

Assessment of "Licensing of Vowel Length in Czech", M. Ziková

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I want to make it clear from the outset that this is excellent work. Ziková's "Licensing of Vowel Length in Czech" is a rare example of the interface between syntax and semantics done right. More precisely, it is a rare example of research done right about "small" morpho-syntactic phenomena where it is not clear whether they are still morpho-syntactic or already phonological, or a combination of the two. Research in this territory is typically unbalanced, either it is syntactically sophisticated but phonologically simplistic, or phonologically sophisticated but syntactically simplistic (often simply restating a few assumptions about phases or phrase structure). Ziková's work on the other hand is rich and creative both on the phonological side and on the syntactic side. Her syntactic hypotheses are very far from trivial, in fact they could be professional syntax papers on their own right, both when she proposes new functional sequences, and when she proposes new analyses for particular constructions. The only other strand of research that succeeds at that, that comes readily to mind, is Michael Wagner's work about prosody.

(I can of course only judge the morpho-syntactic side, not being a phonologist, but I think that this makes my judgment stronger in this case: since Ziková is a phonologist by trade, the typical outcome would be a phonologically creative but syntactically pedestrian body of research, so the fact that a syntactician is impressed by her morpho-syntactic work is a testament to the fact that she managed to do justice to both sides of the fence.)

In sum, whatever disagreements one might have with Ziková's proposals, or whatever flaws one might find in their execution, are a minor issue compared to her pulling off this bigger goal. Overall, I find the general line of Ziková's proposals convincing and exciting. The nature of reports such as this one however requires

focusing on issues, and I do have some issues, ranging from the trivial (eg. the title of the book doesn't do justice to its contents) to the substantive (eg. I'm not convinced by some of her analyses in terms of compounding).

1. Complex and sometimes redundant technology. Let us start with a general methodological point, which will no doubt strike many readers: Ziková has a tendency to add lots of theoretical technology when solving empirical puzzles, which doesn't necessarily lead to parsimony or elegance of the final theoretical result. I will leave the phonological side of this to other evaluators (presumably involving 16, 17 and all the surrounding assumptions). On the syntactic side we might note:

- enriching "pointers" to pointing to "sets" instead of pointing to another lexical entry (page 57). This is not just a minor tinkering, this completely transforms the very notion of "pointer" and considerably enriches its power. There is no discussion of the fact that this defeats one of the main tenets of nanosyntax, that the lexicon is just a repository of frozen syntactic derivations. There is also no discussion of the fact that it transforms the lexicon from a static repository to a dynamic generative system, making it enormously more powerful, possibly making it similar to construction grammar.

- enriching "overwriting" with "partial overwriting" (page 55), see below.

- mixing cartography reasoning and nanosyntax reasonings in ways that are not always legitimate. Which amounts to using both the tools of cartography and the tools of nanosyntax, against enriching the theory. For instance on page 51, Ziková states that "By the logic of the cartographic approach, I take the containment of the forms to indicate an actual containment in terms of the syntactic structure". But that cartographic reasoning doesn't work in the nanosyntax that Ziková adopts: it could be for instance that the simplex form ("Tom" in her case) spells out a big tree and that the added suffix of the bi-morphemic form ("-y" in her case) is in the middle of that tree and 'prevents it from growing'. Under such a scenario, "Tom" in "Tomm-y" is smaller than when it is alone, and we would get FAM>CLS,

the opposite of what the cartographic reasoning concludes. This kind of situation is found for instance in English passives where the active verb "hid" is analyzed as bigger than the passive "hidd-en", despite being contained in the latter.

2. Partial overwriting. Maybe my biggest doubt is about the enrichment of the notion of overwriting with the new option of "partial" overwriting. (In a sense this is also an example of Ziková's liberal enriching of the theory discussed above.)

The underlying empirical problem is interesting and challenging: how do we express the fact that a given template applies to the material spelled out by a given syntactic node? Ziková's natural move is to assign the template to that node, so that it "clips" the phonological material under that node. It is a solution that a number of us have explored informally. The problem with this solution is that higher information erases lower information of the same module, and hence the template should erase all phonological information sitting below it.

To solve that, Ziková embraces complexity in a way that many of us wouldn't: she allows "partial" erasing of lower information. This of course solves the problem but it also enriches the theory a lot. And beyond theoretical proliferation, it may also open the door to all sorts of empirical mispredictions: we would now expect to find all sorts of cases where part of the melody comes from a higher node, and the other part comes from dominated nodes. It might be possible to reanalyze a couple of patterns that way (eg Semitic), but overall this prediction seems incorrect.

Here is a possibly more elegant solution: templatic information and melody are two different modules, and hence their data don't overwrite each other. In other words, if what we call "phonology" is in fact (at least) two different modules, one for melody, and one of the structure above the melody (a line of thought directly linked to Scheer's work), then lexical entries would be tuples of (at least) <MELODY, PHO-STRUCTURE, SYN-STRUCTURE, CONCEPTS>. And hence melody overwrites melody, phonological structure overwrites phonological structure. But

phonological structure does not overwrite melody. There would thus be no need to enrich the theory with "partial overwriting".

Another possibility is that the templatic information is in fact **not** in a node dominating the melody, but rather in a node c-commanding the melody, ie a "prefix". Evidence for that would include templatic reduplication (briefly discussed by Ziková). Templatic reduplication clearly allows the same kind of "reusing melody and clipping it", and hence its theoretical treatment needs to be unified with the kind of phenomena discussed by Ziková. One option is to see hypochoristics et al as cases of templatic reduplication where the second part is not pronounced. If so, the issue of partial overwriting also disappears.

I went at some length about this example to illustrate the kind of discussion and hypotheses that I think would make Ziková's work even more exciting. Another domain where I would be inclined to provide a similar discussion is Ziková's analyses in terms of double-expression of features and compounding, which I think might be simplified to traditional single-expression of features, but providing that discussion would bring this document far beyond its space allotment. I'll thus keep that discussion for my future seminars about this great work.

(There are also a number of English mistakes and typos which make the work less pleasant than it could be.)

In conclusion let me reiterate that Ziková's work is excellent and inspiring. The issues I discussed are minor and are only meant as possible improvement on an already great piece of work. Dr M. Ziková's habilitation work has a high scientific level by international standards of linguistics research, and I can confirm without a doubt that it meets the requirements for habilitation works in the field Czech language and linguistics.