COMPARISON OF TONGUE TWISTERS IN CZECH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract
The article presents the results of a comparative analysis of Czech and Russian tongue twisters in terms of their content and structure. The initial part of the article provides a general description of a tongue twister as a part of children's folklore. The main part focuses on specific similarities and differences of tongue twisters related to their structure and content and offers tongue twisters for practicing individual sounds in Czech and Russian.

Key terms
tongue twister, folklore, children's folklore, Czech language, Russian language

Introduction

Every culture has a rich history, which is reflected in its folklore. This enables people to communicate not only their thoughts and feelings but also attitudes of the whole society. The development of any language is an ongoing process and so is the development of folklore as its part. Tongue twisters belong to children's folklore, which is created by children or by adults for children and is used accordingly. It is a genre that has firmly established itself as one of the best means to advance articulation and is still actively used in a linguistic community.

Tongue twisters are well collected in Russian and Czech languages separately (see, for example, Mel'nikov, 1987, or Kneblová, 2016), nevertheless, the issues of their existence and development in the area of the relationship of the two languages have not yet been studied. Therefore, this article aims to present the parallels between Russian and Czech tongue twisters based on their content and structure, and also on their focus on developing specific speech skills. A general description of tongue twisters as a part of children's folklore is given at the beginning of the article. The substantive part of the article is devoted to the comparison of selected Russian and Czech tongue twisters based on their semantic and formal contents. Moreover, this part reviews the specifics of given tongue twisters in terms of their focus on improving the pronunciation technique of individual sounds.

This article presents the results of a comparative analysis of tongue twisters that belong to two Slavonic languages, namely, Russian and Czech. The tongue twisters were analyzed according to two principal criteria: form and content. The corpus of tongue twisters is based on the analysis of various titles on tongue twisters and folklore in general, pedagogy and logopedia, and also Internet sources, for instance Jalam.cz or ДИКТОРЫ.com. The last part of the article presents the results of the quantitative analysis of the composed corpus of Russian and Czech tongue twisters by letters and sounds that form the basis of the tongue twisters.

Tongue twisters as a genre of children's folklore and their characteristics

In this article, folklore is understood in the narrower sense as "an oral poetic creative work shared by large segments of the masses", according to the definition made by Y. Sokolov (Sokolov, 2007, p. 12). This definition was chosen for this article because it identifies the nature of tongue twisters accurately and thoroughly. Nevertheless, there are many other folklore definitions and classifications in the scientific literature, for example, the wide definition of folklore by S. Pecháček (2010, pp. 123-124), or the classifications of folklore by B. Beneš (1989, p. 64-65) or by Y. Ross (2008, pp. 6-8).

Children's folklore is one of the major and richest parts of folklore in general. Its key audience are the younger generations. Their introduction to children's folklore at an early age leads to their earlier inclusion in the culture of the society they live in and helps them to find their place in it. As well as folklore in general, children's folklore is a large system that includes works of various genres. They perform different functions, such as cognitive, entertaining, educational, aesthetic, as well as functions of integration and identification (Pospíšilová, Uhlíková, 2014, p. 26). All of them are common to tongue twisters too. Most linguistic phenomena reflect the world that surrounds a human and, therefore, carry within them a precise idea of reality that an individual (or even a whole society) has in mind. Nevertheless, there are folklore works whose artistic form prevails over their content and they, consequently, acquire new functions. Such works show not only the ability of a language to adapt to various people's requirements but also people's creativity to reflect the reality of the world. One example of such works are tongue twisters.

According to Ye. Ross' definition (2008, p. 85), tongue twisters are „smaller one- or two-phrase sentences, which are based on a combination of similar-sounding but different words and sounds which makes them difficult to be properly pronounced". A. Kvyatkovskiy (1966, p. 272) describes a tongue twister as „a folk poetic joke based on alliterations that consists in a deliberate choice of words which are challenging for proper articulation during the fast and multiple repetitions of the whole phrase".

It was the idea of joking that defined the major role of tongue twisters in a society in the early stages of their development. As they were only a form of entertainment, tongue twisters belonged to the world of adults. Gradually, this genre began to lose its popularity and could have disappeared throughout history if it were not for its obvious pedagogical value. It is difficult for modern people to imagine that, originally, tongue twisters did not belong to children's folklore, although today this genre is understood in this context. After a while, children started to create new examples of tongue twisters by themselves that were up to their aesthetic standards. Consequently, typical children's images and subjects have replaced the predominant context of adults' culture. Even so, older generations, passing part of their culture to children, considered tongue twisters as pieces designed for pedagogical reasons. They should have advanced children's sense of a language and eliminate mistakes in the articulation of sounds, which leads directly to the improvement of pronunciation. Nowadays, tongue twisters still perform the functions described above; nevertheless, they also constitute an artwork that embodies the specifics of children's worldview. (Meľnikov, 1987, pp. 95-96)

Despite many differences in content and structure of tongue twisters, their assignment to one particular genre is based on their various common features. The main one is the maximum compaction of the same sounds (or similar ones) in one phrase, whose interaction makes them difficult to pronounce. This is achieved by using various phonetic means and figures of speech. The most popular are rhyme, alliteration and assonance whose presence in a tongue twister is also one of the main features of this genre. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned literary devices often deprive tongue twisters or their parts of euphony. This reflects the oppression of aesthetic features of the genre in favour of functional ones, i.e. those aiming at achievement of certain goals. In case of tongue twisters, these goals are improvement or correction of pronunciation and articulation, which is another specific feature of the genre. (Meľnikov, 1987, p. 96) It should be noted that the Russian term 'скороговорка' has an additional meaning. It is understood as a way of saying something quickly, briefly, without details, and is slightly negative.

Tongue twisters have been very popular among people due to a variety of their functions. The aesthetic function shows the human's ability to improvise and work with their language and, at the same time, reflect the world around them. The entertaining function reveals the potential of a play that every tongue twister contains. The pedagogical function facilitates to develop the articulation abilities of children and adults. Nowadays, since the correct pronunciation is one of the most essential skills in the world of prosperous globalization, tongue twisters are applied in many spheres of the

society. Children become familiar with tongue twisters already in kindergarten when they start to explore the nuances of their mother tongue. The use of tongue twisters is integral to speech-therapy lessons, but that is not the only area where tongue twisters could be found. They are used by actors, singers, newscasters, teachers of foreign languages and many others.

Despite all of the above mentioned, tongue twisters have been studied relatively little in the interlingual area. A comparative analysis of tongue twisters that belong to different languages could reveal not only the diversity of people's worldview but also the ways of expressing them in artworks. This is the reason why this article is focused precisely on the comparison of Russian and Czech tongue twisters from interlingual and intercultural perspectives.

Comparison of Russian and Czech tongue twisters based on their content

Every ethnic group reflects in tongue twisters, as well as in any other folklore genre, its own culture, history and vision of the world, which are then introduced to children. Consequently, there are many more differences than similarities in subjects, motives, and characters of Russian and Czech tongue twisters. Examples of this sort of phenomenon are presented below:

Pepíku, Pepíku, vzkazuje ti Pepka, že upeče koláče, trnek doprostředka. (Koutský, 2006, p. 17) In this Czech tongue twister, whose aim is to practice the pronunciation of the sound /p/, two proper names are used, i.e. *Pepík* and *Pepka*. They are diminutive forms of the full Czech names *Josef* and *Josefína*. A man's name Josef is popular in the Czech Republic, therefore it is not surprising that one of its forms is used in the tongue twister. This illustrates the fact that folklore tends to reflect the world around. Nevertheless, the usage of the above-mentioned short names is the reality of Czech society. Meanwhile, the Russian name equivalent *Иосиф* not only failed to be popular, but it does not also have a diminutive form that would be similar to the Czech one.

Топтыгин в тапочках протаптывал тропу. Топтыгин в кофточке потопывал в поту. (Lapteva, 2016, p. 79) This Russian tongue twister, which is intended to advance articulation of the sound /t/, has a cultural and linguistic characteristic too. The word *Топтыгин* is jokingly used in the Russian language to denote a bear. Nevertheless, this name does not exist in the Czech language.

The two aforementioned examples have been chosen to illustrate the differences in the content of Russian and Czech tongue twisters because they clearly show how differently the two societies perceive and describe their environment. The objects that are reflected in these tongue twisters exist in the environment of both ethnic groups, nonetheless, these groups choose different ways of naming them. Even so, the principle of tongue-twister formation is the same in each language: it is based on the combination of words with a predominance of a particular sound or a cluster of sounds difficult to pronounce. This observation logically concludes that different ethnic groups name the objects of the world differently and, therefore, construct tongue twisters based on the realities of their languages. This leads to the creation of folklore works that are unique in every ethnos. Their content differs from one language to another but the functions these folklore works perform can be similar.

After the explanation of differences in the content of Russian and Czech tongue twisters was given, it is necessary to mention similarities as well. Since Russian and Czech languages are descended from a common stock, the overlap of subjects and images of various folklore genres is also frequent. This is facilitated by the affinity of two languages, their grammar rules, and the alphabets. For example, similar subjects could be found in the following tongue twisters:

— *Šla Prokopka pro Prokopa, pojď, Prokope pojíst oukropa.* (Koutský, 2006, p. 17)
— *Пришёл Прокоп, кипел укроп, ушёл Прокоп, кипел укроп; как при Прокопе кипел укроп, так и без Прокопа кипел укроп.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 60)
— *Pan kaplan v kapli plakal.* (Nelešovská, 2005, p. 138)
— *Пан капеллан в капелле плакал.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 93), etc.

The above-mentioned examples prove the connection between Russian and Czech tongue twisters in terms of their content. The main reason for such similarities is the existence of comparable or

similar words in the vocabularies of the two languages. These words often denote the same object of reality and sound similar, and therefore, the tongue twisters that are combined from them sound similarly too. Moreover, they are characterized by a similar content and focus on advancing or correcting the pronunciation of the same or related sounds.

Similarities in the structure of Russian and Czech tongue twisters
Every literature or folklore genre is organized in certain traditions and has its specific characteristics. Tongue twisters, being an example of an interlingual genre, are composed according to the same general rules in both Russian and Czech languages. This is facilitated by specifics of the genre and its functions, as well as by the fact that the languages are related. The basis of both Czech and Russian tongue twisters is founded on phonetically similar words, nonetheless, it is not the only similarity between them. The following examples show that Czech and Russian tongue twisters can be analyzed on various linguistic levels and similarities in their structure will be evident on every one of them.

This analysis begins on the **phonetic level**. It can be observed that both Russian and Czech tongue twisters are based on words that sound similar. What makes a tongue twister difficult to pronounce is a frequent repetition of one sound or a combination of sounds in a sentence, especially during its continuously accelerating repeating. The following tongue twisters that are focused on the sound /š/ and on the combination of sounds /š/ and /s/ prove this:

— *Šašek šeptem plaší myši, však ho myši špatně slyší.* (Koutský, 2006, p. 18)
— *Шесть мышат в камыше шуршат.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 91)
— *Strýček Šusta sušil švestky v Sušici.* (Stará, 2013, p. 83)
— *Шла Саша по шоссе и сосала сушку.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 96)

All these tongue twisters feature alliterations. The first pair of the examples also contains onomatopoeia, i.e. *šeptem, шуршат*. The usage of these speech figures leads to similarities in the sounding of words in a tongue twister, which are based either on clusters of sounds or individual sounds.

