

# A new look at possessive reflexivization: A comparative study between Czech and Russian

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## Abstract

The paper presents a contrastive description of reflexive possessive pronouns “svůj” in Czech and “svoj” in Russian. The research concerns syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects. With our analysis, we shed a new light on the already investigated issue, which comes from a detailed comparison of the phenomenon of possessive reflexivization in two typologically and genetically similar languages. We show that whereas in Czech, the possessive reflexivization is mostly limited to syntactic functions and does not go beyond the grammar, in Russian it gets additional semantic meanings and moves substantially towards the lexicon. The obtained knowledge allows us to explain heretofore unclear marginal uses of reflexives in each language.

## 1 Introduction

It is generally known that a comparison of the performance of a phenomenon in different languages brings more knowledge about this phenomenon. The fact that a cross-lingual study brings more knowledge about how a phenomenon functions in each separate language under comparison is less trivial, but also challenging. Our research here contributes to the latter claim: we compare possessive pronouns in Czech and Russian by addressing statistics obtained from the parallel English-Czech-Russian corpus PCEDT-R (Novák et al., 2016) as well as existing (mostly) monolingual theoretical knowledge with the aim to learn more about this type of pronouns in each language separately. Taking into account existing variety of means to express the notion of possessivity, we concentrate on reflexive possessive pronouns “svůj” in Czech and “svoj” in Russian.

In occasional references, the rules of the use of reflexive pronouns are observed as similar or the same (cf. Panevová, 1986; Čmejrková, 2003). Indeed, a shallow observation proves this assumption. Both in Czech and in Russian, the reflexive possessive “svůj/svoj” is basically coreferential with the subject. Situations where it is not the case are thoroughly described in the literature and, again, a shallow observation of research papers on this topic proves the similarity. However, there can be found a number of sentences, where a very frequent conventional use of Russian “svoj” cannot be translated as such into Czech, as can be seen in Example (1). Also, the statistics obtained from PCEDT\_R (see Section 3) provides a significant difference in the frequency of the use of possessive pronouns and the distribution between personal and reflexive possessive pronouns in Czech and Russian.

(1) RU: *U každého učeného jest svoja biblioteka.* - CZ: *Každý vědec má \*svou/vlastní knihovnu.*  
[lit. Each scientist has self's/own library.]

The analysis of these discrepancies shows that it is meaningful to compare possessives in Czech and Russian according to the following aspects:

- a) Syntactic rules and tendencies for the use of reflexive possessives (possibility of the use of “svůj/svoj” with antecedents in direct or indirect cases, occurrences of reflexive possessives in the nominative case, the use and referential qualities of nominal groups with reflexive possessives in sentences with embedded explicit and implicit predications, etc.);
- b) Semantics and functions of reflexive possessives (i.e. we should answer the question if

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- “svůj/svoj” has its own meaning, if it may change the meaning of a nominal group it is used with, or if it is just the formal means of possessive reflexivization);
- c) Pragmatic factors of the use of personal and reflexive possessive pronouns;
  - d) Competition of personal (*můj, tvůj, náš, váš, jeho, její, jejich* in Czech, *мой, твой, наш, ваш, его, ее, ich* in Russian) and reflexive possessives, co-occurrence in specific contexts and comparison of these contexts for Czech and Russian, also with respect to pragmatic factors;
  - e) Optionality of possessives, possibility to omit possessive pronouns, or, on the contrary, to insert them to the places where they have not been used by the speaker;
  - f) Distribution between spoken and written discourse, sociolinguistic and historical factors for Czech and Russian, etc.

Due to extensiveness of the topic, this paper primarily addresses the first three aspects, namely syntactic, semantic and partially pragmatic factors of the use of reflexive possessive pronouns.

We believe that our findings are interesting both from the theoretical and computational perspectives. From the perspective of computational linguistics, searching for rules of expressing possessivity helps us find and verify specific features in text that can be further used as background knowledge for the improvement of multilingual tools for coreference and anaphora resolution. From the theoretical point of view, our research contributes to contrastive comparative analysis of typologically related languages. The knowledge acquired by such comparison not only gives us the typologically relevant information in general but also an opportunity to know more about each separate language.

