What's in an adjective? The morphosyntax of Czech -teln(ý) adjectives

This paper surveys the structure of the Czech adjectives of the type -teln(ý) (předvidatelný), comparing it to analyses of English -able adjectives (preferable). -able adjectives are often considered to be functional equivalents to -teln(ý) adjectives, however, their structure, it is argued, is different. The existing analyses of -able adjectives (Aronoff 1976, Volpe 2005) demonstrate that they constitute two different classes. In terms of Distributed Morphology, they are v-derived (1.ii) or root-derived (1.iv). The former have compositional semantics whereas the latter are compositionally opaque.

1. i. repair (V) → ii. repairable (A)
   able to be repaired
   iii. compare (V) ⇔ iv. comparable (A)
   equivalent

Descriptive accounts of the Czech data mostly claim that -teln(ý) adjectives are compositionally transparent and derived from a verbal stem. The suffix has been predominantly considered one morpheme, alternative approach is nonetheless possible: -tel is a productive morpheme deriving agentive nominals from verbs (2) and -n(ý) is an adj-deriving morpheme (3). Caha and Karlík (2005) convincingly argue for the bi-morphemic analysis.

2. i. učit (V)→ ii. učitel (N)
   teach teacher
   (3) i. napsat (V)→ ii. napsaný (A)
   write written

The paper analyzes the morpho-syntactic structure of the -teln(ý) adjectives, proposing that these adjectives are uniformly of the v-derived type unlike the English data. It argues that there is a verbal functional structure below the categorizing adj-head and it focuses on the portion of the verbal structure present in these adjectives, including the aspect feature, exemplified by the aspectual pair in (4). The ungrammaticality of derivation from unaccusative verbs is elaborated on (5).

4. mazatelný → smazatelný
   erasableIMPERF.ASP erasablePERF.ASP

5. i. padat (V)→ ii. *padatelný
   fallVERB able to fall

Finally it is shown that -teln(ý) has to be differentiated from another adj-deriving suffix of a seemingly similar form -eln(ý) (6).

6. i. světlo (N)→ ii. světelný (A)
   lightNOUN concerning lightADJ

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References: