

## THE DEFAULT CASE IN CZECH

MICHAELA ČAKÁNYOVÁ

Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, Česká republika

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the issue of a non-assigned case in Czech. This so-called default case can be found in many languages and its behavior seems to be largely determined by the type of the given language. English, being a poor case language, does not have many options for the default; it is basically the nominative or accusative that are somehow available. Czech, on the other hand, being a rich case language, offers a greater variety. The paper considers special environments where case is not assigned, such as those suggested by Schütze (2001) for English. From these, only the left-dislocation seems to be the right environment for the default case in Czech. Moreover, we consider post copular DPs, which show a competition of the nominative and the instrumental. The former proves to be the default option for Czech.

**Key Words:** structural case, default case, nominalization, nominative, instrumental

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will try to shed some light on the so-called default case for Czech compared to English. They are both nominative-accusative languages; however, Czech is a rich case language as opposed to English, which is a poor case language.<sup>1</sup> The first non-trivial question that needs to be answered is how we define default case. This term has been used by many authors (e.g.: Schütze 2001; Sigurðsson 2006; McFadden 2007) with varying degrees of its specification. We are going to begin with our own definition based on previous research, then we are going to consider the syntactic tests designed by Schütze (2001) and furthermore, we will have a look at some special instances of case in Czech post-copular NPs and APs.

Case theory distinguishes **structural case** where a verb (V) marks accusative, inflection/tense (I/T) marks nominative and a preposition (P) marks accusative, and which is sensitive to A-movement (1). Then there are non-structural cases (2): **lexical case** (typically a specific verb's lexical entry, which can be idiosyncratic) and **inherent case** (concerning specific theta role marking, which is typically genitive or

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<sup>1</sup> The cross-linguistic theory of case is not a straightforward matter. According to the World Atlas of Languages (Baerman – Brown 2013), there is no overt case-marking at all in 123 out of 198 languages studied.

dative). Non-structural case is preserved under passivization while lexical case is not. For further description of the particular properties of these cases see Woolford (2006). We are not going to treat the latter two (lexical and inherent) separately as it is neither necessary for Czech nor for English.

- (1) a. *Pes pokousal pošťáka.*<sup>2</sup>  
 dog.NOM bit postman.ACC  
 ‘A dog bit a postman.’
- b. *Pošťák byl pokousán psem.*  
 postman.NOM was bitten dog.INS  
 ‘A postman was bitten by a dog.’
- (2) a. *Michal pomáhá Janě.*  
 Michal.NOM helps Jane.DAT  
 ‘Michal helps Jane.’
- b. *Janě je pomáháno.*  
 Jane.DAT is helped  
 ‘Jane is helped.’

The theory of case in the Government and Binding framework was shaped by Chomsky’s case filter (1981, p. 49): “\*NP if NP has phonetic content and no Case”. Later, he introduced the Visibility Condition which combines case and theta role assignment: “an element must be Case-marked in order for it to be visible for theta-marking (which in turn is required by the theta criterion)” (1986, p. 94). However, this proved to be quite problematic in case of PRO subjects in control constructions which do not have any (overt) case, yet they do have theta roles assigned. Null Case (Chomsky – Lasnik 2015) was supposed to deal with this shortcoming, however, the problematic nature of Null Case is evident from examples such as:<sup>3</sup>

- (3) *Petr<sub>i</sub> se rozhodl PRO<sub>i</sub> jít sám svou cestou.*  
 Petr REFL decided go.INF alone.NOM his way  
 ‘Peter decided to go alone his way.’

<sup>2</sup> All Czech examples are our own if not stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> Hinzen (2014) notices that there are structures where the theta role and case marking do not really correspond to Case filter either. Apart from PRO subjects he also mentions expletives. These require some case in order to be overt, but they do not have any theta role assigned.

i. *To bylo do vás pěkné, že jste přišel.*  
 it was from you nice that you came.3SG  
 ‘It was nice of you that you came.’

- (4) *Jana chtěla PRO odjet volná jako pták.*  
 Jana wanted leave.INF free.NOM as bird  
 ‘Jana wanted to leave free as a bird.’

All the modifiers of the subject in the embedded clause are in the nominative case, which would suggest that the PRO subject is in nominative itself. This observation was made by Sigurðsson (2008) for Icelandic and for ‘floating quantifiers’ as well as for semi-predicates (such as the pronoun *einn* ‘alone’). But inside the lower (lexical) projections the Null Case seems to work.

- (5) *Jana refused PRO to be examined t.*

The *t* is null, and it does not get case in this VP projection – it must move to a higher (functional) projection. Then it gets nominative case even if it is not overt. A case assigner is a probe looking for a goal, but it can’t see one if the latter phrase (“goal”) is null.

