

## Phraseme and the motivationality of its meaning

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### Abstract

While exploring the motivationality of Czech phraseological units, this article focuses undivided attention on ‘the motivation of word collocations’ induced by the relation between individual components and the phraseological whole, paying no regard to motivation inspired by phonetics, word formation, or semasiology/onomasiology. It is generally acknowledged that, in most cases, phraseological units are not directly and measurably motivated by their components. Our aim is to evidence that direct motivation can be traced in some phraseological groupings performing the denominating function and in phrasemes comprising a particular formal structure which will be described and supported by examples.

It is an arduous, if not formidable, task to propose an exhaustive definition of the term phraseme (the phraseological expression; the phraseological unit; the phraseologism). So far the Czech linguistic community has not reached complete concurrence in determining the fundamental aspects of phrasemes and their typology. Volume 4 of *Slovník české frazeologie a idiomatiky* thus says:

Traditionally and in earlier usage, the area of expressions included in propositional phrasemes has been referred to by a disturbing motley of various designations, today fairly opaque and fragmentary, conveying little meaning. Mainly, they mutually overlap, not being able to designate many types of expressions whatsoever; varied as they may be, they are nominatively insufficient (Čermák 2009, p. 1241).

In *Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny*, Čermák says:

The traditional and widespread delimitation of p.i. [phraseme and idiom – M.K.] as a fixed reproducible combination of words whose meaning is partly, or completely, derivable from the meaning of its components is inappropriate because it does not

cover all types and all planes. Yet in principle, it is true that a combinatory unit that is analysed formally through explaining its formal features, is called the *frazém* (phrase-me), whereas the semantic analysis regarding the relevant semantic features justifies the term *idiom* (Čermák 2017).

This paper, similar to e.g. Z. Hladká’s *Příruční mluvnice češtiny* (1997), sees a phraseological unit as a fixed combination of a minimum of two words conveying a meaning as a whole (for the most part underivable from the meaning of its constituents), with at least one of its components in a particular function being solely reduced to this combination or a few others. As concomitant markers may appear metaphoricity; expressivity; or occurrence of archaisms.

Special attention is given to the motivationality of meanings communicated through Czech phraseological units. Motivation in this respect is only understood as the motivation of word collocations, i.e. motivation applicable to the relation between the components and the phraseological whole, not in the least motivation affected by phonetics; by word formation; or by semasiology/onomasiology (cp. Hladká 2017a). Our main focus in pursuit of this aim were phrasemes featuring (or as a whole denoting) fairy creatures. All of the phraseological expressions quoted in this article (and signalled by italics) were excerpted from the lists and dictionaries of Czech phraseology included in the final bibliography.

Stating that, as a rule, the meaning of a phraseological expression cannot be deduced from the meanings of its components at the same time implies that in some cases the global meaning of a phraseological unit can be directly motivated by individual components and therefore it is derivable from the meanings of these segments, though in a very limited number of excerpts. Direct motivation of phrasemes containing (or as a whole expressing) a denomination of a fairy creature is evidenced, on the one hand, by some phraseological compound lexemes with a denominating function, and on the other hand, by a phraseme type with a particular formal structure which will be described subsequently. Let us start with the former.

In present-day linguistics, designation (denomination) is linked with the very appellative act (the assignation of a linguistic form to a particular content) as well as with the result of the appellative process (the nominative unit): hence not only words but established collocations (including phraseologisms) are denominations (cp. Hladká 2017b). As the *frazeologie a idiomatika* (phraseology idiomatic) entry in *Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny* has it:

Being a multi-word and fixed appellation supported by semiotics and psychology, the phraseme serves its primary nominative function [...] (Čermák 2017).

According to *Česká lexikologie* (1985), a publication co-authored by J. Filipec and F. Čermák, the meaning of collocational idiomatic denominations is related to entities (persons; things; etc.), qualities; processes; states; and conditions; and the meaning conveyed by propositional idiomatic designations then corresponds to events.

Yet idiomatic appellations also include expressions that denominate relations; functions; operations; deixis; modality; etc. (J. Filipec and F. Čermák 1985, p. 188).

If this paper is focused on phrasemes with a denominative function (in brief, phraseological appellations), this term refers to the narrower conception, i.e. only to communicating a meaning which corresponds with entities (i.e. substances). With regard to the expressional aspect (namely the linguistic realisation), it is a multi-word denomination of a fairy creature itself (in some cases a designation of other entities, as will be exposed further), which, at the same time, functions as a secondary appellation, not primal. Only thus can its phraseological implication be completed and the expression in question can be termed *frazeologické sousloví* (phraseological unit).

Phraseological units with an appellative function are evidenced e.g. by the excerpted expressions *zelený mužik* or *vodní mužiček* [green manikin, water sprite]. Both of these expressions offer a secondary denomination of a fairy creature known as water elf (where the expression *vodník* (water elf) is the primary appellation, that is to say an expression denoting a hitherto not denominated entity). As another example of a similar type can serve phraseological units *král pekelný* /

*kníže pekelný* (King of Hell / Prince of Hell)<sup>1</sup>, a secondary appellations for Lucifer/Satan as Lord of Devils (where the expressions Lucifer/Satan are primary denominations), or *zlá moc* (Force of Evil),<sup>2</sup> a secondary denomination of a devilish/diabolic creature (where the expressions *čert/dábel* (fiend/devil) are primal appellations)<sup>3</sup>. These phraseological denominative groupings are not transferred to anyone else, i.e. to the real-world beings<sup>4</sup> but they denote only fairy creatures or divine (biblical) beings alone. The appellative transfer to anyone else is effected solely through primary appellations, i.e. by the expressions *vodník* and *čert*, which however, being one-word appellations, are not phrasemes.

The above mentioned phraseological units as a whole are secondary denominations of fairy creatures proper. Some other excerpted phraseological expressions may contain an element denoting a fairy being, the phraseme as a whole is a secondary appellation of a different entity, e.g. *dvaatřicet loupežníků* (thirty-two bandits) for ‘a pack of cards’; *král zvířat* (king of animals) for ‘the lion’; *lidský duch* for ‘mental strength, ability, or intelligence’; etc. Though direct motivation can be considered only in the case of phraseological collocations

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<sup>1</sup> The component *kníže* is in this phraseme represented by the meaning *panovník* (ruler). Cp. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *kníže*.

<sup>2</sup> The component *moc* is in this phraseme represented by the meaning “incarnated supernatural force, power”. Cp. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *moc*.

<sup>3</sup> R. Večerka (2006, pp. 176-177) says that the word *čert* was newly established as a surrogate (alternative) appellation of the Devil whose real name was forbidden lest he should be raised. Later on, the very appellation *čert* became taboo at secondary level, as in plain speech people started to use other expressions, e.g. *rohatej* (the horned one); *ten s kopytem* (the hoofed one); etc. In this paper, the expressions *čert* and *dábel* are considered as synchronous items and since our concern are not biblical but fairy-tale creatures, both denominations are treated as synonymous and primary.

<sup>4</sup> Real creatures are from the real world, whereas fairy creatures are beings from a fictional world. The dichotomy of *real creatures* versus *fairy creatures* and *real world* versus *fairy world* is used in correspondence with the terms of Lubomír Doležal (2003).

denominating the fairy creature itself. When phraseological expressions denote other entities than fairy beings, they are figurative appellations and direct motivation is out of question. This can be exemplified by the above mentioned expressions: *dvaatřicet loupežníků* figuratively denoting a pack of cards; *král zvířat* figuratively denoting the lion; *lidský duch* denoting mental strength, ability, or intelligence; etc.

