

Comicality in Contemporary Czech American Periodicals

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The terminology used to describe *humour* and *comicality* in specialised literature is rather diverse, and equally unresolved is the definition of the relationship between these two terms itself. Sometimes *humour* is considered to be the central term, but often the terms *humour*, *the comic*, *comicality*, *laughter*, *joke*, or *anecdote* are used interchangeably or confused with one another.

However, *humour* may not be defined uniformly even when it is taken as the key term. Owing to the legacy of S. Freud, it is usually interpreted as a human defence mechanism, a tool affecting human relationships, a means of communication, a communication strategy, or as one of the tactics of human behaviour (Preisendanz 1976: 156-157). In spite of the different definitions of *humour*, most of their authors agree that it is a complex phenomenon, whose essence cannot be sufficiently described by means of a few simple concepts. *Humour* is linked to mirth and seriousness, joy and sadness, but particularly to wit, joke, comicality, irony, satire, sarcasm, and cynicism.

The relationship between *humour* and *comicality* may, however, be viewed from the opposite perspective, i.e. the term *comicality* is considered as the historically older of the two, as well as dominant and superordinate, a hyperonym of all terms used to refer to anything comical. This is the standpoint of the most recent Czech study of the theory of comicality by V. Borecký (2000: 25-26). Comicality is understood as a "specific property of discourse manifesting a particular attitude to reality". On the psychological level, this discourse is based on the attitudinal structure, uniting the rational, emotional and judgemental aspects of personality. According to Borecký, comicality varies on a scale of shades, with

irony, humour, absurdity and *naivety* as the main modes, *humour* being considered the most recent comic configuration of the four.

Among the secondary aspects of *comicality*, according to Borecký (2000: 26), are those determined on the basis of content or form, but essentially varying on the above mentioned scale. Examples of the former are *scatology, coprolalia, lasciviousness*, and *eroticism*, examples of the latter *gag, joke, anecdote, parody, travesty, persiflage, mystification, farce, burlesque, capriccio, slapstick* and *comedy*.

Since the middle of the 20th century, there have been three major theories of *comicality*:

- incongruity theory (also called ambivalence, contrast, conflict theory)
- superiority theory
- relaxation theory (also freedom theory).

Borecký (2000: 139) points out that while the comical may induce a feeling of superiority over the ridiculed, as well as that of freedom or relaxation, superiority or relaxation as such are not sufficient causes of the comic effect. Although it seems that all theories of comicality might be reduced to a single one, namely that of incongruity, not every incongruity creates comicality. Instead of *causes* of comicality it may therefore be more accurate to speak of *structural features of comicality*: these are always present in comicality in one way or another and participate in creating it. Borecký includes among these features the *sense of comicality* (usually based on non-sense), *reduplication* (based on bi-polar incongruous oppositions), the *social and cultural setting, freedom, coincidence* and *surprise, ludism* (playfulness), *degradation* (of social norms and values), and the *comic world*, seen as an escape from the world of everyday banality, and that of seriousness.

The above characteristics suggest that comicality is a markedly subjective phenomenon, and the process of “deciphering“ it is influenced by the personality of both the author and the addressee, by their sense of the comic, and their mental state, as well as by the social and situational context. In the case of the present study there is another prominent factor, namely the knowledge of the language-specific linguistic and stylistic convention in journalism.

Depending on whether the comicality springs from the events described or from the manner of their description, it is possible to distinguish between *situational* and *linguistic comicality*, the former being the consequence or result of extralinguistic circumstances or processes, the latter a verbal response to the comicality latently present in them.

