

## **The verb in a Czech sentence: How do foreign learners of the Czech language perceive the structure of a Czech sentence?<sup>1</sup>**

**Keywords:** verb phrase, noun phrase, Czech language, sentence structure, syntax, morphology, subject – predicate agreement

**Klíčová slova:** český jazyk, větná struktura, syntax, morfologie, shoda přísudku s podmětem

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to illustrate through two sentences how foreign learners perceive the structure of the Czech language. Respondents were asked to write answers on how the language works, what the syntactic relations of the sentence members are, and why the chosen words have their concrete forms with respect to the whole clause. The survey collected answers of a wide range of respondents with respect to both the number of years of studying the Czech language and their native language. After a brief introduction to the Czech language focusing mainly on the syntactic and morphological properties that were at the center of attention in this survey, the chosen survey questions are analyzed. It turned out that learners of the Czech language were willing to participate in this survey; in total the respondents provided answers in 95.7 % of cases, which helped to get more exact results. It emerged that respondents of the survey fully answered the questions correctly in 52.7 % of cases. The remaining 47.3 % of responses were either wrong or incomplete depending on the form of the question. The results of this survey lead us to the conclusion that it might be worth focusing more on the system of morphology and syntax while teaching Czech for foreigners. The complete list of answers with respect to the number of years of studying the Czech language is attached in the appendix.

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## Introduction

Interest in learning Czech as a foreign language seems to be growing strongly in recent years, as the number of new learning programs for foreign learners of Czech has increased in number as well as in the variety of educational materials. Language tutors face the task of how to find not only the essential strategies of teaching the Czech language efficiently and discovering what their students need the most, but also ascertaining what their weakest areas in Czech language acquisition are. Studying how learners perceive the language can help us find the most suitable ways of improving teaching strategies. Taking a word as a basic unit of language, we need to understand how it works in the sentence structure depending on which part of speech it belongs to. Or in our case, we need to understand how foreign students of the Czech language comprehend the basis of Czech sentence structure: the syntagmatic relations. While native speakers do not usually think about all the complexities of their mother tongue, they may focus on the phonological, morphological, or syntactical system of the targeted language more, simply because of their need to understand how to use the language in order to communicate their goals properly. This article is focused mainly on the verb and its comprehension in terms of building the grammatically correct sentence in Czech. Two simple clauses are taken as examples and are further discussed. These sentences were given to a group of foreign students with a list of questions concerning their grasp of Czech sentence structure to help us understand how exactly students think about sentence structure, and where we should improve our teaching methodology to make it more comprehensible for new learners.

## Theoretical Background

A canonical clause, syntactically the most elementary type of clause, must contain a head element, i.e., a verb phrase (VP), the head which is a verb. The verb is thus the most important element of a clause structure and in a long-established terminology its syntactical

function in the clause is called the predicate. One of the crucial characteristics of the predicate is its ability to require a certain amount and type of participants or constituents based on its lexico-semantic nature; in other words, the predicate largely affects what can occur in a clause. The decisive factor in composing the sentence is the semantic role played by sentence members in relation to the predicate. From the functional perspective, the predicate provides information about the subject: it can express a property, state, change, or activity attributed to the subject. The subject usually expresses a cause or a carrier of the activity, state, change or property. Predicate and subject are thus two fundamental parts of the clause (Huddleston, Pullum, 2005: 63–64; Daneš, Hlavsa, Grepl, 1987: 10). Their mutual relation is specific in morphological and syntactical properties. The predicate dominates the category of subject case, but the category of grammatical gender or, in the majority of cases, number<sup>2</sup> is syntactically independent of the predicate, hence the predicate is in these two categories related to (and changes with) the subject (Komárek, Kořenský, Petr, Veselková, 1986: 156–163). Morphological properties of the Czech language allow a certain amount of movement in terms of word order and information structure within the clause. Since the Czech language has a complex verbal morphology system (as Czech belongs to pro-drop languages), it allows for the drop of the subject, as the subject is expressed by the verbal morphology:

Náš soused / On hraje na kytaru.  
Our neighbor / He plays the guitar.

Hraje na kytaru každý den.  
\* Plays the guitar every day.

