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Obsah

Another Piece of the Infinitive Puzzle: the Czech Frustrative Construction *ne a ne zapršet*

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1 Petr and the infinitive

Petr Karlík for several years has been interested in the study of the Czech infinitive. In the corresponding lexicon entry of the known *Encyklopedický slovník češtiny* (ESČ: 180–181) he shortly describes its morphology, presents a concise overview of the syntactic surroundings this verbal form can be used in and lists the most relevant research literature on the infinitive in Czech and in some other languages. Petr Karlík distinguishes a) autonomous groups ("skupiny samostatné") and b) non-autonomous groups ("skupiny nesamostatné"). The first comprises the following sentence types:

i) clauses like, e.g.
(1) *Ne a ne zapršet!*

ii) optative clauses ("přací"), e.g.
(2) *Mít tak dvacet let!*

iii) imperative clauses ("rozkazovací"), e.g.
(3) *Nekouřit!*

iv) interrogative clauses ("tázací") like, e.g.
(4) *Co dělat?*

v) declarative clauses ("oznamovací"). e.g.
(5) *Tak nás překvapit!*

Here, the infinitive is in the predicate position without being licensed by any superordinate element. Among the infinitive phrases subsumed under the heading non-autonomous groups ("skupiny nesamostatné"), Karlík distinguishes between i) non-embedded ("syntakticky nezačleněný") and ii) embedded ("syntakticky začleněný") structures. Under i) Karlík mentions

i) introductory clauses ("navozovací"), e.g.
(6) *Dostat jsem to dostal.*

ii) conditionals ("podmínkový"), e.g.
(7) *Zapršet trochu, (a) všechno by se zazelenelo*.

iii) consecutive clauses ("účinkový"), e.g.
(8) *Nos měla, jen jím klovnout*.

These construction types are contrasted with embedded infinitival phrases which can occupy any syntactic position of the clause. There are infinitival phrases functioning as

– subjects:
(9) *Stačilo podívat se tam jen jednou*.

– objects:
(10) *Zakázal jim o tom hovořit*.

– adjuncts:
(11) *Šel pozorovat ptáky*.

– attributes:
(12) *Její zvyk předčítat knihy nesnáším*.

Karlík – Veselovská (2009: 199) claim that the infinitive "has a special place among Czech verbal forms", because it displays underspecified characteristics which makes the infinitive compatible with a much wider range of syntactic constructions than all other verbal forms. They ascribe the following features to the infinitive (*ibid.*: 197ff.):

1. lack of ability to assign nominative case,
2. ability to combine with a tense or conditional auxiliary (*jsem/bych*),
3. ability to assign a semantic role to the subject,
4. ability to assign accusative case,
5. possibility of an aspectual morpheme,
6. absence of agreement with the subject,
7. presence of independent gender.

On the basis of this general introduction into the syntactic flexibility of the Czech infinitive we shall move on to a more detailed analysis of one of the infinitival constructions which hitherto has not received much attention: the construction *ne a ne zapršet* (henceforth *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn*) which Karlík treats as an autonomous group ("skupina samostatná"), without adding a functional label. This is a very interesting infinitival construction because it seems to violate three of the abovementioned features: 1) it does assign nominative case, 2) it does not combine with a tense or conditional auxiliary[1] and 3) seems to be restricted to perfective aspect:

(13)   *Stávka*$_{NOM}$ *pilotů ne a ne skončit.*
      a. **Stávka pilotů ne a ne byla*$_{AUX}$ *skončit.*
      b. **Stávka pilotů ne a ne by*$_{AUX}$ *skončit.*
      c. *?Stávka pilotů ne a ne končit*$_{IPFV}$*.*

On the basis of these structural features we could argue that the element 'ne a ne' does not function as a regular negator, but as an auxiliary in its own right. It is noteworthy that the construction hitherto did not receive a specific terminological label linked to its function.

