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Copular Verbs *Sound* and *Look* and their Czech Counterparts



Markéta Malá

Abstract

Both in Czech and in English copular clauses, i.e. clauses with a verbo-nominal predicate comprising a copular verb and a subject complement, are used to ascribe a quality, property or value to the subject. While both languages make use of copular verbs *be* and *become* (*být*, *stát se*, respectively, in Czech), the repertoire of copular verbs is much broader in English, making it possible to distinguish between various types of attribution (e.g. verbs of 'seeming', verbs of 'remaining' etc.). In the present paper we shall focus on two copular verbs, *sound* and *look*, which primarily serve to express 'attribution based on perception through the senses'. Since these copulas have no direct Czech counterparts, the question arises of what means are employed in Czech to express such 'modified attribution' and, on the other hand, what the constructions used in Czech can suggest of the meaning of the respective copular verbs in English.

1 COPULAR VERBS AND LOW SYNTACTIC CONSTANCY

Inspired by Professor Dušková's observation that "the subject complement [...] appears to be the least constant syntactic element especially in the English-Czech direction" (2005: 3), the present paper sets out to explore the Czech counterparts of two English verbs which take a subject complement – the verbs *sound* and *look* in their copular function. These current copulas, which express attribution mediated by the senses of hearing and eyesight, have no direct copular counterparts in the Czech language. English copular verbs were shown to correspond frequently to Czech lexical verbs, accounting for a high degree of syntactic nonconstancy of the subject complement (Dušková, 2005: 17). Focussing merely on two copular verbs, we would like to trace also other translation correspondences, which may be related to the specific modification achieved by the 'perceptual' copulas.

The paper is based on the material drawn from a parallel translation corpus of English and Czech fiction texts. We hope it will therefore illustrate also some ways in which multilingual corpora can be employed in contrastive research.

2 THE MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material was excerpted from a parallel English – Czech corpus being built as a part of a larger project of multilingual corpora InterCorp.¹ Four hundred copular clauses were drawn from English original fiction texts, two hundred with the copula *look* as the predicate verb and two hundred with

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¹ The study is a part of the research project *Czech National Corpus and Corpora of Other Languages* MSM 0021620823, InterCorp, <http://www.korpus.cz/intercorp>

sound,² and analysed with respect to the Czech correspondences of the copular verbs. Occurring 0.74 times per one thousand words, the copula *look* is the more frequent of the two; the frequency of *sound* was 0.11 per one thousand words. Since we were not interested primarily in the correspondences of the subject complement, no distinction was made between the various formal realizations of this clause element – both phrasal and clausal realizations were included. The queries were based on lexemes. It may be noted here that both copulas were also attested in the progressive forms – *sound* in two examples, *look* in eleven. The progressive form, however, did not seem to have a systematic influence on the choice of the translation counterpart. Both finite and non-finite copular clauses were considered (cf. zero correspondence below). *Look* displays a preference for animate subjects (124), while *sound* occurred with an animate subject in seventy-six examples. The animateness of the subject may result in non-correspondence or partial correspondence of the subject between English and Czech (particularly in the case of *sound*),³ nevertheless, it does not appear to influence the choice of the counterpart of the copular verb to a significant extent.

3 THE CZECH CORRESPONDENCES OF *LOOK* AND *SOUND*

3.1 Zero correspondence

Let us first discuss those instances in which no direct counterpart of the English copular verb could be identified in the

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 2 The tagging of the corpus does not distinguish between copular and full lexical uses of verbs. The sorting was performed manually.

3 The *sound*-copular clauses with animate subjects are often translated by Czech clauses whose subject is *hlas* or anaphoric *to*: “*The forest?*” he repeated, and *he didn't sound quite as cool as usual*. – “*Do lesa?*” opakoval, a jeho *hlas* nezněł tak chladně jako jindy. (Rowling), *He sounded meek and scared*. – *Znělo to pokorně a vystrašeně*. (Grisham)

Czech translation. These comprise pairs where the correspondence of meaning was preserved in translation,⁴ but the translator opted for an alternative construction, dispensing with a direct counterpart of the copular verb.