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<sup>2</sup> DANEŠ et. al, 1987 also points out that some verbs require the subject to have a specific number as well. For example, for the verb *hledat* in the sentence *Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den* the category of number (subject in singular/plural) is syntactically free, compared, e.g., to the verb *udobřit se* (to reconcile) in the sentence *Konečně se udobřili* (They were finally reconciled with each other), which requires the subject to be in plural, making the number syntactically bound.

Compared to English, where the most important domain for the word order are the grammatical factors, Czech word order is managed by the semantic and pragmatic factors, and the morphological abilities of Czech language play an important role. In terms of morphological language typology, the Czech language belongs to the group of fusional languages that are traditionally described as those with no clear-cut boundary between morphemes. A complex meaning or different morphological functions can be expressed in one unsegmentable morpheme (Comrie, 1981: 44). The words' paradigms are complex, and zero morphemes frequently occur in such languages. This can be illustrated through the Czech declension of nouns, which has two active numbers (singular and plural) and seven cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, vocative, local, and instrumental). Words, e.g., nouns, belong to different classes, and different affixes are used to express their meaning. For example, the affix *-a* in *žena* (woman) combines both case and number (portmanteau morph) (Comrie, 1981: 45). In the Czech declension of nouns, a word can have up to six different affixes and the noun *žena*, singular in number, is a good example:

	<b>singular</b>	<b>plural</b>
nominative	<i>žen-a</i>	<i>žen-y</i>
accusative	<i>žen-u</i>	<i>žen-y</i>
genitive	<i>žen-y</i>	<i>žen-ø</i>
dative	<i>žen-ě</i>	<i>žen-ám</i>
vocative	<i>žen-o</i>	<i>žen-y</i>
local	<i>žen-ě</i>	<i>žen-ách</i>
instrumental	<i>žen-ou</i>	<i>žen-ami</i>

Traditional Czech grammar classifies words based on ten parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, pronouns, numbers, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, particles, and interjections. Words create phrases (noun phrase, verb phrase, etc.) and clauses, and their occurrence in such structures is affected by the structure of each language. To illustrate this, let us focus on the clauses in our survey:

[Moje nová asistentka] NP, Subject	[hledala] V, Predicate	[ty ztracené dokumenty] NP, Object	[celý den] Adv of time.
NOM		ACC	ACC
My new assistant	was searching for	those lost documents	the whole day.

[Moje asistentka] NP, Subject	[pracovala] V, Predicate	[v Brně] Adv of place.
NOM		LOC
My assistant	worked	in Brno.

In the clauses above, as well as in every other clause, the sentence members are connected through syntactical relations. Sentence members that are required by the predicate and that create (together with the predicate) the basic clause cannot be omitted and are called complements. The number of complements together with the choice of the concrete parts of speech for these positions create various types of clauses. These basic clauses can be enlarged by optional parts of the sentence, known as adjuncts. The sentence functions of these semantic roles are reflected in syntax, and are called the subject, the object, the attribute, etc., and their occurrence might differ from language to language. For example, the subject is an obligatory complement of most Czech verbs (Karlík, Nekula, Rusínová, Grepl, 2012: 386; Daneš, Hlavsa, Grepl, 1987: 27) and it is an obligatory member in the chosen sentences as well. Sentence members are not equal and their occurrence in a sentence depends on the use of dominating sentence members. Elements that are dominated by other sentence members are entirely dependent on the presence of the dominating constituents. For example, in the sentence *Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den* the attributes *moje* and *nová* are dominated by the member *asistentka*, the attribute *ztracené* is dominated by *dokumenty*, the attribute *celý* is dominated by *den*, and so on. By way of this principle, the hierarchical structure of any clause is formed.

The top of this hierarchy is occupied by the finite verb *hledala* (predicate). By choosing the concrete predicate, the author of the utterance determines how the clause structure must be formed, i.e., which rules the predicate needs to apply to create a syntactically complete clause (Huddleston, Pullum, 2005: 64–67). For example the verb *hledat* (INF) is bivalent, i.e., subject and object are obligatory complements. Our basic clause is hence *Asistentka hledala dokumenty* and the remaining members are optional additions of the obligatory sentence members. In the sentence *Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den* we have already illustrated the necessary verb complements and what the optional constituents are. In the second sentence, *Moje asistentka pracovala v Brně*, the basic clause is *Asistentka pracovala* and the rest of the sentence members, i.e., the attribute *moje* and the locative adverbial *v Brně* are optional.

