

The Czech preposition *na* and its English Equivalents

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0. In this contribution a quite detailed analysis of one of the Czech prepositions (*na*) will be discussed in comparison with its English equivalents. This study is based on the Czech-English parallel corpus.

1. In the Frequency Dictionary of Czech (2004, *Frekvenční slovník češtiny*, Čermák et al.) *na* is the second most frequent preposition (the most frequent is the preposition *v*), while in the Frequency Dictionary of Spoken Czech (2006, *Frekvenční slovník mluvené češtiny*, Čermák, ed.) it is the most frequent preposition (informal dialogues). This means that this preposition is used typically in spoken language and its usage also increases in contemporary written Czech. This expansion of the use of the preposition *na* can be seen in the shift from *v* to *na* as the most frequent preposition in the two dictionaries which the Institute of the Czech National Corpus has published so far – while in Karel Čapek's vocabulary the prevailing preposition is still *v*, in the works of Bohumil Hrabal the preposition *na* is in first place (see Dictionary of Karel Čapek and Dictionary of Bohumil Hrabal published in 2006 and 2009).

2. Let us first briefly outline the theoretical background for this study, i.e. the sources used and the implications for the distribution of the preposition *na*, *the object of this study*.

2.1. The theoretical sources for this study are devoted to the problems of prepositions, word syntagmatics and valency:

a) F. Čermák – System, Function, Form and Semantics of the Czech Prepositions (*Systém, funkce, forma a sémantika českých předložek*, 1996);

b) F. Čermák et al. – Syntagmatics and Paradigmatics of the Czech Word: Valency and Collocability (*Syntagmatika a paradigmatika českého slova: valence a kolokabilita*, 2005)

c) F. Čermák – The Substance of Valency from the Lexicological Point of View (*Podstata valence z hlediska lexikologického*, 1991)

2.2. In the system of the Czech prepositions the preposition *na* is a one-word preposition in contrast to multi-word prepositions such as *na základě* (in both frequency dictionaries mentioned above the prepositions *na* and *na základě* are treated separately; the frequency of the one-word preposition *na* as a part of the multi-word preposition *na základě* was subtracted (FSČ: *na* = 1012442, *na základě* = 6696, FSMČ: *na* = 7066, *na základě* = 20).

Czech prepositions can have three functions according to their position in the sentence:

a) adverbial (Verb – Noun) – expressing the relation between the verb and the noun (*vzpomínat na prázdniny* – to reminisce about the holidays)

b) adnominal (Noun – Noun) – expressing the relation between two nominal expressions (?), such as two nouns, adjective and noun etc. (*prázdniny u moře* – holidays by the sea)

c) adverbial (Preposition – Noun) – in contrast to the previous functions it does not express valency relations, only the relation to the preposition as a whole (e.g. *v létě* – in the summer).

In the present analysis all three functions of the preposition *na* were taken into account. The emphasis was mainly on the valency functions, i.e. adverbial and adnominal.

According to Syntagmatics and Paradigmatics of the Czech Word (Čermák & Holub, 2005) the adverbial function was divided into two groups:

a) valency – cases such as *myslet na*, *čekat na* etc., the preposition *na* expresses an abstract relation between the verb and the noun

b) addition/complement – such as *jít na /ples/* (to go to the ball), *stát na /zemi/* (to stand on the ground), in which the direction or the place, but not the abstract relation are expressed by the preposition; in this case the preposition *na* can be replaced by other prepositions, such as *do*, e.g. *jít do /školy/* (to go to school), *před*, e.g. *stát před /domem/* (to stand in front of the house) etc.

The adnominal function was concentrated on nouns and adjectives, i. e. their valency.¹ As noun valency is slightly different from verbal valency, abstract and concrete nouns were treated separately:

a) valency of abstract nouns, such as *čas na /odpočinek/* (time for rest)

b) valency of concrete nouns, e. g. *těsto na /závin/* (crust for the pie)

The valency of the adjectives was studied as a separate group, e. g. *pyšný na /svého syna/* (proud of his son).

While the valency of verbs, nouns and adjectives expressed by the preposition is the inherent attribute of the lexical item with the categorial feature² and therefore the verb/noun/adjective with the valency preposition can be taken as one lexical item or one lexeme; the adverbial function of the preposition is independent and forms a collocation, e.g. *na dovolené* – on vacation.

