A Semiotic Approach to the Semantics of Czech Verbs of the Type *říkávat*

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Introduction

In this paper, I will introduce an alternative approach to a controversial issue in Czech linguistics, namely, the semantics of verbs of the type *říkávat, dělávat, mívat,* etc. These verbs form a morphologically well-defined class: they are unprefixed imperfectives derived usually by means of the formant *-va-*.[1] Various names have been used to designate them: iteratives, frequentatives, non-actual iteratives (*násobená neaktuální slovesa*), quantified states, and habits. It has been said that they express regular, irregular, sporadic, indeterminate, and quantified iteration.

Several different approaches to the semantics of *říkávat* verbs have been explored. The issue was originally framed by F. Kopečný (1948, 1962, 1965, 1966),[2] who adopted a feature-based approach which survives largely intact in the latest edition of the Czechoslovak Academy Grammar (Mluvnice 1986: 185) and which I will call the traditional analysis. The later approaches of A. G. Širokova (1963, 1965) and H. Kučera (1979, 1980, 1981) pay more attention to context and move away from a strictly feature-based account. In general, the progression from Kopečný to Kučera illustrates increasing concern with motivation and with explaining the behavior of verbs in various contexts. A bottom-up approach to semantics gradually gives way to a top-down approach; emphasis on isolated parts of meaning is gradually replaced by an understanding of meaning as a gestalt structure.

Continuing this trend in the research, I will adopt a top-down approach to the semantics of *říkávat* verbs which attempts to motivate the various contextual meanings associated with the verbs within a single conceptual framework. This global framework reveals how the different contextual meanings are related to one another. I will demonstrate that the framework is not simply an artificial construct imposed on the data for purposes of theoretical convenience, but a cognitively-based model of the relations which actually exist between the meanings. The framework "makes sense"

of the contextual meanings by rendering the various usages of the verb form coherent. The theoretical approach I adopt is grounded in the semiotic theory of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and specifically in his understanding of the semiotics of habit.[3]

This paper is divided into several sections. First, I will exemplify and define the various meanings associated with *říkávat* verbs. Then, I will briefly discuss the treatment of these meanings within the context of the traditional analysis. Finally, I will introduce the Peircean notion of habit and develop around it a framework for the semantics of the verb form.

Meanings Associated with the Verb Form

Space considerations will not allow me to treat all of the contextual meanings associated with verbs of the *říkávat* type.[4] I will focus on the five meanings exemplified and briefly discussed below. The first two are fundamental to the semantics of these verbs; the last three are marginal of specialized meanings.

(a) *Non-actuality.* Non-actuality is defined as "the impossibility of using a present form of such a verb to indicate an action which is in the process of occurring" (Kopečný 1996: 259). A verb marked for non-actuality cannot be used to answer the question "*Co to tu děláš?*" ('What are you doing right now?') (Kopečný 1948: 153; 1962: 15). That is, one could respond with an imperfective verb form: *Zrovna teď píšu dopis* ('Right now I am writing a letter'), but not with a verb of the *říkávat* type: **Zrovna teď psávám dopis.*

Non-actuality is an obligatory meaning in all usages of verbs of this type. Note the example below:[5]

(1) Představuji si rád svatého Petra, jak sedí na štrokrleti u okénka, kterým je vidět dolů na zem. Moje maminka za ním **chodívá** často k tomu okénku. (Kundera 1967: 146)

'I like to think of Saint Peter perched on a stool looking down on earth through a tiny window. My mother often **visits** him there.' (Kundera 1982: 124)

In this example, the verb form *chodívá* (< *chodit* "to go/walk") does not describe the act of going to visit Saint Peter at one particular moment in time, but rather a series of visits over an indefinite period of time. The verb is used to generalize rather than to specify.

(b) *Iterativity.* Closely related to non-actuality is iterativity (*násobenost*). Verbs of the *říkávat* type must express some form of iteration (a series of visits as opposed to just one). The specific degree of iteration expressed by a given verb is dependent on context (Širokova 1965: 81) and may be denoted by adverbial modifiers (*často* in the above example). Verbs of this type are therefore capable of expressing regular, irregular, frequent, occasional, and sporadic iteration in different contexts.