The zero correspondence occurs especially in two types of *sound*-copular clauses: participial adverbial clauses of manner (ex. 1), and postmodifying relative clauses (ex. 2). In the former type, the copula *sound* seems to be redundant, referring back to the verb of speaking (*said*) in the superordinate clause. The translation renders the copular clause as an adverbial corresponding to the subject complement. So does the copular clause appear redundant in the latter type – and indeed in the translation the postmodifying clause is replaced by a postmodifying prepositional phrase corresponding to the subject complement.

Nevertheless, dispensing with the copular verb brings about a higher degree of certainty in presenting the statement. In both types of clauses the copula *sound* makes it possible to view the communication from a different perspective, viz. that of the listener. It is through the copular verb that the listener reports on his impression and evaluates the communication. There is nothing in the general verb of speaking *said* in ex. 1 to suggest Professor McGonagall's exasperation or admiration, and the evaluator remains implicit in the Czech translation. In a similar way, the English copula in ex. 2 suggests that the interpretation of *something* is based on what the listener has inferred when hearing the words – again this ‘interpretative’ aspect is missing in the Czech translation.

(1) “I know you haven't,” said Professor McGonagall, *sounding half exasperated, half admiring*. (Rowling)

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 4 The rare instances where the English copular clause had no counterpart in the Czech translation were disregarded in the excerption.

“Já vím, že vy ho nemáte,” řekla profesorka McGonagallová napůl podrážděně, napůl s obdivem.

- (2) The latter poked the fire again and said something under his breath *which sounded like: ‘Unpatriotic trash’*. (Ishiguro)
Druhý opět prohrábl popel a zamumlal pro sebe cosi o “vlastizrádném svinstvu”.

There occurred also non-systematic and idiomatic zero correspondences, such as ex. 3.

- (3) “Sounds good to me, too.” (Brown)
“Taky si dám.”

Among the zero correspondences of *look* two types can also be distinguished, which appear to be parallel to those described above. The first type comprises adverbial participial copular clauses specifying the manner or circumstances (ex. 4).⁵ The Czech counterparts dispense with the copular verb, the modification being conveyed merely by a clause element corresponding semantically to the English nominal part of the predicate. Again, the explicit reference to the source of evaluation (i.e. the speaker’s visual perception) is missing in the translation. The Czech counterparts of the latter type (ex. 5), i.e. noun phrases, lack the indeterminateness and the observer’s point of view conveyed by the copular verb in the English relative nominal clause.

- (4) Hagrid greeted them, *looking flushed and excited*. (Rowling)
Hagrid je uvítal celý rozpálený a vzrušený.

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5 There does not appear to be any preference for a specific verb in the superordinate clause.

- (5) ... one factory yard went by after another, untidily stacked with broken timber, old sheets of corrugated metal, and often *what looked to be plain rubble*. (Ishiguro)

Jeden tovární dvůr za druhým a všude jen hromady polámaných prken a trámů, zrezivělé pláty vlnitého plechu a často pouhé hromady sutin.

3.2 Overt counterparts

The overt correspondences of the copular verbs *sound* and *look* comprise Czech verbs, verbo-nominal constructions and adverbials.

	total	zero		verbal				verbo-nominal		adverbial			
				copular		lexical				epistemic		other	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
sound	200	8	4.0	9	4.5	164	82.0	10	5.0	3	1.5	6	3.0
look	200	10	5.0	6	3.0	171	85.5	3	1.5	10	5.0	0	0.0

Table 1: Czech correspondences of the copular verbs *sound* and *look*

3.2.1 Copular verbs

Being copulas, *sound* and *look* may be expected to correspond to the Czech copular verbs – this, however, does not seem to be the case. As shown in Table 1, the copular verb *být* represents merely 4.5 and 3 percent of correspondences of *sound* and *look*, respectively (ex. 6). We can also include among these ex. 7, where the evaluation through the sense of hearing is indicated not by the copular verb but by the Czech nominal part of the predicate, the English subject complement corresponding to the adjectival modifier within the Czech nominal part of the predicate.

