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Templatic activity in Czech

The goal of this presentation is to show that 1) Czech does recur to templatic restrictions on morphologically defined categories and 2) compare this templatic status to languages that are reputed to be templatic (Semitic).

Templatic activity is active in Czech in at least two places: infinitives and the morphological object [prefix+root]. If templaticity is defined as a restriction of melodic (=consonantal or vocalic) volume on a given morphological object, the template of Czech infinitives is "two morae at most", and the one governing [prefix+root] "three and only three morae".

(1) below provides illustration for the restriction imposed on infinitives.

(1)   Infinitives are at least bimoraic[1]. Three ways to meet bimoraicity:
         a. two short vowels   d**ě**l**a**t
         b. one long vowel   zn**á**t
         c. one short vowel and one syllabic consonant   **trp**ě**t, v**rt**i**t

inf	1st sg pres	past active part.	
krás-t	krad-u	kradl	"steal"
růs-t	rost-u	rostl	"grow"
krý-t	kry-j-u	kryl	"cover"
stá-t se	stan-e se	stal se	"become"
zná-t		znal	"know"
po-znat		po-znal	"recognize"
dlí-t		dlel	"stay"
prá-t	per-u	pral	"wash"
vy-pra-t	vy-per-u	vy-pral	"wash out"

The other template in fact does apply only to a subset of the object [prefix+root], i.e. prefixed denominal nouns. This implies that verbs and deverbal nouns have always short prefixes, while denominal nouns show prefixal length. For instance, the root √bav "have fun" gives a verb and a deverbal noun that are short (z**a**-bavit, z**a**-bav-en-í, -en- being the past passive participle marker), but a denominal noun with a long prefix (z**á**-bav-a, -a being the NOMsg case-marker).

However, it would be wrong to say that all denominal nouns possess a long prefix, cf. nouns built on the nominal agentive/ nominalizing suffix –ka:

zadávka, zahálka, zahálka, zahrádka, zahrádkář, zacházka, zachránce, zachránkyně, zajížd'ka, zakázka, zakázkový, zanáška, zarážka, zastávka, zatáčka, zavíjec
against
zádržka, zádumčivec, zádumčivost, zádumčivý, záhumenek, záchytka, zájemce, zájemkynč, základka, záklopka, zákonodárce, zákožka, zákrsek, zákusek, záložka, zálepka, zámeček, zámyčka, záměnka, záměrka, záminka, zámotek, zánožka, západka, zápalka, záporka, zápisek,

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[1]   Only a handful of verbs such as *chvě̌t se* "tremble", *pě̌t* "sing" or *jet* "ride" disregard this generalisation.

zápletka, zápletkový, zápražka, záprška, záprtek, zármutek, zárodečný, zárodek, zárodkový, zářivka etc.

The obvious generalisation that obtains regards the root-vowel, whose length is in complemetary distribution with the length of the prefix: if the root-vowel is long, the prefix is short, and vice-versa. Hence, the exact length for the object [prefix+root] of denominal nouns is "three morae", no more, no less.

Languages are usually devided into templatic and non-templatic, and this opposition is assumed to follow genetic kinship, e.g. Afro-Asiatic = templatic vs. Indo-European = non-templatic. The Czech situation casts doubt on a strict division of that kind. Rather, it suggests that languages that are reputed to be non-templatic may well host a templatic system in a particular and very restricted area of their morphology. Or, in other words, everybody knows that all "templatic" languages also recur to concatenative morphology. It may well be that "non-templatic" languages do also make use of templatic morphology. The difference, then, should not be described as a principled opposition, but rather as one where the amount of templaticity a language possesses is variable.

But even assuming the possibility for an IE to have templatic islands in their morphology, Slavic does not look like a good candidate for templaticity because it hosts consonantal clusters of extreme size, and there is an obvious correlation between templaticity and overt CVCV-character of Semitic languages.

Finally, it is worth while asking the question whether a Semitic vs. non-Semitic distinction between templatic languages may be established on the ground of morphological relevance: in Semitic, templatic activity usually represents a morpheme: binyan I is unmarked, binyan II is intensive etc., binyan III is reciprocal etc. The fact of being long or short in the two Czech cases discussed is not a matter of morphemic distinction: the morphological information "infinitive" is carried independently from length by the suffix –*t*, and denominal nouns do not need the restriction on [prefix+root] in order to identify because the suffixes do this job.

Hence, the typological question to be asked is "are there non-Semitic languages where templatic activity is attested and morphemic?"