

# Treatment of Complex Prepositions in Czech and English Dictionaries

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## Abstract

The paper studies complex prepositions, such as *within the bounds of, on the basis of*, their frequency in the 100-million corpora (Czech corpora SYN2000, SYN2005 and SYN2010, English corpus BNC) and their treatment in dictionaries. In the Czech monolingual dictionary Dictionary of Literary Czech (Slovník spisovné češtiny) the complex prepositions are stated under the lemmas of abstract nouns, such as *hledisko* (viewpoint) - *z hlediska* (from the point of view of), in the Great Czech-English Dictionary (Velký česko-anglický slovník) by J. Fronek states as prepositions only part of them, the rest of complex prepositions is given in collocations, such as *v rámci zákona* - *within the bounds of law*. In the Collins COBUILD English Dictionary the prepositions *out of* and *according to* are stated in separate entry, while the rest of the prepositions are stated within another entry. In New Oxford Dictionary of English most of the complex prepositions are stated within the phrases given at the end of each entry, the exceptions are prepositions *according to* and *rather than*. The author proposes to state all the complex prepositions as separate entries, i. e. on the same level as single or one-word prepositions.

## 1. Number and frequency of complex prepositions.

This paper focuses on the problem of complex prepositions, such as *within the bounds of, on the basis of*, and the way they are treated in dictionaries. The number of prepositions of this type is much higher than that of one-word prepositions: there are several hundred complex prepositions in Czech and English. The Dictionary of Czech Phraseology and Idiomatics (Slovník české frazeologie a idiomatiky), volume II: Non-Verbal Expressions, gives a list of 297 complex prepositions and their variants, as well as their treatment and examples of usage. The most frequent complex prepositions reach more than 10,000 occurrences in the one hundred million corpus. In English the situation is similar. The British National Corpus lists approx. 300 complex prepositions, the most frequent having over 10,000 occurrences. The aim of this paper is to study the distribution of various complex prepositions in dictionary entries and to suggest a solution for their position within the dictionary macrostructure.

## 2. Structure of complex prepositions.

### 2.1. Czech complex prepositions

Complex prepositions in Czech can be paradigmatic or non-paradigmatic (Čermák 1996). Paradigmatic prepositions have the following structure:

- (1) prep – N: preposition and an abstract noun, such as *v rámci* 'within the bounds of',
- (2) prep – N – prep: preposition, abstract noun and preposition, such as *s ohledem na* 'in view of'.

The non-paradigmatic prepositions can be structured as follows:

- (1) V<sup>f</sup> – prep: the verb form and preposition, such as *nehledě na* 'in spite of' (*nehledě* is the transgressive form of the verb *nehledět*)
- (2) ADV – prep: the adverb and the preposition, such as *spolu s* 'together with'
- (3) N<sub>c</sub> – prep: the noun in a specific case and the preposition, such as *vzhledem k* 'owing to' (*vzhledem* is the instrumental form of the noun *vzhled*)

- (4) N – prep – N: noun, preposition and a noun, such as *bok po boku* 'side by side'
- (5) isolated, such as *pokud jde o* 'as for'
- (6) foreign, such as *à la, à conto, ad vocem*

## 2.2. English complex prepositions

Klégr (2002) distinguishes simple (i.e. single-word) prepositions and complex (multi-word) prepositions. The same method is used by Čermák (1996) in the case of Czech. English complex prepositions may be subdivided into two-word sequences and three-word sequences. Two-word sequences involve a whole range of word-class combinations, such as adverb-preposition (*along with*), adjective-preposition (*close to*), participle-preposition (*except for*), conjunction-preposition (*because of*) or noun-preposition (*thanks to*). The largest category is that of the three-word sequences, as in Prep1 + Noun + Prep2 - *in spite of*.

## 3. Complex prepositions in Czech dictionaries.

### 3.1. Representative corpora

Three representative synchronic corpora of written Czech language have been compiled to date, each containing a hundred million words: SYN2000, SYN2005, and SYN2010. The text types in these corpora are variously distributed: the SYN2000 corpus contains fifteen per cent fiction, twenty-five per cent technical and scientific literature and sixty per cent newspapers and periodicals, while the SYN2005 and SYN2010 corpora contain forty per cent fiction, twenty-seven per cent technical and scientific literature and thirty-three per cent newspapers and periodicals.

**Table 1.** Complex prepositions in three Czech representative corpora.

complex preposition	SYN2000	SYN2005	SYN2010
<i>v rámci</i> 'within the framework of'	15 765	15 436	15 897
<i>v případě</i> 'in the case of'	14 798	13 557	14 002
<i>spolu s</i> 'together with'	14 732	11 005	12 246
<i>na základě</i> 'on the basis of'	13 734	13 345	12 236
<i>vzhledem k</i> 'owing to'	11 972	9 356	8 422

Although the percentage of the text types differs in these corpora, complex prepositions seem to have quite a stable position in the language, partial exceptions being *spolu s* (together with) and *vzhledem k* 'owing to' with higher frequencies in the SYN2000 corpus. This means that they are more likely to appear in newspapers (newspaper texts constitute sixty per cent of SYN2000 as opposed to thirty-three per cent in the case of SYN2005 and SYN2010).

### 3.2. Frequency Dictionary of Czech

In the Frequency Dictionary of Czech (Frekvenční slovník češtiny, 2004), which is based on the SYN2000 corpus, there are multi-word lexical units and lexical units with restricted collocability marked with a plus sign (+). Therefore the idiom *nechat někoho na holičkách* 'to leave sb. out in the cold' or *být/zůstat na holičkách* 'to be in a tight spot' is recorded as

*holičkách+*, which means that the form *holičkách* only occurs with combination with one or more words. As far as complex prepositions are concerned, the following prepositions are marked with the + sign: *z hlediska* 'from the point of view of', *v neprospěch* 'to the disadvantage of', *pod patronací* 'under the patronage of', *na počest* 'in honour of', *na pokraji* 'on the verge of', *s přihlédnutím k* 'taking account of', *v rámci* 'within the bounds of', *na roveň s* 'on a par with', *na sklonku* 'at the close of', *ve srovnání s* 'in comparison with', *pod taktovkou* 'under the baton of' ('conducted by'), *na úkor* 'at the expense of', *na vrub* 'at the door of', *vzhledem k* 'owing to', *na základě* 'on the basis of', *pod záštitou* 'under the auspices of'. The main reason why these sixteen complex prepositions were selected is statistical, as the frequency of these prepositions forms over one half of the frequency of the corresponding abstract noun, i.e. preposition *v rámci*, with 15 765 occurrences, constitutes eighty-one per cent of the frequency of the noun *rámec* - the frequency ratio is 0.815.

**Table 2.** Frequency ratio of the Czech complex prepositions.

Noun	Frequency of the noun	Complex preposition	Frequency of the complex preposition	Frequency ratio
<i>úkor</i> 'expense'	1945	<i>na úkor</i>	1845	0.948
<i>sklonek</i> 'close'	1344	<i>na sklonku</i>	1171	0.871
<i>patronace</i> 'patronage'	321	<i>pod patronací</i>	279	0.869
<i>přihlédnutí</i> 'account'	557	<i>s přihlédnutím k</i>	470	0.843
<i>rámec</i> 'scope'	19347	<i>v rámci</i>	15765	0.815
<i>pokraj</i> 'verge'	835	<i>na pokraji</i>	645	0.772
<i>počest</i> 'honour'	751	<i>na počest</i>	563	0.754
<i>taktovka</i> 'baton'	650	<i>pod taktovkou</i>	428	0.658
<i>neprospěch</i> 'disadvantage'	521	<i>v neprospěch</i>	331	0.635
<i>vzhled</i> 'appearance'	17487	<i>vzhledem k</i>	11072	0.633
<i>srovnání</i> 'comparison'	8623	<i>ve srovnání s</i>	5194	0.602
<i>roveň</i> 'par'	145	<i>na roveň s</i>	84	0.593
<i>záštita</i> 'protection'	950	<i>pod záštitou</i>	559	0.588
<i>vrub</i> 'account'	493	<i>na vrub</i>	252	0.511
<i>hledisko</i> 'point of view'	14259	<i>z hlediska</i>	7280	0.510
<i>základ</i> 'basis'	27657	<i>na základě</i>	13734	0.497