## 2 Theoretical Background

The use and distribution of personal and reflexive possessive pronouns are analyzed in scientific literature both for Czech and for Russian, but mostly separately. To our knowledge, the only study concerning both languages in detail is Bílý (1981), who explains the choice of pronouns on the background of the theory of FSP, applying the notion of communicative dynamism.

For Czech, the description of personal and reflexive possessive pronouns begins with Svoboda (1880) and is further addressed in a number of theoretical studies and grammars (Gebauer, 1890; Trávníček, 1951; Daneš—Hausenblas, 1962; Grepl—Karlík, 1986; Daneš et al., 1987, etc). These studies formulate the basic rule of coreference of the reflexive possessive “svůj” with the subject (Gebauer, 1890) and point out an ambiguous reference of reflexive possessives in sentences with embedded predications.

The study of reflexive possessives in Russian goes back to Peškovskij (1914). After a longer time period, the cases of oblique control of Russian possessives were addressed within the binding theory by Timberlake (1980) and Rappoport (1986).

The most intensive research, both for Czech and for Russian, begins independently in 1980s. The shallow and deep syntactic criteria for the use of personal and reflexive possessives in Czech have been formulated within the theory of Functional Generative Description (Hajičová et al., 1985; Panevová 1980, 1986) and it was later developed by Čmejrková (1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2011), who used pragmatic criteria to explain the concurrence of personal and reflexive possessives in literary and colloquial Czech.

The research of possessivity and reflexivization for Russian continued in the semantic and pragmatic directions. Yokoyama—Klenin (1976) and Yokoyama (1980) analyze possessive pronouns within the theory of empathy (Kuno, 1975). Padučeva (1983, 1985) considers additional meanings of a reflexive possessive “svoj” which largely conform to the list of the meanings presented in the Dictionary of Russian (Ožegov—Švedova, 1997). Semantic functions and non-canonical control of Russian possessives is further addressed in Brykina (2009) and Fed’ko (2007).

Coreference resolution of reflexive pronouns is generally considered an easy task, particularly for English. Usually a principle that the reflexive pronoun refers to the subject in the same clause is followed (Mitkov 2002). However, this task may be more challenging for other languages, especially for those with free word order for which syntactic parsers perform worse. For example, in their error analysis of coreference resolvers for Russian, Toldova et al. (2016) report the maximum resolution accuracy on reflexive pronouns to be 80%. Even for English, the strict syntax-driven approach starts to fail if

applied on more complicated texts, as reported on split antecedent coreference resolution on a patent material (Burga et al., 2016).

### 3 What data show

The analysis performed in this study is inspired by statistical results obtained from the three-language parallel corpus **PCEDT-R** (Novák et al., 2016) and presented in Nedoluzhko et al. (2016). The corpus contains 50 journalist texts (1078 sentences), manually translated from English into Czech and Russian. The corpus is provided with rich morphological, shallow syntactic and tectogrammatical annotation, it also contains manual annotation of word alignment for Czech and English pronouns. The Russian part was automatically aligned with the Czech part of PCEDT using GIZA++ (Och and Ney, 2000), which was run on a large amount of parallel Czech-Russian data. The resulting triples containing possessive units (in at least one of the languages used) have been manually annotated and analyzed from the perspective of each language separately. The absolute numbers of the mapping of 238 English possessive pronouns in PCEDT-R are briefly presented in Table 1.

238 English possessive pronouns	Personal possessives	Reflexive possessives	External possession <sup>1</sup>	No possessive
Czech	92	80	12	54
Russian	112	83	8	35

Table 1: Counterparts of English possessive pronouns in Czech and Russian.

The statistics of the correspondences of English possessive pronouns to their Czech and Russian counterparts showed the tendency of Czech and Russian to use possessive pronouns less frequently than in English. Moreover, Nedoluzhko et al. (2016) observed that the numbers differ significantly for Czech and for Russian. In Russian, 15% of English pronouns remain unexpressed, whereas in Czech this number comes up to 23%. The more frequent use of possessives in Russian texts raise the suspicion that it could be influenced by lower translation quality, but the comparison with original texts from the Prague Dependency Treebank for Czech (PDT 3.0; Bejček et al., 2013) and the Russian Treebank (RTB; Boguslavsky et al., 2000) proved that the difference between the frequency of pronouns in original and translated texts in Czech is even higher than in Russian.