2 *ne a ne zapršet* as a construction

In our contribution, we would like to present a corpus-based analysis of *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* inspired by Construction Grammar. This theory is based on the assumption that grammatical patterns are complex signs. Construction Grammar does not draw a clear distinction

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1 In contrast to the absentive: *Petr byl boxovat* (see Karlík 2009 and Berger 2009).

between grammatical and lexical constructions. A construction is treated as a conventional association between form and function that is at least partially arbitrary; it is treated as a multidimensional object, in which morpho-syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, phonological, etc. features are integrated in a single description (for an overview see Fried – Östman 2004). We will try to show that the Czech *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* has a specific morpho-syntax, a non-compositionally derived meaning and a specific pragmatic profile. We would propose to call it **frustrative** which is a meaning label for a complex function expressing both the dynamics of the action and the attitude of the speaker and, thus, combining aspectual features with speaker's emotional stance. We will get back to the semantics in section 4.4.

3 The data

For the collection of data we made use of the Czech National Corpus, *Český národní korpus*, to be more precise of the subcorpus SYN2009PUB, a corpus of newspapers from the period 1995–2007 which in July 2010 comprised 700 Mio tokens. The search queries were quite straightforward, because the string *ne a ne* with the additional specifications "followed or preceded by a verbal infinitive in the distance 0 to 3 tokens within one sentence"[2] shows a very high hit rate of instances of the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* with low additional data noise. As a matter of fact, *ne a ne* has undergone a coalescence process and, therefore, does not allow for any intervening linguistic material between the individual words *ne*, *a* and *ne*.[3] The queries gave 1,103 hits for the postposed and three hits for the preposed infinitival phrase which is a sound basis for the following analysis. These figures show that we are dealing with a phenomenon of low token-frequency (compare: there are 1,279,873 hits for the lemma *muset*).

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2   ([word="ne"] [word="a"] [word="ne"][]{0,3} [tag="Vf.*"]) within <s id=".*">
    ([tag="Vf.*"] []{0,3} [word="ne"] [word="a"] [word="ne"]) within <s id=".*">
3   There were no hits for the following queries:
    ([word="ne"] []{0,2} [word="a"][]{1,2} [word="ne"][]{0,3}[tag="Vf.*"])
    ([word="ne"] []{1,2} [word="a"][]{0,2} [word="ne"][]{0,3}[tag="Vf.*"])

4 The corpus based analysis

The basis of our empirical analysis was the working hypothesis that the construction under consideration shows a certain degree of idiomaticity in that sense that it underlies certain combinatorial restrictions and that its meaning is not fully derived from its components. The data were analysed according to the following features:

1. Semantics of the subject:
   a. +/− human,
   b. person.
2. Features of the infinitival verb:
   a. aspect,
   b. transitivity,
   c. semantic role.
3. Temporal framing of the state of affairs.
4. Semantics of the construction.

As already observed by Porák (1961: 142), the string *ne a ne* is not absolutely restricted to infinitival phrases, but can also co-occur with a small number of predicatively used nouns or adverbs like *konec*, *pryč*[4] as in the following example:

(14) *Kůň sotva mohl vytáhnout nohy. A dešti ne a ne konec.* (Chlumecké listy)

4.1 Semantic properties of the subject

The first question to be addressed concerns the semantics of the subject, to be more precise the selectional restrictions. As we already know from the short descriptions in Porák (1961), Svoboda (1962) and, of course, from Petr Karlík's lexicon entry the construction in question can combine with weather predicates which are assumed to be avalent:

(15) *Přírodu zase ohrožuje sucho. Na jižní Moravě ne a ne zapršet, půda puká, co chvíli hoří.* (Deníky Moravia)

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4 Porák, however, only mentions directional adverbs.

Next, we have to find out whether the construction can combine with human, concrete non-human and abstract non-human nouns in the subject position. It turns out that all three noun types are attested:

Human:
(16)   *Jím už velmi málo, ale pořád ne a ne hubnout.* (Blesk)

(17)   *Moje kamarádka už podřimovala, ale já ne a ne usnout.* (Deníky Bohemia**)**

Non-human concrete:
(18)   *Znáte to. Přijdete k autu a ono ne a ne nastartovat.* (Blesk)

(19)   *Připravit evakuaci nevěsty však trvalo o něco déle, protože dlouhé svatební šaty s nezbytnou krinolínou ne a ne otvorem prolézt.* (Právo)

Abstract:
(20)   *Po hodinách čekání byl ve vzduchu silně cítit adrenalin. Stávka pilotů ne a ne skončit.* (Mladá fronta Dnes)

(21)   *Vidí i ekonomiku, která ne a ne nabrat nový dech, a rostoucí veřejné dluhy.* (Mladá fronta Dnes)

The same holds for person (first person in ex. 16 and 17, third person in 20 and 21, second person 22 and 23) which leads us to the conclusion that as there are no restrictions we are dealing with a fully productive syntactic pattern of Czech; cf.