### 3.3. Czech monolingual dictionaries

As far as monolingual dictionaries are concerned, the problem is whether to treat complex prepositions within one-word entries (especially in the case of abstract nouns), or to give them separate entries. The older Dictionary of Literary Czech (Slovník spisovné češtiny, 1994) usually lists complex prepositions at the end of the relevant abstract noun entry, cf.:

**hledisko** (standpoint, point of view)

– **z hlediska** předl. s 2. p. vyj. zřetel: *z hlediska hospodárnosti je nutno omezit...*

- **from the point of view of** prep. with gen. expresses consideration: *from the point of view of economy it is necessary to put a limit on...*

In some cases the usage of the complex preposition is idiomatic and it is only there that the prepositional idiom is stated in full:

**roveň** (par)

**stavět někoho, něco na roveň** stejně hodnotit, cenit

**put sb. on a par with sb.** to evaluate sb. on the same level

The only complex preposition which is given a separate entry is *vzhledem k* 'owing to'.

### 3.4. Czech bilingual dictionaries

The Comprehensive Czech-English Dictionary (Velký česko-anglický slovník, 2000) by J. Fronek employs a different pattern. Of the sixteen complex prepositions stated above, only four are treated as prepositions, i.e. *ve srovnání s* – *in comparison with*, *na úkor koho/čeho* – *at the expense of*, *na základě čeho* – *on the basis/strength of* and *pod záštitou čeho* – *under the auspices/aegis of*. Three of these complex prepositions are presented within idioms, cf. *být na pokraji čeho* – *be close to sth*, *stavět koho na roveň s kým* – *put sb. on a par with sb.* and *připsat komu co na vrub* – *debit sb's account*. The remaining complex prepositions are presented in typical collocations, such as *v rámci zákona* – *within the bounds of law*, *na sklonku života* – *in one's declining years, in the autumn/sunset of one's life, late in life*, *na sklonku dne* – *at the close of the day* etc. As in the Dictionary of Literary Czech (SSČ), the preposition *vzhledem k* – *owing to* is given an individual entry. The justification for this approach may be the difference in meaning between the abstract noun *vzhled* 'appearance' and the form *vzhledem* in the preposition *vzhledem k* which means 'regard, respect'.

## 4. Complex prepositions in English dictionaries.

### 4.1. British National Corpus

The complex prepositions with the highest occurrence in the British National Corpus were studied.

**Table 3.** Most frequent complex prepositions (BNC).

complex preposition	frequency
<i>out of</i>	46889
<i>because of</i>	17446
<i>as well as</i>	17322
<i>rather than</i>	16695
<i>according to</i>	15522
<i>away from</i>	11417
<i>in terms of</i>	10067
<i>on to</i>	8813
<i>due to</i>	7702
<i>as to</i>	7184

### 4.2. COBUILD dictionary

In the Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (COBUILD, 1995) only the prepositions *out of* and *according to* are given separate entries, the remainder being listed within another entry (i.e. *because of* – *because*, *as well as* – *well*, *rather than* – *rather*, *away from* – *away*, *in terms of* – *term*, *due to* – *due*, *as to* – *as*), while the preposition *on to* is spelled *onto*. The preposition *in terms of* is idiomatic as the most frequent verb used with this preposition is *think*.

### 4.3. NODE dictionary

The approach of the New Oxford Dictionary of English (NODE, 1998) is somewhat bit different. Most of the complex prepositions are listed within the phrases given at the end of each entry, i.e. *out of* – phrases under the entry *out*, *because of* – phrases under the entry *because*, *in terms of* – phrases under the entry *term*, *on to* – phrases under the entry *on*, *due to* – phrases under the entry *due* and *as to* – phrases under the entry *as*. The exceptions are prepositions *according to*, given as the only collocation of the entry *according*, and *rather than* treated as a preposition (with the synonyms *instead of* and *opposed to*) within the entry *rather*.