In the examples from contemporary literary Czech which I collected and

analyzed, the degrees of iteration specified vary from *často* 'often' t vzácně 'rarely' (and, in one case, *nikdy* 'never'). The data is summarized in the chart below:

Correlation between říkávat verbs and frequency adverbials

Sample Size: 268

Frequency Adverbial	Number of Occurrences	Percentage[6]
no explicit quantification	216	81%
často (velmi/hodně často)	10	4%
občas	10	4%
vždycky	8	3%
někdy	7	2.5%
obvykle	6	2%
zpravidla	1	0.5%
zřídka	1	0.5%
málokdy	1	0.5%
každý den	1	0.5%
denně	1	0.5%
každý rok	1	0.5%
týdně	1	0.5%
tolikrát	1	0.5%
nikdy	1	0.5%
vzácně	1	0.5%
tu a tam	1	0.5%

Most contexts (81%) show no explicit specification of the degree of iteration. For example:

(2) Západní návštěvníci **bývají** šokováni, že Černobyl a AIDS tu nejsou zdrojem hrůzy, ale námětem vtipů. (Havel: 118)

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

In this example, iteration occurs over the plural subject.[7] Western visitors are shocked, although the exact or even approximate percentage of shocked visitors is not reported.

Consider also the following:

(3) Minulý týden ležel doma a chřipkou každý padesátý český občan [. . .] Lékaři upozornili veřejnost, že se jedná o počínající epidemie [. . .] Podle statistiky ministerstva zdravotnictví však letošní situace není horší než loni. Chřipka překvapila pouze tím, že přišla tak pozdě: **někdy** bývá už o vánocích. (*Respekt*)

'Last week one out of every fifty citizens of the Czech Republic stayed home in bed with the flu [. . .] Doctors advised the public that it looks like the start of an epidemic [. . .]

However, according to statistics provided by the Ministry of Health, this year's situation is no worse than last year's. This year's flu has been surprising only in its late arrival: sometimes it is already here at Christmas'.

In this example, the degree of iteration is made explicit by the adverb *někdy* 'sometimes'.

In general, a thorough account of the semantics of *říkávat* verbs must motivate and explain several aspects of the connection between the verb form and iterativity: first and foremost, the fact that *říkávat* verbs are necessarily iterative verbs; second, the tendency for the great majority of contexts to lack a frequency specification; and finally, the existence of widely varying degrees of iteration in those contexts which contain a frequency adverbial.

(c) *Negated contexts*. No previous analysis of the semantics of *říkávat* verbs has considered contexts under negation, which is probably due to the fact that negated verbs of this type occur rarely.[8] Nonetheless, the behavior of the verbs in negated contexts has significance for an investigation of their semantics. This significance consists chiefly in that negated *říkávat* verbs tend to exhibit a different scope of negation from corresponding imperfective simplex forms also under negation.

Consider the following example:

(4) Slíbil vs svém spise o psychologii důkazy pro nesmrtelnost, ale v přednáškách, pokud vím, o tom blíž **nemluvíval.** (Čapek 1990: 94)

'In his writing on psychology he promised proof of immortality, but in his lectures, as far as I know, he **didn't talk** in depth about it'.

The verb form *nemluvíval* (< *mluvit* 'to speak') yields the reading that "he mentioned [the proof of immortality] from time to time, but he didn't analyze it."[9] This reading works well with the adverb *blíž* 'in depth'. If the imperfective simplex form *nemluvil* is substituted, however, the most natural reading is that the lecturer "didn't mention it at all." In other words, all possible situations are negated: the subject was never even touched upon. For imperfective simplex forms, the scope of negation tends to cover all possible moments at which the situation might have been valid: the situation is explicitly denied at all these moments. However, for verbs of the *říkávat* type, the validity of the situation is not denied across the board: the lecturer did talk about it, but not in a significant way.

