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when *svůj* becomes *můj*: personal and reflexive  
possessive pronouns in Czech

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possessive pronouns in czech

michal láznička (with prokop hanžl)



# svůj in czech

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*Ve **svém okolí** žádného bebišovce nemám, ale mimo **mé okolí** jich jistě bude hromada.*

‘I don’t have any Babišers in **my circles**, but there will be many outside **my circles**.’

- reflexive possessive pronoun
  - possessor :: subject identity

# svůj in czech

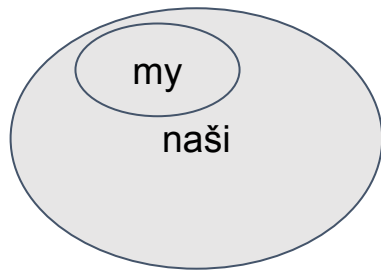
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- reflexive possessive pronoun
  - possessor :: subject identity
- personal pronouns also possible
  - increasing tendency of use(?)

# svůj in czech

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- reflexive possessive pronoun
  - possessor :: subject identity
- personal pronouns also possible
  - increasing tendency of use(?)
  - 1sg & 2sg >> 3sg / pl
    - *viděla<sub>i</sub> svoji<sub>i</sub> kočku* -- *viděla<sub>i</sub> její<sub>j/(i)</sub> kočku* 'she saw her cat'
    - *fandíme našim studujícím* 'we support our students'



# previous observations

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*nech<sub>i</sub> mě<sub>j</sub> sníst můj/tvůj/svůj<sub>i/j</sub> dort* 'let me eat my/your cake'

- early discussions focused on contexts with nonfinite predications (e.g. daneš & hausenblas 1962)
- additional observations by čmejrková (2003)
  - interaction of syntax, semantics, & pragmatics
    - genre-specific usage (advertising)
    - *svůj* ~ distance between subject & possessum
    - alienability(?) - "personal sphere of the possessor"
  - based on personal observations & informal corpus queries

# perevozchikova 2023

- first systematic, corpus-based study
- 1sg possessor expression in bulgarian, czech, & russian
- sample of 1000 occurrences
  - aranea web corpora
  - up to two words between verb & possessive pronoun

**Table 4.** Output of the logistic regression model predicting the reflexivity of possessives in Czech

Predictor	Coefficient	SE	<i>p</i>	Odds ratio
<i>Intercept</i>	-3.13	0.19	***	0.04
Alternative antecedents: yes	4.85	0.63	***	43.18
Embedding: yes	1.39	0.28	***	4.00
Animacy of possessum: animate	1.24	0.24	***	3.45
Alienability of possessum: body part	-0.00	0.75		1.63
Alienability of possessum: kinship term	-0.61	0.42		0.46
Word order: OV	0.88	0.23	***	2.41

\*significant at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

# present study

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- extended follow-up on perevozchikova
  - similar patterns in our data?
  - other factors?
- 1sg & 2sg
- less restricted context
- intuitions of czech speakers



# data

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- corpus *on-line*
  - social media posts, discussions, & forums
- distance from verb not restricted (sentence boundary tags)
- můj/svůj + finite verb 1sg & tvůj/svůj + finite verb 2sg

	reflexive	personal
1sg	611	588
2sg	597	586

# annotation

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- a suite of syntactic & semantic variables
  - *Zvu Vás na **mou besedu*** 'I invite you to my talk'

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possessum animacy: inanimate

possessum semantics: alienable

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position relative to the predicate: post

syntactic distance: not direct dependent

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competitor for possessor identity: pro

presence of other possessive pronoun: no

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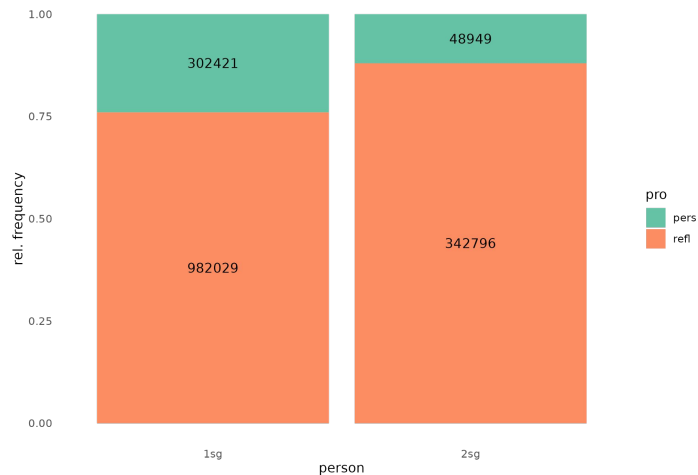
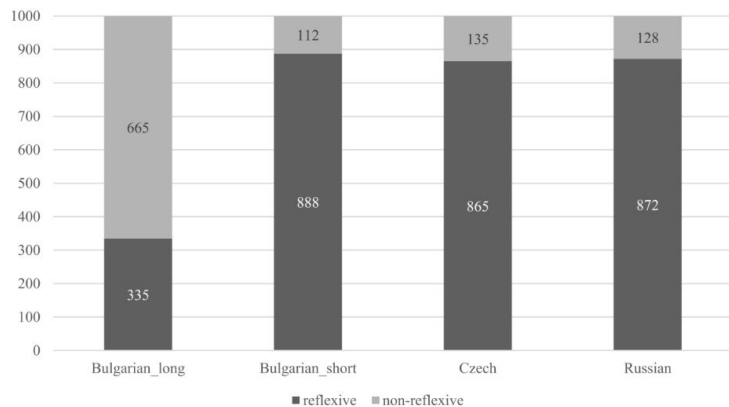
agentivity of subject: actor

