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AGENTS AND INSTRUMENTS IN OLD CZECH NOMINAL WORD FORMATION*

Abstract

In this article, I will apply the kind of semantic analysis that has been employed with grammatical morphemes in functional-typological research to nominal word formation patterns. Since I will re-alise this analysis gradually, in this paper I focus only on six deverbal suffixes associated with two main semantic roles: Agent and Instrument. I will define these semantic roles, together with others related to them, and then provide an overview of the kind of semantic polysemy or multifunctionality in which the given suffixes are involved in nominal word formation in old Czech. I will conclude my paper with some typological considerations.

Key words

Word-formation; old Czech; suffixation; semantic roles; semantic maps

1. Semantic roles and word formation

According to Luján (2010) and Luján & Ruiz Abad (forthcoming), some word formation suffixes are not related to one semantic role, but to various roles, such as, for instance, the English suffix *-er*, which is connected to the semantic role Agent (as in *killer*) and Instrument (as in *lighter*).

Until the birth of a research group at the Complutense University in Madrid, there had been no previous applications of these *semantic roles* to the study of word formation as a systematic phenomenon. The members of this research group apply to word formation a version (adapted for this purpose) of the kind of analysis often employed with grammatical morphemes for functional-typological research and, especially, semantic map analysis in accordance with Haspelmath (1999, 2003) and Luraghi (2003). The authors justify this decision by the fact that

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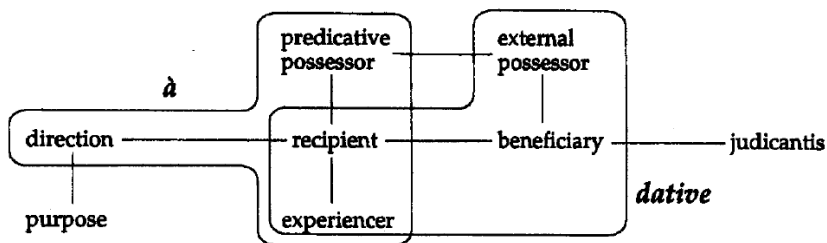
“the findings of the studies on grammaticalization carried out in the last thirty years have shown that lexical and grammatical morphemes constitute a continuum and their meanings are organized in similar ways” (Luján & Ruiz, forthcoming).

To put the same question differently, Santos Marinas (2010: 214) states that:

[...] while in Syntax exist certain universal semantic functions that are expressed in every language through different morphosyntactic mechanisms such as cases, prepositions and so on, similarly in the domain of the word formation, the speaker might bear in mind some semantic motivations in order to create the agent names choosing a specific morphological mark.

If one now takes a look at the previous works on semantic roles and grammatical morphemes and, especially, on the development of semantic map theories¹, we can observe an example of the application of semantic maps to grammatical morphemes, in this particular case (see Figure 1), the semantic relationship between the French preposition *à* and the typical dative functions.

Fig. 1: *The boundaries of French à and dative* (Haspelmath 2003: 219)



On the other hand, in my study of semantic roles and word formation in old Czech, I limit myself to “non-contextual” semantic roles, ignoring other possible semantic roles relating to the syntactic function of the nouns in a particular context. For instance, in the sentence “John killed the runner with his car”, the noun *runner* would represent the semantic role Agent, without taking into consideration the fact that, in this particular sentence, *runner* appears in the semantic role Patient. We ignore it as “the meaning of *runner* is construed in such a way that its referent is thought of as the Agent of the action ‘running’” (cf. Luján & Ruiz, forthcoming).

It is a very difficult task to find the most accurate and proper criterion to identify different semantic roles. Following Haspelmath (2003: 217), Luján & Ruiz (forthcoming) state that “[n]o different semantic role should be distinguished unless there is at least one dedicated word formation pattern in a language that is used for a given semantic role but not for other”.

¹ “A semantic map is a geometrical representation of functions in ‘conceptual/semantic space’ that are linked by connecting lines and thus constitute a network. The configuration of functions shown by the map is claimed to be universal” (Haspelmath 2003: 213).