### 5. Comparison of Czech and English prepositions.

A comparison of Czech and English prepositions requires us to analyze them together with their associated abstract nouns, as in the case of the Czech preposition *v rámci* (the abstract noun being *rámec*), or the English preposition *in spite of*, etc.

**Table 4.** Most frequent English complex prepositions with abstract nouns.

complex preposition	frequency
<i>in terms of</i>	10067
<i>in front of</i>	6122
<i>in relation to</i>	4647
<i>in favour of</i>	3531
<i>in addition to</i>	3431
<i>in respect of</i>	2980
<i>on behalf of</i>	2700
<i>in spite of</i>	2695
<i>on top of</i>	2462
<i>in accordance with</i>	2044

### 5.1. COBUILD dictionary

In the COBUILD dictionary, the complex prepositions *in accordance with* and *on behalf of* are stated as the only expressions under the corresponding abstract nouns *accordance* and *behalf*; the remaining prepositions are given within the corresponding abstract noun entries (*in addition to* – *addition*, *in favour of* – *favour*, *in front of* – *front*, *in relation to* – *relation*, *in respect of* – *respect*, *in spite of* – *spite*, *in terms of* – *term*, *on top of* – *top*).

### 5.2. NODE dictionary

Similarly, NODE presents the prepositions *in accordance with* and *on behalf of* as the only phrases occurring with the corresponding abstract nouns (cf. *accordance* – grouped with *in accordance with*, *behalf* – grouped with *on behalf of*). The remaining complex prepositions are given in the Phrases section at the end of the entry of the associated abstract noun, i.e. *in addition to* – *addition*, *in favour of* – *favour*, *in front of* – *front*, *in relation to* – *relation*, *in respect of* – *respect*, *in spite of* – *spite*, *in terms of* – *term* and *on top of* – *top*.

## 6. The idiomatic nature of complex prepositions.

As this outline suggests, the treatment of complex prepositions in dictionaries is slightly inconsistent. In Czech dictionaries, the only preposition given an individual entry is *vzhledem k* 'owing to', while other prepositions with prevailing frequency within the lemma of the given abstract noun, such as *na úkor* 'at the expense of', *na sklonku* 'at the close of' etc., are included within the abstract noun entries. Such inconsistency can be found in English dictionaries as well. Čermák (2006: 930) notes that from the viewpoint of collocability, there is a group of words "that is apparently and strictly limited in its collocational capacity, where a list of collocates, usually very small, can and has to be given" and suggests "to view both the head and collocate as a single unit, tantamount, in many approaches, to idioms" – the examples he gives are *to be afraid*, *to run afoul* and *to make amends*. This can be applied especially to such prepositions as *na úkor*, *na sklonku* in Czech or *in accordance with*, *on behalf of* and *according to* in English. As Čermák (2006: 936) states, the frequency of the noun *accordance* outside the idiom *in accordance with* is less than one per cent. From a broader perspective, even a preposition such as *v případě* 'in case of', is a grammatical idiom (Čermák 2007).

## 7. Proposals for incorporating complex prepositions into the macrostructure of a dictionary.

In contemporary dictionaries, complex prepositions are usually grouped with their abstract nouns or other corresponding parts of speech, as in the case of *spolu s* 'together with' in Czech or *according to* in English. The incorporation of complex prepositions into the dictionary macrostructure mainly depends on the scope of the dictionary, but the most appropriate procedure would be to list complex prepositions as separate entries, with the same status as single or one-word prepositions. This approach has a great advantage: the dictionary-user can easily find the preposition in the list of entries and there is no need to search for the preposition within the often lengthy and complicated entry for the abstract noun, adverb or verb. Klégr (2002) emphasises that English dictionaries avoid giving these units grammatical labels. It is obvious to us that they should be labelled as prepositions.

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