Second person:
(22)   *Když si odložíte brýle a ne a ne je najít? Co je to?* (Mladá fronta Dnes)

(23)   *Stává se vám, že dostanete škytavku a ne a ne se jí zbavit?* (Deníky Bohemia)

4.2 Features of the infinitival verb

The next questions we would like to address concern the infinitival verb. We start our analysis with aspect: it turns out that the construction shows a significant preference for perfective verbs. The search query containing the string *ne a ne* with the additional specifications "followed by a perfective infinitive in the distance 0 to 3 tokens within one sentence" rendered 988 tokens, whereas the corresponding query searching for imperfective verbs rendered the number of 119 hits, among which only 23 turned out to be real imperfective verbs.[5] This strong asymmetry is not a question of arbitrary frequency bias, but exhibits the specific semantic profile of the construction as a whole. A closer semantic analysis of the imperfective examples shows that their usual aspectual value notwithstanding these imperfective verbs come to express the initial stage of the action, i.e. the phasal value "inchoative" which is usually associated with perfective verbs. This effect of the coercion of a new aspectual value can nicely be illustrated on the base of ex. (24) and (25):

(24) *Lístek se zabarvoval čím dál víc, už vypadal úplně jako motýl, ale ne a ne létat.* (Hospodářské noviny)

(25) *Tina Smithová (43) prodělala již 21 gynekologických operací, a stále ne a ne být matkou.* (Blesk)

What we get here are readings like "it didn't get into the air" and "she didn't become pregnant". These data strongly corroborate the claim that the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* has a semantic content in its own which is not derivable from its individual components; otherwise, we would not be able to explain the mentioned process of semantic shift. According to Karlík's analysis shown in the introductory section 1, the infinitive is expected to be able to assign accusative case to the object and to determine the semantic role of the subject. The data show the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* to allow for both intransitive (ex. 16) and transitive verbs (22) and for verbs with different semantic roles (e.g. patient in ex. 17, agent in ex. 26, cognizer in ex. 27):

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5 ([word="ne"] [word="a"] [word="ne"][]{0,3} [tag="...............P.*"]) within <s id=".*">
([word="ne"] [word="a"] [word="ne"][]{0,3} [tag="...............I.*"]) within <s id=".*">

(16)   *Jím už velmi málo, ale pořád ne a ne hubnout*$_{\text{INTRANS}}$*.* (Blesk)

(22)   *Když si odložíte brýle a ne a ne je*$_{\text{ACC}}$ *najít*$_{\text{TRANS}}$*? Co je to?*
(Mladá fronta Dnes)

(17)   *Moje kamarádka už podřimovala, ale já ne a ne usnout*$_{\text{PATIENT}}$*.*
(Deníky Bohemia)

(26)   *V jedenadevadesátém roce jsme s bráchou založili vydavatelství
a nazvali ho Ne a Ne records, protože v té době Supraphon ne
a ne naše věci vydávat*$_{\text{AGENT}}$*.* (Lidové noviny)

(27)   *Donesli mi do schránky volební lístky, a já ne a ne se dopí-
dit*$_{\text{COGNIZER}}$*, co tímhle kdo sleduje.* (Deníky Moravia)

We come to the conclusion that the infinitival verb in the *ne_a_ne_Inf-
-cxn* inherently receives an inchoative reading which leads to a strong
preference of perfective aspect. There are, in contrast, no restrictions
concerning transitivity and semantic roles.