As concerns the distribution of personal and reflexive possessives, the data show a moderate but statistically significant prevalence of personal possessives over reflexive ones in both languages, and in Czech reflexive possessives are significantly more frequent than in Russian.

Another finding obtained from the parallel data is a similar optionality of possessives in Czech and Russian. Out of the translations of English possessive pronouns, about 20% were marked as optional in both languages. However, we observe a substantial difference in optionality of expressing possessivity between personal and reflexive possessives in both languages: Reflexive possessives can be omitted more frequently.

### 4 Syntactic rules for reflexive possessives

The basic “school-grammar” rule for the use of reflexive possessive pronouns was formulated for Czech (Gebauer, 1890) and for Russian (Peškovskij, 1914) in a similar way: a reflexive pronoun refers to the subject of the sentence (Example 2). The moderate difference can be observed in the modality of the rule: It is formulated rather prescriptively for Czech and more descriptively for Russian.<sup>2</sup>

(2) CZ: *Petr ztratil svou peněženku* – RU: *Petr poterjal svoj košelek*. [lit. Peter lost self’s wallet.]

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the English possessive pronoun *their* translated with the external dative reflexive *si* into Czech: *Glenn and Sharon Beebe of Cincinnati had sued the company in 1981 after installing Burlington carpets in their office.* – CZ: *Společnost zažalovali Glenn a Sharon Beebeovi z Cincinnati v roce 1981 poté, co si koberec Burlington položili do kanceláře.*

<sup>2</sup> This difference mostly concerns the attitude on this issue in general during the research period, not primarily the studies of J. Gebauer (1890) and A. Peškovskij (1914).

Reference to antecedents in indirect cases is restricted to a close set of Russian verbs (Padučeva, 1983).<sup>3</sup> As for Czech, the use of “svůj” referring to an antecedent in an indirect case is unacceptable for singular subjects (Example 3 and 4a) but, interestingly, it sounds somewhat better in distributive contexts (Example 4b)<sup>4</sup>:

(3) RU: *Jemu tošno ot svojej bespomosčnosti.* – CZ: *Je mu špatně ze \*své bezmoci.* [lit. He feels sick because of self’s helplessness.]

(4a) CZ: *\*Petrovi je líto svého mládí.* [lit. Petr feels sorry for self’s youth.]

(4b) CZ: *⁹Každému je líto svého mládí.* [lit. Everybody feels sorry for self’s youth.]

In a simple sentence like Example (2), the speaker, as well as the interpreter, is able to process sentences demanding reflexivization unambiguously. Differences occur when sentences contain embedded predications (Example 5). It is not clear then, which subject (i.e. the subject of the main clause or the subject of the embedded predication) triggers reflexivization.

(5) CZ: *Profesor požádal asistenta přednést svůj referát.* – RU: *Professor poprosil asistenta pročitat' svoj doklad.* [lit. The professor asked the assistant to read self’s report.]

The interpretation of sentences like (5) evoked intensive discussion which began with J. Gebauer and A. Peškovskij (such cases are even referred to as so called ‘Peškovskij sentences’), continued with Trávníček (1951), Daneš—Hausenblas (1962), Růžička (1973), Bílý (1981), Timberlake (1980), Rapoport (1986), Panevová (1980, 1986), Hajičová et al. (1985, 2002) and it is still addressed in the recent studies of Feďko (2007), Brykina (2009) and Čmejrková (2011 etc.).

There is, again, an interesting discrepancy in the modality of claims concerning referential ambiguity in ‘Peškovskij sentences’ for Czech and for Russian. For Russian, their ambiguity is generally accepted. For Czech, we find contradictory opinions in different studies on this topic. According to most of the authors, „svůj/svoj“ in (5) is ambiguous, as it can refer to the subject of the matrix sentence (*professor*), as well as to the agent of the embedded predication (*assistant*). However, Fr. Trávníček in his Grammar of Czech (Trávníček, 1951) and even in his translation of Gebauer’s Czech grammar (Trávníček, 1939) gives the prescription saying that the reflexive “svůj” must refer to the subject of the embedded predication (*assistant*). Contrarily, the prescription in school grammars is opposite: “svůj” in sentences like (5) must refer to the shallow subject of the sentence (*professor*). Panevová (1986) formulated the following syntactic hypothesis: in cases with embedded predications, „svůj“ tends to refer to the Agent of the embedded structure, i.e. to *the assistant* in (5). Besides the cases with explicit embedded predications, this pattern nicely explains the acceptance of sentences with indirect cases of the deep subject in non-personal sentences like (6) for Czech.