The verbal selection needs to be supported by the morphology of its complements as well in terms of agreement in number (singular – plural), gender (masculine inanimate, masculine animate, feminine, neuter), or case. The predicate *hledala* only requires a specific case of the subject (nominative) and object (accusative), while the subject *asistentka* in the noun phrase *moje nová asistentka* dominates the attributes *moje* and *nová*, hence requiring agreement in case, number, and gender of its dependent constituents. The predicate *hledala* must also agree with the subject in gender and number: the Czech past tense (preterite) is formed with the *-l*-participle (active participle) and the auxiliary verb *být* (to be). The auxiliary verb is null in third-person singular and plural; the *-l*-participle takes an ending according to the number and gender of the subject: *-ø* (masculine singular), *-a* (feminine singular or neuter plural), *-o* (neuter singular), *-i* (masculine animate plural), *-y* (feminine plural or masculine inanimate plural):

	Singular		Plural	
1 <sup>st</sup> person	hledal-ø/-a/-o	jsem	hledal-i/-y/-a	jsme
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	hledal-ø/-a/-o	jsi	hledal-i/-y/-a	jste
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	hledal-ø/-a/-o	ø	hledal-i/-y/-a	ø

The second complement required by the predicate, the direct object *dokumenty*, is dependent neither on the predicate nor the subject in number; it is, as we said, dependent on the predicate in the category of case. The accusative is the most frequent case for the direct object; it receives the action of the predicate. Such predicates are called transitive; and predicates with a complement in accusative have a specific place in the Czech system of verbs (Daneš, Hlavsa, Grepl, 1987: 28). As a head of the noun phrase *ty ztracené dokumenty*, the direct object *dokumenty* dominates the demonstrative pronoun *ty* and the adjective *ztracené* in the category of number and gender. The time adverbial phrase *celý den* is dependent on the verb *hledat*, but the dependency is not expressed by grammatical rules such as agreement or case dependency (Havránek, Jedlička 2002: 166; Daneš, Hlavsa, Grepl 1987: 75). One of the basic ways of expressing time adverbials with the meaning ‘how long’ in the Czech language is the use of a phrase formed by the adverbial expression *celý* and the noun in the accusative (Karlík, Nekula, Rusínová, Grepl, 2012: 450).

Even though the time adverbial phrase *celý den* is fully dependent on the predicate, not all predicates can be combined with this phrase. The time adverbial phrase *celý den* responds to the question ‘how long?’ and so it usually does not occur in most sentences with verbs that are perfective (Křížková, Helena 1966: 65–72 [cit. 2021-12-12]). One of the characteristics of Czech language verbs is the category of verbal aspect. The verbal aspect is the grammatical category expressing action which is either completed (perfective) or uncompleted, i.e., actions that are in progress and repeated actions (imperfective), and it is a typical category of verbs shared by the Slavonic languages (Karlík, Nekula, Pleskalová, 2012–2018 [cit. 2021-12-10], headword: vid). Most Czech verbs come in aspectual pairs, i.e., in perfective–imperfective form. For example the imperfective verb *hledat* ‘to be looking for sth’ is paired with the perfective verbs *dohledat* (*si*) ‘to track down’, *vyhledat* (*si*) ‘to look up’, *najít* (*se/si*) ‘to find’ etc.; the imperfective verb *pracovat* ‘to work, to have a job’ creates such a pair with the perfective verbs *dopracovat* (*si*) ‘to finish the task’, *přepřacovat* ‘to rewrite’, *přepracovat se* ‘to overwork’, and *zpracovat* ‘to process’,

to name but a few (Horáková, Kopečková, Nováková, Poláchová, 2021, headwords: hledat (se/si), pracovat). To create such aspectual pairs, Czech language verbs use prefixes (with the base of an imperfective verb) and suffixes (with the base of a perfective verb) (Horáková, Kopečková, Nováková, Poláchová, 2021: 27). In the chosen sentences the verbal aspect of both predicates is imperfective.