Consider a more clear-cut example:

(5) Nebývá mým zvykem polemizovat s těmi čtenáři, kteří nesouhlasí s tím, co píši [. . .] Mají samozřejmě na to právo, nejednou mají i pravdu [. . .] Jestliže dnes činím výjimku, pak je to ze dvou důvodů [. . .] (*Lidové noviny*)

'It **is not** my habit to polemicize with those readers who do not agree with that I write [. . .] They of course have the right to do so and more than once they've even been right in doing so [. . .] If, however, I make an exception today, I do so for two reasons [. . .]'.

This example confirms the above observation. The verb form *nebývá* (< *být* 'to be') explicitly reports that the habit of not polemicizing with disgruntled readers is not absolute, as shown by the fact that the journalist immediately goes on to contradict the statement. Not all possible worlds are denied; the scope of negation is somehow restricted.

(d) *Emotional nuances.* It is commonly pointed out that verbs of this type tend to express emotional nuances which are not generally associated with corresponding imperfective simplex forms in the same context. Consider, for instance, the following:

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

'He suggested we leave, take a roundabout path through the fields, the way we **used to go long ago** [. . .]'.* (Kundera 1982: 264)[10]

In this example, native informants noted that the tone of the passage is nostalgic and emotional. The verb form *chodívali* (< *chodit* 'to go/walk') was therefore much preferred to the imperfective simplex form *chodili*. The speaker is presenting an emotional judgment of the good old days, and the form *chodívali* communicates this emotional speaker-orientation. In contrast, the imperfective simplex form *chodili* was said to be factual, dry, without emotional content.

Emotional content is also evident in example (1) about the mother's visits to Saint Peter. According to native informants, the form *chodívá* (< *chodit* 'to go/walk') here has a strong emotional charge: the visits mean something to the speaker. In contrast, the corresponding imperfective simplex *chodí* in this context was read as reporting a bald fact devoid of emotional content which emphasizes the actual physical act of walking.

(e) *Discourse function.* Stunová (1993: 40) has pointed out that *říkávat* verbs tend to occur in passage-initial discourse position, serving as introductions to what follows. This can be seen clearly in the example below:

(7) Stačí pozorovat, jak se lidé k sobě chovají v obchodech, úřadech, v dopravních prostředcích: **bývají** nerudní, sobečtí, nezdvořilí a neochotní; pro prodávající je zákazník často jen obtěžovačem, prodavačky ho obsluhují a přitom se baví mezi sebou o svých věcech, na dotazy odpovídají s nechutí (pokud na ně vůbec znají odpověď). Řidiči aut si nadávají, lidé ve frontách do sebe strkají, předbíhají se a okřikují. Úředníkům je lhostejné, kolik na ně čeká lidí a jak dlouho [. . .] (Havel: 135)

'It is sufficient to observe how people behave toward each other in stores, offices, and on public transportation: they **are** boorish, selfish, impolite, and unhelpful. For salespeople the client is often just an inconvenience. Salesgirls serve him while at the same time amusing each other with their own matters; they answer questions with reluctance (if they can answer them at all). People driving in cars curse at each other. People waiting in lines jostle each other, cut in front of each other, and reproach each other. Office workers are indifferent as to how many people are waiting to see them and how long they've been waiting [. . .].'

In this example, the verb *bývají* (< *být* 'to be') reports a general assertion in discourse-initial position: people are selfish and impolite. The text which follows provides specific examples of how people behave selfishly and impolitely in a variety of contexts.

To Stunová's observation, I would add that *říkávat* verbs also sometimes occur in discourse-final position, acting as summarizing devices of what has immediately preceded them. Note the following example:

(8) Prokopa si představovala, že se obrátí a řekne jí pravdu. Zešilela strachem, u její ruky ležely dlouhé nůžky, zvedla je a bodla. A podařilo se jí to. Josef nic netušil a svým postojem jí nabízel výhodnou polohu. Prokopa tak v naprosté nepoučenosti spáchala dokonalý zločin. Nesmyslná, nehorázná odvaha **mívá** často štěstí [. . .], o tom nás konečně mnohokrát poučila historie. (Bělohradská: 135)

'Prokopa imagined that he would turn around and tell her the truth. By her hand lay the long scissors. She became mad with fear, picked them up, and stabbed him. And she struck successfully. Josef didn't expect anything, and his stance offered her an advantageous target. Completely unschooled in murder, Prokopa committed the perfect crime. Unpremeditated, arrant acts of courage often **have** great success; history has taught us that many times over'.

In this second example, the passage begins with a detailed description of how Prokopa commits an unpremeditated murder. The theme of this passage is subsequently summed up in a proverb-like sentence containing the verb form *mívá* (< *mít* 'to have').

The Traditional Analysis

The traditional analysis of verbs of the *říkávat* type, originally proposed by Kopečný, is a bottom-up, feature-based approach which necessarily and sufficiently defines these verbs in terms of two features: non-actuality (*neaktuálnost*) and iterativity (*násobenost*). Verbs of this type are therefore labelled *neaktuální násobená slovesa*. However, although the traditional analysis notes the feature of iterativity as essential to the semantics of these verbs, it fails to explain why varying degrees of iteration quite naturally occur. In other words, why do some verbs co-occur with the adverb *často* 'often' and others with *vzácně* 'rarely', and why is an explicit frequency specification absent in the overwhelming majority of examples of this verb form? Moreover, although Kopečný and others have noted the tendency of these verbs to express emotional nuances, this tendency cannot be understood in an analysis resting solely on the features of non-actuality and iterativity. The same can be said of the behavior of these verbs under negation and of their discourse function.

In short, the traditional analysis treats only the two fundamental meanings of the verbs. Specialized meanings are not integrated into the analytical framework. In the traditional analysis, there is no general sense of why the same verbal form can be used in the various contexts in which it is used; in other words, the different meanings associated with the verbs do not in

any way cohere. To understand the various usages as coherent, a differe[nt] analytical approach is necessary. In the next section, I will outline an approach which is grounded in the Peircean notion of habit.

The Semiotics of Habit

Kučera was the first to introduce the notion of habit in regard to Czech verbs of this type.[11] He argued: "[W]e clearly are not dealing with simple iteration. Instead, what we have in this case are verbal forms that denote HABITS" (1980: 26). Kučera's use of the term is closely linked with the semantic model of verbal aspect he developed (Kučera 1983) on the basis of Vendler 1957. To this extent, the term is limited in its application to the semantics of *říkávat* verbs.

A considerably more general understanding of habit is found in Peircean semiotic theory.[12] Very broadly speaking, Peirce defined habit as:

[. . .] a specialization, original or acquired, 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. (1931–35, 1958: 5.538)

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 "generalizing tendency" or law (6.204).

For example, a person cannot have acquired the habit of smoking without some real experience with cigarettes. On the other hand, being a smoker implies much more than just some limited experience smoking cigarettes. That is, 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. As one commentator on Peirce wrote: "Even if the habitual after dinner smoker were to die this afternoon, it must be true that s/he *would* have, probably, smoked a cigaret after dinner" (Savan 1988: 12). The habit is a 'would-be', an indefinite proposition with future reference.

A Peircean habit is a gestalt conceptual structure. In cognitive terms, according to Lakoff, "[g]estalts are at once holistic and analyzeable. They have parts, but the wholes are not reducible to the parts" (1977: 246).[13] Moreover, it is "a whole that we humans find more basic than the parts" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 70). The structure of a habit is comparable to the structure implicit in a collective noun.[14] A collective noun, as in *faculty* or *orchestra,* is a gestalt consisting necessarily of parts, although the whole is more than the simple sum of those parts. The faculty of a university is a grouping of all the real professors of that university, but as a collective the

faculty has considerably greater power than the sum of the isolated bits of influence that each individual faculty member has.