Common trends of word-formation are noticed on the **morphological level** of the language system. They make word structure more complex by using various affixes, which is illustrated by the following examples:

— *Náš táta má neolemovanou čepici. Olemujeme-li mu ji, nebo neolemujeme-li mu ji?*
— *Nenaolejuje-li koleje Julie, naolejuje je Jan.* (Kneblová, 2016, p. 18, 44)
— *Проросли ростки, повыросли, да ростом ростки не выросли.*
— *Всех скороговорок не переговоришь, не перевыскороговоришь.* (Лаптева, 2016, p. 63, 112)

In these tongue twisters, one can notice a tendency to make lexemes more complex using prefixes and suffixes. The process of affixation can lead to either making new word-forms or creating new words, which do not have to belong to the same part of speech. As a result, the cluster of words of the same root in a tongue twister makes it even more complicated. Therefore, it can be stated that difficulties when pronouncing the above-mentioned tongue twisters occur on both phonetic and morphological levels.

The **lexical level** of the language system manifests itself mostly in homophones, homoforms and paronyms, which are presented in the following examples:

— *Byl jednou jeden Řek a ten mi řek', abych mu řek', kolik je v Řecku řeckých řek. A já mu řek', že nejsem Řek, abych mu řek', kolik je v Řecku řeckých řek.* (Kneblová, 2016, p. 38)
— *Kapka kápla, klapka klapla.* (Koutský, 2006, p. 16)
— *Ужа ужалила ужица.*
— *Ужу с ужицей не ужиться.*
— *Уж от ужаса стал уже.*
— *Ужа ужица съест на ужин.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 29)
— *Карл украл у Поликарпа полкарася, полкарпа.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 46)

Furthermore, words that are related to each other these ways do not often have anything in common in their meaning and are normally used in different contexts. This enables people to create new fun authentic tongue twisters.

Structural similarities of Russian and Czech tongue twisters manifest themselves on the **syntactic level** of the language system too. In this case, it is characterized by complex phrases and sentences:

— *Kmotře Petře, nepřepepřete mi toho vepře, jak mi, Kmotře Petře, toho vepře přepepříte, tak si toho přepepřeného vepře sám sníte.* (Koutský, 2006, p. 17)

— *Дрозд дроздиху дразнил-передразнивал, да не выдразнил, а дроздиха дрозда просто выдрессировала.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 29);

or by various repetitions:

— *Tento nejnenapomarmeládovatělejší lívanec je ten nejnenapomarmeládovatělejší ze všech nejnenapomarmeládovatělejších.* (Koutský, 2006, p. 18)

— *Расскажите про покупки. Про какие про покупки? Про покупки, про покупки, про покупочки свои.* (Lapteva, 2016, p. 60)

It is important to note that there can be found not only syntactic similarities in Czech and Russian tongue twisters, but also differences between them. Specifically, many Czech tongue twisters are presented as a long complex sentence that do not have to be rhymed and rhythmically organized. Russian tongue twisters, on the other hand, are mostly presented as little poems or sentences that have their own rhythm. This tendency can be observed due to specific phonetic differences between Russian and Czech languages on the suprasegmental level.

Structural differences between Russian and Czech tongue twisters

Although there are many similarities in the content and structure of Russian and Czech tongue twisters, the rules under which these languages operate cannot be eliminated. Particularly, due to a greater focus of tongue twisters on the phonetic aspect of a language, the most significant differences between Russian and Czech tongue twisters concern their rhythmic organization, notably in poetic forms. One of the most essential differences between these two languages is observed in the way they sound. The reason for this is that the stress in the Russian language can be described as qualitative and quantitative (whose main elements are length and tones of vowels), whereas in the Czech language a weak dynamic stress is common. Therefore, when using an accentual-syllabic verse, the rhythmic organization of tongue twisters in both languages differs in its expressiveness. This is in part the result of the fact that the Russian language has a free stress, whereas the Czech language has a fixed one. Moreover, what also has an impact is the different usage of vowels' length. In the Russian language, it is one of the elements that helps to differ stressed and unstressed syllables, whilst in the Czech language vowels' length distinguishes one word from another. All these factors create a strict and clear rhythmical organization of Russian tongue twisters and a soft rhyme of the Czech ones. (Konečný, 2017, online)

Differences between the Russian and Czech languages are evident in many other aspects than just in the way they sound. One of the most significant concerns the syllabic organization and, therefore, construction of words. In that regard, it is important to mention "special" tongue twisters that exist only in the Czech language:

Chrt pln skvrn zdrhl z Brd.