As to the complete sentence structure, as we said earlier, in the Czech language a certain level of movement of sentence members is possible, since the word order is managed by the semantic and pragmatic factors, and morphological properties of the Czech language allow for certain positions to change without the sentence losing its meaning. For example, both sentences *Petr viděl Pavla* and *Pavla viděl Petr* use the same tense (preterite) and the same cases (Petr = nominative, Pavla = accusative). Because of the nominative–accusative distinction, here within masculine animate nouns in particular, the subject–object switching is possible without altering the meaning of the sentence (*Peter saw Pavel*). The word order in our sentences can be changed as well, but it is necessary to reorder the positions of the whole phrases, not just the individual sentence members:

Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den. (S – V – O – T)  
 Ty ztracené dokumenty hledala moje nová asistentka celý den. (O – V – S – T)  
 Celý den hledala moje nová asistentka ty ztracené dokumenty. (T – V – S – O)  
 Moje nová asistentka celý den hledala ty ztracené dokumenty. (S – T – V – O)  
 Moje nová asistentka ty ztracené dokumenty hledala celý den. (S – O – V – T)  
 Moje asistentka pracovala v Brně. (S – V – P)  
 V Brně pracovala moje asistentka. (P – V – S)  
 V Brně moje asistentka pracovala. (P – S – V)

Every reordering of the phrases results in certain changes in the meaning and the sentence dynamism. To a large extent, the Czech language uses the word order to reflect the information structure, the functional sentence perspective. However, students were given the unmarked word order to focus on different aspects of the sentence structure. Although this subject matter will not be further discussed in

this article, I outlined this grammar as well to illustrate the flexible capacities of Czech syntax and morphology.

### Survey Data and the Analysis

Respondents were given two forms of the questionnaire, one complex and the other simplified, and asked to choose the best option for them. In total 53 learners of the Czech language answered the survey. In addition to the questions regarding the grammatical and syntactical properties of the sentence members, respondents were asked to write their mother tongue and how many years they had studied the Czech language.

Germanic	English	2	13
	German	9	
	Norwegian	2	
Italic	Catalan	1	14
	French	4	
	Italic	4	
	Romanian	1	
	Spanish	4	
Indo-Iranian	Persian	1	2
	Turkish	1	
Japonic	Japanese	1	1
Malayo-Polynesian	Indonesian	1	1
Semitic	Arabic	2	2
Sino-Tibetan	Chinese	5	5
Slavic	Bulgarian	1	10
	Croatian	1	
	Polish	1	
	Russian	5	
	Serbian	1	
	Ukrainian	1	
Unlisted	Unlisted	5	5

As we can see, the highest number of respondents belong to the highest number of respondents belong to the Italic, Germanic, and Slavonic languages. In addition, most respondents' years of studying Czech are not equal, as most had learned the Czech language for up to three years:

0–1 years	1–3 years	3–5 years	5–10 years
32.1 %	47.2 %	11.3 %	9.4 %

Respondents worked with the properties of the simple clause – the subject, the verb, the direct object, and the adverbials of time or place – and answered several questions concerning the sentence relations and particular properties of the chosen sentence members. Let us start with the properties of the verb itself. Two verbs were featured in finite forms: *hledala* and *pracovala* in the sentences *Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den* and *Moje asistentka pracovala v Brně*. Both verb forms indicate the agreement with the subject in the categories described earlier. Here the respondents' answers of how they understand the principle of creating a Czech sentence are being described. Having in mind the sentences, let us start with the category of person. Respondents were asked whether the form of the verb *hledala* is based on a sentence structure or if it is a choice of the speaker. Most respondents (72.2 %) replied that the verb *hledala* takes its form from the structure of the sentence and not by the choice of the author of the utterance. Interestingly, corresponding answers were given by the exact same respondents when asked if the category of number is also dependent on the sentence structure or on the choice of the author (which was the answer of 27.8 % respondents). Respondents who focused on the verb *pracovala* answered the question on the gender as to whether the verb *pracovala* indicates the gender of the subject and if the gender is determined by the sentence structure or by the author of the utterance. Respondents clearly recognized the feminine ending *-a* in the third person singular in 88.2 % of the cases, and only 4 respondents did not answer this question. In terms of who determines the gender of the verb, the answers were rather equal: 45.5 % of

respondents chose the author of the utterance to make the choice about the form of the verb and 55.5 % of respondents replied that the form the predicate receives depends on the sentence structure. In fact, in this category the subject also dominates the subject – predicate agreement and influences what ending the verb takes. The predicate indicates the person, number, and grammatical gender from its morphological structure. As the form of the verb is in the past tense, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person consists of the verb *hledat* without the auxiliary. Hence, we should not forget the fact that only the whole structure of the predicate indicates the person.