These approaches were reformulated with a VP internal subject hypothesis (Koopman – Sportiche 1991), which says that the base position of the subject is within the VP. In this way, it is the verb that assigns theta roles. A particular case is assigned later in the functional domain through the introduction of the functional head AGR.

Thus, the instances of case (including morphological case) which are not assigned are the so-called **default case**. It is defined as a case that appears when no other case is assigned. Or as Schütze puts it: “[t]he default case forms of a language are those that are used to spell out nominal expressions (e.g., DPs)<sup>4</sup> that are not associated with any case feature assigned or otherwise determined by syntactic mechanisms” (2001, p. 204). McFadden specifies default case as a case that “is not assigned when other cases fail, but the actual lack of case” (2007, p. 231). It is, according to him, also the least marked case of the given language.

We will use the definition of default case as follows:

- (6) The default case is a case of a DP/NP in a selected argument position. The default case is invisible to syntax as it is not assigned by anything. It is only used to spell out the terminal node.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. DEFAULT CASE IN ENGLISH

Schütze (2001) developed and used a series of tests to demonstrate the existence of the default case. He believes that English can be compared to richer case languages.

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<sup>4</sup> DP means a determiner phrase.

<sup>5</sup> Every generated argument position (every DP that gets a theta role) must get case. There is a unique subject position and at most three selected complements (Emonds 2000, Ch. 8).

As a Nom-Acc language, English uses these two cases as the assigned, checked cases. The nominative is checked by the finite predicate, and the accusative is checked during the spell-out. The default case on the other hand is never assigned by anything, it is only used to spell out a terminal node. There are five environments where the default case manifests itself in English with personal pronouns. Namely: left dislocation (7), ellipsis (8), gapping (9), coordination (10) and modified pronouns (11). In (12), where we can see post-modification of the pronoun, both Nom and Acc are possible.<sup>6</sup>

- (7) *Me* /\**I*, *I like beans.*  
*Him?* *Wear a tux?*
  
- (8) *Short responses to the question: Who wants to try it?*  
*Me*/\**I.*  
*I do*/\**me do.*
  
- (9) *We can't eat caviar and him*/\**he (eat) beans.*  
*For her to be the winner and us/?we to be losers?*
  
- (10) *Us and them are gonna rumble tonight.*  
*\*We and they are gonna rumble tonight.*  
*Her and us*/\**she and we have been friends for ages.*<sup>7</sup>
  
- (11) *The real me*/\**I is finally emerging.*  
*Lucky me*/\**I gets to clean the toilets.*  
*Dear me*/\**I.*
  
- (12) *Us/ ?we three have to be leaving now.*

It would seem that pronouns which are not heads of a particular subject DP are not in the nominative case, instead they seem to receive their case by default. As Schütze (2001, p. 215) notices, this is especially apparent if the head of these phrases is a D preceding the pronouns. That is also why there is a third person agreement with first person pronoun (11). The predicate does not agree with the pronoun but rather with the notion of a singular DP.

For English, the default appears to be the accusative case, for other Nom-Acc languages there seems to be a tendency for it to be the nominative in case of rich case languages and Nom or Acc in case of poor case languages.

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<sup>6</sup> The examples (7)–(12) are taken from Schütze (2001)

<sup>7</sup> For more on the topic of coordinate determiner phrases and case-form mismatches see (Parrott 2009).

### 3. BURZIO'S GENERALIZATION AND BEYOND

The traditional morphological views of cases match thematic roles (agent, patient, beneficiary) or sentence functions (subject, object, indirect object) to specific cases (nominative, accusative and dative respectively). This approach explains the need for these corresponding features in terms of disambiguity, i.e., it needs to be clear what the distinct sentence members are. This is especially important in languages such as Czech where the clausal word order is less fixed than, for example, in English.

The relationship of theta roles and case is further developed in the Burzio's generalization (1986, p. 178), which says: "All and only the verbs that can assign a  $\theta$ -role to the subject can assign accusative case to an object". There are, however, several problems with this as it seems to fail in case of some colloquial Czech constructions:

- (13) a) *Zebe*                      *mě.*  
          feel-cold.3.SG.N    me.ACC  
          'I am cold.'
- b) *Třefilo*                *ho.*  
          hit.3.SG.N        him.ACC  
          'He had a stroke.'

In the example (13)a, the verb shows agreement with a 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular neuter subject (not to violate the EPP)<sup>8</sup> meaning that the syntactic covert subject is something like the weather 'it'. There is only one overt DP, a pronoun in the position of the object in accusative case. This pronoun is the only theta marked argument in the clause, it is the experiencer. The verb *zebat* does not assign any theta role to the covert subject, yet it assigns the accusative to its object. There are multiple verbs of this kind in Czech, e.g., (13)b.

