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Czech Habitual Verbs and Conceptual Distancing

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Abstract. One of the more puzzling meanings associated with Czech habitual or iterative verbs is their tendency in past morphology to denote a distant past. Traditional, feature-based analyses of this verb form's semantics cannot adequately account for the status of the distant past meaning. Other scholars see a link between the distant past tendency and the feature of indeterminate iterativity that is part of the verb's core semantics—thereby making the verb's behavior in past morphology coherent with its behavior in present morphology—although the exact nature of this link has yet to be adequately described. Using a corpus of examples taken from sources in contemporary literary Czech, I argue that the distant-past meaning is in fact only a tendency. Verbs of this type can be used to express a remote past, a past period of time which is ambiguous with regard to remoteness, and, in some instances, a more or less recent past. The key to making sense of this behavior is an understanding of remoteness as primarily conceptual and not merely temporal; temporal distance becomes one possible, even preferred, realization of the broader phenomenon of conceptual distance. The notion of conceptual distancing also provides an adequate explanation for the link between morphologically past and present usages of the verb since morphologically present usages, as inductive generalizations over a class of entities or events, naturally presuppose distancing. My analysis is grounded in Charles Peirce's semiotic treatment of habit and Ronald Langacker's cognitive grammar framework.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss one aspect of the semantics of Czech verbs of the type *říkávat*, *dělávat*, *mívat*, etc.[1] Hypotheses concerning the semantics

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[1] Verbs of this type form a morphologically well-defined class: they are unprefixed imperfectives derived usually by means of the formant *-va-*. They are traditionally called *iterative* or *frequentative* verbs. This article is not intended as a general treatment of aspectual encoding of iteration in Czech, but is limited to a discussion of the distant-past meaning associated with the so-called frequentative forms. As is well known, iteration can be expressed in Czech by the frequentative verb forms as well as by both imperfective simplex and perfective aspectual forms. In the third case, aspectual selection in Czech is said to operate at the micro-level of the individual subevent: a singular event denoted by a perfective verb serves as a token of the larger iterated type, as in the sentence *Vypije* [< *vypít*, perfective] *jednu skleničku vodky denně* ("He drinks one shot of vodka every day"). Although perfective singularization of the subevent is a possible way of expressing iteration in Czech, there is not necessarily a connection between the productivity of a morphologically habitual or frequentative form and the phenomenon of perfective singularization. For relevant articles on perfective singularization and other related questions to aspectual encoding of iteration in Czech, see Kresin 2000, Stunová 1993, Chung and Timberlake (1985), and Monnesland 1984. Dickey (2000: Chapter 2)

of these verbs, which I will call habitual verbs, have traditionally generated controversy. Framing the issue, František Kopečný (1948, 1962, 1965, and 1966) attempted to define the semantics of the verb form in terms of the features of non-actuality and iterativity; the verbs were therefore called non-actual iteratives (*neaktuální násobená slovesa*).[2] Later researchers (Širokova 1963 and 1965; Kučera 1979, 1980, and 1981) moved away from a strictly feature-based account by analyzing the verbs in context and by trying to understand the relations between the various meanings associated with the verb form. More recent research (Danaher 1995, 1996, and 1999) is grounded in a semiotic and cognitive approach to language and understands the different contextual meanings associated with the verb form as coherent, given what is involved in the conceptualization of a habit.

One of the more puzzling meanings associated with verbs of this type is their tendency in past morphology to denote a distant past. Kopečný mentions the "distant-past nuance in meaning" (1962: 65) expressed by the verbs, although its exact status cannot be clarified in the context of his feature-based analysis. Following Kopečný, other Czech linguists have attributed a distant-past reading to morphologically past instances of these verbs. Havránek and Jedlička (1960: 232), for example, note: "Their past forms […] tend to express the notion of an emotionally colored recollection of the distant past."[3] Similarly, Nemec writes (1958: 197): "In the past [they express] iteration which is temporally remote, distant-past." Kopečný's analysis survives even in the most recent Czechoslovak Academy Grammar, which asserts that the verbs "have a special connotation of the distant-past" (*Mluvnice*: 184).

A. G. Širokova and H. Kučera have both attempted to clarify the status of the distant-past meaning. Širokova (1965: 83) argues that a distant-past reading is dependent on context. Taking the analysis one step further, she links the distant-past tendency to the feature of indeterminate iterativity which she claims is fundamental to the verb form: "The meaning of indeterminateness [indeterminate iterativity] is easily connected in the mind of a speaker with a meaning of greater duration and temporal

provides a comparative discussion of habitual aspect in Slavic languages and offers a tentative explanation (Dickey 2000: 88) of the function of the three alternative construals in Czech.

[2] Kopečný's treatment developed in a polemic with I. Poldauf (1949, 1964, 1966a, and 1966b).

[3] The emotional coloring often associated with habitual verbs seems to be an implicature resulting from the "speaker-orientation" of habitual propositions. See Danaher (1995: Chapter 3) for discussion of this point. The *-va-* suffix may be reduplicated (*-váva-* or even *-váváva-*) for expressive (or humorous) effect.

distance" (1965: 84).[4] Kučera approaches the question more systematically, and for that reason I will return to his analysis in more detail below. It is enough to note here that Kučera reaches the conclusion that the past continuum in Czech can be divided into a recent and a distant past. He compares Czech to Kikuyu as a language in which "distinct tense forms exist [...] for remote past and near past" (1981: 183). Like Širokova, he also senses a connection between some form of iterativity and a distant past, although he remarks: "I cannot present as yet an entirely satisfactory explanation of why the same verbal form may assume both functions" (1981: 183–4).[5]

I will argue here that, in order to provide a "satisfactory explanation" for the connection between iterativity and a distant past, the question must be approached from a much broader perspective, in which the various meanings associated with the verb form are viewed as coherently related to each other. My analysis is based on the definition of habit found in Peircean semiotic theory, on recent work carried out on the logic of habitual propositions in French and English, and on research in cognitive linguistics on generic statements and other questions.[6] My intent is twofold: (1) to examine new data which sheds significant light on the behavior of these verbs in past morphology, and (2) to demonstrate just how the tendency for these verbs to express a distant past, like other contextual meanings associated with the form, follows naturally from an understanding of these verbs as expressions of habituality.[7]

2. New data

Analysis of the meaning of Czech habitual verbs as they are used in actual discourse contexts is essential to making sense of the behavior of them in past morphology. Previous studies have mostly reached conclusions

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[4] All translations, from both Russian and Czech, are mine unless otherwise noted. Some of the translations from literature have been modified to present more clearly the particularies of the verb form in question.

[5] Filip also speculates on this connection, writing that the "solution to the puzzle formulated by Kučera (1981) is to be sought in the intersection of modal and temporal semantics" (1993: 138–9).

[6] Jakobson (1965) is the first study which explicitly applies Peirce's semiotic to the study of language. This productive line of research has been continued by, among others, Michael Shapiro (see 1983 and 1990) and Henning Andersen (see 1973 and 1979). A collection of linguistic analyses in this vein is Shapiro (1999); see also Danaher (1998) for a comparison of this semiotic approach with cognitive linguistics.

[7] Kučera (1980: 26) was the first to introduce the notion of habit in regard to Czech verbs of this type. His use of the term is closely linked with his semantic model of verbal aspect (Kučera 1983) and is therefore somewhat limited in its application to the problem at hand.

based on examples invented by the researchers themselves (as native speakers of Czech) and/or borrowed from other studies using the same methodology. The data presented here are drawn from a corpus of 317 habitual verbs gleaned from contemporary literary Czech essays, fiction, memoirs, and journalistic prose (Belohradská 1992; Čapek 1990; Havel 1989b, 1990a, and 1990b; Jirotka 1964 and 1999; Kundera 1967; Rybakov 1987; Škvorecky 1988).[8]

Of these 317 examples, 187 or approximately 59% are morphologically past (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Tense/mood distribution in 317 examples of habitual verbs

Tense/mood	Number of occurrences	Percentage of examples
Past	187	59%
Present	124	39%
Infinitive	6	2%

An analysis of the discourse contexts of these 187 morphologically past examples establishes the relative value of the distant-past meaning associated with the verb form (Figure 2). Of the 187 morphologically past examples in my corpus, only 100 or 53% can be classified as unambiguously distant past; 65 occurrences or 35% remain ambiguous with regard to a distant-past reading. Most significantly, 22 examples or 12% of the total number of morphologically past examples occur in contexts in which a distant-past reading is clearly not possible; the verb form is used to describe a situation valid in the recent past.[9]

Figure 2: Distant-past reading in 187 past examples of habitual verbs

Status of reading	Number of occurrences	Percentage of examples
Distant past explicit	100	53%
Distant past not explicit	65	35%
Recent past	22	12%

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[8] Rybakov 1987 is a translation from Russian. Journalistic sources include *Respekt*, *Lidové noviny*, and *Mladá fronta dnes*.

[9] Categorization with regard to pastness is a subjective undertaking, a point I implicitly return to below.

Prototypical examples of a distant-past meaning include the following:

(1) Navrhl, abychom odešli; abychom se dali polní cestou oklikou k mestu, tak jak jsme kdysi **chodívali**, kdysi dávno. (Kundera 1967: 309)

"He suggested we leave, take a path to town through the fields, the way we *used to go* long ago."   (Kundera 1982: 264)

(2) Tak co bych vám měl říci? Jako student jsem **hrával** kulečník a hrál jsem jej velmi špatně.   (Jirotka 1999: 205)

"What can I say? When I was a student, I *used to play* pool, and I played it very badly."

(3) Ta sebevražda byla možná z rodu sebevražd, jaké **páchávali** pruští dustojníci, zanechaní v pokoji sami s revolverem.   (Jirotka 1964: 99)

"The suicide was perhaps the kind of suicide *committed* by Prussian officers left alone in a room with a revolver."

(4) Na reálce mně malování jaksi nešlo, kreslení lépe; pozdeji jsem na gymnáziu měl rád deskriptivu, té nás mimorádne ucil profesor matematiky Adam. Byl jsem slušný matematik, **hájíval** me na konferencích v těch mých potyčkách s jeho kolegy.   (Čapek 1990: 25)

"In school I somehow wasn't very good at painting, I was better at drawing. Later, at the gymnasium, I liked geometrical drawing, which was taught as a special class by our mathematics professor, Adam. I was a decent mathematician, and he *used to defend* me at staff meetings in my disputes with his colleagues."   (Čapek 1934: 35)

In example (1), the distant-past reading of the habitual verb *chodívat* (< *chodit* "to go") is made explicit by the phrase *kdysi dávno* ("a long time ago"). In (2), the speaker is reminiscing about his student days some 20 years before the moment of speech. In (3), the distant-past reading is made clear by the historical reference to Prussian generals. In (4), Masaryk is reminiscing about his childhood and a distant-past reading is therefore natural.

Examples which do not refer explicitly to a distant past, which represent slightly more than one-third of the total number of examples, include that of the following page:

(5) Lidstvo ještě nezapomnělo na světovou válku, která zmarila deset
miliónů životů. Napadení Sovětského svazu? Copak by to světová
dělnická trída dopustila? A Rusko je dnes jiné, než **bývalo**. Magnitka
a Kuzněck vyrábějí železo, ve Stalingradě a Charkove zahájily
provoz továrny na traktory.   (Rybakov: 35)

"Mankind still hasn't forgotten the World War which wiped out ten
million lives. An attack on the Soviet Union? Would the working
class of the world allow that? And Russia today is different than it
used to be. Magnitka and Kuznetsk produce iron. Stalingrad and
Kharkov have begun production of tractors."

(6) Perníková srdce na hrudích koní! Tuny papírových pentlí
nakoupených ve velkoobchodě! Dlív **bývaly** kroje také barevné, ale
prostší. (Kundera 1967: 264)

"Gingerbread hearts on the horses' chests! Reels of paper ribbons
bought in a department store! The costumes *used to be* colored
before, but plainer."   (Kundera 1982: 225)

(7) Byla to moje první hra, která byla napsána v době zakázanosti,
kterou jsem tedy nejen nemohl vidět na českém jevišti, ale kterou
jsem si hlavně na něm nemohl prověřit, respektive ji v průběhu
zkoušek dotvořit, jak jsem to **dělával** u her dřívějších. A tak jsem
neměl onu základní kontrolu, na niž jsem byl zvyklý.
                                                                  (Havel 1990b: 235)
"It was the first play written since I had been banned, the first play
that I not only could not see performed on the Czech stage, but also
that I could not check there or rather put the finishing touches on
during rehearsals like I *used to do* with earlier plays. And so I didn't
have the crucial element of control that I had been used to."

(8) Byla jsem první Češka, kterou viděli. Vzhledem k tomu, že jsem
hrávala závodně volejbal, mají pocit, že dobrý smeč je něco jako
česká národní vlastnost.   (*Lidové noviny*)

"I was the first Czech they had ever seen. And since I *had played*
volleyball competitively, they thought that being able to spike the
ball well was something like a Czech national trait."

In example (5), the narration takes place shortly before World War II.
Russia is characterized as different than it used to be (*bývalo < být* "to be")
at a previous time, presumably before industrial modernization, but the
temporal reference cannot be termed explicitly distant past. Similarly, in
example (6), the present-day costumes in a traditional festival are
described in ghastly terms, and it is noted that earlier the costumes were

simpler; the meaning of the word "earlier" in this context is, however, ambiguous. In (7), the time period separating Havel's earlier plays from his first play after being banned cannot be more than five years, and, in example (8), it is clear from the larger context that the woman played competitive volleyball in her mid- to late-teens, which can hardly be termed objectively "distant" from her early twenties.

The fact that morphologically past habitual verbs can also be used, although considerably less frequently, to report a more or less recent past has yet to be noted in the scholarly literature.[10] Recent-past contexts in my corpus include the following:

(9) "Přijde toho vždycky hodně najednou," rekla a vyfoukla neobratně kouř nosem. "Táta má infarkt."
"Infarkt?"

"Prý malý, darí se mu celkem slušně. Ale na mě je toho moc. **Bývala jsem** zvyklá, že rozhodoval všechno za mě, nikdy jsem se nemusela o nic starat, a ted…"   [Bělohradská: 86]

"Everything always happens at once," she said and awkwardly blew smoke out of her nose. "My father has had a heart attack."
"A heart attack?"

"Apparently a small one, he's doing okay. But it's too much for me. I *had been used* to him deciding everything for me. I never had to worry about anything. But now…"

(10) Milá Olgo, těžko si lze představit radikálnější STRÍH, než jaký znamenala má nedávná změna působiště: po sedmi měsících samoty, klidu, tepla, nic-nědelání, najednou takový kolotoč […] Má duše si už na tu změnu jakž takž zvykla, mému tělu to asi bude trvat delší dobu: včera mne přepadla nějaká nemoc, snad chřipka nebo co […] Trochu se ozývaly hemoroidy, jsem všude trochu opruzen (zvlášt tam, kde **bývaly** vlasy a fousy), atd. atd. atd.   [Havel 1990a: 55]

'Dear Olga, It would be difficult to imagine a more radical CUT than my recent change of workplace: after seven months of solitude, quiet, warmth, indolence—suddenly such a flurry of activity […] My mind has more or less adjusted to the change, my body will likely take quite a while. Yesterday I came down with what may be the flu […] My hemorrhoids are acting up again and my skin is raw and slightly chafed (especially where there *used to be* hair and whiskers), etc. etc. etc.   [Havel, 1989a: 68]

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[10] Writing on the use of iterative verbs in nineteenth-century Russian, Ivanchikova notes that although they prototypically express a distant past, a recent-past meaning is possible in certain contexts (Ivanchikova 1957: 264).

(11)   Denně hodinu až dvě chodím nebo si vyjedu na koni; snesu též v
       sedle dobře dvě až tři hodiny, ale před několika léty jsem **jezdíval** i
       pět hodin.   [Čapek 1990: 203]

       "I have one or two hours' exercise on foot daily, or else I go riding. I
       can stand two to three hours in the saddle now; a few years ago, I
       could ride for five."   [Čapek 1934: 288]

(12)   Též jsem na jeho místě a všechno leží na mně. Zvykám si na to velmi
       pomalu (trvalo to měsíc, než jsem se jen osmělil usednout na židli v
       čele stolu, kde **sedával**).   [*Lidové noviny*]

       "Now I'm in his place and everything is in my lap. I'm slowly
       getting used to it (it took a month before I even dared to sit in the
       chair at the desk where he *used to sit*)."

All the habitual verbs in these examples refer to situations which were
arguably valid in the recent past. Example (9) reports that a daughter has
lost the support of her father since his heart attack, and the heart attack
occurs explictly in the recent past: note the use of the present tense form
má (< *mít* "to have") to make the incident especially vivid. In (10), Havel
describes a very recent move to another prison and the changes which
accompany the move. In example (11), the context makes it clear that the
habitual verb *jezdíval* (< *jezdit* "to ride") characterizes a period of time just
a few years earlier. Finally, in example (12), which is taken from a
newspaper interview with the new head of the Russian Orthodox church
in the Czech Republic, the period of time when his predecessor "would
sit" (*sedával* < *sedět* "to sit") in the chair came to end, due to his
predecessor's death, slightly more than a month prior to statement.

Before reaching general conclusions about the behavior of Czech
habitual verbs in the past, it will prove instructive to examine Kučera's
treatment of the question, which is not based on a corpus of examples.
Kučera discusses the status of the distant-past meaning in detail in his
analysis of habitual verbs as quantified states.[11] According to Kučera,
habitual verbs report quantification over various elements of a sentence.
Quantification can occur over a predicate, a temporal adverbial, or a plural
subject:[12]

(13)   Petr mi **psával**.
       "Petr *used to write* me."

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[11] Kučera (1980: 26) was the first to introduce the notion of habit in regard to Czech verbs
of this type. Mazon had already used the same concept in reference to Russian iterative
verbs (1908: 69–70).

[12] Quantification is also possible over a plural object. See Kučera (1981: 182).

(14)   V sobotu Petr **sedává** v hospodě.
      "On Saturday Petr *sits* in the pub."

(15)   Ruští generálové **umírávají** v mladém věku.
      "Russian generals *tend to die* young."

In example (13), the habitual *psával* (< *psát* 'to write') reports that Petr wrote on some but not all occasions. In (14), the habitual *sedává* (< *sedět* 'to sit') reports quantification over the temporal adverbal: on some but not all Saturdays, Petr can be found in the pub. Example (15) with the habitual verb *umírávají* (< *umírat* "to die") reports quantification over the subject: some but not all Russian generals die young. The English translation "tend to die" neatly captures this notion.

Kučera notes that not all uses of habitual verbs exhibit quantification in this sense of the term. He illustrates this contention with the following examples:

(16)   **Mívala** ho ráda.
      "She *used to like* him."

(17)   **Znával jsem** ho dobře.
      "I *used to know* him well."

Here the habitual forms *mívala* (< *mít* "to have") and *znával* (< *znát* "to know") are derived from basic state terms, and there is no implication of quantification over any element of the sentence. According to Kučera's analysis (1979: 200), morphologically past instances of Czech habitual verbs without the possibility of quantification necessarily communicate a distant-past meaning. He specifically argues: "What these [...] sentences do designate is a state asserted to exist over an extended duration in the DISTANT past" (1981: 179–80). It is here that Kučera goes on to assert that the past tense in Czech can be divided into two segments: "When no quantification [...] is possible, Czech iteratives thus signal the digitilization of the past continuum. The state is asserted to be true in some distant past" (1981: 183). If this is true, then, as Kučera asserts, Czech can be compared in this respect to a language like Kikuyu.

Kučera attempts to account for a distant-past reading in cases like (16) and (17) where quantification is impossible. However, as examples (1) through (4) demonstrate, a distant-past reading quite frequently occurs in cases where quantification is, in fact, present. These instances are not explicitly motivated in Kučera's treatment. More significantly, in my corpus not all examples of habitual verbs derived from basic state terms which do not exhibit quantification over any element of the sentence explicitly signal a distant past. Verbs of this type account for 22 examples

in my corpus. Of these 22 examples, only 11 or 50% are explicitly distant past. 8 (36%) are ambiguous with regard to a distant past: consider, for instance, the phrase "Russia is different than it *used to be*" in example (5), in which there is neither quantification nor explicit reference to an objective distant past. Moreover, 3 of my examples (approximately 14%) seem to report a recent past. Note in this regard examples (9) and (10), which are non-quantified and yet in which the habitual forms report clear reference to situations in the recent past. These examples and others like them directly contradict Kučera's hypothesis.

Kučera's treatment of the behavior of Czech habitual verbs in the past tense, the most detailed analysis available in the literature to date, is incomplete. It motivates a small portion of my corpus of distant-past examples, although even some non-quantified contexts have been found which refer not to a distant but a recent past. Moreover, since it is not based on a corpus of examples, Kučera's analysis unintentionally overstates the importance of those non-quantified contexts which it can successfully motivate. They comprise only 7% of all examples in my corpus and 12% of all morphologically past examples. By focusing his analysis on an arguably marginal subset of all possible contexts, Kučera's treatment improperly partitions the data and does not lead to an elucidation of the general case.

All these examples raise the question of just exactly what the term "distant past" means. How past is distant past? If the Czech past continuum is divided into a recent and distant past by the usage of habitual verbs in certain contexts, then it is logical to assume that an adequate and objective specification of what period of time in the past a distant past refers to might be determined. On the contrary, no such adequate specification is forthcoming in an examination of habitual verbs in my corpus. I would argue that, in most cases, the exact degree of temporal remoteness reported by the habitual verb from the moment of speech is not even important for a meaningful interpretation of the passage.

What then do all the morphologically past examples in the corpus have in common, and is there a cognitively natural framework in which we can understand the behavior of habitual verbs in past morphology as coherent with their behavior in present morphology? Not all the past examples in the corpus report a *temporally* distant past, but all do report a *conceptually* distant past: temporal remoteness is, in other words, just one possible (if quite natural) realization of conceptual remoteness. A further examination of the broader notion of conceptual remoteness as a logical component in the proposition of a habit will prove key to reconciling the semantics of Czech habitual verbs in past and present morphology.

3. Habit in Peirce and linguistic theory

A very general understanding of habit is found in the semiotic theory of the turn-of-the-century American scientist and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Habit is in fact central to Peirce's philosophy and semiotic in a number of different ways, and my discussion of Peirce's views here is circumscribed by its application to the question at hand. Broadly speaking, Peirce defined habit as:

> a specialization [...] of the nature of a man, or an animal, or a vine, or a crystallizable chemical substance, or anything else, that he or it will behave, or always tend to behave, in a way describable in general terms upon every occasion (or upon a considerable proportion of the occasions) that may present itself of a generally describable character. (Peirce: 5.538)[13]

> Two levels are involved in any habit thus formed: there is the level of the real or actual instances of the habit—the replicas or tokens of the habit—and the more abstract level of the habit itself, the habit as a law or "generalizing tendency" (Peirce: 1.409 and 6.204).

For example, a person cannot have acquired a drinking habit (cannot be an alcoholic) without some real experience with alcohol. On the other hand, being a habitual drinker implies much more than just some limited experience drinking alcohol. The habit itself is a general tendency or law which depends upon, but is not sufficiently defined by, a number of concrete instantiations of its general principle; a habit is alive through its instantiations even though it is not reducible to a finite set of them. In this sense, a habit is a "would-be" or indefinite proposition with future reference (Peirce 5.467). It can be supposed, for example, that an alcoholic *would* have a drink given the opportunity to do so. In other words, a habit is a gestalt with complex structure: a number of more or less identical tokens is interpreted as exemplifying a general tendency or law, the validity of which is not actual but potential.[14]

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[13] Reference is conventionally made to *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* by volume number and section (5.538 is to be read as volume 5, section 538).

[14] In Peirce's phenomenology, habit is a prime example of "Thirdness" or "the being of law that will govern facts in the future" (Peirce: 1.23). Over the past decade, introductions to various aspects of Peirce's thought have proliferated. For a general introduction to Peirce, see Corrington (1993). For a more sophisticated introduction, see Hookway 1985. For introductions to Peirce's sign theory, see Savan (1988) and Liszka (1996).

Applying this Peircean understanding of habit to language, we can understand any habitual proposition as a general assertion which presumes the real or believed existence of a number of instances at which the general assertion proves to be valid. The replicas or instances of the habit are understood through the mediation of the general rule; they exist within the framework of the habit as backgrounded suppositions, but are not the focus of the habitual assertion itself.[15]

The account of habituality within the framework of cognitive linguistics follows this same broad outline. In cognitive terms, habituals are gestalt structures. Lakoff has written: "Gestalts are at once holistic and analyzeable. They have parts, but the wholes are not reducible to the parts" (1977: 246). The structure of a habit is also comparable to the conceptual structure implicit in a collective noun, in which multiple entities are considered "as an aggregate or unit" (Brinton 1991: 59).

Langacker has provided the most detailed account of habitual and generic propositions within the framework of cognitive linguistics (Langacker 1996 and 1997), and his argument parallels Peirce's in key respects. According to Langacker, generics and habituals represent two distinct kinds of "general validity predications," that is, predications which do not profile individual instances but rather the "higher-order relationship (of genericity/habituality) that they constitute or manifest" (Langacker 1996: 292).[16] Since habituals imply an indefinite number of occurrences, we cannot naturally ask exactly how many times the event constituting the habit actually occurred without changing the nature of the construal "from habituality to the summation of actual instances" (Langacker 1997: 197).[17] Langacker also notes that the "emergence and profiling of higher-order entities represents a pervasive and familiar linguistic phenomenon" (Langacker 1997: 199), and he therefore considers

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[15] A Peircean understanding of habit is compatible with recent work carried out on the logic of habitual propositions in French and English. For details, see Kleiber (1985) and Tyvaert (1987).

[16] Langacker explores the distinctions between generics and habituals (as well as repetitives) as higher-order relationships, but the details are not directly relevant to the topic at hand. Nor is the interesting distinction Langacker makes between the *structural* and *actual* planes of conceptualization.

[17] Langacker argues that habituals need not be based in any actual experience. For example, we can utter the sentence "The door opens to the inside" without ever having tried to open the door (Langacker 1997: 198). Peirce argues similarly that habits can be grounded in minimal experience or in mere mental effort, like imagining how the door would open given the placement of its hinges and our general knowledge of doors and how they tend to open.

habituals and generics "verbal analogs" of collective nouns (Langacker 1997: 199).[18]

Although they differ significantly in their scope and details, these three approaches to habit all clearly demonstrate, each in its own terms, the indefinite and generalizing nature of habitual conceptualization. Taking the forest for the trees means engaging in a form of habitual construal; profiling the individual trees over the forest they comprise is a non-habitual mode of conceptualization. The distinction between habitual conceptualization and non-habitual conceptualization is strongly reminiscent of the "multiplicity-to-mass" image-schema transformation discussed in cognitive linguistics (see, for example, Lakoff 1987: 428–9, 440–4). This transformation is:

> natural in conceptual systems. In general, we find a systematic relationship between multiplicities and masses [...] Such a relationship is based on the commonest of everyday experiences: a group of similar individuals standing near each other looks like a mass when viewed from a distance. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 145)

The key point here is that both multiplicity-to-mass and habitual forms of conceptualization require visualization *from a distance*. In the assertion of a habit, we take a metaphorical step backward from a set of actual events (considered in isolation from each other) and construe those events as being related to each other, at a higher level, as tokens of the same general rule. Habitual construal therefore presupposes conceptual distancing, or a remote vantage point from which the multiple situations can be evaluated as one coherent unit.

Conceptual distancing is subject to different forms of realization. It is well documented that one linguistic category, like habituality with its inherent mechanism of conceptual distancing, can have multiple semantic and pragmatic realizations. Fleischman 1995, for example, has explored the relationship between imperfective and irrealis, noting that in many different languages, both synchronically and diachronically, imperfective gravitates toward irrealis; Fleischman 1989 makes a convincing case for the metaphoric nature of temporal pastness, demonstrating that tense distance can serve as a vehicle to express other kinds of conceptual distance and can thereby fulfill a wide range of grammatical, pragmatic, textual, and expressive functions. In the literature on habituality, it becomes clear that habitual forms in a variety of languages can also play other conceptual roles: more than a few scholars, including Slavists, have noted the seemingly natural link between habitual, irrealis (conditional or

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[18] Danaher (1999: 567–8) discusses habitual construal in a variety of non-linguistic phenomena.

counterfactual conditional), and future forms (Lazard 1975, Aronson 1978, Wallace 1982, Kramer 1986, Fife 1990: 168ff). Fleischman discusses this strong cross-linguistic tendency as a case of drift and speculates that, because habituals are indefinite with regard to the number of occurrences and temporal scope, they might naturally lend themselves to extension over possible worlds (1995: 537–39).

The "would-be" nature of habit in Peirce's semiotic provides a framework for understanding the natural connection between habituality and conditionality, although by itself the Peircean framework is not sufficient. The distancing component inherent in habitual construal may also prove essential to understanding the relationship between habitual and irrealis forms.[19] For the purposes of this study, the question remains open. It is clear, however, that conceptual distancing in its various realizations provides a resolution to the puzzle of the relationship between a distant-past meaning and indeterminate iterativity. In the final section of this paper I demonstrate how.

4. Conceptual distancing: A solution to the distant-past puzzle

Temporal remoteness is one natural realization of conceptual distancing. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, temporally remote situations are, in fact, favored in the corpus. Most of my examples are morphologically past (59% past to approximately 39% morphologically present)[20]; in past tense usage, distant-past readings are more frequent than other readings by 53% to 47%, the latter number including contexts seemingly ambiguous with regard to a distant past and a small percentage (12%) which report a more or less recent past.

All these past examples—whether they be explicitly distant past, not explicitly distant past, or recent past—necessarily imply evaluation of a situation from a distanced perspective. By briefly returning to the morphologically past examples introduced earlier, we can see how

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[19] I believe a solution may ultimately lie in analyzing habituals as spatial operators within Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985). As generalizations based on actual or believed occurrences of an event in a reality space, habitual forms essentially instruct us to create a new mental space (a child space of the parent reality space) which is the locus of the habitual generalization. Conditionals, modals, and future forms also act to create new mental spaces, thus providing an inherent link between habituality and these other categories. I offer this merely as a speculative hypothesis since I have yet to work out the details of the analysis.

[20] Admittedly, the import of this statistic is somewhat lessened by the fact that, as a rule, past tense forms tend to predominate over present tense forms in imaginative or narrative prose (Kučera 1982: 170). This is presumably equally (if not more) valid for memoiristic prose, which is a principal source of many examples of the verbs analyzed for this study.

conceptual distancing is manifested. Example (1) reports nostalgic longing for the days when the situation was regularly valid, but those days have long been over and the speaker can evaluate them from a distanced perspective. In both (2) and (4), the habitual verbs are used to describe each speaker's student days, which have definitively ended and can be summarized from both a temporal and psychological distance. In (3), reference is made to a historical period and the presumed behavior of an indefinite set of actors in it. Although examples (5) through (8) do not report an explicit temporally distant past, they do report conceptually distant situations. In (5), Russia has fundamentally changed through industrial modernization, and the old Russia can be looked back upon from the clear perspective of the new one. In (6), aspects of the traditional festival have been dramatically altered, and the narrator can look on past incarnations of the festival with some nostalgia.[21] In example (7), Havel looks back on his artistic method in the period before being banned and compares it with his current method under radically new conditions. In (8), the young woman is able to summarize her participation in competitive volleyball with a habitual verb not because it happened long ago, but because her days as a volleyball player have definitively ended.

Even the recent-past examples strongly imply conceptual distancing. In (9), the father's heart attack has forever changed his relations with his daughter, a definite rupture with the past has occurred, and that past chunk of time is therefore at some conceptual remove from the speaker.[22] In (10), the shift to a new prison has brought about a radical change in Havel's conditions and his attitude toward imprisonment, which seems to subjectively distance his earlier conditions (and his earlier self) from him; life in the old prison has been forcibly distanced from him, even though the temporal difference between old and new locations is minimal.[23] In example (11), Masaryk is getting older, and the days when he used to ride for five hours will not return. And, finally, in (12), the speaker's predecessor has died, and a bird's-eye view of who he was and what he used to do can be clearly established.

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[21] One native informant reports that the habitual form (*bývaly*) is better than the corresponding imperfective simplex form (*byly*) at least in part because the former emphasizes the contrast between the festival as it once was and is now, which is an evaluation consistent with a focus on a conceptually distant situation. The imperfective simplex here would report a simple statement of fact.

[22] A native informant notes that the habitual verb implies that the former situation is "over and done with" and that a "new model" is now in effect.

[23] Given a choice between the habitual *bývaly* and the imperfective simplex *byly* in this context, one informant opted for the habitual form because the whole context strongly implied the contrast between Havel's present situation and his past one, and the habitual verb brought this contrast out in a much more expressive manner.

While *temporal* distancing is a possible reading only for past tense forms of the verb, *conceptual* distancing cuts across tenses, and it is a requirement for Czech habitual verbs in present as well as past morphology. Consider the following morphologically present examples:

(18)   Západní návštěvníci **bývají** šokováni, že Černobyl a AIDS tu nejsou zdrojem hrůzy, ale námetem vtipů.   [Havel 1989: 118]

"Visitors from the West *are* shocked that Chernobyl and AIDS are not sources of terror here, but the subject matter of jokes."

(19)   Moravské písně jsou tonálně nepředstavitelně různé. Jejich myšlení **bývá** záhadné.   [Kundera 1967: 133]

"Moravian songs exhibit an unbelievably wide range of tonality. The rationale behind them *can be* puzzling."

Both contexts illustrate the need for the speaker to take a metaphorical step backward from the plane of concrete events in order to make a general statement which is hypothetically valid for an indefinite set of those events. In (18), the habitual verb *bývají* (< *byt* "to be") reports a general rule: Western visitors tend to be shocked. The focus of the statement is not on the reaction of a specific set of Western visitors, but on the overall impression gleaned from the reactions of (presumably) a good sample of visitors over the years. If the imperfective simplex form *jsou* ("are") is substituted for *bývají*, native speakers report a shift in focus from an abstract, indefinite set of visitors to a concrete group of visitors who are most likely visible and can be counted. "Western visitors" is read more as "The [Those] Western visitors," that is, "the ones standing over there" or "the ones we know." Changing the verb form habitual to imperfective simplex puts the speaker in dramatically closer proximity to the actual context and concretizes the scene; the conceptual distance involved in the habitual generalization is eliminated. Similarly, in (19), Moravian songs are clearly being considered as a single, indefinite mass. The evaluation presupposes a wide acquaintance (whether actual or merely implied to be so) with Moravian music. In the evaluation, the speaker distances himself from a definite set of songs and induces a general typological characteristic: given any Moravian song, the rationale behind it may be puzzling. The perspective from which the assertion is made is, metaphorically speaking, a remote one.

Conceptual distancing is manifested in other ways in the usage of Czech habitual verbs. Here, however, I will consider only two other realizations: modal distancing and discourse distancing. In a few contexts in my corpus, a habitual form, in opposition to its corresponding imperfective simplex in the same context, can be used to express modal

distancing: the imperfective simplex in the context tends to report a fact while the habitual form shifts the reading from factual to hypothetical. Consider this example:

(20) [Č]asto **se říkává** [hab]/**říká** [impf], že poznat o jazyk víc znamená žít o jeden život víc.   [Čapek 1990: 65]

> "[I]t *is* often *said* that to know more than one language means to live more than one life."