Linguistic comicality is brought about by particular use of linguistic means of expression, i.e. phonemes, affixes, morphemes, syntactic structures, phonetic or graphic variants; it could also result from the choice of words and their accumulation, as well as from the tension between their potential ambiguity and their unambiguous meanings in a given context. A comic effect may also be produced by a special use of signs (semiological properties) of the language: the author may imitate existing words by inventing new complex signs (actually pseudo-signs), which are, however, devoid of meaning. Sus (1963: 20) applies the term *asemantic*, or more exactly, *cryptosemantic comicality* to such cases (see some of the poems by Ch. Morgenstern). Comicality may be achieved by breaking the laws of the logical principles of language, which link separate signs into meaningful units. Comicality, often manifested as senselessness, is the result of mechanical use of language, when accidental, surprising or even absurd connection of premises occurs, although the premises may be perfectly meaningful on their own. Breaking the logical and semantic structure of clauses and sentences produces comical semantics of syntax.

This study attempts an analysis of comicality, its types, means, functions and uses in contemporary *Czech American* journalism, i.e. in written texts published in periodical press. The results are then compared with the comicality found in contemporary Czech journalism (see Jaklová 2000: 167-179).

The United States is now the home of probably the largest group of Czech immigrants. The first of them arrived in the country as early as the first half of the 17th century, in the wave of emigration from Czech lands brought about by religious reasons (Kučera 1990: 13). However, Czech had been scarcely used in communication until the influx of more substantial numbers of immigrants started in the late 1840s, in the so-called classical stage of Czech immigration into the USA (Kučera 1966: 117).

The first newspaper written in *Czech* and called *Slowan Amerikánský* was started on 1 January 1860 in Racine (Wisconsin), and the same month saw the first issue of *Národní Noviny* in St. Louis. As the immigrants grew in number and their opinions became more distinctly divided, new Czech American newspapers and magazines appeared, appealing to supporters of separate movements or opinions. *Katolické noviny*, the first Catholic paper, was started in 1867 and soon afterwards the existing paper *Národní Noviny* was proclaimed to be social-democratic. The number of Czech periodicals grew steeply, although some of them were short-lived. In 1860-1911 America produced 326 Czech American periodicals representing a variety of movements religious or political orientations ranging from Catholicism and Protestantism to atheism and diffe-

rent forms of socialism, republicanism, democratism, and Americanism (Čapek 1911: 185).

The importance and number of Czech American periodicals peaked in the 1920s, with 123 Czech and Slovak periodicals published regularly (Duben 1962: 6). Since that time their number has been falling steadily, and now there are between five and ten periodicals in the USA (depending on the criteria applied) written in Czech or Slovak (Kučera 1990: 38).

The reasons for Czech press existence in the USA have always been strictly pragmatic. The first newspapers and magazines in Czech in the 1860s, along with the all-American Czech organisations, represented the principal link for Czech immigrants in America. They reported on the life of Czech Americans, influenced them in terms of culture and language and amalgamated them as a distinct ethnic group (Kučera 1990: 38-39). Even today, Czech newspapers in the USA focus primarily on events in the Czech Republic, their primary topic being allegiance to everything Czech in the broadest sense of the word. The feeling of unity with the former home is kept alive by texts praising the glorious Czech history, outstanding Czech celebrities, the beauty of Czech landscape, and the achievements of Czech music. However, by far the largest number of texts in Czech American periodicals is devoted to current changes in Czech social, political and economic life.

The focus of the present analysis were selected issues of the following periodicals (referred to by means of abbreviations): *Americké Listy* (AL), *Československé noviny* (ČN), *Nedělní Hlasatel* (NH), *HLAS NÁRODA* (HN), *POSEL* (P) and *Glorious Hope/Slavná naděje* (SN).

Americké listy is an independent Czech and Slovak fortnightly. Founded in 1874 and originally called *New Yorkské Listy*, it was published under the name *Československý Týdeník* from 1990 to 1996. *Americké listy* is printed in New York under the editor-in-chief Petr Bísek.

The front page header of *Československé noviny* describes it as an independent Czechoslovak bi-weekly. It is published in Brooklyn, New York, under editor-in-chief Jan Krondl.

Nedělní Hlasatel, founded in 1891, is published in Woodridge, Illinois. Besides *Nedělní Hlasatel*, there is also *Denní Hlasatel*.

HLAS NÁRODA with the English subheading VOICE OF THE NATION is a fortnightly published every other Saturday by "Velehrad", the Czech American cultural centre in Chicago.

POSEL described as the "Central Organ of Czech Catholic Unity" is a bi-monthly published in Cleveland, Ohio.

Glorious Hope/Slavná naděje is a bi-monthly published in Oakville, Canada by Czechoslovak Baptists living in the USA and Canada. The editor-in-chief is Natasha Legier.

The analysis of comicality in the periodicals listed above paid particular attention to the frequency of situational and linguistic comicality in separate sections of the newspapers and in different genres of journalism, following at the same time the most frequent means of comicality in Czech American press.

Compared with linguistic comicality, situational comicality is extremely rare in Czech American journalism, in spite of the fact that it is, pragmatically speaking, the more powerful of the two. While Czech periodicals present situational comicality in two forms – either short news items describing a variety of comic, usually paradoxical events, or longer, more detailed and often pleonastic reports on comic events with a sensational twist – situational comicality in e.g. *Nedělní Hlasatel* is of a completely different kind. Czech Americans probably put into this category some advertisements reproduced from Czech papers. These advertisements are printed in a separate column with a bold headline “*Inzeráty z českých novin*” (Advertisements from Czech Papers), and a subheading “*Trochu humoru neuškodí*” (A little humour can do no harm). The following are examples of such advertisements:

38letý mladšího vzhledu, hledá přítel z Mostecka. Stav a věk nerozhoduje. Zn.:
“*Diskrétnost nutná*”.

Ženatý 45/180 hledá něžnou, temperamentní, štíhlou ženu k hezkým chvilčkám ve dvou. Zn.:
“*Úroveň a 100 % diskrétnost*”.

(NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 12)

The examples above illustrate the subjective nature of comicality, not only in terms of the personality of the recipient, but also in terms of the social context and its values. Advertisements of this kind, although appearing only in a certain range of periodicals, are common in the Czech Republic and are definitely devoid of any type of comicality.

On the other hand, linguistic comicality is frequent in all the Czech American periodicals surveyed, and its means are rather varied. Among the most striking, and probably the most effective in terms of the comic effect, are *lexical means*. Their range is extremely wide and therefore it is possible to comment only on the most frequent and most typical of them.

1. In all the Czech American periodicals surveyed, the most frequent lexical means of comicality is **irony**. While referring to Bergson, Borecký (2000: 83) says about irony that “it proceeds from the worse to the better, from evil to good, states what there might be, and pretends that it really is so”. As irony does not

explicitly name what it actually refers to, it has to be understood as a code which has to be deciphered by the reader. And this presents an obstacle in employing irony, which tends to be spoken and dialogical, in written journalism.

Irony uses a variety of techniques, the semantically most transparent one being the statement of the **opposite**:

Nepochybují, že sliby, které dal Václav Havel Mařence Korbelové při návštěvě ČR dodrží. Do posledního puntíku. Takže - ke spokojenosti mocných v Bílém domě i "drobných" amerických podnikatelů, nedodá ČR techniku pro jadernou elektrárnu v Búšehru. Jistě bude spokojen i pracující lid v USA. Na rozdíl od Milevska, kde bude muset ZVVZ propouštět. Ale to je přeče v zájmu globalizace i když ji nakonec dodá někdo chytřejší. Míru zdar!¹ (NH, 28. 5. 2000, p. 4)

O to, aby česká koruna, česká práce našich lidí a naše národní bohatství byly pro cizince levně se tedy [vláda – comment by A. J.] starala znamenitě. (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 12)

I nejvýznamnější vědeckí socialisté se v roli proroků podobně vyznamenali. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

To je pokrok, po staru se nedá žít, to by tak ještě scházelo, aby se v práci lidem líbilo a litovali toho, že už musí na konci šichy domů. (NH, 25. 6. 2000, p. 8)

Ironic use of **metaphors** and **other periphrastic forms** is semantically more ambiguous:

Vidíme to dnes a denně, kam to došlo s tolik prosazovanou "pravicovostí" ODS: Klaus a Zeman si padli do náručí lžíprorokově. Je to fraška připravená podle scénáře KGB a StB. Oni se stali jen herci a my jim nesmíme dělat křoví. (NH, 25. 6. 2000, p. 3)

Another relatively frequent means of ironic assessment in Czech American newspapers is **hyperbole**, which, for emphatic and particularly comic reasons, exaggerates a certain feature or situation.