Sigurðsson adjusts Burzio's generalization (1986) into the following: "All and only the verbs that take a **Nom** subject can assign structural **Acc** to an object" (2006, p. 2). The subject does not need to be overt as in (13), but it is visible through agreement. This adjusted formulation once again leads to the conclusion that Nom-Acc case marking serves mainly the purpose of distinguishing between two arguments (subject and object).

### 4. SUPER CASE AND CASE SYNCRETISM

The morphological approach to case might benefit from a syntactic approach as presented by Emonds (2010). According to this theory, case is assigned through case

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<sup>8</sup> Extended Projection Principle (EPP) as introduced in (Chomsky 1981, Ch. 3).

assigners that are few in number and each results in a different case. Nominative is triggered by an inflectional head I, Accusative by a verbal head V, dative by a prepositional head P and genitive most typically by some other nominal phrase head N. Since nominative and accusative are both triggered by a verbal presence and show a high level of syncretism, Emonds uses for both of them the umbrella term Super Case. More specifically, “Super Case is an informal term for the transferred features of V common to both nominative and accusative case” (2010, p. 105). Under Super Case, it is not fully specified whether the case is assigned by the inflectional head or not, it is only certain that there is a verbal head: [V, +/-I].<sup>9</sup>

Emonds’ Super Case theory is supported by data from Czech, as well as other Indo-European languages, as there is a striking amount of case syncretism between nominative and accusative of certain classes of nouns and adjectives. With the neuter nouns there is a complete case syncretism, and the result can be thus quite ambiguous without a further context.

- (14) *Batole*                                      *pokousalo*      *morče*.  
toddler.NOM/ACC      bit                      guinea-pig. NOM/ACC  
‘A toddler bit a guinea pig.’ OR ‘A guinea pig bit a toddler.’

There seems to be a relatively high correlation in Czech between semantic role of an agent (typically an animate noun) and Nom-Acc case distinct morphemes. In other words, those nouns that typically refer to animate beings (feminine and masculine nouns) tend to have different forms in nominative and accusative, which is more than a mere coincidence but rather a functional distinction.

A significant study of Czech case has been carried out by Caha (2009; 2013) and Karlík (2000). Caha postulates a hierarchy of cases, and according to him “the template corresponds to a cross-linguistically fixed sequence of cases, in which only adjacent cases show syncretism” (2009, p. 1). He uses a “peeling theory of case” and provides two conditions: “a. In the Case sequence, case on the right can change to any case on its left under movement, but not the other way round. b. The Case sequence: nom – acc – gen – dat – ins – com” (2009, p. 47).<sup>10</sup>

Czech is said to have seven cases, however, due to the case syncretism there are far less than seven different morphological forms (or fourteen – for singular and plural). In fact, the nominative-accusative syncretism is most significant. There are three grammatical genders and for each there are several morphological paradigms (four neuter, four feminine and six masculine). For masculine gender we distinguish animate and inanimate nouns – they follow different declension paradigms – but for

<sup>9</sup> Sigurðsson (2006) has a similar approach with v\* assigning Nom or Acc and v assigning Nom in so-called defective predicates.

<sup>10</sup> The COM stands for comitative, a case that typically expresses accompaniment. In Czech the accompaniment is typically expressed through instrumental.

the other genders there is no such distinction. Nom ≠ Acc only in case of animate masculine nouns (both singular and plural) and two paradigms of singular feminine nouns (ending in a vowel). In Table 1 all the examples show the form for nominative which equals the form for the accusative.

**Table 1.** Nom and Acc syncretism in Czech nominal paradigms<sup>11</sup>

Nom = Acc	SG	PL
Masculine -animate	<i>stroj</i>	<i>stroje</i>
	<i>hrad</i>	<i>hrady</i>
Feminine		<i>ženy</i>
		<i>růže</i>
	<i>píseň</i>	<i>písně</i>
	<i>kost</i>	<i>kosti</i>
Neuter	<i>město</i>	<i>města</i>
	<i>moře</i>	<i>moře</i>
	<i>kuře</i>	<i>kuřata</i>
	<i>stavení</i>	<i>stavení</i>

Depending on the animacy and gender, there are bigger or smaller differences between the forms of the case suffixes. The masculine animate paradigm is the most diverse one. Neuter on the other hand shows the most case syncretism and for this reason it is by some (e.g. Emonds 2010) not considered as a separate paradigm. All plurals in the table show case syncretism no matter which gender they are. Animacy seems to have the decisive role when it comes to case syncretism and the lack of animacy corresponds to the poorer inflectional paradigms.

5.    **DEFAULT CASE IN CZECH**

Default case is associated with morphological case marking in both English and Czech. Czech is one of the Nom-Acc rich case languages and as such one of these two cases should have the role of the default case. First let’s apply Schütze’s tests to see if this is unambiguously so. As Czech has morphological case for both pronouns and nouns, we will use both. Then, we will have a look at one more complex issue; that of nominal predicates.

The first test concerns **left dislocation**. The only possible item in left dislocation (i.e., in the position of the subject) is in the nominative (15).

<sup>11</sup> These nouns are typically used in Czech for declension paradigms. Their English translations follow: *stroj* ‘machine’, *hrad* ‘castle’, *ženy* ‘women’, *růže* ‘roses’, *píseň* ‘song’, *kost* ‘bone’, *město* ‘town’, *moře* ‘sea’, *kuře* ‘chicken’, *stavení* ‘building’.

- (15) a. *Já / \*mě / \*mnou, já mám rád fazole.*  
 I.NOM / me.ACC / me.INS, I.NOM like beans  
 ‘Me, I like beans.’
- b. *Nejlepší atletka, ona / \*ji, by měla vyhrát.*  
 best athlete, she.NOM / her.ACC should win  
 ‘The best athlete, her, should win.’

There might be, however, a kind of agreement between the dislocated element and the co-referential item. We can compare examples (16), where it is possible to have both the nominative (16)a or the accusative (16)b in the dislocated element as the name is co-referential with the demonstrative pronoun *tu* ‘her’ in the accusative case.<sup>12</sup>

- (16) a. *Jana, tu nikdo nemá rád.*  
 Jana.NOM.SG.F, that.ACC.SG.F nobody NEG-likes  
 ‘Jane, nobody likes her.’
- b. *Janu, tu nikdo nemá rád.*  
 Janu.ACC.SG.F, that.ACC.SG.F nobody NEG-likes  
 ‘Jane, nobody likes her.’

As for **ellipsis**, the interrogative pronoun *kdo* ‘who’ will always trigger nominative case in Czech as it is in nominative itself. This case-matching is typical for Czech.

- (17) *Kdo to chce vyzkoušet?* → *Já / \*mě (to chci vyzkoušet).*  
 who.NOM it wants try I.NOM / me.ACC (it want try)  
 ‘Who wants to try it?’ ‘I want to try it.’
- *My / \*nás ne.*  
 we.NOM / us.ACC not.  
 ‘Not us.’

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<sup>12</sup> This observation is in accord with Sturgeon (2005) who distinguishes between Contrastive Left dislocation (CLD) which would correspond to example (16)b and a Hanging Topic (HT) which corresponds to (16)a. The dislocated element *Janu* in (16)b is moved out of its original position and the resumptive element is then spelled out as its copy.



The Czech pronoun *kdo* ‘who’ has a full morphological paradigm with five distinct forms (genitive and accusative being the same). The inflectional forms (other than nominative) of this pronoun in Czech will trigger the corresponding case in elliptical constructions.

- (18) a. *Koho se to týká?*      *Jany / \*Jana*  
           who.GEN REFL it concerns?    Jana.GEN / Jana.NOM  
           ‘Who does it concern? Jana.’
- b. *Komu věříš?*      *Jemu / \*On.*  
           who.DAT believe?    Him.DAT / he.NOM  
           ‘Who do you believe? Him.’
- c. *Koho sleduješ?*      *Janu / \*Jana*  
           who.ACC watch?      Janu.ACC / Jana.NOM  
           ‘Who are you watching? Jana.’
- d. *O kom mluvíš?*      *O Janovi / \*Jan*  
           about who.LOC talk?    About Jan.LOC / Jan.NOM  
           ‘Who are you talking about? About Jan.’

There is only one exception and that is the example (19), in this particular instance we can actually choose between the nominative and instrumental case. We will see that these two cases tend to compete in certain contexts, namely in cases of nominal predicates that follow a copula *být* ‘be’.

- (19) *Kým<sup>13</sup> je? – kuchařem / kuchař*  
       who.INS is? – cook.INS / cook.NOM  
       ‘Who is he? – a chef’

**Gapping** in Czech also results in nominative case because the subject of the main clause is also in the nominative. As it is an example of a coordination it is unsurprising that both agents are in the nominative.

- (20) a. *Nemůžeme jíst kaviár a on / \*ho fazole.*  
           Cannot.1PL eat caviar and he.NOM / him.ACC beans  
           ‘We cannot eat caviar and him beans.’

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<sup>13</sup> Here it is also possible to use an inanimate interrogative pronoun in the instrumental case *Čím* instead of the animate *Kým* as suggested by one of the reviewers. It would not change the case(s) in the answer, both Nom and Ins are possible.