relative frequency with *svůj*: high

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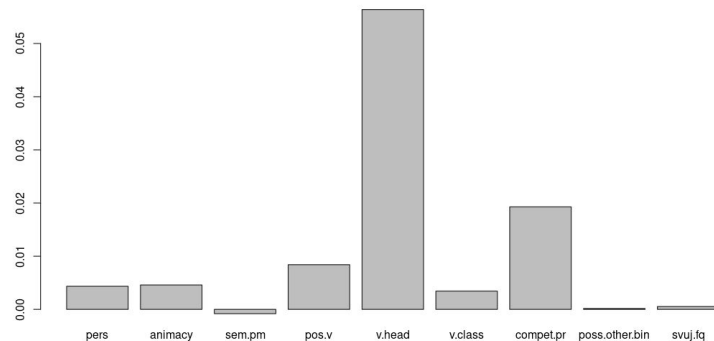
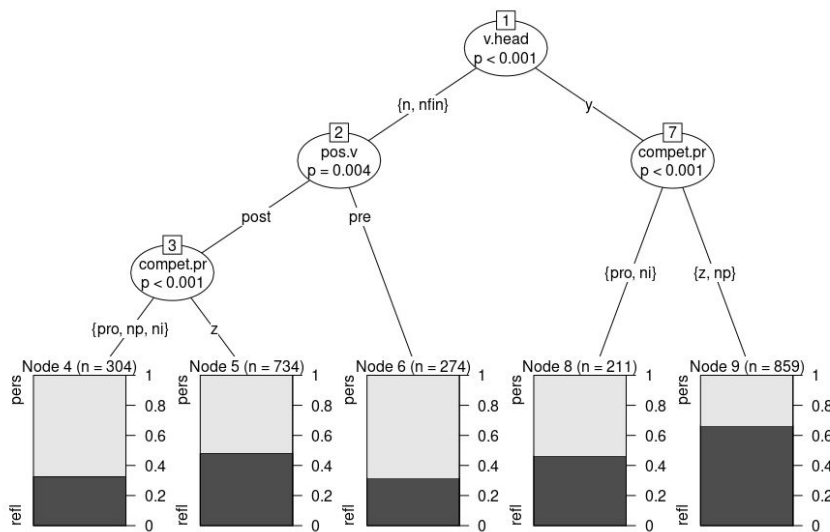
# results

- estimated overall frequency of reflexive and personal usage
  - ~ 50% of data kept for personal pronouns
  - ~ 80% of data kept for *svůj* (1/2sg)



# results

- conditional inference trees & random forests + logistic regression



# results

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- *Když jsem četla **svoje** starý **tweety**, tak jsem se pousmála nad tím, co mě trápilo*  
'When I was reading **my** old **tweets** I had to smile at what had been bothering me back then'
- *ale kohoto tohle zajímá, když mu hned ve druhém řádku **tvého komentáře** nadáváš*  
'who gives a hoot when, right in the second line of **your comment**, you start calling him names'
- no effect of semantics
- room for improvement

# personal pronouns in “reflexive contexts”

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- contexts favoring *svůj* where a personal pronoun occurs
  - post-verbal, direct dependent, no competitor
- specific tokens/clusters of tokens
  - relatively high proportion of animate possessa with *můj*
    - 48.1% vs 24.8% in the rest of data
  - *Klidně si tu piš ty tvé bludy...*
    - ‘Feel free to write these delusions of yours on here’
    - V-imprt that [expletive] something of yours!
    - expressive meaning, presence of demonstrative

# what do czech speakers say?

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- overlap between corpus patterns & speakers' intuitions?
- 20 sentences from the data
  - configuration of features favoring *svůj*/personal pronouns
- reflexive & personal version of each sentence presented
- two tasks
  - guess the original (N = 110)
  - "suitability/fittingness" rating (N = 139)
- each item followed by an unrelated "trivia" question
- participants aware of the phenomenon under investigation



*postup*

Která varianta je originál?

Nesnáším svoje večerní návaly breku.

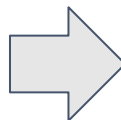
Nesnáším moje večerní návaly breku.



*postup*

Která varianta je přirozenější?

Miluju můj způsob uvažování.   << < 0 > >>   Miluju svůj způsob uvažování.  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○



*postup*

Dvě míle jsou totéž co tři kilometry.