Besides the groups given above, fixed collocation and idioms were also studied, such as *na okamžik* – for a moment, *bez ohledu na* – let alone, *je to na vás* – it's up to you, *mít něco na jazyku* – to be on the edge of sb's tongue etc.

3. The linguistic data for this study was searched in the English-Czech parallel corpus built as a part of the InterCorp project. As the corpus includes both English-Czech and Czech-English translations, only the English-Czech translations were chosen as the basis for this study, i. e. 25 texts with 30,096 words. It was impossible to study this material as a whole, therefore 15 random samples of 100 sentences each were extracted automatically, i. e. 5% of the material.

4. According to the English equivalents given in the 15 extracted samples the original groups of lexical valency, collocations and idioms were extended to the following scheme:

I – lexemes

1) verb

a) valency – e.g. *dívat se na oblohu* – to look at the sky

b) complement – e.g. *vyjít na chodbu* – to go out to the corridor

2) noun

a) valency of the abstract noun – e.g. *myšlenka na dítě* – thought of the child³

b) valency of the concrete noun – e.g. *kapsy na prsou* – pockets across the

chest

In some cases the English equivalent is expressed not by a preposition but by an adjective, where the essential meaning of the adjective-noun combination in English is the purpose:

c) valency of the concrete noun in Czech expressed by adjective in the attribute position in English, e.g. *koš na odpadky* – trash can

3) adjective valency – e.g. *opatrný na peníze* – careful with money⁴

Moreover, a separate group for mixed valency, i.e. valency of different parts of speech in each language, was established:

¹ As. F. Čermák states in his paper “The Essence of Valency from the Lexicological Point of View”, all the parts of speech have their valency except for interjections, which form a separate sentence. (1991, 25)

² This categorial feature is the part of the semantics of the word, cf. the metalanguage to buy = to get for somebody by paying the money where **for somebody** doubles the explicit valency. (Čermák, 1991, 21).

³ A. Čermáková (2009, 71) gives the following most frequent abstract nouns with the preposition *na* (based on the SYN2000 corpus): *ohled na, pohled na, náklady na, nárok na, návrh na, právo na, podíl na, vliv na*.

⁴ M. Kopřivová (2006, 41) gives the 10 most frequent adjectives with the preposition *na* (based on the SYN2000 corpus): *založený, určený, zaměřený, závislý, postavený, umístěný, zvyklý, bohatý, náročný, nakrájený..*

4) mixed valency – e.g. *dveře na schodiště* – *the door opens onto a staircase*

II – collocations

1) adverbials – e.g. *na zahradě* – *in the garden*

2) fixed collocations – *na druhé straně* – *on the other hand*

III - idioms

This is also a separate group as it can include both collocations and sentences, e.g. *na tom nesejde* – *never mind*, *má to napsané na čele* – *it's written all over her*

IV – mixed group

This group incorporates the various possible differences in combinations of one-word and multi-word units between the two languages:

1) collocation – lexeme, e.g. *myčka na nádobí* – *dishwasher*, *zapnutý na knoflíky* – *buttoned*, *zahnat na strom* – *to tree*, *na chvíli* – *temporarily* etc.

2) idiom – lexeme – e.g. *mít na sobě* – *to wear*, *dát se na útěk* – *to run*, *mít na paměti* – *to remember* etc.

The last group is composed of quasi-idioms, i.e. combinations of verbs and abstract nouns having one-word equivalents in the other language:

3) quasi-idiom – lexeme – e.g. *vrhnout pohled na hodinky* – *to glance at the watch* x *he gave her a retiring look* – *unaveně na ni pohlédl*

V – Particular differences

As a separate group, cases of particular differences were also studied:

The most typical examples are the addition of the adverbial in Czech.