- (6) “I told you it *sounded* banal.” (Brown)
“Říkala jsem ti, že *je* to banální.”

- (7) My god you *sound* self-pitying. (Franzen)
 Panebože, to *jsou* sebelítostný *pindy*.

Not only are the copular counterparts rare but they often co-occur with a lexical verb in Czech (ex 8).

- (8) He *looked* simply too big to be allowed, and so wild
 (Rowling)
Byl prostě takový hromotluk, že se to ani nepatřilo, a *působil*
 divoce ...

Both *sound* and *look* “add meaning to the predicate phrases in which they are contained. This semantic function, while not directly affecting the inner core of the predicate phrase, that is, its lexical nucleus, by altering the intrinsic semantic content of the latter, consist in ‘importing’ [...] meaning components into the predicate phrase.” (Pustet, 2005 [2003]: 5–6). It is this meaning modification which leads to the marked preference for a lexical counterpart in Czech, be it a lexical verb, a verb-nominal construction or an adverbial. The Czech counterparts may, in turn, make the ‘meaning components’ conveyed be the copular verbs more explicit.

3.2.2 Adverbials

Adverbials corresponding to the English copular verbs express manner, respect or epistemic modification. In ex. 9, which resembles ex. 1 above in specifying the manner of speaking, *sound* is, in fact, redundant (its meaning being conveyed by the verb of speaking *answered*). The same tautology is retained in Czech, viz. *odpověděl* [...] *hlasem*.

- (9) The same distance to the west, Rome *answered*, *sounding* *suspiciously* *sleepy*. (Clarke)

Ze stejné vzdálenosti na západ *odpověděl* Řím, podezřele *ospalým hlasem*.

In ex. 9 above the copular verb *sound* makes it possible to view, and interpret, the communication from the listener’s point of view. In a similar manner, the Czech adverbial counterparts can make it explicit that a quality, property or value is ascribed to the subject on the basis of perception through the senses of hearing (the judgement may be based on the subject’s speaking or on a report on the subject – exx. 10 and 11, respectively) or eyesight (ex. 12). The adverbial *očividně* (*obviously*) in ex. 12 may be understood as explicit reference to visual perception. However, it should be pointed out that this adverbial can serve also as the counterpart of another copular verb – *seem* – conveying a degree of certainty, i.e. epistemic modification (ex. 13).

- (10) He *sounded* a little scared. (Day)
Podle hlasu poznala, že má trochu nahnáno.
 (11) He *sounds* an admirable gentleman. (Ishiguro)
Podle toho, co jste o něm říkal, je to velmi obdivuhodný pán.
 (12) For a second, my daughter *looked* at a loss. (Ishiguro)
 Moje dcera chvíli *očividně* váhala, co odpovědět.
 (13) Rennie didn’t *seem* too pleased with him for sharing that.
 (Brown)
 Rennie *očividně* neměla velkou radost, že o tom nepomlčel.

Example 12 may thus be seen as a borderline case of meaning modification. Other adverbial counterparts convey epistemic modification more clearly.⁶ Adverbial counterparts of

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 6 Epistemic modification may also be conveyed by a modal verb (plus *be*), as shown, e.g., by *She sounds like a wonderful woman*. – *Musela být úžasná*. (Steele). This example, however, is not a part of the set analysed in the present paper.

this type are shared by both copular verbs discussed here (exx. 14, 15).

- (14) Hermione *looked* convinced, but Ron didn't. (Rowling)
Hermionu *zřejmě* přesvědčil, Rona však ne.
- (15) I've been asking around, and I hope I'm in Gryffindor, it *sounds*
by far the best ... (Rowling)
Vyptávala jsem se na to a doufám, že se dostanu do Nebelvíru;
ten je *zřejmě* ze všech nejlepší ...