A specific case are appellative collocations *král nebeský* (King of Heaven) (a secondary denomination of God or Christ) and *královna nebes* (Queen of Heaven) (a secondary denomination of Virgin Mary). In these phraseological units, the words *král* or *královna* refer to the ruler and this meaning is not negated even in the meaning of the phraseme as a whole. The global meaning of phraseological units is solely extended by the attributive expressions *nebeský*, *nebes* specifying where the thematised beings reign. These are not fairy-tale creatures but divine figures. The Christian definition of God is ‘the King ruling in Heaven’ and Virgin Mary is defined as ‘the Queen of Heaven’. These two expressions can be specified as directly motivated and such collocations can be defined as phraseological expressions that, as a whole, do not denominate fairy creatures but biblical figures. It should be noted that a similar, though not identical, implication arises in the above mentioned phrasemes referring to fiend/devil: *král pekelné* / *kníže pekelné* or *zlá moc*. Christian theology thematises “devil” interpreting him as a really existent immaterial being whose activities spread evil (usually called Lucifer or Satan). Fairy tales, by contrast, introduce the creature of “fiend” which is connected with various attributes, including evil and presence in hell. In the communication outside the religious sphere, however, the denominations “fiend” and “devil” can be perceived as synonyms.

A completely different reference occurs in the following appellative collocations excerpted from Czech phraseological dictionaries: *lesní muž*; *lesní žínka*; *mořská panna*; *baba Jaga*, *děd Vševěd*; *baron Prášil*; *brouk Pytlík*; *ošklivé kačátko*; *kocour v botách*; *zlatá ryba*; and *zlatý pták* (wood troll; wood nymph; mermaid; crone; wise old man; yarn-spinner; know-it-all; ugly duckling; Puss in Boots; goldfish; gold

bird; respectively). If these are used to denominate fairy-tale creatures, they are primary appellations: there is no other expression to denote these figures as hitherto not denominated “reality”, with their appellative collocations concurrently (perhaps only partially) expressing or defining their meaning (like e.g. green manikin or water sprite and other phrasemes in the earlier mentioned paragraph. Appellative groupings denoting fairy creatures described in this paragraph are not phraseological items, because they are not secondary appellations. It is necessary to note that in the case of fairy figures *lesní/divá žínka* (wood nymph/dryad) and *baba Jaga*, their one-word equivalents can be used instead of appellative collocations – *jezinka/divoženka* for ‘lesní žínka’ and *ježibaba* for ‘baba Jaga’; and instead of the collocation *děd Vševěd*, only the shorter variation *Vševěd/vševěd* can be used. These equivalents are produced through word formation (by modifying the structure of the existing words with their motivation being ascribed to word formation), yet as one-word appellations they are not phraseological expressions and do not appear in any of our excerpted collections or lists of Czech phraseology (not even as a component of a different phraseme. Let us go back to all denominations of fairy creatures covered in this paragraph. If these terms are used to denote anything other than fairy creatures proper (i.e. to name real-world beings), it is the case of secondary appellation and such groupings then possess phraseological quality. Nevertheless, it cannot be recognised as direct motivation, for it is a figurative appellation, e.g. *mořská panna* ‘any person who is keen on swimming in the sea or water in general’; *brouk Pytlík* ‘a stupid, conceited and stuck-up person’; etc. Let us mention here the remaining excerpted collocations. In Czech phraseology, the expressions *hloupý Honza* (Simple Simon) and *chytrá horákyně* (approx. Cunning Girl) are not only represented by these collocative denominations, but are incorporated in “broader” phrasemes which thematise a particular mark of these fairy-tale beings, even those referred to by the phraseme as a whole (e.g. *tvářit se jako hloupý Honza* ‘look like a Simple Simon’; *chovat se jako chytrá horákyně* ‘be a cunning girl’, etc.) A ‘broader’ phraseme also includes the expression ‘Red Ri-

ding Hood’: *Je to stále jako o Červené karkulce* which means ‘It is always the same’. The excerpted phrasemes featuring these groupings are not and cannot be denoted as phraseological collocations.