- b. *Aby ona byla vítěz a my / \*nás poražení?*  
 that she was winner and we.NOM / us.ACC losers  
 ‘For her to be the winner and us to be losers?’

If the experiencer is in some other (lexical) case – in the dative here (21) – then it is going to get projected in the gapped part as an experiencer as well, and the dative will be assigned, apparently by the ellipted inflected verb.

- (21) *Nemůže nám chutnat kaviár a jemu / \*on fazole.*  
 Cannot.1PL us.DAT taste caviar and him.DAT / he.NOM beans  
 ‘We cannot like caviar and him beans.’

**Coordination** of subjects in Czech does not trigger a case different than the usual nominative. It is not acceptable to use accusative or any other case.

- (22) a. *My a oni / \*nás a je budeme tančit.*  
 we.NOM and they.NOM / us.ACC and them.ACC will dance  
 ‘Us and them are going to dance.’  
 b. *Ona a my / \*ji a nás jsme přátelé.*  
 She.NOM and we.NOM / her.ACC and us.ACC are friends  
 ‘Her and us are friends.’

**Modified pronouns** are also in nominative case unless a different case is triggered by some case assigner. In example (23)d we can see the genitive form used for the numeral. It is typical for Slavic languages to use genitive for numerals above five.<sup>14</sup>

- (23) a. *Pravé já / \*pravou mě se konečně objevuje.<sup>15</sup>*  
 real me.NOM / real me.ACC REFL finally emerges  
 ‘The real me is finally emerging.’  
 b. *Já nešťastná!<sup>16</sup>*  
 I.NOM unlucky  
 ‘Unlucky me!’

<sup>14</sup> For more about higher cardinals in Czech, see Veselovská (2001).

<sup>15</sup> As suggested by one of the reviewers, this example contains a slightly different version of the word *já* ‘I’ than the other examples. In this particular case it seems to function as a noun rather than a pronoun, suggesting that it is some kind of inner self, an ego. In this use the word *já* is not to be found in any other case than nominative as there is nothing to assign it case.

<sup>16</sup> In Czech, it is not something typical or natural sounding to use a premodifier with a personal pronoun. They are, however, used in more or less fixed expressions with a negative postmodifying adjective as an exclamation.

c. *my*                      *tři*  
       we.NOM            three  
       ‘us three.’

d. *nás*                      *pět*  
       us.GEN            five  
       ‘us five’

All the tests involve a DP/NP in an argument position of a subject with one exception and that is the example (16). As we have seen on Schütze’s tests, they were developed especially for English to show the accusative in the environments that are not typical for it, and it is thus not assigned in those instances, but the accusative functions as the default case. When we used the same tests for Czech, however, we merely pointed out that the nominative indeed occurs in the environments that are typical for it even though there is no overt case assigner. So, in order to show that the nominative is the default case in Czech, we should also have a look at the occurrences where it is licensed but not assigned by its typical case assigner, i.e., the finite predicate. We have actually seen several such examples already (24)a–b and we will discuss (24)c in the upcoming section:

- (24) a) PRO in control constructions – examples (3) and (4)<sup>17</sup>
- b) left dislocation where the nominative does not agree with the corresponding co-referential NP – example (16)
- c) post-copular nominal and adjectival predicates – sections 6 and 7

The nominative also appears in other environments which seem to lack any kind of case assigner. It is the so-called ‘naming nominative’ as in a direct naming (25) and indirect naming (26).<sup>18</sup>

(25) *Jmenuji se*            *Jana* /            *\*Jano*.  
       name    REFL    Jana.NOM / Jana.VOC  
       ‘My name is Jana.’

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<sup>17</sup> Other smaller infinitivals do not license Nom (Wurmbrand 2012). They typically license Acc (ECM constructions), and the raising structure involves the verb *být* and as such assigns either lexical Ins or default Nom.

<sup>18</sup> This kind of nominative is not used in Czech for calling somebody by their name. For that the vocative case is used instead.

i) *Voláme na ni:*    “*\*Jana* /    *Jano!*”  
       call    to her: Jana.NOM/ Jana.VOC  
       ‘We are calling to her: Jana!’

- (26) *Říkáme jí Jana / Jano.*  
 call her Jana.NOM / Jana.VOC  
 ‘We call her Jana.’

Another instance of the nominative (when it is not assigned) is the so-called dictionary nominative, which is used to refer to a particular lexical unit in dictionaries. This one form refers to all the potential morphological forms of that particular unit. All of these instances would suggest that nominative is the default case in Czech.