3.2.3 Lexical verbs and verbo-nominal constructions

Lexical verbs constitute the largest group of counterparts of both *sound* and *look*. The repertoire of verbs used, however, is quite narrow. The most frequent lexical verb counterpart of *sound* is *za/znít* (77 instances, i.e. 38.5 percent of all correspondences of *sound*), *look* is most frequently (in 62.6 percent of all its counterparts) translated as *vypadat*. Both these verbal counterparts refer explicitly to communication mediated by the senses – the focus is on the perception of the sound or evaluation of the visual impression. On the other hand, both copulas can have lexical counterparts which shift the attention to the production side of the communication – *říkat*, *promlouvat*, *mluvit*, *odpovědět*, *dívat se*, *koukat*, – but these are represented marginally in comparison with the ‘perception’ verbs, including e.g. *poznat*, *vyhlížet*, *působit*, *vyjadřovat*, *vyzařovat*, *mít pocit*, *působit dojemem*. The perception is rarely neutral: it is linked with evaluation and epistemic modification. The speaker often uses comparison as a means of evaluation, expressing the quality tentatively, e.g. *jevit se*, *považovat za*, *připomínat*, *připadat jako*, *podobat se*. The ‘evaluative perception’ does not appear to be tied to a particular physical sense, as can be seen from the fact that some of the counterparts of the two copulas overlap. The dominant feature seems to be expressing a degree of certainty in one’s evaluation.

3.2.4 Overlapping correspondences

We have already mentioned the fact that *sound* and *look* share epistemic adverbial counterparts (*zřejmě* – exx. 14 and 15 above, *jako by/kdyby*) and that the same applies to verbal counterparts expressing a degree of certainty in subjective evaluation (*podobat se*, *připadat*, *připomínat*, *vypadat*, *zdát se*, exx. 16–20). The epistemic modification is apparent also in the verbo-nominal counterpart shared by both copulas, viz. *působit dojemem* (ex. 21).

- (16) a. Dudley *looked* a lot like Uncle Vernon. (Rowling)
Dudley *se* velice *podobal* strýci Vernonovi.
b. *Sounds* like a bunch of lawyers. (Grisham)
To *se* bandě právníků *podobá*.
- (17) a. Everything *looked* so strange, somehow. (Rowling)
... všechno mu *připadalo* jaksi podivné.
b. These may *sound* unnecessarily vindictive words for a teacher to use to a pupil whose admiration he knows he still commands. (Ishiguro)
Od učitele, který ví, jak ho žák dosud bezmezně obdivuje, vám to může *připadat* přehnaně kruté.
- (18) a. One book had a dark stain on it that *looked* horribly like blood. (Rowling)
... na jedné z nich byla tmavá skvrna, která hrůzně *připomínala* krev.
b. The crickets outside *sounded* like water running interminably in pipes. (Franzen)
Cvrčení cvrčků za oknem *připomínalo* vodu neúnavně běžící potrubím.
- (19) a. And you *looked* so healthy when you first arrived. (Ishiguro)
A když jsi přišel, *vypadals* tak zdravě.

- b. This project *sounds* phenomenal. (Franzen)
Ten nápad *vypadá* fenomenálně.

- (20) a. Hermione *looked* ready to fling her arms around him again,
... (Rowling)
Zdálo se, že Hermiona by ho nejraději znovu objala, ...
b. “What, they don’t move at all?” Ron *sounded* amazed.
(Rowling)
“A to se ani nepohnou?” *zdálo se*, že Rona to překvapilo.

- (21) a. ... the plush of its chest and belly *looked* ready to burst
the fabric buttons that crisscrossed it. (Frantzen)
Napjatý plyš na čalouněné hrudi a bříše sedačky *působil*
dojmem, že každou chvíli pukne a odcvrnkne látkové
knoflíky,
jimiž byl přepásán.
b. Portleigh had *sounded* harried in the extreme. (Frantzen)
Portleigh *působil* *dojmem*, že má mimořádně naspěch.