Chrt vtrhl skrz trs chrp v čtvrť Krč.

*Plch zdrhl skrz drn, prv zhltl hrst zrn.*

Smrž pln skvrn zvlhl z mlh.

Strč prst skrz krk. (Velká sbírka jazykolamů, 2016, online), etc.

The greatest challenge, which a speaker has to overcome while pronouncing, is based on the structure of these tongue twisters that contain no vowels. Consonant clusters here are not interrupted

by vowels and are often repeated. This makes these tongue twisters even more difficult to pronounce. With the increased speed of pronunciation and multiple repetitions, consonants start ‚jumping' from one position to another. This not only destroys the structure of a tongue twister but also makes it meaningless. Overall, these examples of tongue twisters exist only in the Czech language since it is impossible to form vowelless syllables in the Russian language.

Russian and Czech tongue twisters in practice
As mentioned above, in practice tongue twisters are used to master proper pronunciation of sounds or their combinations. The amount of tongue twisters focused on particular sounds shows the difficulty of their articulation in language. Consequently, the study could not have been done without the evaluation of the quantitative ratio between tongue twisters and the most frequent sounds (expressed in letters) in their structure. This analysis reveals the frequency of occurrence of tongue twisters that are focused on particular sounds and shows which of them are problematic for children. The two following diagrams show the distribution of the number of the analyzed tongue twisters per letter and, therefore, sounds that can be realized by them. The results are presented regardless of whether a tongue twister focuses on a particular letter or combination of letters.

Number of tongue twisters with particular letter
(Czech language)