## 6. COMPETING INSTRUMENTAL

One case that sometimes competes with the nominative in Czech, especially but not only in post-copular DPs, is the instrumental. The instrumental in Czech is widely recognized as a lexical semantic case and it is typically used for adjuncts that express location, instrument, means of transport, manner, times, etc., which suggests by virtue of its translations some underlying preposition. It can function as a complement of certain verbs (*zabývat se myšlenkou* ‘to ponder the idea’) and many prepositions such as *s, před, nad, mezi, ...* ‘with, before, over, between, ...’, or it can appear in passive constructions as an optional agent.

- (27) a. *Petr napsal dopis.*  
 Petr.NOM wrote letter.ACC  
 ‘Peter wrote a letter.’
- b. *Dopis byl napsán (Petrem)*  
 letter.NOM was written Peter.INS  
 ‘The letter was written by Peter.’

The passive Nom-Ins alteration can be explained by Caha’s Peeling theory: “The Peeling theory leads to an analysis of the pair in [(27)] according to which the external argument is base-generated as an oblique in Spec,vP, and stays in a low position in [(27)b]. In [(27)a], the external argument has raised from this position to Spec, TP, stranding all layers of case but the nominative one” (2009, p. 154).<sup>19</sup> The same theory can also account for the instances of the expletive-instrumental combination (28). This is to say that according to the Peeling theory, the oblique case can sometimes alternate with structural case. That is exactly what is happening with the instrumental in Czech.

<sup>19</sup> The original active/passive voice examples in Caha (2009) are numbered as 27a and 27b.

(28) a. *V místnosti se to hemžilo mouchami.*  
 in room REFL it swarmed flies.INS  
 ‘The room swarmed with flies.’

b. *Mouchy se hemžily v místnosti.*  
 Flies.NOM REFL swarmed in room  
 ‘The flies were swarming in the room.’

In the examples (27) and (28) we talk about arguments that have their case assigned structurally. The competition between the nominative and the instrumental case is most apparent in predicative constructions, which are potentially an ideal environment for the default case as the case is not assigned by syntax. The examples of predicative use of instrumental case are very frequent, but there are not many verbs that can function as a copula in Czech, it is mostly the verb *být* ‘be’.<sup>20</sup>

The difference in use between the nominative and the instrumental might be conditioned semantically. The nominative after *být* is often supposed to express the identification and the instrumental the attribution of a certain quality or function (which can be permanent). Typically, if the nominal predicate is in the instrumental case, then it could be used to describe properties of the subject that are transient. This suggests some kind of development and transitional change from not being an X to becoming an X or functioning as an X. In the following example, it is possible to use either Nom or Ins.

(29) *Jeho otec je ředitelem / ředitel.*  
 his father is director.INS / director.NOM  
 ‘His father is a director.’

For environments that express pure identification, especially if demonstrative pronouns are used and permanent qualities described, such as one’s nationality or the material of something, the nominative is the only choice (30)–(32). However, if the expression is further modified to suggest the impermanence of the current situation, then the instrumental is preferred (33).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> A corpus-based study through SYN2000 (Čermák et al. 2000) carried out by Štícha (2004) on a sample of 630 predicative nouns in Nom and Ins seems to suggest a correlation between the particular case and semantic use. Nominative is typically used for identification and definition of something. Instrumental is almost never obligatory and is used when identification is relativized as one entity appearing as another. Regarding their frequency, Ins is more frequent with regard to the number of tokens (Inst:Nom = 524:438), but Nom is used with more lexemes (Nom:Ins = 237:119). Another influential Czech study on the given topic is (Uličný 2000).

<sup>21</sup> In all these examples, the predicative NP follows the copula. However, the predicative NP can also appear pre-verbally. If that is the case, the instrumental is usually preferred to dissimilate the NP from the nominative subject which appears post verbally.

- (30) *Toto je Německo / \*Německem.*  
 this is Germany.INS / Germany.NOM  
 ‘This is Germany.’
- (31) *Jeho otec je Němcem/ Němec.*  
 his father is German.INS / German.NOM  
 ‘His father is a German.’
- (32) *Rtut’ je kov / \*kovem.*  
 mercury is metal.NOM/ metal.INS  
 ‘Mercury is a metal.’
- (33) *Narodila se v Turecku, ale nyní je naturalizovanou Němkou.*  
 born REFL in Turkey but now is naturalized.INS German.INS  
 ‘She was born in Turkey, but now she is a naturalized German.’

The competition between these two cases seems to be an example of the ‘Elsewhere Condition’ (Kiparsky 1973), which says that if two rules can apply in a specific environment and one of them is more specific, and applies in a proper subset of environments compared to the other rule, then it is preferred. This is also in accord with the Subset Principle (Halle – Marantz 1993) because the item with most specific context is preferred. It follows then that if the nominative can be used for both permanent and temporary properties, but the instrumental can be used only for the temporary properties it should be preferred in this context, and it indeed is.