4 SOUND, LOOK AND OTHER CONSTRUCTIONS SHARING THE SAME TRANSLATION CORRESPONDENCES

The functions shared by the copular verbs *sound* and *look* may stand out as more prominent when we compare the copulas with other constructions with which they share the same translation counterparts.⁷ Let us consider from this point of view

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7 A smaller subcorpus, comprising five English novels and their Czech translations, was used to find out which English constructions were translated by the same means as the copular verbs *sound* and *look*. The starting point were the Czech translations, which were searched for the occurrences of *zřejmě*, *připadat*, *zdát se*, *působil* *dojmem* (the verb queries were formulated as lexeme queries). The English constructions corresponding to these query terms are given in Table 2.

the adverb *zřejmě*, the verbo-nominal construction *působil* *dojmem*, and the lexical verbs *připadat* and *zdát se*. While the frequency patterns of correspondence differ (Table 2), the types of counterparts are similar, making it possible to identify the functions shared by all these expressions – the English constructions translated by the same Czech expressions can be expected to be functionally equivalent.

	total	zero	adv.	adj./ noun	modal verb	copular verb	lexical verb			com. clause
							SVOCo	SVOCs	other	
<i>zřejmě</i>	152	22	49	2	21	45	0	0	10	3
<i>připadat</i>	187	21	2	1	1	105	22	18	12	5
<i>zdát se</i>	211	16	3	1	3	166	3	1	18	0
<i>působil</i> <i>dojmem</i>	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9	0
total	560	59	54	4	25	317	25	19	40	8
percent	100.0	10.5	9.6	0.7	4.5	56.6	4.5	3.4	7.1	1.4

Table 2: English correspondences of *zřejmě*, *připadat*, *zdát se*, *působil* *dojmem* (in English original texts)

The Czech counterparts shared by *sound* and *look* – *zřejmě*, *připadat*, *zdát se*, *působil* *dojmem* – are used frequently also as translation counterparts of other copular verbs, which may suggest a sub-grouping of copular verbs based on the meaning modification achieved by the copulas. Apart from *sound* (10) and *look* (14), the copular verbs attested in the correspondences comprise *seem* (221), *appear* (38), *feel* (28), *be* (4), *become* (1), and *prove* (1). The dominant position of *seem* and *appear* may suggest that *sound* and *look* are indeed used as means of conveying epistemic bias; *feel*, although less prominent, indicates the perceptual aspect of ascribing a quality or characteristics to the subject.

Lexical verbs which were translated by the same means as *sound* and *look* can be divided into three groups. The first is represented

by complex transitive verbs *find*,⁸ *see*, *think* (ex. 22). The copular relation of ascribing a quality obtains not between the subject and the subject complement but between the object and object complement. Secondly, in 19 pairs *připadat* and *zdát se* were counterparts of the verb *strike ... as* (ex. 23), a prepositional verb with a subject complement (Quirk et al., 1985: 1199–1200). The third group involves verbs whose lexical meaning suggests considering or thinking – *imagine*, *think*, *believe*, *suspect*, etc. These verbs also form the predicates of parenthetical ‘comment clauses’, which were translated using the adverbial *zřejmě* and the verb *připadat* (ex. 24). The adverbial counterparts (*seemingly*, *apparently*, *evidently*, *obviously*, *perhaps*, *clearly*, *probably*) also indicate epistemic modification, and so do the modal verbs (ex. 25).

(22) She'd always *thought* it strange that her father *found* it so natural to be naked in front of her. (Irving)

Vždycky jí *připadalo* zvláštní, že se otci *zdá* tak přirozené před ní chodit nahý.

(23) ... yet Harry had *struck* her *as* much younger. (Irving)

Přesto jí Harry *připadal* mnohem mladší.

(24) This, *he supposed*, was the crash, though he couldn't imagine where all the green light came from. (Rowling)

To *zřejmě* byla ta havárie, i když si neuměl představit, odkud se všechno to zelené světlo vzalo.

(25) Hagrid *must* have forgotten to tell him something you had to do, ... (Rowling)

Hagrid mu *zřejmě* zapomněl říct něco, co má udělat, ...