5. Now we can give a survey of the percentage representation of each of the groups given above⁵:

Table 1

Group	Description	Percentage
I – 1a:	valency of the verb	24.600 %
I – 1b:	complement of the verb	16.267 %
I – 2a:	valency of the abstract noun	3.933 %
I – 2b:	valency of the concrete noun	3.400 %
I – 2c:	attribute as an English equivalent of Czech valency	2.867 %
I – 3:	valency of the adjective	1.133 %
I – 4:	mixed valency	3.133 %
II – 1:	adverbials	7.533 %
II – 2:	fixed collocations	4.867 %
III:	idioms	7.733 %
IV – 1:	collocation – lexeme	3.667 %
IV – 2:	idiom – lexeme	3.267 %
IV – 3:	quasi-idiom - lexeme	2.467 %
V:	particular differences	13.400 %
VI – 1	insufficient context	0.867 %
VI – 2:	bad alignment	0.800 %

6. To sum up the findings about the Czech preposition *na* and its English equivalents it would be useful to see the most frequent equivalents of the Czech preposition *na*, especially on the level of the valency and complement of verbs and of the valency of nouns and adjectives.

6.1. The group I-1a contains 370 parallel sentences. The most frequent prepositions – equivalents of the Czech preposition *na* □ are *about*, *at*, *for*, *in*, *of* on and *to*. Among the less frequent are prepositions such as *after* (to call after), *against* (to rail against), *from* (to sprout from), *onto* (to hold onto – *lpět na*), *over* (to say over), *through* (to blot through), *toward* (to

⁵ The full data for each sample are given in the Appendix.

nod toward), *upon* (*to fix upon – upnout se na*) and *with* (*to lie with*). About one third of the material consists of verbs which have no preposition in English and there are also several cases of the infinitive and clause valency, e.g. *byl plánován na jaro – was planned to begin in spring*, *na to bych přísahala – I could have sworn that...* The table gives the most frequent English prepositions and their representing verbs.

Table 2

Number	Valency	Most frequent verbs
101	without prep	10x <i>to forget</i> , 10x <i>to remember</i> , 4x <i>to ask</i> , <i>to matter</i> , <i>to tap</i> , 3x <i>to answer</i> , <i>to call</i> , <i>to kiss</i> , 2x <i>to eat</i> , <i>to face</i> , <i>to recall</i>
95	<i>at</i>	41x <i>to look at</i> , 13x <i>to stare at</i> , 12x <i>to glance at</i> , 8x <i>to smile at</i> , 2x <i>to frown at</i> , <i>to grin at</i> , <i>to point at</i> , <i>to scowl at</i>
49	<i>on</i>	7x <i>to insist on</i> , 4x <i>to rely on</i> , 3x <i>to focus on</i>
28	<i>to</i>	5x <i>to point to</i> , 4x <i>to respond to</i> , 2x <i>to switch to</i>
21	<i>for</i>	9x <i>to wait for</i> , 3x <i>to prepare for</i>
15	<i>about</i>	7x <i>to think about</i> , 4x <i>to care about</i> , 3x <i>to ask about</i>
12	<i>of</i>	8x <i>to think of</i>
8	<i>in</i>	different verbs, e.g. <i>to participate in</i>
6	<i>inf</i>	
5	Kl	

6.2. The group **I-1b** contains 242 parallel sentences. This group shows broader variety in the verbs occurring. The most frequent prepositions are *at*, *for*, *in*, *into*, *on*, *onto* and *to*.

Table 3

Number	Complement	Most frequent verbs
84	<i>on</i>	9x <i>to sit on</i> , 8x <i>to stand on</i> , 4x <i>to lay on</i> , <i>to put on</i> , 3x <i>to lie on</i> , <i>to rest on</i> , 2x <i>to go on</i>
48	<i>to</i>	9x <i>to go to</i> , 4x <i>to come to</i> , <i>to return to</i> , <i>to take to</i> , 3x <i>to bring to</i> , <i>to descend to</i> , 2x <i>to drive to</i>
29	without prep	4x <i>to take (a train)</i> , 3x <i>to hit</i> , <i>to reach</i> , <i>to straddle</i> , 2x <i>to head (North)</i>
19	<i>for</i>	3x <i>to go for (dinner)</i> , 2x <i>to leave for</i>
17	<i>in</i>	2x <i>to live in</i> , 2x <i>to see in</i>
12	<i>into</i>	3x <i>to go into</i>
7	<i>at</i>	2x <i>to land at</i>
6	<i>onto</i>	different verbs

6.3. The group with abstract noun valency **I-2a** contains 59 parallel sentences. The most frequent English prepositions are *at*, *for*, *in*, *of*, *on* and *to*.