The acceptability of the instrumental case with NPs expressing a permanent quality also seems to depend on the complexity of the given NP; if the nominal predicate is a bare NP then the nominative is preferred (31)–(32), but if it is a complex NP then the instrumental is preferred (34)–(35). When the predicate becomes too heavy for the light verb *v*, the Ins is more likely to be used.

- (34) *Rtut’ je dobrým vodičem / dobrý vodič proudu.*  
 mercury is good.INS conductor.INS / good.NOM conductor.NOM current<sub>GEN</sub>  
 ‘Mercury is a good conductor of the electric current.’
- (35) *Marie je první Češkou, které se něco takového povedlo.*  
 Marie is first.INS Czech.INS who REFL something this succeeded  
 ‘Mary is the first Czech woman to succeed in something like that.’<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> In the Czech corpus SYNv9 (Křen et al. 2021), there are 13 examples with Nom and 100 examples with Ins for the construction “be the first Czech who”. We are not claiming that the Ins is the only permissible case here, but merely suggesting that the more complex the DP/NP is, the more probable the use of Ins becomes.

All the examples we have introduced so far contain a copula in present tense. If the copula is in the past or future tense, the tendency to use the instrumental case increases, as suggested already by (Šmilauer 1966).

The copula can also be followed by an adjective. The distribution with adjectival predicates does not consider whether the quality is permanent or not. Adjectival predicates show strong preference for the nominative case if the copula is in present tense. The instrumental, if at all possible, very often sounds archaic or stylistically marked.

- (36) *Naše řeč je bohatá / \*bohatou.*  
 our language is rich.NOM / \*rich.INS  
 ‘Our language is rich.’

- (37) *Chce být šťastný/ ?šťastným.*  
 wants.3SG be happy.NOM/ happy.INS  
 ‘He wants to be happy.’

According to Lindert and his analysis of Polish default case, “the instrumental predication arises as a form of DP predication where the adjective is actually a DP in disguise” (2017, p. 22). According to this analysis, the situation for Czech would look like this:

- (38) a. *Hvar je nejdelší (ostrov Chorvatska).*  
 Hvar is longest.NOM (island.NOM Croatia.GEN)  
 ‘Hvar is the longest (island of Croatia).’  
 b. *Hvar je nejdelším (ostrovem Chorvatska).*  
 Hvar is longest.INS (island.INS Croatia.GEN)  
 ‘Hvar is the longest (island of Croatia).’

An AP is typically in the nominative after *být* unless it is underlyingly understood from the context that there is an NP ellipsis. In such a case the understood DP, in (38) suggested in parentheses, can be in the instrumental case.

## 7. STRUCTURAL, LEXICAL OR DEFAULT

Default case should be neither structural nor lexical because it is not assigned. The nominative is typically one of the structural cases (assigned to a subject by the finite predicate) and the instrumental is one of the lexical cases (typically assigned by the P or V). To decide whether a particular case is structural or lexical we can use the passivization test as we saw in (1)–(2).

As Przepiórkowski (1999) suggests, there is another possible way to determine the particular kind of case and that is a nominalization test. It was originally designed for Polish, but it seems to work for Czech as well, as they are both Slavic languages. The idea of the nominalization test is that objects which are structurally case-marked will change into genitive when the predicate is nominalized. We can see this change on structural case in (39).<sup>23</sup>

- (39) a. *Jan maluje Petru.*  
 Jan paints Petra<sub>ACC</sub>
- b. *malování Petry*  
 painting Petra<sub>GEN</sub>

This change does not occur with objects that are lexically marked, as in (40). The lexical dative case remains the same even under nominalization.<sup>24</sup>

- (40) a. *Jan pomáhá Petře.*  
 Jan helps Petra<sub>DAT</sub>
- b. *pomáhání Petře*  
 helping Petra<sub>DAT</sub>

When it comes to the post-copular instrumental case, the nominalization does not trigger any change in case form. This indicates that the instrumental is not a structural but a lexical case in Czech.

- (41) a. *Petr se stal učitelem / \*učitel.*  
 Peter REFL became teacher<sub>INS</sub>/ teacher<sub>NOM</sub>  
 ‘Petr became a teacher.’
- b. *stávání se učitelem / \*učitel*  
 becoming REFL teacher<sub>INS</sub>/ teacher<sub>NOM</sub>  
 ‘becoming a teacher’

We are now going to introduce an analysis which suggests that there are in fact two different kinds of the copula *být*. One, which is a lexical verb *V* that assigns lexical instrumental case, and a second one where a light “linking verb” *v* does not

<sup>23</sup> Veselovská (1998) argues that genitive is for this reason also a structural case.