.....
8 Poldauf mentions the complex transitive construction with *find* and *see* in connection with “introductory signals” of emotional evaluation in English. The construction was shown to convey “personal impression”: “that is a construction predicating about an impression the content of which is given by the subordinate or dependent unit, though actually it is more this content that is in the speaker's view than the fact of it being a mere impression.” (Poldauf, 1964: 249–250)

5 THE DATIVE

The epistemic modification conveyed by the copular verbs of perception and ‘seeming’ may be explicitly related to the observer or experiencer: “[...] the sense verbs and verbs of seeming license a *to*-phrase where the oblique NP expresses the experiencer” (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 263). Johansson points out that the meaning of the copula *seem* can therefore be defined as: “somebody or something gives the experiencer the impression of being something or doing something” (Johansson, 2007: 118). In the Czech counterparts of the copular clauses the epistemic evaluation may be explicitly ascribed to an experiencer using a noun phrase in the dative case.⁹ The overt experiencer is more frequent in the Czech translation, which can be partly accounted for by the syntactic structure of the Czech clauses – the dative is an obligatory clause element in the clause pattern of some of the lexical verbs used to translate the copulas *sound* and *look* (ex. 26). The dative may correspond to the animate subject of the *sound*-copular clause (ex. 27). Nevertheless, Czech appears to employ the experiencer dative more frequently than English even when these systematic correspondences are disregarded (ex. 28). The ‘point of view’ modification may be more inherent in the English copular verb.

(26) It *sounds* more like a firm producing cardboard boxes. (Ishiguro)

Připadá mi to spíš jako podnik na lepenkové krabice.

(27) “I don't think that's necessary,” Laura said, but she knew *she didn't sound* as sure this time. (Day)

“Já myslím, že to není zapotřebí,” řekla Laura, ale hlas už *jí nezně*l tak jistě jako dřív.

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9 Cf. Poldauf (1964: 242): “The dative case is a good example of a means of introducing a person who has some sort of concern in the matter communicated.”

- (28) In the meantime, a vacation to a tropical Mexican climate *sounded* good. (Brown)
Mezítím se *mu* *jevila* jako nejlepší řešení dovolená v tropickém podnebí.

6 CONCLUSION

The Czech correspondences of the copular verbs *sound* and *look* suggest that the primary semantic function of these copulas consists in epistemic modification. The meaning they ‘import’ in the copular predicate is connected with “introducing into the sentence the person having some sort of concern in what is being communicated and his attitude to what is being communicated.” (Poldauf, 1964: 254) The attitude may be based on sensual perception. The overlapping counterparts of the two copulas, shared also by *seem* and *appear*, seem to suggest the inclusion of *sound* and *look* in a broader group of ‘attitudinal’ or ‘epistemic’ copulas which “relativize the facticity of the attributive relation” (Dušková et al., 2006 [1988]: 415).

It was shown by Poldauf that English did not dispense with the third syntactical plan, in which “the content of the sentence is placed in relation to the individual and his special ability to perceive, judge and assess” (Poldauf, 1964: 244); it compensates for it by employing means other than those found in Czech. Copular verbs of ‘perception’, including *sound* and *look* can be considered one of these means. Though obligatory from the syntactic point of view, these copular verbs are not semantically indispensable components of the sentence since they do not affect the semantic content of the lexical core of the predication (and can, consequently, be replaced by the ‘neutral’ copular verb *be*, or translated by *být*). Like in other expressions used in English for evaluation, “the dependent unit

[i.e. the subject complement] is the more important part of the communication, while the governing word merely modifies. [...T]he governing expression introduces into the sentence the person presenting his evaluation” (Poldauf, 1964: 251). In Czech the corresponding modification is conveyed by the lexical meaning of the predicate verb, by adverbials, and also by the optional dative. Confirming the findings of Dušková (2004, 2005), lexical verbs occupied a dominant position among the counterparts of copular verbs, which relates to the more verbal character of Czech.

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