4.3 Temporal framing of the state of affairs

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* does not
combine with tense or mood auxiliaries. This does not imply, however,
that the state of affairs referred to by the infinitive would be restricted to
the time of utterance. There are ample examples of contexts where the
state of affairs is located in the past:

(17)   *Moje kamarádka už podřimovala*$_{\text{PAST}}$*, ale já ne a ne usnout.*
(Deníky Bohemia)

(28)   *Zpět jsem však ztratila*$_{\text{PAST}}$ *orientaci a ne a ne najít uličku k na-
šemu pensionu.* (Chlumecké listy)

As the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* usually occurs in a narrative sequence, it is
closely linked to the preceding clause, often in the form of a complex
sentence. The infinitival construction in itself is tenseless and receives
its temporal interpretation from the preceding clause. The data show

that the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* occurs only in contexts of present or past tense reference; there was a single instance of the use of the analytical future tense which, however, receives an atemporal generic reading:[6]

(29) *Kdo ví, jak svíčka funguje, dokáže zřejmě i odhalit, kdy by s ní mohl být problém. Když se bude startér točit a motor stále ne a ne chytnout, není od věci svíčku vyšroubovat a podívat se, jak vypadá.* (Deníky Moravia)

4.4 Semantics of the construction

After having described the formal and combinatorial properties of the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* we would like to move on to its functional profile. A first functional description is offered by Porák (1961: 141) who treats it as a subtype of the two-member infinitive clauses with particles ("dvojčlenné infinitivní věty s časticemi"):[7]

> Tyto věty vyjadřují, že mluvčí nechce nebo nemůže vykonat děj vyjádřený infinitivem. Od vět slovesných se stejným významem se odlišují silnější emocionálností a velmi silným negativním poměrem, až odporem činitele k možnosti nebo chtění vykonat děj […].
> (These clauses express that the speaker does not want to or cannot carry out the action encoded in the infinitive. In comparison with verbal clauses of the same meaning, they are marked with stronger emotionality and with a very strong negative attitude, even disgust of the actor to the capability or willingness to carry out the action […].)

Similarly, Svoboda (1962: 44ff.) calls it a subtype of two-member infinitive declarative clauses ("dvojčlenné infinitivní věty oznamovací") which serves specific expressive purposes ("užívá se ho k expresívnímu vyjádření jedné z dějových složek") and links it to the meanings "incapability" ("neschopnost") and "unwillingness to carry out the action

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6 ([tag="........F.*"][]{0,6}[word="ne"] [word="a"] [word="ne"])

7 Other terms are: "Dvojčlenné infinitivní věty oznamovací" (Svoboda 1962: 43ff.) and in Slovak linguistics "Infinitiv v jednoduchom prisudku dvojčlenných viet – Vety vyjadrujúce nemožnosť alebo neschopnosť'" (Ružička 1956: 43).

encoded in the infinitive" ("neochoty konat děj").[8] What remains un-clear in both functional descriptions is whether it is the speaker or the participant who is the experiencer of the emotion. Another problem concerns the assumed modal meaning which seems to vacillate between negated possibility and negated volition. As a matter of fact, this type of ambiguity has not been reported on in typological research on mo-dality. As shown in section 4.1, the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* allows for human and non-human subjects and – in the case of meteorological verbs – empty subject positions. As we cannot ascribe the notions "incapabili-ty" or "unwillingness" to entities like rain or strikes we have to look for other functional features. We would like to put forward the hypothesis that we are dealing with a verbal category which in linguistic typo-logy is called **frustrative**: this term is used as a cover label e.g. for the functional description of specific affixes in Amazonian languages (Sparing-Chávez 2003, Overall 2008) or of particles in the Siberian lan-guage Ket (Butorin 2006). According to Overall (2008), the frustrative expresses both the dynamics of the action and the attitude of the speaker and, thus, combines aspectual features with speaker's emotional stance (see also Porák's and Svoboda's term "expressive"). The frustrative is not a uniform notion, but covers a cluster of different meanings linked by the key notion of unfulfilled expectation on the side of the speaker which leads to some sort of negative attitude towards the situation, in our case towards the fact that the situation remains unrealised. Using elements from the semantic analysis of a Ket particle in Butorin (2006), we would like to propose the following explication for the Czech *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn*:

> THE SPEAKER WANTS THAT THE SITUATION P SHOULD TAKE PLACE, BUT THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN, BECAUSE THE SITUATION Q WHICH IS UNKNOWN TO THE SPEAKER TAKES PLACE WHICH IMPEDES THE REALISATION OF P. THE SPEAKER DID NOT EXPECT Q TO TAKE PLACE, UNDER THE USUAL CIRCUMSTANCES ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED P TO TAKE PLACE. THE SPEAKER THINKS: THIS IS BAD.