Next, the category of tense was discussed again in terms of whether the tense is determined by the sentence structure or by the author. Again, both possibilities were chosen by the respondents of the survey: 64.9 % of answers for being determined by the author of the utterance and 35.1 % by the sentence structure. One of the general ways for expressing the category of time in the utterance is to use the appropriate verb tense. The category of time is thus expressed by the finite verb and most often the tense of the verb is chosen in relation to the moment of the act of communication. That is, it is determined by the speaker, who chooses the appropriate verb tense with respect to the actual moment of communication (Komárek, Kořenský, Petr, Veselková 1986: 163–166).

In addition to the question focusing on the verb tense, the survey examined how time is expressed by the sentence in general. Respondents were asked to think about the words that can express tense reflected in the sentence *Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den*. Usually, the respondents thought about the tense of the predicate, as 66.7 % of answers mentioned the predicate *hledala* to have the ability to express tense. Next, 22.2 % of respondents wrote that the ability of expressing time have both the predicate and the adverbial of time. One respondent chose the time adverbial to be the only phrase capable of expressing time. The most complex answer was made by one respondent who discussed all the words that can express the tense. Besides the predicate *hledala* and the time adverbial *celý*

den, this respondent also mentioned the adjective *nová* in the noun phrase *moje nová asistentka* – denoting the recency of employing that assistant – as well as the deverbative adjective *ztracené* in the direct object phrase *ty ztracené dokumenty*. It seems that respondents focused mainly on the grammatical properties of the sentence, and in a simple clause consisting of only one predicate, the highest attention was given to the verb itself.

An interesting set of answers was offered to the question of whether the word *hledala* influences the form of another word in the sentence. Most of the answers focused on the valence of the verb requiring the direct object to be in the accusative case (66.7 %). Some respondents (11.1 %) wrote that there is no word in the sentence whose form is influenced by the verb. One answer said the verb influences the form of the possessive pronoun *moje* and the form of the adjective *nová*. A slightly higher amount (16.7 %) recorded that the verb influences the subject *asistentka* or the noun phrase *moje nová asistentka* and they mentioned mainly the category of gender—that it requires the subject to be of the feminine gender. As we said earlier, the subject must agree with the predicate, but the form of the predicate changes with the subject in terms of person and number. The attributes *moje* and *nová* are also not influenced by the verb. These attributes enlarge the subject *asistentka*, and are hence fully dependent on the form of the subject. Recognizing which sentence elements belong together and create one phrase (noun phrase, adjective phrase, etc.) is crucial to understanding the sentence structure of the language. For example, in changing the word order we need to change the position of the whole phrase and not just of single elements. As we emphasized earlier when discussing word order, there can be a lot of phrase movement in one sentence.

Respondents showed a similar lack of clarity regarding the subject *asistentka*, as to why the word *asistentka* has precisely this form and who (or what) decides this. The highest number of respondents (25 %) replied that the word *asistentka* has its form ‘because she is a woman’, hence it cannot have the male form *asistent*; respondents here focused

highly on the gender characteristic of the subject. Next, 18.8 % of respondents focused on its sentence role as a subject and on the most common case for the subject in Czech, the nominative case. The same percentage of respondents (12.5 %) selected the following answers: the form is indicated by the verb *hledala*; the sentence structure requires it; because of the gender, number, and case; or because the author of the utterance decided on this. There was also one answer saying that the words *moje*, *nová* and *-a* in *hledala* decided the form of the subject. It seems this question was quite unclear for the respondents and for that reason the answers to this question are not included in the total results.