If we turn back to language and apply Peirce's general definition of habit, we see that any habitual proposition is a general assertion (an abstract law) which presumes the real or believed existence of a number of concrete instances for which the general assertion is valid. Iterated situations can therefore be evaluated on two distinct levels: on the level of the actual, definite events which are isolated from one another and not viewed "as a mass" or on the more abstract level of habit where the individual situations are viewed as constituting one cognitive unit. In other words, it is possible, on the one hand, to assert the repetition of a certain series of acts without explicitly asserting that these repeated acts constitute a habit (a pattern). On the other hand, the assertion of a habit presupposes the existence of a number of acts, that is, of instantiations or replicas of the habit. (Being a smoker minimally implies having smoked some cigarettes.) The acts themselves exist in the framework of a habit as a whole; in and of themselves, they are not the focus of the assertion, but are necessary to it.[15]

Repeating situation evaluated without reference to an overarching law or generalizing tendency could be termed cases of "simple iteration." Situations evaluated with regard to law may be called cases of "habitual iteration." In the latter, one interprets the iteration of a situation as necessary background to the assertion of a general rule which patterns or systematizes the repetition. To assert a habit is therefore an attempt to make sense of some repeating circumstance on a higher evaluative level.

In cognitive terms, the difference between simple and habitual iteration is a matter of how a given set of repeating situations is *construed*. Langacker has defined *construal* in the following way:

> People have the capacity to construe a scene by means of alternative images, so semantic value is not simply received from the objective situation but instead is in large measure imposed on it [. . .] Two linguistic expressions can therefore designate the same objective situation yet differ substantially in their semantic import because they structure it through different images. (1990: 35)

In other words, in habitual iteration, the repeating situations are construed as being related through the existence of a general rule; the rule itself is semantically profiled.[16]

How does an interpreter move from simple iteration (a series of isolated situations) to habitual iteration (the law connecting the situations)? In other words, what is the cognitive process underlying habitual evaluation? Habitual evaluation in its prototypical form presupposes inference by induction.[17] Peirce defined induction as that form of reasoning "where we generalize from a number of cases of which something is true, and infer that the same thing is true of a whole class" (2.624). Induction permits generaliza-

tion on the basis of a number of concrete (or believed) instances. A habitual proposition is therefore an inductive generalization which the speaker proposes to account for the existence of a number of facts by subsuming those facts under a general law.

Peirce's understanding of the semiotics of habit provides a skeletal framework within which to consider the semantics of *říkávat* verbs. In the next section, I will demonstrate how the five widely divergent meanings associated with the verb form are motivated by viewing them as reflections of what is semiotically involved in the conceptualization of a habit.

Application of the Semiotic Framework

The two meanings present in all examples of the verbs, non-actuality (a) and iterativity (b), follow necessarily from the larger framework of habituality. The feature of non-actuality can be understood as a consequence of a habit being defined over a number of different occasions with a view toward the indefinite future. Habitual propositions cannot express actuality, but must refer to a series of events or situations. Verbs of the *říkávat* type, as assertions of a general law, provide no information regarding the moment of speech. The same is true of everyday habits. If someone is a smoker, this does not imply that the person is smoking at any given moment, but that there is a likelihood that he or she might be doing so if the opportunity presented itself.

As far as iterativity is concerned, for a habit to be real it must be supported by actual or believed instances or replicas. The real instances are used as a basis for an inductive inference: they are taken as representative samples of a larger type. The habit itself is embodied in that type.

In example (2), the verb *bývají* (< *být* 'to be') reports a general rule: visitors tend to be shocked. The verb form does not indicate that all visitors are shocked, nor does it delimit the percentage of visitors who are shocked. The focus of the statement is not on the reaction of individual visitors, but on the overall impression gleaned from the reactions of (presumably) a good sample of visitors over the years. The form *bývají* treats Western visitors as a single mass and judges a general reaction.[18] Similarly, in example (3), the verb form *bývá* (< *být* 'to be') does not specifically describe the yearly occurrence of the flu virus in the Czech Republic. Native speakers report that this verb form emphasizes the possibility of the flu occurring at Christmas. The *bývá* form in this context presupposes the occasional factual occurrence of the flu virus in the Czech Republic by Christmas as necessary background to an evaluative assertion of the general possibility that the flu virus may occur that early.

