

Why Czech case markers sometimes get lost

Markéta Ziková (zikova@phil.muni.cz), University of Brno

Tobias Scheer (scheer@unice.fr), University of Nice, CNRS 6039

In this paper, we discuss the relationship between the phonological structure of vowel-final nominal stems in Czech and the phonological structure of their inflectional forms. Following the CVCV model of Scheer (2004), we assume (i) the existence of final empty Nuclei, and (ii) the fact that the vowel of V-initial case markers is a floating melody. We show that on these assumptions the morphologically irregular non-realization of V-initial case markers in a specific neuter paradigm follows from its phonological properties.

Case markers in Czech are either zero or begin with a vowel. Both categories typically produce opposite effects on the stem; e.g. *kotel-Ø* ‘boiler,nom.sg.’ vs *kotol-i* ‘loc.sg.’, *kotol-em* ‘ins.sg.’ Hence in case there is an $e \sim \emptyset$ alternation between the stem-final consonants, all positive markers behave alike (they produce a zero in the stem) and contrast with zero markers (which produce the V in the stem). In CVCV, the distribution of alternants is controlled by Government: alternation sites remain phonetically unrealized under Government. Provided that full, but not empty Nuclei can govern, stem-final Nuclei in the context of positive markers have to be full, but in the context of zero markers need to be empty. It follows that in the lexicon, marker-initial Vs have to float; in the course of the derivation, they associate with the stem-final Nucleus which therefore can govern the preceding alternation site.

The floating scenario, which is enforced by the assumptions of the specific phonological theory at hand, receives support from the strange behaviour of a peculiar inflectional paradigm. In Czech nominal declension, 14 paradigms are usually identified. Among them, the neuter paradigm *dělán* ‘making’ shows a massive syncretism which (i) has no parallel in any other paradigm, and (ii) occurs whenever a case marker consists of just a V. This V fails systematically to be realized. However, the paradigm at hand is not otherwise special since all consonants that appear in the other neuter paradigms are also faithfully realized. Illustration is given below from the comparison with the singular of the two other neuter paradigms, *moře* ‘sea’ and *město* ‘city’:

NOM/ACC	dělán	moř-e	měst-o
GEN	dělán	moř-e	měst-a
DAT/LOC	dělán	moř-i	měst-u
INS	dělán- m	moř- em	měst- em

The state of affairs described follows from the hypothesis that initial vowels of V-initial case markers float: they can associate only with stems whose final Nucleus is empty. In the *dělán* paradigm, however, the stem-final nucleus is filled up with the suffix *-í*. This holds also for the instrumental marker. However, in instrumental, the floating *e* is followed by a full Onset - filled up with [m] - which can be normally pronounced:

C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V
			—		—		—		—		—
d	e	l		a	n		i	e	m		

Crucial for this analysis is the assumption that the suffix *-í* is not a case marker itself (as is traditionally assumed). This is actually what makes stems of this paradigm stand out among others that are V-final in nom.sg. The *-í* cannot be a case marker for three reasons: (i) no case marker is syncretic across five paradigm slots, (ii) it nominalizes participles: *nesen* ‘carry, part.’ and *nesen-í* ‘carry, noun’, (iii) it always changes the gender to neuter which case markers do not do necessarily: *zem* ‘ground, fem.’ and *podzem-í* ‘underground, neu.’ vs *zem* and *zem-ě*, both ‘ground, fem.’

In sum, thus, we submit independent morphological evidence for the floating analysis that has

been achieved on purely phonological grounds.