(6) CZ: *Zátopkové se podařilo opakovat svůj úspěch* Daneš—Hausenblas(1962) [lit. To Zátopková was possible to repeat self’s success.]

Moreover, Panevová (1986) formulates two other syntactic tendencies for Czech, interesting from the comparative point of view. The first observation is the strong restriction to the use of reflexive possessives within the subject of the sentence (cf. impossible “svůj” in Examples 7–9 for Czech).

(7) CZ: *\*Svoje děti běhají po ulici.* [lit. Self’s children are running on the street.]

(8) CZ: *\*Trhání svých zubů ve mně vzbudilo nelibé pocity.* [lit. Pulling out the self’s teeth was unpleasant to me.]

(9) CZ: *\*Matku dojala péče o osud svých dětí.* [lit. The care for self’s children affected the mother.]

However, these sentences contain additional restrictions. In (7), “svůj” is used in Nominative case, which is forbidden with the reflexive possessive in its basic function (see Section 5.1). In (8) and (9), the antecedent of “svůj” is different from the Agents of the verbal nouns used within the same subject

<sup>3</sup> This claim concerns the reflexive “svoj” in its basic purely possessive meaning. For other meanings see Section 5.

<sup>4</sup> Deliberately, we do not consider sentences like (6) with embedded implicit predications that determine the antecedent for the reflexivization.

(*trhání* [pulling out] in (8) and *péče* [care] in (9)). If we change the Agent and reformulate the sentence (8) to (8a) in Czech, it becomes acceptable in Czech and absolutely normal in Russian.

(8a) CZ: *Trhání svých zubů je dost nepříjemný úkol.* – RU: *Udalenije svoich zubov – zanjatije vesma neprijatnoje.* [lit. Pulling out the self's teeth is quite unpleasant.]

Surprisingly, however, the same transformation for (9) does not give an acceptable sentence in Czech, whereas in Russian it becomes fully acceptable.

(9a) CZ: *Matku vždy velice těšila péče o své děti.* – RU: *Mamu vseгда očēn radovala zabota o svoich detjach.* [lit. The care for self's children always gave joy to the mother.]

The second Panevová's restriction concerns the use of personal and reflexive possessive pronouns in matrix and embedded predications. She claims for Czech that in the embedded clause, a reflexive possessive must be used when referring to the subject in the matrix clause, and only personal possessive may be used when referring to the Agent of the embedded predication. The claim is demonstrated on Example (10). However, this delicate syntactic rule does not work for Russian, where all forms of possessive pronouns may be used with slight stylistic but not referential difference.<sup>5</sup>

(10) CZ: *Jan byl znepokojen chováním svých/\*jeho dětí v jejich/\*svém pokoji.* – RU: *Jan byl nedovolen povedenijem svoich/jeho detej v svojej/ich komnate* [lit. Jan was unhappy with the behaviour of self's/his children in self's/their room.]

## 5 Semantics of reflexive possessives

Most studies addressing possessive reflexivization in Czech do not concern any special lexical semantics of „svůj“, it is considered to be “lexically completely emptied” (Čmejrková, 2003:186). Uses mismatching this claim, such as Example (12) or (15) below are observed as a “special transformation” (Daneš – Hausenblas (1962), “implied predications [...] of very low predicative quality” (Bílý, 1981), substandard expressions (Karlík et al., 1995), homonyms with the basic reflexive “svůj” (Dočekal, 2000), phrasemes (Čmejrková, 2003), etc.

