

Intensification Functions of Phrasemes with the Base Words *čert* ‘devil’, *král* ‘king’, and *drak* ‘dragon’

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Abstract

This contribution focuses on phrasemes with an intensification function. The emphasis is laid on phrasemes with the so-called base word *čert* ‘devil’, *král* ‘king’, and *drak* ‘dragon’. We will attempt to show that the bearer of an intensification function is in some phrasemes the base word itself and in other cases the whole proposition. On several illustrative examples we will prove different formal types of phraseological units which perform an intensification function with the given base words. Furthermore, we will attempt to show that an identical or similar form of phraseological units differing only in the base word (although from one thematic unit) need not have an identical or similar semantic-functional structure.

In this paper we analyse phrasemes with an intensification function. In accordance with Mrhačová (2003) and Čermák (2007) we understand a phraseme as a combination of words being a sign, having a form (occurring as a phraseme in a text) and a meaning, i.e. a semantic-functional part (idiomatic). Both of these components are of course inseparable: there is no phraseological form without carrying a meaning, and on the other hand, it is not possible for a meaning not to have its formal expression. For the purpose of analysing these units, F. Čermák distinguishes the terms *phraseme* and *idiom*. In *Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny* under the entry „phraseme and idiom” (2017, online) he states that „[...] if we analyse the combinatorial formation formally, from the point of view of formal features, we speak of a *phraseme*, while the semantic analysis, in terms of relevant se-

mantic features, justifies the use of the denotation *idiom*.” If we speak about a phraseme in this paper, then we mean the phraseme in the broader sense, i.e. the phraseme as a sign, or a close connection of the two components, both formal and semantic. If we need to emphasise the formal structure of a phraseological unit in certain parts of this contribution, we use the phrase „formal expression”, „phraseological form” or „form”. If, on the other hand, we need to emphasise the meaning component of a phraseological unit, we talk about the „meaning” or „semantic part” of the phraseme.

The material under analysis here is Czech phrasemes with the base words *čert* ‘devil’, *král* ‘king’, and *drak* ‘dragon’. The base word means the generic name of these fairy-tale beings, and in specific phrasemes, this generic name can be realised by various parts of speech and their derivatives or synonymous variants. The term *base word* is in a similar context appropriately used by Eva Mrhačová (2003, s. 107–115). All the phrasemes mentioned in this article and highlighted by underlining were excerpted from inventories and dictionaries of Czech phraseology stated in the list of sources. In this article, we do not strive for exhaustive evidence of excerpts with the above-mentioned base words (we have paid a close attention to the names of fairy-tale beings in Czech phraseology elsewhere, see Křivancová 2015, 2016, 2017), but we try to give evidence of various formal types of phraseological units on several representative examples with an intensification function.

In the case of phrasemes with the semantic mark of a „great extent or amount of something” we can distinguish three types of phrases:

- 1) Firstly, these are propositional phraseological units, in which the proposition as a whole carries the given mark (where the base word itself, which is part of the given proposition, refers to the fairy-tale being). In the phraseological units of this type, we can observe different inter-propositional relationships¹:

¹ Josef Hrbáček (1994) paid a close attention to the inter-propositional relationships in Czech.

- a) The so-called „blending of propositions” occurs in some phrasemes, where some of these propositions may be non-sentential. Non-sentential propositions are always nominalisations of sentential propositions. They are realised by deverbal nouns, deverbal adjectives, participles, or infinitives. For example, in the phraseme *křičet, jako když ho všichni čerti berou* [to scream as if all devils carry him away]² is the base word *uert* ‘devil’ part of the proposition *všichni čerti ho berou* [all devils carry him away]. This proposition as a whole expresses the intensity of something thematised in another proposition of the given phraseme, i.e. it expresses the intensity of the non-sentential proposition *křičet* [to scream]. The whole phraseological unit then carries the meaning ‘to scream a lot’.
- b) In other phrasemes, one proposition is incorporated into another, usually in the function of its participant. A proof of these types of phraseological units is, for instance, the phrase *Má všeho dost jako čert plev* [He has everything enough like the devil has chaff]. The phraseme as a whole bears the meaning ‘he has got enough of everything’, (i.e. as much as the devil has chaff; the proposition *má všeho dost* [he has everything enough] is intensified by the incorporation of the proposition *čert má hodně plev* [the devil has a lot of chuff], which is formally expressed in the resulting phraseme as a sentential simile with an eluded predicate). A similar example is the phraseme *Umí to jako všichni čerti* [he knows that like all devils]. The phraseme as a whole bears the meaning ‘he knows it very much’ (i.e. as much as the devil knows it; the proposition *umí to hodně* [he knows it very much] is intensified by the incorporation of the proposition *všichni čerti to umí* [all devils know it]).
- c) There are also such types of propositions in Czech phraseology, which, as a whole, express the intensity of something not thematised in another proposition (which would be part of the phraseme), but it emerges from the situational context. Formally, therefore, these are phrasemes consisting of only one proposition. However, the situational context can be understood as another (hidden) proposition because a formally expressed proposition does not have any function in these „situational phrasemes” but it acquires this function only in a given situational context. An example may be the phraseme *I čert by mu salutýroval* [even the devil would salute him], whose meaning is defined as ‘something is very successful’ in phraseological dictionaries. We can see that the phraseme is formally made up of only one proposition. In it, the devil is the representative of „something big,” so his salutation „is important”. This intensifies any quality that the phraseme completes, for example, He is handsome / clever / hardworking, etc. (... that even the devil would salute him). The way of the verbalisation of the situational context then has a direct impact on the type of the inter-propositional relationship. The result may be a) semantic determination of propositions³, in which the formally expressed proposition (i.e. the original phraseological unit) is semantically dependent on the situational proposition, without the propositions losing their formal autonomy, e.g.: *He is clever. Even the devil would salute him.* b) Propositions may also be formulated as syntactically unequal and therefore the blending of propositions may occur, e.g.: *He is so clever that the devil would salute him.*
- 2) There are such phrasemes in which the base word itself bears the meaning ‘a great extent or quantity of something’. Thus, the base word does not refer to a fairy-tale being, and the proposition as a whole then thematises any mark that is intensified by the base word. For example, the phraseme *Klouže to jako čert* [it skids as a devil] carries the meaning ‘it’s very slippery’. In this case (and in many others, such as *Bolí/štípe/zebe [...] to jako čert* etc.) [it hurts / it bites