This meaning decomposition shows the semantic complexity of this construction; the main components are subjectivity, negative evaluation, disappointed expectation, encyclopaedic knowledge and the telicity of the action. The speaker is involved in a double way: (s)he for some

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8 Also in PMČ: 545 and for the Slovak equivalent *nie a nie* in Ružička (1956: 43).

reason is interested in the realisation of the situation referred to by the lexical verb and (s)he is not happy that this does not happen. The latter reflects what Porák calls expressivity. The *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* is restricted to verbs which denote situations a speaker might potentially be interested in like e.g. losing weight, getting rid of a hiccup, rain in the time of heat etc. The construction expresses that the action is impeded by some factor which is construed as being unknown to the speaker (in ex. 28: for some reason I couldn't find my way back to the hotel). Under usual circumstances which are determined by our knowledge about the world one would have expected the situation to be realised which leads to the reading of unexpectedness.

Let us apply this semantic explication to the sentence ex. (16) *Jím už velmi málo, ale pořád ne a ne hubnout*; the speaker, coinciding with the participant, wants to lose weight and started dieting; the former, however, does not happen because something unknown happens to her/his body which inhibits the weight loss which comes as a surprise to her/him. Under usual circumstances one would expect a diet to lead to the loss of weight. The speaker (coinciding with the referent of the subject) is disappointed. In sentences with a subject in the third person the evaluative component might get the intersubjective reading THE SPEAKER AND THE PARTICIPANT THINK: THIS IS BAD which is understood as the expression of the empathy of the speaker.

We would like to conclude this chapter by some typological remarks. Although the frustrative has mainly been studied in Non-European languages, we assume that there are similar constructions in other Slavonic or in Germanic languages. For example, in colloquial German we find a construction which shows some resemblance to the Czech *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn*:

(30) *Hallo, habe seit vier Jahren einen Olivenbaum, aber er will und will nicht blühen.* "Hi, I've had an olive tree for four years now, but it simply won't bloom." (<http://green24.de>)

Both constructions are formed by means of morphological reduplication, they differ, however, in the element reduplicated (Czech – the negator, German – the volitional verb). This short side-glance at German shall suffice to illustrate the necessity of further cross-linguistic research on frustratives in the languages of Europe.

5 Conclusion

The Czech infinitive can be used in an astonishingly wide range of syntactic constructions all of which display specific internal syntactic and semantic properties. In our contribution we zeroed in on *ne_a_ne+Inf* which belongs to the less studied infinitival constructions. Based on the assumption that we are dealing with a conventional association between form and function that is at least partially arbitrary we described its specific morphosyntactic and semantic features using data from the Czech National Corpus. The *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* is a fully productive pattern of Czech syntax which allows for different types of subjects and infinitival verbs; its arbitrary feature is found in its inherent aspectual properties which lead to a strong preference of perfective verbs and the aspectual coercion in the case of imperfective verbs. Another specific feature is its frequent use in complex sentences which shows its close link to narrative discourse. Inspired by typological research, we proposed the term "frustrative" which is used to cover various meanings linking aspectual features with the notion of speaker's unfulfilled expectation and negative attitude towards the non-realisation of the state of affairs. Due to the lack of space, we did not present a detailed corpus-based investigation of the discourse properties of the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* which we leave for future research.

Acknowledgment

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Another Piece of the Infinitive Puzzle: the Czech Frustrative Construction *ne a ne zapršet*

In our paper we present a corpus-based analysis of the Czech *ne a ne zapršet* construction (*ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn*) using larger amounts of data from the Czech National Corpus. The construction is treated as a conventional association between form and function that is at least partially arbitrary. It is shown that the *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* has a specific morpho-syntax and a non-compositionally derived meaning. The *ne_a_ne_Inf-cxn* turns out to be a rare, but fully productive pattern of Czech syntax which can combine with different types of subjects and verbs; one arbitrary feature is to be seen in its inherent aspectual properties which lead to a strong preference of perfective verbs and the aspectual coercion in the case of imperfective verbs. The construction has a highly specific meaning we propose to call "frustrative"; i.e. a meaning linking aspectual features with the notion of speaker's unfulfilled expectation and negative attitude towards the non-realisation of the state of affairs.