A connected question examined the syntactical relations of the subject in the sentence. That is, whether the word *asistentka* influences the form of another word or not. It was expected to receive answers concerning the subject – predicate agreement in person, number, and grammatical gender, as well as the agreement of the attributes, the possessive pronoun *moje* and the adjective *nová*. The category of grammatical gender is usually taught at the beginning of learning Czech (Holá 2016; Boccou Kestřánková, Štěpánková, Vodičková, 2017), and therefore it was expected that respondents would not have trouble while completing this task. However, only 22.2 % of respondents named both the agreement of the subject attributes and the subject – predicate agreement. Most respondents chose either one or the other option. Thus, 33.3 % of respondents wrote that the word *asistentka* influences the forms of its attributes and the same percentage of respondents answered that it influences the form of the predicate. And finally, 11.1 % of respondents wrote that the word *asistentka* does not influence the form of any word in the sentence.

With animate words, the natural gender is usually decisive for the grammatical gender. Besides having feminine, masculine, and neuter names of different bases, e.g., *muž* (‘man’) – *žena* (‘woman’) – *dítě* (‘child’), there is another way of creating words that express the natural sex of the word in the Czech language. That is to use gender inflection, as in the example *manžel* (‘husband’) – *manželka* (‘wife’). Tradi-

tionally, the relation between such pairs is asymmetric, as one word is the base word from which the derived counterpart is formed. The base word can be of a masculine gender and the female counterpart is formed using different suffixes, among which are the most frequent suffixes *-ka*, *-(n)ice*, *-(k)yně*, or *-ová*. Gender inflection is common in the Czech language, and it is used widely for the creation of names of female nationalities, e.g., *Angličan – Angličanka* ('Englishman' – 'Englishwoman'), for different professions, e.g., *knihovnik – knihovnice* ( $\sigma$  –  $\varphi$  'librarian'), for creating the female form of the surname, e.g. *Novák – Nováková* ( $\sigma$  –  $\varphi$  'Newman'), but also for creating female animal names, e.g., *slon – slonice* ( $\sigma$  –  $\varphi$  'elephant'). Gender inflection uses words of feminine gender, too, deriving a male counterpart, using the affixes such as *-er* or *-ák*, e.g., *husa – houser* ('goose' – 'gander'), *žába – žabák* ( $\varphi$  –  $\sigma$  'frog'). Generally, this type of grammatical inflection ( $\varphi > \sigma$ ) creates words naming animals, whereas the previous type ( $\sigma > \varphi$ ) creates both animal and person words. Grammatical inflection creating a neuter form also exists; it is mostly used for creating the names of young animals and immature beings (Karlík, Nekula, Rusínová, Grepl 2012: 120–123). From the answers of respondents, we may assume that this grammar is well-understood by the learners of the Czech language as 94.2 % of respondents were able to distinguish the suffix *-ka* and to create the gender pair of the occupation assistant, i.e., *asistent – asistentka*.

The survey also focused on the optional sentence elements, in this case on the adverbial of time *celý den*. Respondents were asked to think about the form of the word *den* and to answer whether its case form results from the construction of the sentence or not. The large majority of respondents (81.8 %) believes that its case is dependent on the construction of the sentence. But as was discussed earlier, even though the phrase is dependent on the verb *hledat*, the dependency is not expressed by grammatical rules such as agreement or case dependency. In the same sentence structure scheme, i.e., S – V – O – T the adverbial of time can be replaced by other time sequences in different cases, for example, INSTR.: *mezi svátky* ('between holidays'), LOC.:

*ve svém volnu* ('in her free time'), GEN.: *od pondělí do pátku* ('from Monday to Friday'), *během polední pauzy* ('during the lunch break') and so on. Interestingly, respondents who responded that the case form does not depend on the construction of the sentence were learners of the Czech language who had been learning Czech up to 1 year.