² In square brackets there is a literal English translation of phrasemes corresponding with their form. The meaning of the particular phrasemes is given in the single quotation marks.

³ Josef Hrbáček (1994) uses the term *semantic subordination* in connection with the semantic subordination of propositions.

/ it feels cold [...] as a devil etc.] it is not possible to consider incorporating one proposition into another, i.e. it can not be said that the phraseme, apart from the proposition *klouže to / bolí to / štípe to / zebe to...* [*it skids / it hurts / it bites / it feels cold...*], would also contain another proposition: *čert klouže/bolí/štípe/zebe...* [*the devil skids/hurts/bites/feels cold...*]. These types of phrasemes have only one proposition.

In phrasemes with an intensification base word, the intensity of the quality, action, or state, or the quantity of something are expressed in both the formal part (i.e. in the linguistic form) and the idiomatic part (stated by the particular phrasemes in the dictionaries of Czech phraseology as their meaning). In the formal part of the phraseme, the intensification mark is expressed by intensifying similes (*jako čert / jako všichni čerti / co čert* apod. [*like a devil / like all devils, etc.*], e.g. *být hořký jako čert* [*to be as bitter as a devil*] = ‘to be very bitter’, adjectives (*d’ábelský* [*devilish*], e.g. *d’ábelský křik* [*a devilish scream*] = ‘a loud scream’, i.e. a great intensity of screaming) or adverbs (*d’ábelsky, čertovsky, po čertech, na všecky čerty* apod. [*devilishly, in a devil’s manner*], e.g. *mít něčeho na všecky čerty* [*to have something in a devil’s manner*] = ‘to have a lot of stuff’). In the idiomatic part of the phraseme, the intensification mark is expressed by adverbs of measure (*much, very, intensively, etc.*) or adjectives of measure (*large, extraordinary, etc.*).

It is interesting to note that in Czech phraseology one can find formally analogous collocations with the base words *čert* ‘devil’, *král* ‘king’, or *drak* ‘dragon’, but the phrasemes do not express the same meanings, although at first glance the difference in meaning need not have to be immediately apparent. It is interesting, for example, to compare the phrasemes with the following structure:

(to be) + the Czech preposition *po* [after] BW (local case sg./pl.) + **ADJ**

where

(to be) represents the infinitive of the Czech verb *být*, and as an unmarked form it represents various potential grammatical forms of the verb in the

given phrasemes; round brackets indicate the potential omission of this verb;

po represents the Czech preposition *po* [after];

BW stands for the base word in the form of the local case in the singular or plural;

ADJ. represents an adjective (in any form).

This structure is represented, for example, by the following phrasemes:

(být)⁴ po čertech chytrý [*to be clever after the devil*] = ‘to be very clever’

BUT:

Tys po draku chytrý [*You’re clever after the dragon*] = ‘a curse’ (not: ‘You’re very clever’) (see *Příruční slovník jazyka českého* 2007-2008, the entry *drak* ‘dragon’).

Let us compare also phrasemes with the structure:

BW_(ADJ.) + **N**

where

BW_(ADJ.) represents the base word in an adjective form;

N stands for a noun in any form.

The given structure is represented, for instance, by the following phrasemes:

d’ábelská chytrost [*devil’s cleverness*] = ‘an extraordinary degree of cleverness’ (i.e. a high intensity of this quality)

královská odměna [*a royal reward*] = ‘a great reward’ (i.e. a generous, rich reward)

⁴ We leave the verbal phrasemes in such a form (indefinite or definite), in which they were taken over from inventories of Czech phraseology. As already noted, the infinitive of the verb *být* ‘to be’ represents various potential grammatical forms of the verb in the given phrasemes, i.e., for example, the 2nd person sg. in the present tense indicative with the pronoun: *ty jsi* ‘you are’ (or a contracted form, i.e. *tys* ‘you’re’).