Table 4

Number	Preposition	Most frequent nouns
12	<i>of</i>	4x <i>thought of</i> , 2x <i>chance of</i>
9	<i>to</i>	different nouns, e.g. <i>answer to</i>
8	<i>for</i>	4x <i>time for</i>
8	<i>on</i>	different nouns, e.g. <i>attack on</i>
7	<i>in</i>	different nouns, e.g. <i>trend in</i>
5	<i>at</i>	different nouns, e.g. <i>level at</i>

6.4. The group of concrete noun valency **I-2b** contains 51 parallel sentences. The most frequent English prepositions are the following: *at* (5x), *for* (4x), *in* (7x) and *on* (30x). The most frequent preposition *on* specifies the place of the object, therefore there are various nouns used, cf. *leaf on the tree*, *buttons on the top*, *gashes on each cheek* etc. As far as the other prepositions are concerned the most interesting is the preposition *for*, used primarily for expressing the purpose, e.g. *cup for tea*. This type, nevertheless, is more frequently expressed

by the adjective - **tea cup*, cf. Czech *balzám na rty* – English *lip balm*. This type was studied in the group **I-2c** and 42 parallel sentences were discovered.

6.5. The last group which should be mentioned is the **I-3** group – adjective valency, containing 17 parallel sentences. The prepositions which appear in this group are *at, for, from, of, on, to, with*. The most frequent one is the preposition *to* with 7 instances, e.g. *fixed to, nice to, sensitive to, used to* etc.

6.6. Lastly, a short comment on the group **I-4** with mixed valency. Within the 15 samples there are 46 parallel sentences of this type. **7.** To sum up the findings about the Czech preposition *na* and its English equivalents it can be concluded that the preposition *na* is in most cases used as a verbal valency or a verbal complement, i.e. in its adverbial function (41 % altogether). The adnominal function (noun and adjective valency) forms 7.5 %. The same percentage is shown for usage within an adverbial. The preposition used as verbal valency (the most frequent English equivalent *at*) differs from the prepositions used as a verbal complement (the most frequent English equivalent is *on*). Fixed expressions – collocations and idioms form about 13 %. About 26 % of the parallel sentences show various differences from the original English text. About 3 % of the material is the differences between the two languages, i.e. *balzám na rty* – *lip balm*. The last 2% of the material is of non-linguistic concern, connected with the technical treatment of the material.

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APPENDIX: Number of occurrences of the features studied in the 15 random samples

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	average (%)
I-1a valency of the verb	22	27	18	30	23	32	24	23	22	18	29	26	25	26	25	24.667
I-1b complement of the verb	18	17	15	15	18	18	16	16	17	13	15	17	15	19	15	16.267
I-2a valency of abstract noun	5	5	3	3	4	3	8	3	7	3	4	3	4	1	3	3.933
I-2b valency of concrete noun	2	6	2	2	3	3	3	5	3	5	3	3	3	6	2	3.4
I-2c attribute equivalent in English	4	0	2	4	3	2	2	4	2	5	2	6	3	0	4	2.867
I-3 valency of the adjective	2	1	3	2	1	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	1.133
I-4 mixed valency	1	3	3	1	4	2	7	8	6	0	2	3	2	3	2	3.133
IIa adverbials	7	13	10	6	8	4	5	8	10	9	5	3	13	9	3	7.533
IIb fixed collocations	7	2	7	5	6	5	2	4	3	6	3	6	2	7	8	4.867
III idioms	9	7	5	10	5	10	3	7	4	13	11	10	9	7	6	7.733
IVa collocation – lexeme	5	3	9	3	3	1	7	6	1	3	2	3	1	3	5	3.667
IVb idiom - lexeme	1	2	5	3	4	2	6	2	2	3	2	4	5	3	5	3.267
IVc quasi-idiom - lexeme	2	0	2	1	3	1	1	3	4	4	4	2	3	2	5	2.467
V particular differences	14	11	16	14	14	16	15	7	16	14	15	11	14	11	13	13.4
VIa insufficient context	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	2	0.867
VIb bad alignment	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	0.8