2. Agents and Instruments

In this paper I focus my analysis on suffixes related to the two most prototypical casual semantic roles: Agent and Instrument. On that account, it is necessary to define the features that make the difference between them.

In their classical work, Comrie and Thompson (1985: 351–353) associate *Agentive nominalisation* with nouns meaning “one which ‘verbs’”, as in English *sing* → *singer*, and *Instrumental nominalisation* with nouns meaning “an instrument for ‘verbing’”, as in Wappo, a Californian Native American language, where *kač* ‘to plough (v)’ → *kačema* ‘for the purpose of ploughing = plough (n)’.

Arguing in the same vein, Luján (2010: 164) states that “Agents are prototypically animates, especially humans, and are characterized by control and intentionality over the action that they perform”². On the contrary, “Instruments are prototypically inanimate and can be controlled”.

Moreover, Luján (2010) and Luján & Ruiz (forthcoming) propose three more related semantic roles in word formation:

Force – inanimate entities having “control over the action” but not “intentionality” such as emotions or natural forces; for instance, old Greek *kheimōn* ‘wintry, stormy weather’ (Luján 2010: 164–165).

Means – “Compared to Instrument, Means denotes a somewhat less manipulated and controlled entity” (Luraghi 2003: 35), such as the Ancient Greek *kómistrōn* ‘reward for a messenger’, derived from *komízō* ‘carry’ by means of the Greek suffix *-tro-*, or Latin *piāculum* ‘expiatory offering or rite’, derived from *piāre* ‘expiate’ (Luján 2010: 167).

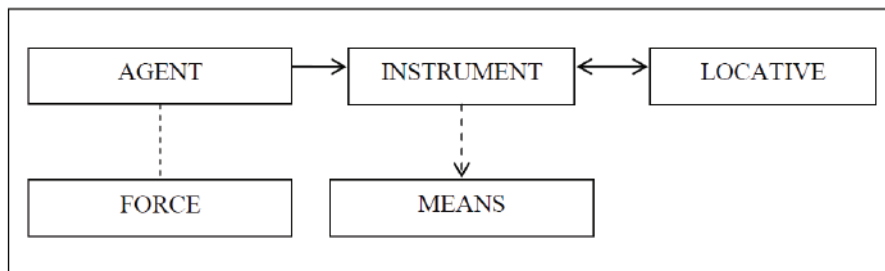
Location or Locative – the place where the action expressed by the verb takes place.³

Luján (2010: 169) summarises the conclusions of his analysis of the semantic roles in word formation by means of a semantic map (Figure 2). The continuous lines express the relationship among the semantic roles, in the sense that a given suffix cannot express Agent and Locative if it does not express Instrument as well. On the other hand, the dotted lines suggest that the semantic roles Force and Means are not separate roles since “no word formation pattern is exclusive to them”. Lastly, the arrows indicate the processes of diachronic change.

² By definition, this *Agentive nominalisation* (‘nomina agentis’ or ‘jména činitelská’ in Czech terminology) exclusively derives nouns from verbal roots. Given that in this paper only deverbal word formation is analysed, a very frequent group of *agentive* derivate nouns – ‘nomina actionis’ or ‘jména konatelská’ – will not be taken into account, since this group of nouns is not derived from verbs but from nouns (such as *houslař* ‘violin maker’, from *housle* ‘violin’).

³ There are other related semantic roles as Intermediaries, i.e. “prototypically animates, especially humans, but are controlled by an Agent” (Luján 2010: 164).

Fig. 2: *Diachronic semantic map of Agents, Instruments, and related semantic roles in word formation (Luján 2010: 169)*



Now the question arises of whether these semantic relationships are valid for the topic of my research – the old Czech deverbal word formation system.

3. Word formation in old Czech

None of the *classical* works on Czech historical grammar and morphology (Gebauer 1896/1960; Vázný 1964; Lamprecht et al. 1977) takes into account the semantic evolution of Czech suffixal word formation.