<sup>24</sup> Przepiórkowski (1999) also suggests a third test – a genitive of negation test – but this type of genitive does not occur in Czech.



assign lexical case and takes the default case instead. This analysis introduced by Veselovská (2008) points out, that the lexical V has an aspect, a full verbal paradigm and a VP adverbial position, as opposed to the light *v* phrase which does not assign a theta role. Veselovská provides persuasive arguments for her claim about two distinct copulas *být*. Her arguments can be summarized in the examples where the lexical *být* is “countable” (42), can follow the aspectual V (43), can be modified adverbially by location (44), and can appear in the participial form (45).

- (42) *Jan byl dvakrát hercem / ?herec Národního divadla.*  
 Jan was twice actor.INS / actor.NOM national theatre  
 ‘Jan was twice an actor in The National Theatre.’

- (43) *Jan přestal být hercem / \*herec národního divadla.*  
 Jan stopped be actor.INS / actor.NOM national theatre  
 ‘Jan stopped being an actor in The National Theatre.’

- (44) *Jan byl v Praze hercem / \*herec Národního divadla.*  
 Jan was in Prague actor.INS / actor.NOM national theatre  
 Jan was an actor in Prague, in The National Theatre.

- (45) *Jsa hercem / \*herec Národního divadla Jan odmítl STB spolupráci.*  
 being actor.INS / actor.NOM national theatre Jan refused STB cooperation  
 ‘Being an actor of The National Theatre, Jan refused to cooperate with The State Security.’

In all the above examples it is not possible to use the light *v* copula followed by the nominative. This distinction prepares the ground for the post-copular predication where both the nominative (in our approach the default) and instrumental are permissible. There are two underlying structures (logical forms) that happen to look the same on the surface (phonetic form). That is also why examples like (46)a can have both Nom and Ins on the post-copular NP. It is, however, only the instrumental that can appear in a nominalization transformation, as it is a lexical case (46)b. The example (46)a represents both kinds of copulas *být*, the lexical verb and the light verb. The nominative following the light verb cannot be nominalized as it is not a structural case (it does not undergo any morphological change), nor is it a lexical case (the verb *být* already triggers one lexical case and that is the Inst). It must be a default case. As a default, it merely appears in the environments where it is not assigned. Nominalization seems to be possible with the lexical V *být* only. Once this verb is nominalized, the derived noun *bytí* keeps the selected lexical instrumental case.

Verb *být* is the only copula in Czech which can have both the nominative and instrumental case on the nominal part of the predicate. Nominalization of this verb is

not frequently encountered. In the Syn2020 corpus of the Czech language (Křen et al. 2020), there are only eight instances of this nominalization *byť* with instrumental case and not a single one with the nominative.

- (46) a. *On je mužem / muž dvou tváří.*  
 he is man.INS / man.NOM two.GEN faces.GEN  
 ‘He is a man of two faces.’
- b. *byť mužem / \*muž*  
 being man.INS / man.NOM  
 ‘being a man’

We can conclude from the above that nominative case does not need to be always structural. According to Caha (2009), nominative is also the smallest case as opposed to the instrumental in Czech. Oblique cases, which are bigger than the genitive, do not transform under nominalization while the smaller (structural) cases do. The nominative in post-copular predication is definitely not structural, its nominalization is impossible.

As the nominative is the least marked case (the structurally smallest one) it should be the most suitable candidate for the default case. McFadden (2007) even argues that structural nominatives are just a subcategory of default nominatives.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

There is one clear candidate for the default case in Czech (Nom) and one potential alternative (Ins) in post-copular predicates. We have seen that some environments which lack case assigners and that systematically have the accusative in English give rise to the nominative in Czech. All these environments involve argument positions (subject) without any finite T case assigner.

In some special contexts like post copular nominal predicates, the nominative can alternate with the instrumental. The instrumental lexical case is used if the property expressed in the NP is not identification or if the NP is itself complex. In all these instances the Nom is also permitted, but it is less frequent. If the post-copular NP is simple, and the property expressed is a case of identification, then it must be in the nominative. The post-copular NP’s case is not structural, but it is either a lexical (instrumental) case following the lexical verb *být* or the default (nominative) case following the light verb *být* that cannot assign case.

Finally, as there is never a finite nor non-finite clause or construction without the presence of the nominative either overtly (on a noun, pronoun or adjective) or through the presence of the finite verbal predicate, it seems rather clear that it is indeed the nominative that is the default case for Czech. The default nominative case is used for arguments which do not have any other case assigned.

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