Emigrace vskutku zvenčí vypadá jako legrace. Pečení holuby nejen že jsou prý kdykoli k dosažení, ale člověk nemusí ani natáhnou ruku a oni sami přilétnou. Někteří mají v zádech zapichnutý nůž a vidličku, jiní přistanou přímo v ústech. (NH, 3. 9. 2000, p. 3)

Josef Zieleniec prý zahořel velkou láskou ke krajanům žijícím v USA a Kanadě a stovky jich oslovil dopisem, v němž je požádal o finanční pomoc při nastávajících volbách. (ČN, 13. 10. 2000, p. 3)

Other means of conveying irony are **euphemisms**, **litotes**, **contrastive**, and particularly **expressive naming units**.

1 All the quotations from Czech American newspapers preserve the original spelling and punctuation, including all its peculiarities, inconsistencies, variations, as well as errors.

V následujících letech po převratu v roce 1989 přestaly sametáckým zbohatlíkům stačit byty, kterých si levně užívali za komunistického režimu. (NH, 4. 12. 1999, p. 13)

Ale Clintonovo a Blairovo bombardování šlo skutečně do několika tisíců zabitých nevinných a to jenom proto, že Jugoslávie se nechtěla podrobit globalistickým válečníkům v čele s bubeníkem Madelénkou Albrightovou-Koerbelovou! (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 5)

Sametová příšera ovládla český národ a vnucuje mu úlohu rasisty ve scénáři Petra Uhla. (NH, 2. 4. 2000, p. 2)

To convey irony, often transcending into sarcasm or scorn, the texts surveyed use derogatives, and also **diminutives**:

Havel byl jedním z prvních, který komunisty obhajoval a dával vinu celému občanstvu za tyto kruté zločiny, které byly spáchané na několika tisících politických vězňů, zatím co on se válel v pohodlné posteli a kouřil si svoje cigaretky. (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 5)

A myslí si pan Dyer, že Gorbačov je či byl nevinným děťátkem? (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 5)

Another possible means of expressing irony is **paradox**, i.e. the use of surprising, seemingly contradictory statements which are in contrast with what is normally thought of as right or correct:

An article headline: *Bělohradského šílenství rozumu. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, supplement, p. A)*

Ale ani tím to nekončí. Zatímco průměrný Západoevropan nebo Američan potřebuje všechny ty pracovní dny a týdny, aby uživil sebe a svou rodinu, Čech svou poloviční pracovní dobou užívá nejen sebe a svou rodinu, ale i stovky pilných tunelářů, kteří ho odírají o úspory a daně, když vesele vylupují banky a velkopodniky, které vláda z Cechových daní zachraňuje. S jistým vědomím, že bohatý Čech na to nejen má, ale radostně i dá. Že sice bude remcat jako vždy, ale i to jenom aby se neřeklo. (NH, 3.9. 2000, p. 3)

The Czech American periodicals described in this study, particularly *Nedělní Hlasatel*, often manifest the highest degree of irony, i.e. **sarcasm**. On the other hand, Czech periodicals use sarcasm much less often because of its sharply pointed meaning. While irony may still be considered friendly or good-natured, sarcasm conveys unmitigated hatred or cynicism:

Prodat majetek za účetní, tedy desetinou cenu dokáže snad jen vesnický buran nebo podplacený státní úředník FNM. A commentary on the sale of the breweries Plzeňský Prazdroj and Radegast to the South-African brewery SAB. (NH, 4. 12. 1999, p. 14)

Havel by se nikdy pod podmínkou republikánské ústavy prezidentem nestal, jelikož by měl protivníky, kteří by ho v debatách usadili tam, kam patří, tj. být hlídačem Lucerny! (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 5)

Lupičský kapitalismus - takto privatizované Rusko nemůže fungovat jako normální stát. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

II. Comicality in journalism often uses the effect of breaking the norms that readers have implicitly acquired by reading other journalistic texts. The most common example of this strategy is the use of lexical units that contrast with the neutral standard language usual in these kinds of texts, and therefore break the established conventions. The most frequent means of this kind are stylistically marked naming units, particularly expressions belonging to the register of **colloquial Czech**, (often Germanisms by origin):

Nuže, tento miláček národa v první krizové situaci odešel od válu. (NH, 19. 3. 2000, p. 1)

Hollywoodský mogul označil vynález televize jako neperspektivní fiasko - lidé přece nebudou doma čučet na malou bednu. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

A potom po 17. listopadu 1989 převlékli rychle sako a hajdy na Hrad. (NH, 25. 6. 2000, p. 11)

To fulfil the same function, Czech periodicals also use, besides expressions of colloquial Czech, **slang expressions**. These have not been found in the Czech American press, however, there are other stylistically marked expressions conveying comicality, namely:

- **literary expressions:**

Vypukly bakchanálie navazování kontaktů a výměny informací. (NH, 25. 6. 2000, p. 4)

- **neologisms:**

Tito tzv. umělci vytvořili jakýsi hybrid umělce všehoschopného. (NH, 25. 6. 2000, p. 10)

In the context of the newspaper, the role of contrastive lexical units is also acquired by **words expressing negative affection and vulgarisms:**

Rakušané mají nového konička. O víkendech traktory a dalšími vozidly zatarasí česko-rakouské přechody a vyvěsí plakáty proti temelínské elektrárně. Na to ovšem česká vláda z vysoká kašle. (ČN, 13. 10. 2000, p. 3)

Předchozí iniciativa s prostoduchým názvem Děkujeme, odejděte, vyšla naprázdno. Otrlí sametoví korytáři neřekli ani není zač a výzvě k odchodu se zasmáli. (NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 1)

Contrast and surprise are often achieved by connecting units of opposite or contradictory meaning, sometimes creating the effect of **absurd paradox:**

Toto je jedním ze skutečných nedostatků české legislativy, o kterém se "nahlas mlčí". (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 13)

Ve srovnání těchto dvou osobností ční skřehotavý stařec Háša nad filozofujícím pivařem - bardem Havlem jako katedrála nad hospodou u Fleků. (NH, 19. 3. 2000, p. 5)

Parlament trpí chorobou plíživě bolševizace. (NH, 3. 9. 2000, p. 2)

When the authors are aware of breaking the norms of journalistic language by using inappropriate naming units, they indicate this by putting them in **quota-**

tion marks. Words that are non-standard, strongly emphatic, or expressing negative assessment or irony tend to be marked in this way, even if they create a comic effect in the given context. By formally indicating the inappropriateness of such units authors distance themselves from the resulting communicative effect:

Prezident Clinton a "druhý viceprezident" Hillary nás žádají, ... (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 7)

Pokud se týče Pavla Rychetského, ten už se několikrát vyznamenal jako "klasický vládní osel", který dělá rāmus, aniž by něčemu rozuměl. (NH, 31. 10. 1999, p. 8)

Trochu těm Angličanům závidím. Oni mají svého "šéřika" pod drobnohledem už od dětství. William je v budoucnu nemůže ničím překvapit. (NH, 3. 9. 2000, p. 4)

To jenom několik horkých hlav sedlo na lep americké provokaci. A lid český to ovšem "sežral". (NH, 2. 4. 2000, p. 2)

III. On the lexical level the periodicals surveyed contain some other frequent means of linguistic comicality, namely **indirect naming**. These are usually present in the form of:

- **metaphor:**

Pan generální ředitel Vydavatelství V. Košťál před televizními kamerami jaksepatří předvedl svůj paví ocas, dokonce se zlatýma očima. (NH, 21. 11. 1999, p. 15)

Pokud otázky řeší Sněhurka a sedm trpaslíků vedených Šmudlou, jde spíše o národní tragédii. (NH, 28. 5. 2000, p. 3)