Example (20) is taken from Čapek's account of his conversations with T. G. Masaryk about the latter's life. Native speakers judge the imperfective simplex *říká se* to mean that the aphorism which follows is more true (*pravdivé*). This form would tend to be used if the speaker himself had direct experience with the psychological effects of knowing another language. In the same context, the habitual form *říkává se* renders the maxim less certain, less exact, or more hypothetical in nature. The speaker thereby distances himself from belief in or responsibility for the validity of the assertion. Čapek cites Masaryk as using the imperfective simplex form, which is fully consistent with the native speakers' judgements since Masaryk himself did indeed have direct experience with the implications of the aphorism.

Distancing at the discourse level takes a variety of forms. Habitual verbs are typically used to introduce new topics of discourse or mark a shift from one discourse topic to another (note example (2) in which the habitual verb begins a long story about how the speaker used to play pool).[24] They are also often used to set up a discourse space which contrasts with the space in focus either by directly contradicting a previous assumption or setting up an alternative space which is conceptually distanced from the one which had earlier been established (for purposes of contrast or comparison); examples (3), (5), (6), (9), (10), (11), and (12) illustrate this function. Finally, habitual verbs frequently occur in parenthetical usage (in a wide sense of the term), in which they are used to amplify or provide background to a current discourse topic. That is, they comment on the topic in focus by stepping away from it and opening up a new space which contains information not *directly* relevant to the initial topic, but which *indirectly* amplifies it from a broader perspective (example (10)).

The following two examples illustrate some of these aspects of conceptual distancing in discourse:

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[24] This was first noted by Stunová (1993: 40). The English past-tense verbal paraphrase "used to" plays the same role, and this differentiates usage of "used to" from usage of "would" in habitual contexts in the past (Suh 1992).

(21)   Se vstupem do nového roku **bývá** zvykem, že lidé uvažují o tom, co
       prožili v předchozím roce; i já o tom ted' uvažuji a uvažuji tudíž i o
       tom, o čem jsem během toho roku uvažoval.   (Havel 1989a: 133)

       "With the coming of the new year, it *is* customary for people to
       reflect on their experiences of the previous year; I, too, am reflecting
       on my last-year's experiences and I'm consequently also reflecting
       on what it was I reflected on during that year."

(22)   A ted' k tomu mému odsouzení: byl jsem na to vnitřně připraven,
       takže mne to nijak nepřekvapilo ani nezaskočilo. Presto se mé
       rozpoložení po procesu dost změnilo: vymizely poslední zbytky
       nervozity (což je pochopitelné, protože nervózní člověk **bývá** z
       nejistoty, nikoli z jistoty).   (Havel 1989a: 30)

       "And now about my sentencing: I was inwardly prepared for it, so it
       didn't surprise me or catch me off guard at all. In spite of this, my
       frame of mind after the trial has changed considerably: the last
       traces of nervousness have died out (which is understandable since
       nervousness *is* never from certainty, but uncertainty.)"

Example (21) represents a typical case of a habitual verb which
introduces a new topic of discourse; the topic is, metaphorically speaking,
approached from afar with a generalization about people's habits as the
new year approaches, and then Havel zooms in on his own behavior on
the occasion of one particular new year. Example (22) is a typical
illustration of parenthetical distancing, in which the clause with the
habitual verb is both physically distanced from surrounding discourse by
parentheses and conceptually distanced from it by offering a generally
valid explanation of Havel's concrete reaction after his sentencing; the
parenthetical explantion covers the specific case but is by no means
limited in scope to it.

5   Conclusion

In attempting to solve Kučera's puzzle concerning the semantics of Czech
habitual verbs, we run into the problem that it is not valid to compare
morphologically present contexts with morphologically past contexts
directly. We need, instead, to appeal to a mediating conceptual structure,
preferably a real cognitive structure that exists independently of the
analysis at hand, in which the behavior of the verb form across both tenses
can be said to make sense. I have argued that the cognitively real
mediating structure which allows for a successful semantic comparison
across morphological tenses, and provides thereby a solution to the
puzzle, is the notion of habituality.

Habits are generalizations, and generalizations presuppose evaluation from a distance. One form which this conceptual distancing takes is a temporal one. However, the distant-past meaning often associated with Czech habitual verbs in the past tense is merely an implicature. The habitual verb in the past tense is not necessarily used to characterize a temporally distant past, but rather a period of time which is seen by the speaker from a remote perspective; that period of time can be temporally distant (the path of, so to speak, least conceptual resistance), ambiguous with regard to temporal distance, or, under certain pragmatic conditions, recent-past. In other words, the verb form in the past does not inherently express a distant past, but a distant-past situation lends itself to being described by use of this particular form; the explicit distant-past reading comes not from the verb itself, but from the larger pragmatic context in which it is embedded.

That conceptual distancing is an essential component of the semantics of the verb form was confirmed by its manifestation in other meanings associated with the verb (modal distancing) and at other levels of the verb's usage (discourse distancing). These considerations demonstrate that the solution to this Czech puzzle may be of interest not only to Slavists, but also to linguists in general. Consideration of the Czech case may bring us a step closer to solving—even if it does not by itself provide a fully satisfactory solution—yet another puzzle in linguistic semantics, namely, the confluence of habitual, conditional, and modal forms across a wide range of languages.[25]

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