The semiotic framework also motivates the varying degrees of iteration which occur with these verbs: they follow from the subjective nature of habitual evaluation. A habitual proposition represents a general rule which

is reached by inferring a type from a number of tokens of that type. The general rule is not necessarily dependent on the existence of a large number of tokens. In this regard Peirce himself wrote:

> It is noticeable that the iteration of the action is often said to be indispensable to the formation of a habit; but a very moderate exercise of observation suffices to refute this error. A single reading yesterday of a casual statement that the [phrase] 'shtar chindis' means in Romany 'four shillings' [. . .] is likely to produce the habit of thinking that 'four' in the Gypsy tongue is 'shtar,' that will last for months, if not for years [. . .]. (5.477)

I would supplement this statement by repeating that the focus of habitual propositions is on the general rule itself, not on the definite instantiations of the rule at the level of simple iteration. In example (1), exactly how often the mother visits Saint Peter is largely irrelevant to interpretation of the passage or to the reality of the habit: it is not the focus of the proposition. To this extent, it is quite natural that most *říkávat* verbs in Czech occur in contexts without explicit frequency specifications. In the assertion of a habit definiteness of frequency is not profiled information.

The marginal or specialized contextual meanings associated with verbs of this type also can be motivated within the semiotic framework. I pointed out earlier that *říkávat* verbs under negation do not deny the validity of the situation in all possible worlds (c). When a habitual proposition is negated in Czech, the scope of negation is restricted to the general rule or law which the proposition asserts. That is, the scope of the negation is limited to the level of habitual iteration. Negated *říkávat* verbs therefore cannot report the total absence of occasions on which the proposition defined by the verb holds. Negate the existence of all replicas of the habit and the habit itself cannot persist.

In this regard, consider the difference between the following statements: *She is not a smoker* and *She doesn't smoke.*[19] The first statement can be neutrally read as a negation of a habit while the second negates an assertion of simple iteration. In the first statement, she may very well smoke on occasion, but the individual instances of smoking have not been interpreted as tokens of a general pattern. In the second statement, however, the neutral reading is that all possible occasions of her smoking (at the present time) are denied.

Similarly, in example (4) the verb form *nemluvíval* functions habitually: the lecturer may have spoken about immortality, but not in depth. In example (5) the verb form *nebývá* explicitly leaves open the possibility that the situation is occasionally valid. The form is necessary in this context because the journalist immediately acts against his habit of refraining from polemicizing with his readers.

The association of *říkávat* verbs with strong emotional content (d) is motivated as a consequence of the speaker-orientation of habitual propositions. Speaker-orientation follows logically from the status of habitual

propositions as basically inductive inferences. Habitual propositions de note subjective hypotheses; by contrast, imperfective simplex forms in the same context tend to report more or less objective observations devoid of emotional charge. Within the semiotic framework proposed here, it can be clearly seen why emotional content is not present in all contexts in which *říkávat* verbs are used. The emotive nuance is a specialized meaning which is logically possible given the semiotic structure of a habit, but at the same time not obligatorily present. I would claim that in a context which calls for emotion (and habitual construal), a *říkávat* form would likely be chosen over a corresponding imperfective simplex form, but that emotional content is not a primary element in the general meaning of the verb form. Examples (1) and (6) support this claim to the extent that speakers indicated a marked preference for the *říkávat* forms given the overall emotional tone of the passages.

The final contextual meaning to consider here is the tendency for verbs of this type to be found in discourse-initial and discourse-final positions (e). The discourse function of *říkávat* verbs exemplifies their status as habitual propositions. In discourse-initial position, *říkávat* verbs furnish a general assertion which is subsequently fleshed out in the passage which follows. In example (7), the verb *bývají* is the crux of a generalization about people being rude. Specific details supporting this generalization follow: salespeople talk amongst themselves instead of helping clients, people curse at each other and jostle each other, etc. In example (7) the flow of discourse is from general to specific. A given theme can, however, be developed in the opposite direction; that is, discourse can flow from specific to general. This is the case in example (8). An unpremeditated and shockingly successful murder is described in detail. This description is followed by a generalization which summarizes the lesson: "unpremeditated acts often have great success [*mívá často štěstí*]". The examples suggest that *říkávat* verbs function in discourse in positions where their character as general assertions proves to be communicatively effective. Given their status as hypothetical generalizations, it follows quite naturally that they function either as a broad introduction to a theme in passage-initial position or as a summary device in passage-final position.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that *říkávat* verbs can properly be called habitual verbs in the Peircean sense of the term "habit". Any analysis which attempts to explain the semantics of these verbs must motivate at least the five meanings which I have discussed here. The traditional feature-based analysis cannot achieve this. It is impossible to understand all five meanings as coherent given a bottom-up or parts-to-whole approach based solely on the features of non-actuality and iterativity. As Dwight

Bolinger has written: "When meanings are built up from below with deterministic features, there is no way to get the elasticity that one always finds with meanings" (1976: 11).

The key to making sense of the semantics of these verbs is to recognize what is cognitively or semiotically involved in the conceptualization of a habit. Habits are gestalt structures. Individual features of the parts of the gestalt can be understood only through the medium of the gestalt itself. As Anttila has argued: "Elements are not there to be combined, but are secondarily abstracted from the whole or totality [. . .] Totality is the starting point" (1977: 5).

This is another way of saying that the key to the semantics of *říkávat* verbs lies in understanding the relations between the different meanings, both fundamental and marginal, which are associated with them in various contexts.[20] The semiotic structure of a habit reveals how the different contextual meanings are related to each other in a more or less coherent way. The contribution of this analysis lies in detailing how those meanings do in fact cohere with one another as well as in showing in some small way the usefulness of Peircean semiotic theory as applied to verbal semantics.

NOTES

1 Exceptional verbs without the *-va-* formant include: *jídat* (< jíst 'to eat'), *slýchat* (< slyšet 'to hear'), *vídat* (< vidět 'to see'), *čítat* (< číst 'to read'). Most of the exceptional forms have regular alternatives exhibiting the productive formant: *jídávat, slýchávat, vídávat, čítávat*. The verbs *dávat* 'to give' and *mávat* 'to wave' do not belong to this class of verbs (Kopečný 1948).

2 Kopečný's treatment of the issue comes out in a long polemic with Ivan Poldauf. See Poldauf 1949, 1964, 1966a, and 1966b. Němec 1958 and Trnková 1969 take part in the same polemic.

3 Roman Jakobson (1965) was the pioneer in applying Peircean theory to the study of language. This productive line of research has been taken up by, among others, Michael Shapiro (1969, 1980, 1983, and 1990), Henning Andersen (1973, 1979, and 1991), and Raimo Anttila (1977, 1978, 1989, and 1991). Unfortunately, Peirce's writings are fragmented and for that reason somewhat inaccessible. The standard edition of Peirce's writings published to date is *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. The best introduction to Peirce's sign categories is Savan 1988. For an introduction to Peirce's theory of the scientific method, see Reilly 1970.

4 One of the more interesting and controversial meanings associated with these verbs is their tendency to express a distant past. The question is a complex one and deserves longer, individual treatment. See Danaher 1995.

5 The data for this study were drawn from sources in contemporary literary Czech (fiction, essays, and newspapers). 268 examples of the verb form in various context were collected and analyzed.

6   Percentages are approximate.

7   Kučera (1980: 31; 1981: 182; 1983: 182–3) has shown that verbs of this type can express iteration or quantification over temporal adverbials, the predicate, plural subjects, and possibly plural objects. Whether the quantified or iterated component is a subject or predicate does not affect the framework proposed here.

8   In the examples I collected for analysis, only 11 (4%) were negated.

9   The information presented here is based on the results of interviewing four native Czech speakers. The speakers were presented with a choice of an imperfective simplex or *říkávat* form and were asked to evaluate which form was more acceptable in the given context. If both were acceptable, the speakers were asked to say how the meaning of the sentence changed if one form was used instead of the other.

10 The asterisk indicates that the translation has been slightly altered to present more clearly the particularities of the verb form in question.

11 Mazon noticed the same thing in regard to the morphologically similar class of Russian iteratives. He based the following comments on examples gleaned from nineteenth century Russian texts: "Le sens commun à tous ces exemples est celui d'avoir l'habitude de faire telle ou telle action. Sans doute cette notion d'habitude comprend-elle celle de répétition de l'action, mais elle [la notion d'habitude] la domine certainement, en ce sens que tous les actes constituant cette habitude apparaissent comme une masse, comme une somme" (1908: 69–70; 1914: 200; also cited in Barnetová: 129). In contemporary literary Russian, verbs of the type говаривать (< говорить) (пивать [< пить], сиживать [< сидеть], хаживать [< ходить], etc.) are morphologically unproductive and extremely marginal in usage (Kučera 1981: 177). They are marked for substandard, colloquial speech and no longer occupy a unique position in the aspectual system.

12 Habit is central to Peirce's philosophy and semiotic in a number of different ways, and my discussion of habit here is circumscribed by its application to the problem at hand.

13 Lakoff contrasts gestalt structure with building-block structure, in which "the meaning of the whole is a function of the meanings of the parts" (1987: 284).

14 Laurel Brinton has written in this regard: "[A] habitual situation results from the repetition of individual situations on different occasions; however, these multiple situations are also considered as an aggregate or unit, indeed what is termed a 'habit' [. . .] The nominal category most closely analogous to habit is, of course, collective, which denotes a single unit made up of multiple individual things" (1991: 59–60). Recall Mazon's earlier definition (footnote 11) that the acts comprising a habit appear "comme une masse, comme une somme".

15 Consider, from this perspective, the distinction commonly made between a person who has a drinking problem (an alcoholic) and a person who on occasion drinks too much (not necessarily an alcoholic, but perhaps tending toward becoming one). Another everyday example of the distinction between these two levels is the difference between having repeated sexual encounters with one person (the whole is merely the sum of the individual acts) and having an intimate reltionship (where acts of sexual intercourse are not the sum total of the whole relationship).

16 The term "profile(d)" is also taken from cognitive linguistics. "[P]rofiling amounts to nothing more than the relative prominence of substructures within a conceptualization, and is inherently a matter of degree" (Langacker 1990: 208). In habitual iteration, the general rule is more prominent than its instantiations.

17 Others have reached similar conclusions on the role of induction in habitual propositions in French and English. See, for example, Kleiber (1985, 1986) and Tyvaert 1987.

18 If the imperfective simplex form *jsou* is substituted for *bývají*, native speakers report a shift in focus from general to specific. *Western visitors* is read more as *The Western visitors* (the ones we know, the ones standing over there). One speaker reported that *jsou* implies that

all Western visitors, without exception, are shocked. The *říkávat* form reports generality; the imperfective simplex form in opposition tends to report specificity or definiteness.

19 This example is not directly translatable into Czech by means of the opposition *kouřil kouřívá* 'to smoke'. Other factors interfere, such as the tendency to identify *říkávat* verbs closely with the formal literary language. Nevertheless, it illustrates that the same cognitive principle of habitual organization is operable in English. The general case is the same, but the linguistic manifestations of the principle are language-specific.

20 The meanings associated with habitual verbs in various contexts are related, in cognitive terms, via a semantic *network*. When one form has more than one meaning associated with it, these meanings "can be thought of as forming a network, where some senses are prototypical, and others constitute extensions or specializations of a prototypical value or of one another" (Langacker 1990: 35).

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