ANO

NE

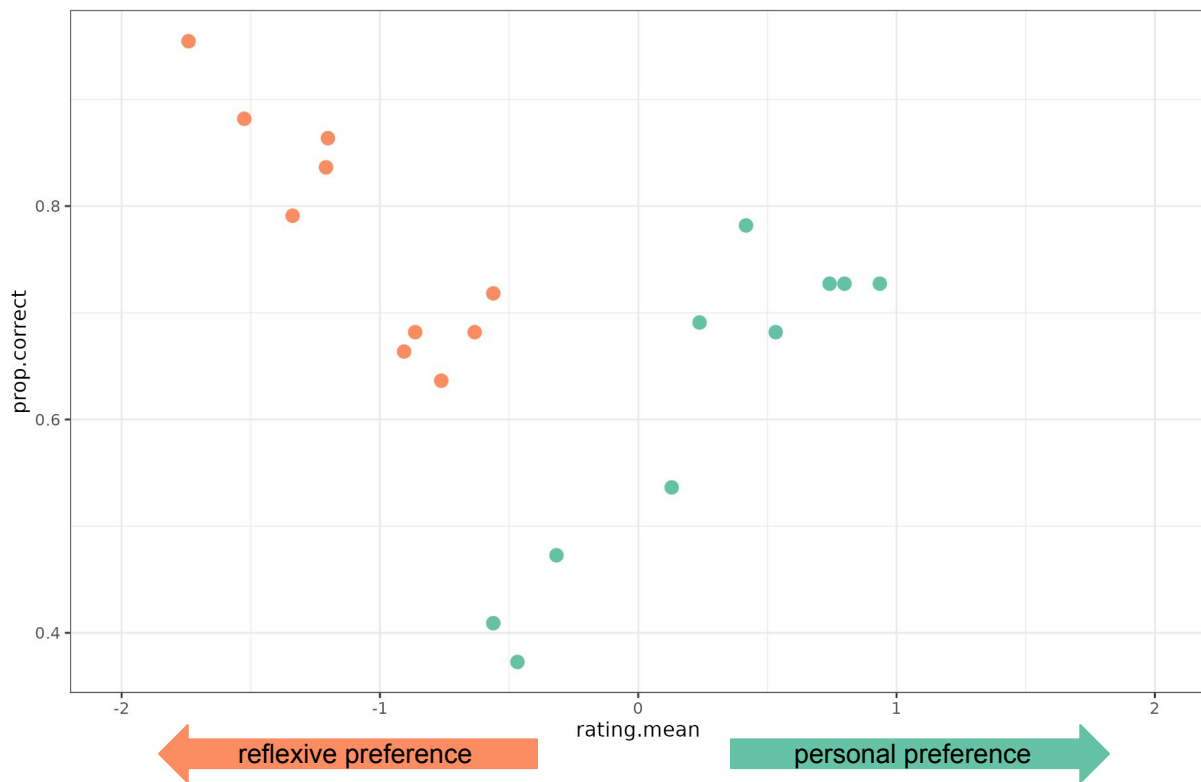


# results

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- reflexive = default
- higher predicted probability of a personal pronoun → higher participant acceptability of the personal pronoun variant

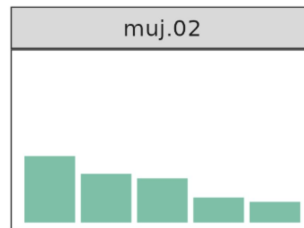
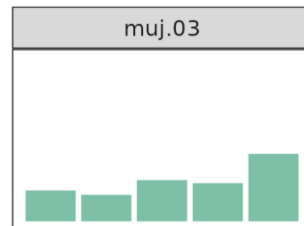
# guessing vs rating



- correct guesses
  - personal = 61.3%
  - reflexive = 77.1%
- mean rating
  - personal = .245
  - reflexive = -1.07

# ratings mis/align with original

- participants tended towards expected pronoun
  - *Díky bohu, že v těch **mejch** super **outfitech**, v kterých venčím psa, nikoho nepotkávám.*  
'Thank God, that — in these wonderful **outfits of mine** that I wear when I walk my dog — I don't meet anyone.'
- participants tended towards unexpected pronoun
  - *Budu vědět, jak poroste hodnota bitcoinu, a s **mými znalostmi** do něj investuju nemalé peníze.*  
'I'll know how Bitcoin's value will go up, and, with **my knowledge**, I'll invest a lot of money in it.'



# conclusions

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- no hints of *svŭj* usage declining
- speakers' intuitions align with corpus data
- selection of pronoun predicted by structural factors
  - lexically (partially) specific clusters of tokens associated with particular variants
- more variables will be considered in further research

# references

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- Čmejrková. 2003. Osudy zvratného posesivního zájmena svůj. *Naše řeč*, 86(4): 181-205.
- Daneš & Hausenblas. 1962. Přivlastňovací zájmena osobní a zvratná ve spisovné češtině. *Slavica Pragensia*, 4: 191-202.
- Perevozchikova. 2023. Reflexive or Not? Choosing a Possessive in Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian. *Scando-Slavica*, 69(2): 244-263.