigned the hat-subject to Slytherin”

<sup>2</sup> Instances where the counterpart of the English copular clause is missing in the Czech translation were excluded from the description.

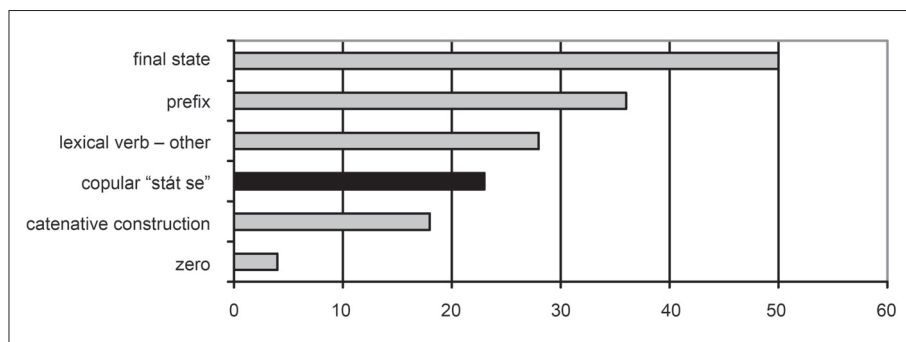


Figure 2: The correspondences of *become*

### 5. Czech translation counterparts of English copular verbs

Following the same procedure as in the case of *become*, we can identify a range of translation correspondences available for the other English copular verbs. Again, there may be zero<sup>3</sup> or overt correspondences. The overt counterparts may be classified as shown in Table 2 below:

Type of correspondence		Examples
verbal	lexical verb (resultative, perception, etc.)	For in all other respects, she <i>looks</i> a self-pitying sort. (KIA) Ve všech ostatních ohledech přitom <i>působí</i> sebelítostivě.
	copular verb	It <i>gets</i> very scary. (KIA) <i>Bude</i> to hrozně strašidelné.
	catenative construction	He would <i>get</i> restless ... (MOE) <i>Začínal být</i> neklidný ...
	verbal prefix (resultative)	They crossed the Bulaq Bridge and the traffic <i>got worse</i> . (MOE) Přejeli přes most Búlák a provoz <i>se zhoršil</i> .
verbo-nominal		He <i>felt</i> capable only of reconnaissance ... (MOE) <i>Měl pocit, že je</i> schopen jenom rekognoskace ...

<sup>3</sup> Apart from lexical-syntactic transpositions illustrated in Example 6, the category of ‘zero correspondence’ also includes instances where a direct counterpart of the copular verb (and the modification achieved by it) is missing in the translation, the rest of the sentence being, however, identifiable, e.g. “... there seemed to be a lot of strangely dressed people about” (JRH) – “...na ulici je spousta podivně oblečených lidí” (i.e. “... in the street there are a lot of strangely dressed people”).

Type of correspondence		Examples
adverbial	(epistemic, temporal, etc.)	It <i>seems</i> unimportant now, with the war and such things. (MOE) Ted' za války a vůbec to <i>zřejmě</i> není důležité.
clausal	'comment clause'	Noriko, however, <i>seems</i> very proud of her apartment, ... (KIA) Noriko je však, <i>jak se mi zdá</i> , na svůj byt velice hrdá ...

Table 2: Types of Czech translation counterparts of English copular verbs

However, it is not primarily the paradigm of translation choices itself that we aim at. Since “one of the most fascinating aspects of multi-lingual corpora is that they can make meanings visible through translation patterns” (Johansson 2007: 28), we shall try to use the correspondence patterns to highlight the meaning modification achieved by copular verbs (cf. Table 3).

	total	zero	verbal							vb-nom.	adverbial		clausal
			lexical verb			copular verb		cate-nat.	pre-fix res.		epist	temp-man-ner	
			re-sult.	per-cept.	other	<i>stát se</i>	<i>být</i>						
<i>become</i>	156	4	30	3	10	23	23	18	36	1	0	8	0
<i>turn</i>	16	0	2	0	0	1	2	2	9	0	0	0	0
<i>go</i>	35	0	8	0	0	0	2	0	25	0	0	0	0
<i>fall</i>	30	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	23	0	0	2	0
<i>grow</i>	31	0	10	0	3	0	3	3	12	0	0	0	0
<i>get</i>	48	2	12	3	1	0	9	6	12	2	0	1	0
<i>come</i>	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<i>prove</i>	8	0	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
<i>appear</i>	38	7	0	17	5	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	1
<i>look</i>	169	4	6	141	1	0	7	0	2	0	7	1	0
<i>seem</i>	317	43	0	135	5	0	5	0	1	7	108	3	10
<i>sound</i>	26	1	0	14	5	0	2	0	0	0	1	3	0
<i>feel</i>	79	0	0	37	8	0	15	0	1	16	2	0	0
<i>taste</i>	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>remain</i>	39	6	4	1	22	1	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
<i>continue</i>	49	17	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	30	0
<i>stay</i>	7	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
<i>keep</i>	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>total</b>	<b>1054</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>11</b>

Table 3: Translation counterparts and the meaning of English copular verbs (the individual types of correspondence are exemplified in Table 2 above)

The correspondence pattern may be approached as a type of multi-dimensional variation (cf. Biber 1995: 18-20), i.e., a ‘translation correspondence variation’. In a way similar to Biber’s methodology, the approach uses text-corpora and computational tools to identify the corresponding structures in the parallel texts – the ‘dimensions’ of translation correspondence. Since the present study relies on a relatively small pilot corpus, multivariate statistical techniques were not used to analyze the co-occurrence relations among translation counterparts. We only recorded the absolute numbers of the individual types of correspondences for each copular verb in Table 3. The most frequent type of counterpart of each copula is marked in dark grey, the second most frequent in a lighter shade of grey. Even with this degree of simplification, a distinct pattern of correspondence starts to emerge.

First, there is a group of copular verbs which are predominantly translated by a lexical resultative verb. The resultative meaning of the verb is typically expressed by the prefix. This group comprises the copular verbs *become, turn, go, fall, get, grow, come, prove*. These verbs, indeed, coincide with those classified as verbs with resultative predicative complements in Huddleston/Pullum (2002: 264). The second group of copular verbs share a preference for lexical verbs related to perception as their counterparts: *appear, look, seem, sound, feel, taste*. Within this class, three verbs, *appear, look, seem*, are also frequently translated using epistemic adverbial modification in Czech. We shall return to this sub-group in Section 6 below. The third group of copular verbs – *remain, continue, stay, keep* – typically invites three types of counterparts: a lexical verb which comprises the meaning of the copula and its complement, adverbial modification, and a zero counterpart. The aspectual modification (durative) achieved by the copular verb in English is manifested in the morphological aspect marking in Czech. This applies both to the translation by a lexical verb and to the zero correspondence, where a direct counterpart of the copula is missing in the translation and the Czech verb corresponds directly to the infinitival complement of the copula (Example 7). The duration may be lexically reinforced by an adverbial of time (Example 8).

- (7) Neither of us spoke for a few moments, while I *continued to light* lanterns. (KIA)  
Chvíli jsme oba mlčeli, a já *rozsvěcel* lucerny.
- (8) Mori-san *remained absorbed* by his pictures. (KIA)  
Mori-san *si dál zkoumavě prohlížel* obrázky.

## 6. Copular verbs as means of epistemic modification

While the copular verbs in the first and third group may be considered means of aspectual modification, often corresponding to morphological marking of aspect in Czech, the second group – *appear, look, seem, sound, feel, taste* – seems to prefer lexical verbs related to perception or specific verb-based constructions closely tied to the individual copulas. For instance, 46.8 percent of the counterparts of the copula *feel* are lexical verbs. The range of these verbs is quite limited though: in 89.2 percent of instances the verb chosen is *(po)cítit (se)* or *případat (si)*. The second and third most prominent types of counterparts of the copula *feel* can be characterized syntactically either as copular predicates (with the copula *být*) or verbo-nominal constructions. Both types, however, comprise highly fixed expressions, often semantically non-compositional, e.g. *feel sorry – být (komu) líto, feel wide awake – být vzhůru, feel strange – mít podivný pocit, feel hungry – mít hlad*.<sup>4</sup>

Three copular verbs in this group – *appear, look, and seem* – share a preference for an epistemic adverbial modifier as their second most frequent counterpart. The adverbial typically takes either the form *jakoby / jako by* (“it was as if”) (Example 9) or that of a modal adverb (Example 10).

- (9) A soft rustling and clinking *seemed* to be coming from up ahead.  
(JRH)  
Zepředu *jako by* k nim doléhalo tiché šustění a cinkání.

- (10) ... he seems capable in that category. (MOE)  
... je *zřejmě* v tomhle směru schopný.

The latter type of adverbial, being one of the paradigmatic choices of expressing epistemic modification available in both languages, poses the question of whether different ways of conveying this meaning are systematically preferred in the source and in the target language. Since copular verbs and modal adverbs are members of a larger set of means of expressing epistemic modification in the two languages, the bidirectional corpus can be used to identify the functionally equivalent constructions. Proceeding from the Czech translations to the English source texts, the Czech modal adverbs *zřejmě, očividně, zjevně, zdánlivě, nejspíš,*

<sup>4</sup> The correspondence between the copular predicate in English and the verbo-nominal construction with the verb *mít* (“have”) in Czech suggests the closeness of *have* to copulas. *Have* in verbo-nominal constructions (e.g. *have the feeling that ...*) can indeed be considered a “copular verb with an object-like complementation” (Dušková et al. 2006: 417).