## Results

Respondents who had studied the Czech language for varying lengths of time and who had different mother tongues were asked to fill in a questionnaire related to the comprehension of Czech sentence structure with a focus on the verb as a predicate of the sentence and additional sentence members. Two simple clauses, *Moje nová asistentka hledala ty ztracené dokumenty celý den* and *Moje asistentka pracovala v Brně* were used as a base for the survey and respondents chose either one or the other sentence to analyze. Most questions allowed for open answers in order to let the respondents write their thoughts. These were very useful in many aspects. In some cases, respondents left the blank space or wrote that they do not understand the question, and therefore they probably did not randomly choose an option just to write something. Clearly, the questions could have been formulated more appropriately or examples could have been provided to better communicate the aim. Unsure responses or blank spaces were provided for 4.3 % of the answers. However, answering the question did not always mean the respondent answered the question fully. Irrelevant or incomplete answers accounted for 16.5 % of the total responses, which is not a negligible number. In the total amount of the analyzed answers, respondents of the survey fully answered the question correctly in 52.7 % of cases. The remaining 47.3 % of responses were either incorrect (for questions deciding between 2 options) or incomplete (for answers that were missing some information).

## Conclusion

From the results, it seems that Czech lessons may be lacking space to discuss individual syntactic relations in sentences, and that more fo-

cus on this grammar could improve students' overall comprehension of sentence structure and the syntactic relations of its elements. That is to say, students of the Czech language need to understand how the language works as it can help them to learn the language more efficiently. For example, by grasping the Czech language's sentence structure and the inflectional and derivational morphology, users of the language can easily recognize certain relations that can help them to understand the meaning of the whole clause, and some morphological properties of the words, too. Even though they may not, for example, know or remember the grammatical gender of a noun, the sentence structure and the morphology could help them to recognize it, as sentence members connected to the noun (e.g., the attributes in the noun phrase or the form of conjunctions used for the relative clauses) need to accord with this noun. Or, in a further example, properly recognizing the syntactic roles helps to construct accusative-centered expressions, relative clauses, or subordinate clauses in general, to name but a few. Right from the beginning of teaching the language, teachers should focus on such relations more in order to communicate properly the relations of the sentence members. Conversely, students should understand what sentence role each of the sentence members has. As this survey consisted of a small number of respondents, this paper does not aim to state how effective or poor the teaching methods used by Czech lecturers are. Rather, the goal is to direct attention to areas of the language that might deserve more care.

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## Appendix

**Table 1.** Why does the verb *hledala* have this form? Who (or what) decides on this?

Years of studying Czech	Person		Number		Tense	
	author	sentence structure	author	sentence structure	author	sentence structure
0–1	2	1	2	1	1	2
1–3	2	9	2	9	5	6
3–5	1	2	1	2	2	1
5–10	0	1	0	1	1	0
Total	5	13	5	13	9	9

**Table 2.** Why does the verb *pracovala* have this form? Who (or what) decides on this?

Years of studying Czech	Gender		Number		Tense	
	author	sentence structure	author	sentence structure	author	sentence structure
0-1	4	3			5	1
1-3	3	5			6	2
3-5		3			2	
5-10	3				2	1
Total	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>			<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>

**Table 3.** Does the verb *hledala* influence the form of another word in the sentence?

Years of studying Czech	Direct Object in ACC	Subject phrase	The attributes <i>moje</i> and <i>nová</i>	No
0-1	3			
1-3	5	2	1	2
3-5	3			
5-10	1	1		
Total	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 4.:** Why does the word *asistentka* have precisely this form and who (or what) decides on this?

Years of studying Czech	Sentence role – the Subject	She is a woman	Requested by the verb	Requested by the sentence structure	Gender, Case and Number	Author of the utterance	The form of <i>moje</i> and <i>nová</i> and the ending <i>-a</i> in <i>hledala</i>
0-1		1	1			1	
1-3	2	3	1	1	1		1
3-5				1		1	
5-10	1				1		
Total	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 5.:** Does the word *asistentka* influence the form of another word or not?

Years of studying Czech	Subject – Predicate agreement	Agreement of the subject attributes	Agreement of the subject attributes and the Subject – Predicate agreement	No
0-1	1	2		
1-3	4	3	2	1
3-5	1	1	1	
5-10			1	1
Total	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 6.:** Which words have the ability to express tense?

Years of studying Czech	Predicate	Predicate + adverbial of time	Adverbial of time	Predicate, adverbial of time, adjective <i>nová</i> and <i>ztracené</i>
0-1	1	1	1	
1-3	7	3		
3-5	3			
5-10	1			1
Total	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>