On the other hand, for Russian, additional semantics of “svoj” is generally accepted and presents an issue of linguistic interest. Apart from its basic reflexive meaning, which expresses possession or a valency position (“svoj<sub>1</sub>”), Padučeva (1983) distinguishes five additional meanings of “svoj” in Russian, which were later supplied by one more meaning in Brykina (2009). In what follows, we list these meanings and look for Czech equivalents for them.

- *svoj<sub>2</sub>* = ‘svoj<sub>1</sub>+‘own’ (Example 11). In Czech, “svůj” is not used in this meaning, but we meet it in phrasemes or collocations (cf. Example (12), *prosadit své/svou* [get one's way, lit. enforce self's], or *trvat na svém* [insist, lit. insist on self's]);

(11) RU: *Svoja kvartira lučše čem sjemnaja.* – CZ: *\*Svůj byt je lepší než nájemní.* [lit. Self's flat is better than a rented one.]

(12) CZ: *Svá vlast je každému nejmilejší* [lit. Self's homeland is to everybody the best.]

- *svoj<sub>3</sub>* = ‘svoj<sub>1</sub>+ distributive meaning (Example 1 in Section 1). Being very productive in Russian, this meaning is marginal in Czech (cf. phraseological Example 12). However, as we observed in Example (4b in Section 4), the distributive semantics can make reflexives in some forbidden contexts sound better;
- *svoj<sub>4</sub>*: = ‘svoj<sub>1</sub>+‘specific, special’ (Examples 13 and 14). In Russian, this meaning is common and productive, also with “svoj” in the nominative case (Example 13). In Czech, it is rather marginal, but yet possible in examples like (14):

<sup>5</sup> In some idiolects, the combination *svoich detej v svojej komnate* [self's children in self's room] is suppressed in the meaning ‘Jan's children in children's room’ or ‘Jan's children in Jan's room’, although other speakers allow for these readings. However, this form is stylistically worse than other combinations, probably due to some kind of priming effect.

(13) RU: *No i zdes' kipjat svoi strasti.* – CZ: *Ale i tady jsou \*své vášně.* [lit. But here, there are also self's passions.]

(14) RU: *Zdes' jest' svoja logika.* – CZ: *To má svou logiku.* [There is a certain (lit. self's) logic here.]

- *svoj<sub>5</sub>* = 'svoj<sub>1</sub>' + 'corresponding' (Examples 15 and 16). The Czech "svůj" has this meaning in constructions with *své místo* [self's place] (Example 15) and in the proverb (16). Due to its semantics, this meaning is not very productive in Russian, but still there are more such contexts for Russian than for Czech (cf. ru. *Den'gi budut v svoje vremja* [lit. Money will come in self's time], *Delo idet svoim por'adkom* [The thing is going on as it should (lit. by self's order)] which are not possible in Czech).

(15) CZ: *Dej to na své místo.* – RU: *Postav' eto na svoje mesto.* [Put it into (self's) place.]

(16) CZ: *Všechno má svůj čas.* – RU: *Vsemu svoje vremja.* [The better day the better deed, lit. Everything has self's time.]

- *svoj<sub>6</sub>* = 'a relative, close person' (Example 17 and 18). This meaning tends to be phraseological as it does not contain the basic reflexive meaning of "svoj<sub>1</sub>" and does not refer to an antecedent. In Czech, this meaning could be slightly (almost not) acceptable in (18). A similar meaning is present in the Czech proverb *Svůj k svému* (Example 18) or the phrase *být svoji* [to be a married couple].

(17) RU: *V semje jeho Ivan byl svoj čelovek.* – CZ: *V jeho rodině byl Ivan \*svůj člověk.* [lit. In his family, Ivan was the self's (meaning close, dear) person.]

(18) RU: *Svoj svojego izdaleka vidit.* [lit. Self's see self's from far away.] – CZ: *??Svůj svého z dálky vidí.* BUT *Svůj k svému.* [lit. Self's to self's, meaning ca. that people of similar background should associate with one another.]

- *svoj<sub>7</sub>*: = 'svoj<sub>1</sub>' + 'typical, characteristic' (Example 19). The reflexive "svoj" used in this meaning functions as a modifier and makes a quality modified by it definite to the interpreter. It also changes the communicative structure of the utterance: the nominal group used with "svoj" becomes contextually bound and gets an additional intonation stress (Brykina, 2009:158).