Number of tongue twisters with particular letter
(Russian language)
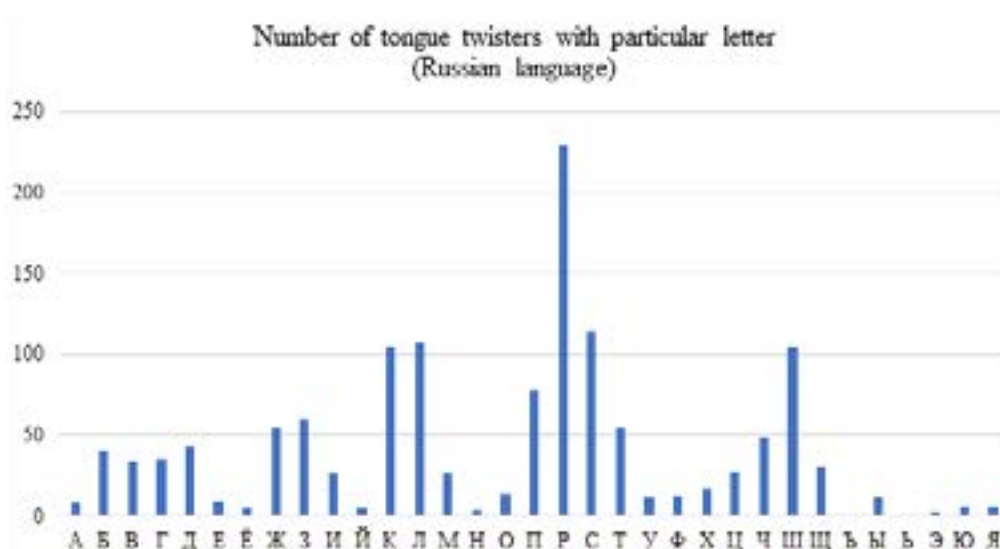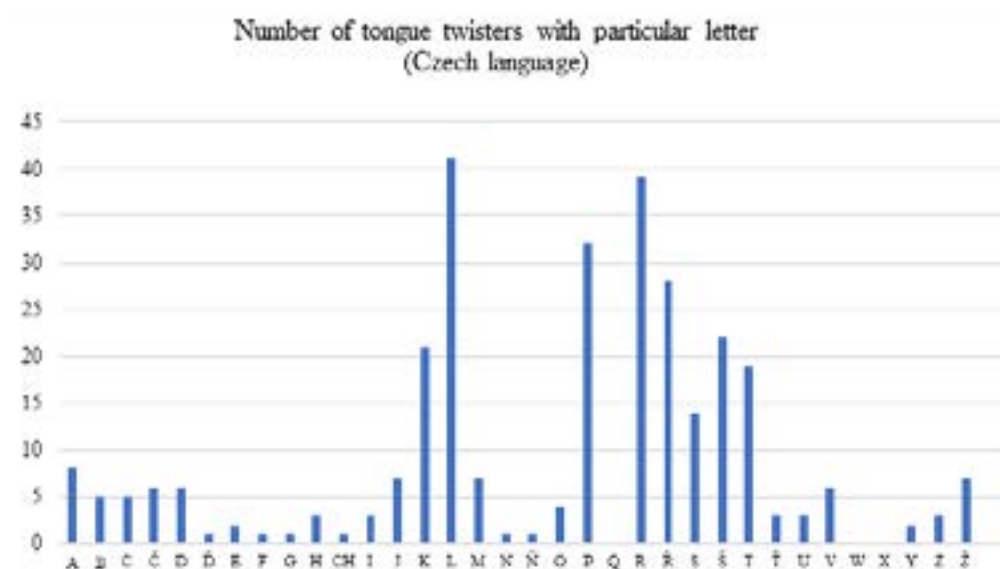
The above-given diagrams show that in the Czech language tongue twisters are mostly focused on letters L, P, R, Ř. In this case, the sound realizations of the letter Ř, which is unique in the Czech language, often causes pronunciation difficulties not only for foreigners who are not familiar with its sound but also for Czech native speakers. In the Russian folklore tradition, the majority of tongue twisters are concentrated on the letter Р, as well as К, Л, Ш, С. Besides, many of these tongue twisters are based on the combinations of these letters. The least amount of tongue twisters in both diagrams is focused on vowels. This stems from the minimum articulation and non-essential changes in speech organs they require. Moreover, it is evident that if one particular vowel frequently occurs within a particular tongue twister, it does not mean that its sound realizations are being practiced. In the majority of cases, it is about a combination of a difficult-to-pronounce consonant and a vowel that is being trained.

Conclusion

It is an indisputable fact that the nature of languages has a significant influence on the existence of particular oral traditions. The differences between Russian and Czech tongue twisters as well as their similarities in the content and structure are based on this factor. The closeness of Russian and Czech tongue twisters is illustrated by the similarity of their images and subjects, as well as by usage of the same figures of speech on different levels of the language system to create them and make them more complex. Moreover, they are also focused on alternative letters and their sound realizations in both languages.

The main sources of differences between Russian and Czech tongue twisters are the unique historical and cultural development of both ethnic groups, differences in the ways they look at and describe the world around them, and also rules according to which the two languages function. The latter aspect also influences the operation of their structural and rhythmical organization.

Differences and similarities of tongue twisters not only stem from the structure of the languages but they also represent extralinguistic reality that is reflected by a given society in its folklore. The comparison of a particular folklore genre between two languages opens numerous entry points where new researches of the same type can start. The more people study the language and folklore of different ethnic groups, the more knowledge can be acquired about their interaction, mutual borrowing of individual aspects from various areas of life, and the way how they are being preserved not only in their culture but also in their language.

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