*asi, možná, nepochybně*, which serve as counterparts of the copular verbs *seem, appear* and *look*, were also found to correspond to English modal adverbs, adjectives and verbs, or comment clauses.<sup>5</sup> All these English forms can be considered functionally equivalent.<sup>6</sup> This approach thus makes it possible to highlight functional patterns in English by grouping together English constructions which, although formally varied, share the same Czech counterpart (Figure 3).

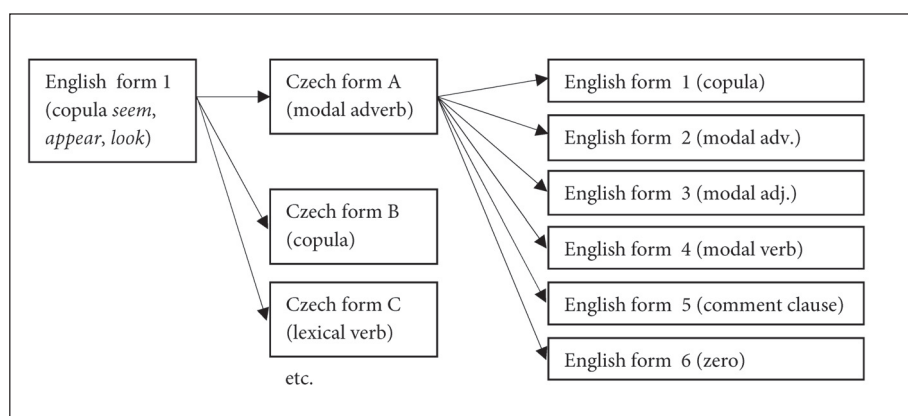


Figure 3: Looking for patterns of meaning in the parallel corpus<sup>7</sup>

The same modal adverbs were then used as query terms in Czech original texts. While the range of correspondences remains the same, the preferences are different (Table 4). In both directions of translation epistemic modification tends to be expressed by modal adverbs in English. However, the distribution of the other means seems to reveal translation effects, i.e. “differences between choices in original and translated texts in the same language” (Johansson 2007: 32, see also Baker 1993). Copular verbs constitute the third most frequent means of expressing the modification in the original texts (14.8 percent); when English is the target language, their representation drops to a mere

<sup>5</sup> 8.2 percent of examples had zero counterparts.

<sup>6</sup> While English constructions whose Czech translation counterparts share the same markers of discourse function can generally be considered functionally equivalent, manual checking is always an inevitable step in the analysis.

<sup>7</sup> The Czech counterparts (A, B, C, etc.) of the English copular verbs represent formally different means of rendering the meaning of the copulas in Czech. Proceeding from each of these Czech forms to its English translations, we can group together various English constructions (1, 2, 3, etc.) which can be assumed to be functionally equivalent (e.g. expressing epistemic modification) due to the fact that they share the same Czech form as their counterpart.



3 percent. More research is needed to answer the question of whether the differences in the preference patterns in the two languages are linked to the narrow repertoire of copular verbs in Czech and the tendency to prefer adverbial clausal modification to analytic modification by a modal verb within the verb phrase. Parallel corpora appear to be useful tools in investigating the area of such language-specific preferences.

	Czech translations > English originals		Czech originals > English translations	
	Σ	(%)	Σ	(%)
modal adverb	210	40.3	111	46.8
copular verb	77	14.8	7	3.0
modal verb	110	21.1	34	14.3
comment clause	60	11.5	27	11.4
modal adjective	18	3.5	5	2.2
zero	46	8.2	53	22.4
<b>total</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4: The translation correspondences of modal adverbs *zřejmě očividně, zjevně, zdánlivě, nejspíš, asi, možná, nepochybně*

## 7. The dative with copular verbs

The epistemic modification conveyed by the copular verbs of perception and ‘seeming’ may be explicitly related to the observer or experiencer: “... the sense verbs and verbs of seeming license a *to*-phrase where the oblique NP expresses the experiencer.” (Huddleston/Pullum 2002: 263) Johansson points out that the meaning of the copula *seem* can therefore be defined as: “somebody or something gives the experiencer the impression of being something or doing something.” (Johansson 2007: 118)

In the Czech counterparts of this class of copular verbs the epistemic evaluation may be explicitly ascribed to an experiencer using a noun phrase in the dative case (Example 11).<sup>8</sup>

- (11) *To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible ... (JRH)*  
*Někomu tak mladému jako ty to jistě zní neuvěřitelně ...*

<sup>8</sup> Similar to the English *to*-prepositional phrase, the Czech dative is typically the case form referring to the recipient.