(19) RU: *On mne nadojel svoimi žalobami na žizň.* – CZ: *Už mě nudí svým stěžováním na život.* [lit. He bores me with self's complaints to his life.]

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As we can see, the cases lacking a uniform description for Czech (like *dej to na své místo* [lit. Put it on its place], etc.) may be treated as having one of the additional meanings that are described for Russian. However, differently from Russian, they are rather marginal and may be considered to be phrasemes or collocations.

## 5.1 Syntax of reflexive possessive with additional meanings

Syntactic rules for the use of reflexive possessives with additional functions differ from those in its basic possessive meaning in the following respects:

(i) Reflexive possessive in its secondary meaning allows Nominative case (cf. Examples (11), (13), (14) for Russian). This is also true for Czech, but because in Czech secondary meanings of reflexives are marginal, it is mostly considered as an exception (cf. Example (12)).

(ii) Opposite to its basic meaning, reflexive possessives with additional semantics may refer to antecedents in indirect cases in Russian without any restrictions (Example 20). This is not the case of Czech. However, the better acceptability of (4b) compared to (4a) in Section 4 in distributive context is similar to it.

(20) RU: *V redakcii malo svoich rabotnikov.* – CZ: *V redakci je málo \*svých (vlastních) pracovníků* [lit. There are few self's employees in the editorial board.]

(iii) The reflexive possessive in its secondary meaning in Russian allows the predicative use (Example 21):

(21) RU: *A grud' – svoja!* – CZ: *Ale prsa jsou \*své!* [lit. But (her) breast is self's.]

(iv) Secondary meanings of reflexive possessives tend to be used in the focus of the sentence, in intonationally stressed positions, etc.

## 5.2 Animacy of the antecedent

The competition between personal and reflexive possessives in Russian may be also explained by the animacy of their antecedents. In Padučeva (1983), the author claims that „svůj“ with inanimate antecedent cannot be used if it fills the valency position of *Patiens*, whereas with animate antecedents it is allowed, cf. Example (22) for inanimate antecedent *zakony* [laws]. Interestingly, for Czech, this form is not fully prohibited<sup>6</sup>. As concerns animate antecedents, Padučeva suggests the example from Dostojevsky (23), where „svůj/svoj“ is allowed for both languages. However, reflexive possessive reference to Patient is common neither in Czech nor in Russian, so many other examples sound unnatural or impossible (Example 24).

(22) RU: *Zakony rasšatvujutsja ot ich (\*svojego) narušenija.* – CZ: *Zákony trpí 'svým častým porušováním.* [lit. Laws get weaker because of self's often breaking.]

(23) RU: *Dlja mnogich naš krestjanin po osvoboždenii svojem javilsja strannym nedoumenijem.* – CZ: *Pro mnohé se náš rolník stal po svém osvobození podivnou raritou.* [lit. For many people, our peasant became a strange creature after self's emancipation.]

(24) RU: *Posle \*svojego ubijstva, jeho vskore zabyli.* – CZ: *Po \*svém zabití byl brzy zapomenut.* [lit. After self's murder, he was quickly forgotten.]

When referring to an inanimate Agent of the sentence, the reflexive possessives are freely replaceable with personal possessives in Russian (Example 25). This is not the case for referring to animate Agent in Russian, moreover this tendency does not work in Czech. In Czech, the choice between personal and reflexive possessives is made according to syntactic (Section 4) and pragmatic (Section 6) criteria, the factor of animacy is not very important.

(25) RU: *Slovo „takže“ v jeho/svojem osnovnom upotreblenii bezudarno.* – CZ: *Výraz „také“ je ve svém (??jeho) primárním významu enklitický.* [lit. The word „also“ is enclitic in its/self's meaning.]

## 6 Pragmatic aspects in possessive reflexivization

Yokoyama–Klenin (1976) and Yokoyama (1980) claim that the choice between personal and reflexive possessive pronouns in Russian is determined by discourse-oriented factors, namely by the degree, to which the speaker identifies with his inner self in the process of the speech performance (Yokoyama, 1980). According to the authors, the situation is different for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> persons. For the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, reflexivization occurs when the speaker feels a distance between his inner self and the utterance, while a personal possessive is used when the speaker psychologically completely identifies himself with the antecedent. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, the situation is reverse.