Marián v obou případech dostal potupný politický kopanec. (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 6)

- **metonymy:**

Domáci vlastenci pak k Impulsu 99 zaujali jednoznačné a stručně stanovisko: "havlárna". (NH, 21. 11. 1999, p. 16)

Rusko je už jiné. Nemá důvod dělat si o kapitalismu iluze, ale do totalitní klece již není nastrkatelné. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

Za svého podřízeného si ihned vybral starou strukturu - vysokého funkcionáře KSC Jiřího Frkala. (NH, 3. 9. 2000, p. 2)

Indirect naming creates a comic effect when taken literally, or when the relationship between their denotation and connotation is surprising, unexpected or amusing. When **simile** is employed, the comicality usually stems from overstatement, unexpectedness or illogicality:

Tři kadibudky (...), tři vedle sebe, v jednom říku, semknuté jako rolníci a dělníci a pracující inteligence. (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 5)

Repríza studené války je stejně málo realistická jako by byla obnova kolonialismu, otroctví či křížáckých výprav osvobodit Jeruzalém. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

Politiky i domácím (většinou německým) tiskem jako MFD atd. byl prodej přivítán stejně dojemně jako předchozí pitomosti započaté vládou OF a jeho politickými pohrobky. (NH, 4. 12. 1999, p. 14)

Otakar Motejl (...) se rozzlobil na poslance, kteří se měli k jím navržené sérii zákonů reformující soudnictví asi jako pařež k tanci. (ČN, 13. 10. 2000, p. 2)

IV. A very common source of comicality in journalism is **intertextuality**. In order to appreciate the comic effect, readers have to be well-versed in a range of different types of texts or familiar with communicative situations related to what is communicated or what is (often indirectly) referred to. The question whether the readers are able to interpret the information as a source of comicality inevitably arises. The most common kind of intertextuality is **allusion** (a hint – quotation of a word, phrase or a catchword):

Naštestí jsem jim na začátku jejich kariéry “podvodníka“ necinkal klíčkama. An allusion to the first demonstrations after 17 November 1989, where people were jingling their keys to send a message to the Communist Party saying that “the game was over“. (NH, 2. 4. 2000, p. 4)

Cinkatelé klíčů předpokládali úsvit příliš náhlých sametových zázraků. (AL, 19. 10. 2000, p. 9)

Leč ne celý národ propadl blbě náladě. An allusion to a statement from Václav Havel’s speeches, assessing the social climate in the Czech Republic. (NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 4)

Nezištných a pro socialismus zanícených Katonů moc nebylo. An allusion to the Minister of Foreign Affairs J. Kavana, who was recorded in the Secret Police files under the nickname of Kato. (NH, 3. 9. 2000, p. 7)

Links between texts may also be established by means of **quotations**. In journalism they usually represent a parenthetical device, making the message more immediate, urgent or lively (in the context of the present study primarily by bringing in comicality), and they are therefore considered as means of stylistic activation (Čechová, Chloupek, Krčmová, Minářová 1997: 188):

Premiér Miloš Zeman prohlásil ve Štrasburku, že “privatizace, které dělaly minulé vlády, nebyly příliš ukázkové, a když, tak ukázaly, jak se nemají dělat“. (NH, 25. 6. 2000, p. 4)

Intertextuality may also be manifested as (comic) **paraphrase** imitating the intonation, text, or mental patterns of other speakers, as well as commonly shared values, creating thus a comic effect:

Zkrátka a dobře stát dostává pouze daň ze zisku, což je obrovský, ale obrovský rozdíl soudruhu profesore. A paraphrase of Prof. Václav Klaus’ typical style. (NH, 4. 12. 1999, p. 14)

Novináři mohou objevit kdeco, kritizovat kdekoho, ale jak to skončí? Poštěkáváním prašivých ratlíků na vznešenou karavanu. (NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 7)

Another way of creating a comic effect is by modifying existing **phraseology** and **idioms**, needless to say only those that are sufficiently well-known for the reader to appreciate the altered structure and the resulting comicality:

Podobně je tomu i u ostatních předních politiků: ryba se vždy kazí od hlavy. (NH, 4. 12. 1999, p. 4)

Týž druh uvažování přispěl svou dávkou i do českého mlýna tvrzením, že sametová evoluce v listopadu 1989 byl dohodnutý, kágebáky a estebáky inscenovaný podvod. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

"Jaký pán, taký krám!" Vinen vším nepořádkem a nedostatkem jsi tedy především Ty, prezidente západního zbytku bývalé Československé republiky! (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 2)

Když šlo státnímu molochu z tlustého do tenkých, přerozdělilo se. (NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 7)

V. Comicality may be brought about by the use of **bons mots**, **aphorisms** and **puns**. **Bons mots**, as well as **aphorisms** are original, witty and often ironic reflections based on comparison, contrast, or paradox. **Puns** in the narrow sense of the word are instances of comical use of homonymy, homophony or polysemy, or even false etymology – the so-called **play on words**. **Puns** in the broad sense are also texts using **paronomasia** (i.e. words that are often confused because of formal similarity but which are not interchangeable), a comic choice of phonemes or letters, choice of words depending on the number of their syllables, clustering of words that are difficult to pronounce, or a comic graphic representation or spelling:

Lidé ještě asi neví, jaký je rozdíl mezi politickým zlodějským a prolhaným "šmejdem" a teroristou. Žádný! Jeden vás zabije pomalu, druhý rychle. (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 2)

Válka nebude, ale nastane velký boj o mír. (NH, 3. 9. 2000, p. 4)

Půvabem každé konspirace je její nezřídka obtížná vyvrátitelnost. Proti takovému plusu je tu ovšem minus její nedokazatelnosti. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

Potíž s intelektuály ovšem je, že mají nebezpečný sklon považovat ideály za důležitější než lidi. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, příloha, p. A)

Tak se politika, která má pečovat o obecné blaho, zvrhla v politikaření. (NH, 2. 4. 2000, p. 1)

Puns in journalism are often based on skilful use of **morphemes**, particularly **affixes**, producing words similar in form but different in meaning. Another strategy is unusual use of different suffixes to achieve a comic effect.

Ve všech emigrantských časopisech se objevily rozčleněné články popírající nepopíratelné. (NH, 4. 12. 1999, p. 5)

Potom přišla krize: Dva politici se domluvili, že se nedomluví, jinými slovy, spikli se. (NH, 19. 3. 2000, p. 5)

Kremlinologové se spletli v odhadech Gorbačova. (AL, 5. 10. 2000, p. 8)

Similar formal structures of **compounds** may also form the basis of a pun:

Mototechna a Slibotechna ÚV KSČ patřily k dominantním strukturám bývalé ČSSR. (NH, 28. 5. 2000, p. 4)

VI. Other prominent sources of linguistic comicality in Czech, and even more so in Czech American newspapers, are **nicknames**, less often also comically marked **surnames**, **first names** and **place names**:

For example, in *Nedělní Hlasatel* President Havel is nicknamed in the following ways: *kulisák z Hrádečku*; *hradní brepta*; *nastrčená loutka* (NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 1); *náš hradní dramatik*; *Jeho veličenstvo* (NH, 20. 8. 2000, p. 4); *prezident podšívka* (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 5); *Vaše výsost* (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 6); *tatiček a ochránce komunistů* (NH, 31. 10. 1999, p. 7); *hradní lídr* (NH, 21. 11. 1999, p.); *novopečený miliardář* (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 1); *prezident NIČITEL* (NH, 19. 3. 2000, p. 10).

President W. Clinton's nicknames: *profesionální lhář* (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 7); *William Jefferson Clinton, guvernér, lhář a podvodník z chudého Arkansasu* (NH, 12. 9. 1999, p. 7).

Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Václav Klaus is nicknamed *Makovec Klaus* (NH, 31. 10. 1999, p. 7); *makovec týdne* (NH, 31. 10. 1999, p. 9); *hlava makovce* (NH, 23. 1. 2000, p. 14).