The overt expression of the experiencer by the Czech dative was 4.6 times more frequent than overt reference to the experiencer by the *to*-prepositional phrase in the original English texts (Table 5). The reasons for the difference may be sought in the syntactic structure of the Czech counterparts. The dative is an obligatory complement of some of the verbs corresponding to the copular verbs of perception and ‘seeming’ (Example 12). However, even when optional, the dative tends to be expressed overtly in Czech where in English it remains implicit (Example 13).

- (12) It felt as though he was sitting on some sort of plant. (JRH)  
Připadalo *mu*, že snad sedí na nějaké rostlině.
- (13) After what seemed an age, she turned and left. (JRH)  
Zdálo se *jim*, že to trvá celou věčnost, pak se však paní Norrisová otočila a vyšla ven.

Moreover, our data have shown that the optional dative can also occur in the correspondences of English copular verbs other than verbs of perception and ‘seeming’ (Table 5). The semantic role of the participant referred to by the dative noun phrase, however, is not that of an experiencer or observer in these cases. The free dative denotes a participant affected by the change in situation or the resultant state (cf. Poldauf 1964). The change may have a negative effect on the participant (‘dativus incommodi’ – Example 14) or affect the participant in a positive way (‘dativus commodi’ – Example 15). However insufficient the size of the corpus, the Czech dative counterparts may suggest that even copular verbs other than those of perception and ‘seeming’ can convey an implicit ‘relativization’ of the situation with respect to a particular participant.

- (14) The cut had turned a nasty shade of green. (JRH)  
Rána *mu* ošklivě zezelenala.  
“The cut had turned a nasty shade of green to / on him”
- (15) Wood was now looking as though all his dreams had come true at once. (JRH)  
Wood se teď tvářil, jako by se *mu* naráz splnily všechny jeho sny.  
“... as though all his dreams had come true at once to him”

	English <i>to</i> -PP	Czech dative
<i>become</i>	0	1
<i>turn</i>	0	1
<i>go</i>	0	4
<i>fall</i>	0	0
<i>get</i>	0	0
<i>grow</i>	0	0
<i>come</i>	0	1
<i>prove</i>	0	0
<i>appear</i>	1	9
<i>look</i>	2	7
<i>seem</i>	17	43
<i>sound</i>	0	6
<i>feel</i>	1	25
<i>taste</i>	0	0
<i>remain</i>	0	0
<i>continue</i>	0	0
<i>stay</i>	0	1
<i>keep</i>	0	0
total	21	97

Table 5: The English *to*-prepositional phrase with copular verbs and the corresponding Czech dative construction

## 8. Conclusion

As pointed out by Tognini-Bonelli (1993: 209), “corpus studies have brought about a major shift in the relationship between data and theory. [...] Patterns of usage [...] are now surfacing and becoming noticeable in the light of the available evidence.” This paper set out to examine the opportunities for a systematic study of comparable patterns of usage in different languages provided by parallel corpora. Based on the analysis of English copular verbs and their Czech correspondences, we hope to have shown several ways in which a bidirectional translation corpus can be employed to reveal such patterns in both languages and their correspondences as well as to highlight the effects of translation from one language to the other.

First, parallel corpora can be used to “make meanings visible through translation patterns” (Johansson 2007: 28). English copular verbs were grouped together according to their preferences with respect to the translation counter-

parts. The three classes of copulas established in this way correspond to the classification given by reference grammars – resulting copular verbs, current copulas and copular verbs of perception and ‘seeming’. Secondly, parallel corpora can serve as a tool which makes it possible to proceed from a particular discourse function to its realization forms. Assuming that the various forms which share the same translation counterpart are functionally equivalent, various realizations of the discourse function can be grouped together. While parallel paradigms of means of expressing the particular function in the two languages may exist, the actual patterns of choice may be language-specific. Moreover, the pattern of preferences in the source language can leave its mark on the translation through overuse or underuse of particular constructions. This may be illustrated by the higher proportion of copular verbs as means of epistemic modification in English source texts as compared with English translations from Czech. Last but not least, parallel corpora may be the source of small surprises, such as the emergence of the affected participant in the translation counterparts of resultative copular clauses.

Parallel corpora not only appear to be useful sources of empirical data for comparative corpus-based research but they also make it possible to approach the data in new useful ways.

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