The two volumes of *Tvoření slov v češtině* by Dokulil (1962) and Daneš et al. (1967) are probably the most significant work on Czech word formation; unfortunately, the authors mainly study the synchronic state of Czech.⁴ From the dozens of suffixes presented in the chapters in which Daneš et al. (1967) describe the Czech suffixes related to *nouns of agents* (pp. 13–124) and *nouns of instruments* (pp. 171–265), I will only deal with six of the most relevant Czech deverbal derivational suffixes: *-ař/-ář* (Proto-Slavic *-arb*), *-tel* (*-telb*), *-ník* (*-bnikb*), *-č* (*-bcb*), *-dlo* (*-lo*), and *-nice* (*-bnica*). Although all six suffixes can express – at least in contemporary Czech and according to Daneš et al. (1967) – both semantic roles, Agent and Instrument, three of them are supposed to be more specialised in Agents (*-ař/-ář*, *-tel*, *-ník*) and three in Instruments (*-č*, *-dlo*, *-nice*).

There are three other works dealing with the historical development of the Czech nominal system that I would like to mention here. Two of them, written by Němec (1968; 1980), are basic readings for any research on the semantic evolution of Czech nouns. Nevertheless, for the specific topic of the analysis presented here, particular account should be taken of an article by Šlosar (1982) called “Vývoj deverbálních substantiv s konkrétním významem v češtině” (‘Evolution of deverbal nouns with a specific meaning in Czech’). In his article, Šlosar studies

⁴ However, in their English summary, Daneš et al. (1967: 739) admit: “the authors tried not to conceal the dynamism of the language system, and to do justice of the productiveness of individual word-formative means and types, to determine their directions [...] and their chances in their strife with rivaling, synonymous means”.

the historical development – from Proto-Slavic to new Czech – of the semantics of nominal word formation (agents, instruments, results of an action, deverbal toponyms, etc.), as well as the suffixes that can be diachronically associated with these semantics.

In order to observe the semantic polysemy or multifunctionality in the old Czech suffixal system, I have analysed the semantic roles associated with these six suffixes in two texts belonging to the earliest stage of the development of the written Czech culture. The first one is the *Chronicle of Dalimil* (*Dalimilova Kronika*), the most significant work from the oldest period of Czech literature (cf. Daňhelka et al. (1988a: 8); Šťastný (1991: 7)), and, particularly, the Vienna Manuscript, which dates back to the end of the 14th century and was edited and published by Daňhelka et al. (1988a, 1988b). The second work is a Latin-Czech glossary, the so-called *Bohemář tzv. Větší*, written in 1395 by Klaret and accessible at Vokabulář webový (<http://vokabular.ujc.cas.cz/>) created by the Department of Language Development (Institute of the Czech Language of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic).

In Table 1 we can observe the results for the first two Agent suffixes, namely *-ař/-ář* and *-tel*.

Tab. 1: Semantic roles of the suffixes *-ař/-ář* and *-tel* in the *Chronicle of Dalimil* and the *Bohemář tzv. větší*.

Noun	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
pekař	baker	<i>-ař/-ář</i>	Agent	<i>péci</i>	bake
tesař	carpenter	<i>-ař/-ář</i>	Agent	<i>tesati</i>	hew
vládař	administrator	<i>-ař/-ář</i>	Agent	<i>vládnúti</i>	have someone in one's power
kovář	smith	<i>-ař/-ář</i>	Agent	<i>kovati</i>	forge
písař	scribe	<i>-ař/-ář</i>	Agent	<i>pisati</i>	write
krstítel	Baptist	<i>-tel</i>	Agent	<i>křtítí</i>	baptise
stvořitel	creator	<i>-tel</i>	Agent	<i>stvořiti</i>	create

Although the number of deverbal nouns with these two suffixes occurring in the corpus is relatively low, it shows a clear tendency to express the highest rank of agentivity. The outcomes regarding *-tel* are not unexpected, given that Šlosar (1982: 131–132) states that this is a very frequent suffix in old Czech when used to form nouns from verbs expressing activity, especially intellectual activity. On the other hand, the high number of agentive nouns formed with *-ař/-ář* documented in the corpus is quite surprising in view of the fact that Šlosar (1982: 133) asserts that the Agentive semantics of this suffix is “okrajový” (‘marginal’) and that for this oldest period there is evidence of less than twenty nouns of this kind.

Unlike *-tel* and *-ař/-ář*, the old Czech suffix *-ník* (see Table 2) is able to play various semantic roles.

Tab. 2: Semantic roles of the suffix *-ník* in the *Chronicle of Dalimil* and the *Bohemář tzv. větší*.

	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
krmník	(pig) sty	<i>-ník</i>	Location	krmiti	feed
pomocník	helper/assistant	<i>-ník</i>	Agent	pomoci	help
postavník	candle	<i>-ník</i>	Instrument	postaviti	demonstrate/ present
přivozník	boatman	<i>-ník</i>	Agent	převoditi	transfer
řečník	intercessor/ advocate	<i>-ník</i>	Agent	řečiti	say
řezník	butcher	<i>-ník</i>	Agent	řezati	cut
sledník	tracker (dog)	<i>-ník</i>	Intermediary	slídití	trace
svalník	a sort of healing herb	<i>-ník</i>	Instrument	svaliti	roll down
zájemník	cattle thief	<i>-ník</i>	Agent	zajieti	take
zvonník	bell ringer	<i>-ník</i>	Agent	zvoniti	ring a bell

In this particular case, six out of the ten nouns express the semantic role Agent. Both Location, with one occurrence, and Instrument, with two, seem to be rather peripheral meanings. The word *sledník* ‘tracker (dog)’ should be understood, in my opinion, rather as Intermediary than as Agent, since the dog tracks according to the wishes of his master (+ animate, + manipulability, – control).

If we now focus on the suffixes primarily related to Instrument, *-č* shares the semantic roles Agent and Instrument but, unlike *-ník*, not Location (see Table 3).

Tab. 3: Semantic roles of the suffix *-č* in the *Chronicle of Dalimil* and the *Bohemář tzv. větší*.

Noun	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
bič	whip	<i>-č</i>	Instrument	bíti	beat
bukač	bittern (a sort of aquatic bird)	<i>-č</i>	Agent	búkati	hoot
holič	barber	<i>-č</i>	Agent	holiti	shave
kopáč	digger	<i>-č</i>	Agent	kopati	dig
lepač	potter	<i>-č</i>	Agent	lépati	glue together
násěč	sort of axe	<i>-č</i>	Instrument	nasieci	cut
opálač	one who win- nows (grain)	<i>-č</i>	Agent	opálati	winnow (grain)
opichač	one who grinds or crushes in a mill	<i>-č</i>	Agent	opíchatí	beat
oráč	ploughman	<i>-č</i>	Agent	orati	plough
osladič	common polypo- dy (a plant)	<i>-č</i>	Varia	osladiti	sweeten
pohonič	oxherd, cowboy	<i>-č</i>	Agent	pohoniti	order, drive up
potahač	a sort of grooved plane	<i>-č</i>	Instrument	potahovati	take out/pull out
rozsěvač	sower	<i>-č</i>	Instrument	rozsěvati	sow
rýč	sort of spade	<i>-č</i>	Instrument	rýti	dig sth with a spade

Noun	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
skladač	poet	-č	Agent	skládati	compose
střihač	barber	-č	Agent	stříci	cut
trubač	trumpet player	-č	Agent	trúbiti	blow, play
vazač	one who bandages	-č	Agent	vázati	bandage

Although Daneš et al. (1967: 196) define the suffix *-č* as one of the most productive suffixes for forming the names of instruments, the majority of the nouns ending in *-č* are Agents (12 out of 18). According to Šlosar (1982: 132), this predominance of the semantic role Agent should not be unexpected because *-č* is supposed to be the most frequent suffix used for creating old Czech agentive nouns. Nevertheless, the fact that there are five nouns with the semantic role Instrument seems to be in disagreement with Šlosar's statement that only in middle Czech do the suffixes *-č* and *-ec* “začínají mimoto sloužit i k derivaci názvů prostředků činnosti” (‘also start to be used for deriving designations of the instruments of an action’; Šlosar, 1982: 132)

On the other hand, and unlike the other name of a plant documented in the corpus (*svalník* ‘a sort of healing herb’, see Table 2), I have categorised *osladič* ‘common polypody’ as *Varia*⁵ instead of Instrument, since this noun does not denote a plant used primarily to sweeten, but one used for medicinal purposes.

The suffix *-dlo* turned out to be the most productive in the corpus, with 19 nouns (see Table 4).

Table 4: Semantic roles of the suffix *-dlo* in the *Chronicle of Dalimil* and the *Bohemář tzv. větší*.

Noun	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
bidlo	pole	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	bíti	beat
bydlo	dwelling	<i>-dlo</i>	Location	býti	be
črnidlo	ink	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	črniti	make black
kadidlo	incense	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	kaditi	burn incense
ličidlo	make-up	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	ličiti	make up
močidlo	swamp	<i>-dlo</i>	Location	močiti	make wet
mýdlo	soap	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	mýti	clean
osidlo	loop	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	osidlati (sidlo)	catch with a loop
prostěradlo	a sort of cloth	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	prostřieti	spread, extend
rádlo	plough	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	orati	plough
rozpínadlo	weaver's tool for stretching canvas	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	rozpínati	expand
strašidlo	bogeyman/spectre	<i>-dlo</i>	Force	strašiti	scare
šidlo	bradawl	<i>-dlo</i>	Instrument	šiti	sew

⁵ Following Luján & Ruiz (forthcoming), I have labelled “marginal, unpredictable meanings” *Varia*.

Noun	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
trdlo	threshing sledge	- <i>dlo</i>	Instrument	třítí	rub
tvořidlo	mould for making cheese	- <i>dlo</i>	Instrument	tvořítí	constitute, create
udidlo	part of bridle	- <i>dlo</i>	Instrument	* <i>Q-děti</i>	insert, put
vratidlo	capstan	- <i>dlo</i>	Instrument	vrťetí	wag
zrcadlo	mirror	- <i>dlo</i>	Instrument	* <i>zъrkati/zъrcati</i>	look, gaze
žahadlo	sting	- <i>dlo</i>	Instrument	žáhati, žehati	sting

Although Daneš et al. (1967: 750) propose at least one example of Agent with *-dlo* – namely the noun *kroutidlo*, used for a woman who moves coquettishly⁶ (< *kroutit* ‘twist, turn’) –, we are clearly dealing here with a suffix limited to denoting Locations and Instruments; in the case of the corpus analysed here, the semantic role Instrument clearly exceeds Location by 16 to 2, which is in accordance with Šlosar’s article (1982). Except for *kroutidlo*, I am not aware of many nouns ending in *-dlo* expressing Agent; there are some non-systematised, metaphorical shifts, such as *bídllo* ‘pole’, used to denote a tall, thin person, or *trdlo* ‘threshing sledge’, which refers to a clumsy, stupid person. Nevertheless, the use of *-dlo* as Agent has to be out of the ordinary because, unlike the other five suffixes we are dealing with in this article, it is a neuter gender suffix.

That is the reason why we are surprised by the word *strašidlo* ‘bogeyman/spectre’, because of the fact that it expresses, without any doubt, some sort of agentivity and could even be interpreted as intentional. To some extent, *strašidlo* is similar to an example documented in Ancient Greek – *phóbētra* (pl.) ‘terrors, things that terrify’ (< *phobēō* ‘terrify’), labelled Force by Luján & Ruiz (forthcoming). Nevertheless, *phóbētra* deals rather with “things” and *strašidlo* with some kind of “creature”.

I think that the most logical solution is to treat *strašidlo* as Force. According to Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 121), Forces are inanimate effectors⁷, which “can act and move independently, and they are not under the control of another effector, animate or inanimate; in other words, they can serve as the instigators of an action, event or process”. This reading presents an important typological problem, though: following Luján (2010) (see Figure 2), one should not expect a suffix expressing Instrument and Force without at the same time denoting the semantic role Agent. Nevertheless, the Greek suffix *-tron*, which is mainly linked to the semantic role Instrument, is not related to the Agent meaning either.