A common component of almost all Czech periodicals is **concentrated linguistic comicality**, i.e. a section of the newspaper devoted exclusively to comicality. This typically features e.g. funny statements by Czech politicians, sometimes with an editorial commentary, or various jokes. These section were almost non-existent in Czech American periodicals, with the exception of *Inzeráty z českých novin*, with the subheading *Trochu humoru neuškodí*, printed irregularly in *Nedělní Hlasatel* (see above). *Americké listy* occasionally feature a section called *Vtipy týdne*. Similar situation can be found in the field of deliberately **misleading texts** (Junková 2000). Correctly interpreted, they have a strong comic appeal. Among the Czech papers they are most commonly found in *Mladá fronta DNES*, and irregularly also in *Lidové noviny*.

Another difference between Czech American and Czech periodicals can be found in **cartoons**. A variety of humorous and satirical drawings, sometimes accompanying verbal jokes or anecdotes, which can be classified as caricature in the broad sense (Pytlík 1988: 7), are an inseparable part of all Czech newspapers. They can be in the form of illustrated jokes and anecdotes, original pictorial moralisms, paradoxes, and aphorisms, usually built upon the principle of hyperbole. This kind of comicality is extremely rare in Czech American

periodicals. Original cartoons by Honza Honner, usually ironic or satirical, appear only in *Nedělní Hlasatel*. They are complemented by text and usually refer to Czech political life. A variety of cartoons including text may also be encountered in *Americké listy*. These are, however, reprints from Czech newspapers.

Comicality is often present in Czech periodicals in **advertisements**². No such advertisements have been discovered in the Czech American papers under the present study.

As the above analysis amply proves, comicality, particularly in its linguistic form, is a prominent component of the texts in Czech American periodicals. Linguistic means of comicality are most frequently used by the editors of the weekly *Nedělní Hlasatel*, while papers of religious orientation employ them least (*POSEL, HLAS NÁRODA, Glorious Hope/Slavná naděje*). As far as separate genres within Czech American newspapers are concerned, linguistic comicality features most prominently in analytical and fiction writing, namely in commentaries, comments, columns, and reports, i.e. in genres that in addition to presenting news and fact also reveal the author's point of view, usually as a chain of reflections. These genres are mostly concerned with Czech political and social events. Strictly news-oriented genres exhibit a significantly lower frequency of linguistic comicality in Czech American papers.

The functions of comicality in journalism are manifold. Owing to comicality the text becomes more convincing, interesting and attractive. It arouses interest in the topic, makes facts easier to remember and the emotional charge of the text easier to understand, and it also helps the reader to concentrate for a longer period of time. Correspondingly, comicality serves both of the principal functions of present-day journalism: the informative function and the persuasive function. Additionally, in Czech periodicals it has another important function, namely that of creating amusement. Comical text become more attractive and exert positive influence on the reader, which is in line with the intentions and business interests of the publisher. However, the main function of comicality differs in Czech and in Czech American newspapers: the latter, by presenting events in the former homeland in the light of irony and spiced with punch lines, manifest their critical attitude and disagreement, and make readers reflect on them. Comicality in Czech American newspapers is therefore used primarily to criticise some of the aspect of current social life in the Czech Republic.

2 A more detailed treatment of advertisement in Czech and its language means can be found in studies by S. Čmejrková (e.g. 1997).

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Komika v současných čechoamerických periodících

Příspěvek se zabývá terminologií týkající se humoru a komiky a vymezením vzájemného vztahu těchto dvou pojmů. Dále pojednává o komice, jejich typech, prostředcích, funkcích i aspektech jejího užívání v současné čechoamerické žurnalistice. Pozornost je přitom věnována situační komice, jazykové komice a kreslenému humoru. Okrajově je zmíněna i komika v reklamních textech. Výsledky zjištěné analýzou šesti současných čechoamerických periodik jsou následně konfrontovány s podobou a funkcí komiky užívané v současné žurnalistice české.