BUT:

dračí símě [dragon's semen] = 'something that causes evil and destruction' (the adjective *dragon* does not have an intensification function here but it implies evil, anger).

If we look up the meaning of the entries *čert* 'devil', *král* 'king', and *drak* 'dragon' in *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* (SSJČ), we will find out that in the case of the entry *čert* 'devil' there are seven different meanings, where the meaning given under number five suggests that the expression *čert* 'devil' indicates a „considerable amount, quantity; very much” (cf. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *čert* 'devil'). It is supported with examples such as *dluhů bylo na čerty; je po čertech chytrý; peněz bylo po čertech málo*” (cf. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *čert* 'devil') [debts were the devil; he is clever after the devil; money was little after the devil]. For the entries *král* 'king', and *drak* 'dragon', the meaning of a „large quantity” is not given (cf. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *král* 'king' and the entry *drak* 'dragon'). Looking further at the meanings of the entry *královský* [royal] in SSJČ, we can see that there are five different meanings here, where the meaning given under number five indicates that the expression *královský* [royal] means „generous, abundant” and that the example *královská odměna* (cf. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *královský* 'royal') [a royal reward] is given there.

- 3) The mark of a „great extent or amount of something” may also be an implicit part of more specifically defined marks. For example, some phrasemes with the base word *drak* 'dragon' carry an implicit mark of a „great extent” within a more specifically defined mark of a „great workload”: *být do práce jako drak* [to be like a dragon to work] = 'to be (very) zealous, efficient'; *dělat jako drak* [to do like a dragon] = 'to be (very) hardworking’.

If we look up the meanings of the word *drak* 'dragon' in SSJČ, we can find the example *je do práce (do všeho) jako drak* [he is to work (to everything) like a dragon], while this collocation (also

present in various phraseological dictionaries) is classified under the meaning one, i.e. 'a fairy-tale monster' (cf. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* 2011, the entry *drak* 'dragon'), not a 'great quality, the amount of something' (for, as already mentioned, this intensification meaning is as one of the meanings given only in the case of the entry *čert* 'devil'). In the idiomatic part of these phrasemes (as they were excerpted from dictionaries of Czech phraseology), a „great extent” is not explicitly thematised as a necessary part of meaning: the intensification expression is given in brackets, which means that it may be omitted: *být do práce jako drak* [to be like a dragon to work] = 'to be (very) zealous, efficient'. The base word *drak* 'dragon' does not, therefore, carry the mark of a „great extent or amount of something”. Compare:

The collocation *jako drak* [like a dragon] in the phraseme *být to práce jako drak* [to be like a dragon to work] cannot be delimited by the intensification expression *velmi* [very] itself. The meaning of the phraseme cannot be formulated as 'být do práce velmi' [to be to work very],

BUT:

The collocation *jako čert* [like a devil] from the above-mentioned phrasemes of the type *bolí to jako čert* [it hurts like a devil] can be delimited by the intensification expression *velmi* [very], i.e. the meaning of the phraseme can be formulated as 'it hurts very much'. The mark of a „great extent” is then in the case of the base word *drak* 'dragon' undoubtedly an implicit component of a more specifically defined mark of *work efficiency* or *zealousness*.

Also in the case of some phrasemes with the base word *čert* 'devil', the intensity of the quality may be an implicit part of more specific meanings, such as *restlessness*, *inexhaustible energy* (e.g. *být jako čert* [to be like a devil] = 'to be very restless, full of energy') or *speed of a movement* (e.g. *jet jako čert* [to go like a devil] = 'to go quickly'; *vyletět odněkud jako čert* [to fly from somewhere like a devil] = 'to fly off sharply'). Worth mentioning is also the phraseme *Ten je za / nad devět čertů* [He is over/above nine devils]

= ‘he is clever’. The phraseme does not mean ‘a great deal, a quantity of something’, because, on the one hand, there is no mark in the formal part of the phraseme that would be intensified by the collocation *za / nad devět čertů* [over/above nine devils], and on the other hand, the intensification of a given mark cannot be derived from the meaning of a given phraseme as stated and taken from phraseological dictionaries (the intensification expression *velmi* [very] is missing from the idiomatic part). The phraseme only carries the meaning ‘he is clever’, not ‘he is very clever’.

In conclusion, we can summarise that each phraseme is unique as a whole, and so it is not possible to present any component in Czech phraseology always (in all phrases) fulfilling an intensification function. Phraseological units with an intensification function are realised by different formal structures and, on the contrary, phrasemes with the same or a similar form cannot a priori be assigned the same or a similar meaning or function. E.g. the component *jako čert* [like a devil] has the meaning ‘very’ in some phrasemes, in others it is an implicit part of a more specifically defined mark and it carries the meaning ‘quickly’ or ‘fiercely’, whereas the component *jako drak* [like a dragon] carries the meaning ‘zealous’; the component *po čertech* [after the devil] does not have the same function as the *po draku* [after the dragon] component etc.

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