The appellative function as described in our paper is also performed by the sobriquets of historical personalities – the monarchs – *Král železný a zlatý* (The Iron and Golden King) ‘Přemysl Otakar II’; and *Zimní král* (The Winter King) ‘Frederic Elector Palatine’, implicating secondary (and figurative) denomination of real figures. The motivation of the meaning of the whole phraseological unit through individual components represents direct motivation, for the given phraseological appellation is figurative, not transferred.

We presume that direct motivation of the phraseme meaning through individual components can be specified also in some explicit similes. Nevertheless this cannot be applied to all established (phraseological) similes. Expressions of this type have to maintain the following structure where the forward slash / marks interchangeable formal variants; and parentheses are used to mark omissible components:

(VFcom / INF(to be / to have)) + ADJ / S + jako + BS,

where:

VFcom is represented by the to-be copula in the 3rd person singular, the present tense active (i.e. *je*);

INF(být) directly represents the infinitive *být* (to be);

INF(mít) directly represents the infinitive *mít* (to have);

ADJ. represents the adjective;

S represents the substantive in any case;

The word *jako* (like/as) represents tetrium comparisonis;

BS represents the foundation word (i.e. the word denoting a fairy creature) in any formal, synonymic, or speech-part manifestation.

The afore mentioned structure must concurrently comply with the following condition – the “jako BS” segment must not convey the meaning “a great amount of something”. Such a case would only be intensification of a thematised quality – with the help of the foundation word. In Czech phraseology, this type of phrasemes is evidenced

e.g. by the foundation word *čert*, such as *Je to tvrdé jako čert* (it is as hard as devil) ‘it is very hard’; *být hořký jako čert* (to be as bitter as fiend) ‘to be very bitter’; *být divoký/vzteklý jako ďábel* (to be as wild/furious as devil) ‘to be very wild / furious’; etc.

If the established (phraseological) simile has any other form than the one described above, it is not directly motivated by its individual components. It can be explained by the structure formally very similar to the above mentioned type, though not identical:

VF (se) [reflexive pronoun] / INF (se) + jako + BS,

where:

VF (se) represents a (reflexive) verb in the finite form;

INF (se) represents a (reflexive) verb in the infinitive.

The given structure is e.g. represented by the following phraseological expressions: *Nese se jako královna* (she is walking like a queen] ‘she is haughty’; *chovat se jako šašek* (to behave like a silly billy) ‘to be funny’; *koukat jako drak* (to look like a dragon) ‘to have a hateful look’ etc. The marks implicitly communicated through the meaning of the phraseological unit as a whole, i.e. haughtiness; ridiculousness; spiteful look are not explicitly referred to. Therefore in such expressions, the meaning of the phraseme as a whole can hardly be described as primarily motivated by individual components.

It can be concluded that the primary motivation for denoting the meaning of a phraseological unit through individual components can be found in some phrasemes with the appellative function. It is evidenced, for example, by the secondary (i.e. phraseological) collocation denominating *vodník*. In explanatory dictionaries, it is described as a green creature, living in water, and this definition is reflected in the phraseological groupings *zelený mužik* and *vodní mužiček*. Another example is the phraseological collocation referring to *čert*. In explanatory dictionaries it is defined as a supernatural being dwelling in hell and personifying evil, as reflected in phraseological expressions *kníže pekla* and *zlá moc*. A similar situation can be described in the case of se-

condary expressions denominating biblical beings *Bůh/Kristus* (God/Christ) and *Panna Marie* (Virgin Mary), whose Christian denominations are reflected in such phraseological groupings as *král nebeský* and *královna nebes*. The direct motivation of phraseme meaning through individual components is also evident in phrasemes conveying explicit comparison, namely through a particular form – (VFcom/INF (*být/mít*)) + ADJ/S + jako (as/like) + BS. If there are any differences from the given structure (in the group of phrasemes with a foundation word referring to a fairy creature) the relation between the components and the phraseme as a whole cannot result from primary motivation.

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