The Yokoyama–Klenin's approach was developed primarily for Russian, but not all the examples presented by the authors sound well in Russian, cf. almost unacceptable Example (26).

(26) RU: *Nu i čto, čto on zametil, kak kakaja-to baba uronila ??jeje košelek.* [lit. So what, if he didn't notice that a woman dropped her wallet?]

Interestingly, Yokoyama–Klenin's approach seem to better pass for Czech than for Russian. S. Čmejrková provides a series of studies (Čmejrková, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2011), where she provides numerous reliably acceptable corpus and empirical examples supporting this approach. The author also distinguishes between pragmatic rules for the pronouns of different persons and number. So, for the concurrence of the reflexive possessive with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular “můj” [my], she defines a number of emphatic contexts, in which there is a strong tendency to use personal possessive pronouns instead of the reflexive one. The possibility to use the reflexive increases with the increasing distance

<sup>6</sup> This sentence was presented to ten native speakers in different pragmatic contexts and it was definitely rejected only by two of them when they were explicitly asked if this sentence was grammatical. However, the sentence does not sound natural by itself, thus the language intuition could not be applied properly and the experiment is not fully legitimate.

between the speaker's inner self and the utterance: from lexicalized phrasemes like *na mou/\*svou duši* [lit. *to my/\*self's soul*], *na mou/\*svou čest* [lit. *to my/\*self's honour*] through close relatives and friends, where the use of personal possessives is very often in (especially spoken) texts (Example 27) up to all other objects of possession where the special degree of empathy with the speaker may be expressed with the personal possessive (Example 28).

(27) CZ: *Mám obavu o moji rodinu.* Čmejrková (2011) [lit. I'm afraid for my family.]

(28) CZ: *To je věc, kterou bych rád připoměl pro mé kolegy.* Čmejrková (1998) [lit. This is a thing that I would like to remind to my colleagues.]

As for Russian, this tendency exists, but it is substantially weaker than for Czech. Differently from Czech, the distribution rules for personal and reflexive possessives in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons are not so strong in Russian, so the distinction in pragmatic aspects is also missing.

## 7 Conclusion

Based on parallel corpus statistics from one hand and on existing theoretical research on the other hand, we contrasted the use of reflexive possessive pronouns "svůj/svoj" in Czech and in Russian. The observed facts indicate substantial difference in the use of possessive pronouns in Czech and Russian.

In Czech, syntactic functions of the reflexive possessive pronoun „svůj“ absolutely prevail, its lexical semantics is so poor that expressions containing semanticalized „svůj“ are rather observed as phrasemes. Furthermore, there is a number of syntactic limitations determining the use of the reflexive possessive in Czech. Contrarily, the Russian pronoun „svoj“ has a number of secondary meanings, most of them supplement the basic reflexivization function of the pronoun. Syntactic rules for the use of „svoj“ in its secondary meanings differ from those when it is used only to express possessivity (common use in the nominative case, reference to antecedents in indirect cases, etc.). The limitations determining the use of the reflexive possessive in Russian include semantic ones (e.g., animacy of the antecedent). These facts indicate that the phenomenon of possessive reflexivization does not exceed the limits of grammar in Czech, whereas in Russian it goes beyond grammar towards the lexicon.

On the other hand, the obtained knowledge about frequently used additional functions of the reflexive possessive in Russian allows us to interpret the nature of marginal uses of reflexive possessives in Czech (e.g., semantic interpretation of *dej to na své místo* [put it on self's place]). Furthermore, it opens new issues of research leading to understanding the essence of reflexivization and passivization phenomena. In the future work, the ideas obtained from our comparison should be secondarily checked on corpus data, this time also on monolingual, and also spoken texts have to be taken into account.

A certain limitation, which makes the study of reflexive possessives especially hard, is the looseness of standards, especially in Czech and especially in sentences with embedded constructions (but not exceptionally). Judging grammatical acceptability differs significantly by speakers, the reason is both in the social–historical background (purist influences on the topic and the prescriptive character of rule for Czech that can form different idiolects and attitudes) and in the nature of the phenomenon itself.

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