I propose another hypothesis that could explain the existence of this unusual noun. Spectres are generally associated with the places where they “terrify”, which can be observed in expressions such as “haunted house”. On that account, we could understand *strašidlo* as the result of a semantic shift: the noun would no

⁶ Cf. *Příruční slovník jazyka českého*.

⁷ Unlike Agent, which is a “willful, purposeful instigator of an action or event”, Effector is “the doer of an action, which may or may not be willful or purposeful” (Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 85)).

longer express the place where something terrifying takes place but the creature that terrifies in the given place.

Šlosar (1982: 135) also takes this specific noun into account in his study. According to him, *strašidlo* would be an old Czech formation (i.e. not inherited from Proto-Slavic) with an unusual meaning: neither Instrument nor Location, but an action noun (*dějové jméno* or *nomen actionis*): in other words, a deverbal noun that refers to an action or event without any other semantic nuance, a synonym for the New Czech *strašení*. Šlosar (1982: 136) concludes that in the beginning the Czech suffix *-dlo* probably had a general meaning: “konkrétní neživotná substance související s dějem” (‘a specific inanimate substance connected with the action’). However, I have to say that Šlosar’s argument is somewhat unconvincing, as a result of the fact that in the corpus *strašidlo* does not correspond to a “general” action noun, such as *strašení*, but to a specific “scaring” entity.

Next, let us consider the sixth and last of the suffixes analysed in this article: *-nice*. It was documented just twice in the corpus. Although Daneš et al. (1967: 250) state that this suffix can express the meaning Instrument, both nouns occurring in the corpus are related to the semantic role Location (see Table 5)⁸.

Tab. 5: Semantic roles of the suffix *-nice* in the *Chronicle of Dalimil* and the *Bohemář tzv. větší*.

Noun	Translation	Suffix	Semantic Role	Verbal Base	Translation
střělnice	embrasure, bastion	<i>-nice</i>	Location	střeliti	shoot
zvonnice	bell tower	<i>-nice</i>	Location	zvoniti (zvon)	ring a bell

4. Conclusion

In this article, and always arguing in the vein of Luján (2010) and Luján & Ruiz Abad (forthcoming), I have applied to old Czech nominal word formation patterns the kind of semantic analysis that has been employed with grammatical morphemes in functional-typological research.

From the research that has been carried out – the analysis of 56 nouns formed by means of six (old) Czech deverbal suffixes – we can conclude that, in general, there are not many unexpected phenomena. Three of them represent just one semantic role: *-ař/-ář* and *-tel* Agent; *-nice* Location. On the other hand, the majority of the nouns ending in *-ník* (6) are Agents. Nevertheless, in the corpus there is one Location, two Instruments, and one Intermediary ending in *-ník*. The suffix *-č* primarily forms the names of Agents (12) and Instruments (5). The last of the suffixes analysed here *-dlo* can definitely be related to Instruments (16); however, two Locations and one Force ending in *-dlo* occur in the corpus.

Even though we are dealing in this paper with a relatively low number of old Czech nouns, some typological considerations can be made. Except for *strašidlo*

⁸ Šlosar (1982: 136) asserts that in Old Czech *-nice* is very rarely used for creating Instrumentals.

‘bogeyman/spectre’ and one unpredictable meaning labelled *Varia*, all the nouns seem to respect the typological tendencies proposed by Luján (2010) and shown in Figure 2, i.e. none of the given old Czech suffixes expresses the semantic roles Agent and Locative if it does not express Instrument at the same time.

Finally, I refuse to classify *strašidlo* as *Varia*. I opted to apply to *strašidlo* the semantic role Force and, as a consequence of this – and since this is not an isolated example (cf. Ancient Greek *phóbētra* in Luján & Ruiz (forthcoming)) – to raise the question of the real configuration of the semantic role Force: Should not Force be defined rather as a transitional step between Agent and Instrument? In order to give a really thorough answer to this question, further research on the semantic roles associated with Czech nominal word formation will be needed.

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