

The meaning of the basic term for the colour black in Czech, Polish and Upper Sorbian

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Abstract

In European culture the colour black has quite a diverse and complex symbolism, which is also confirmed in the phrases containing *black* and referring to human life and the surrounding nature. This article is a comparative analysis of the meanings (figurative and literal) and connotations of the term “black” in three genetically close languages: Czech, Polish and Upper Sorbian. The comparative approach has brought out both the similarities in the conceptualization of this colour and its connotations, which are typical for two languages or only one. The semantic connotations of *black* in the analysed languages confirm their high compliance, which results from the linguistic and cultural proximity. The differences relate primarily to the wealth of expressions that implement the appropriate connotations. There is a visible lack of symmetry between Czech and Polish on the one hand, and Upper Sorbian on the other. In Upper Sorbian, as a minority language, one can also notice the influence of the German language (clichés of German expressions), which results from the closeness of Upper Sorbian with German.

1. Introduction

The term “black” in Czech and Polish, as one of the neutral colours (apart from white and grey), has become the subject of interest of linguists, including Teresa Zofia Orłoś (2005) and Agata Ostrowska-Knapik (2010). However, their studies focus on the analysis of phraseological relations containing the names of the black colour in both languages from the perspective of the Czech-Polish phraseological equivalence. As for the Polish language, there are also publications by Ewa Komorowska (2010, 2011), in which the subject of the seman-

tic-cognitive description is the black colour occurring in Polish and Russian linguistic expressions.

This paper analyses the meanings (figurative and literal) and connotations of the basic terms for “black” in three languages: Czech, Polish and Upper Sorbian, i.e. *černý*, *czarny* and *čorny*. In some cases the adverbs deriving from the adjectives have been considered: Czech – *černo/černě*, Pol. – *czarno* and USorb. – *čornje*. The analysis aims at defining the ways of the conceptualization of the black colour as well as establishing the linguistic and cultural references and connotations. In turn, the adopted comparative background is intended to bring out both the similarities in the conceptualization of this colour, resulting from the linguistic and cultural proximity, as well as the meanings and scopes of reference, typical only for the Czech or the other two compared languages.

The material bases for the analysis are dictionaries and corpus data (see the Bibliography). Considering the state of Upper Sorbian lexicography, the latter are especially important to the Upper Sorbian language. However, due to the limitation of the volume of the article, only a selection of materials will be presented here, illustrating the meanings and references of the discussed terms for the black colour to real objects placed in the structure of the semantic spheres of the world, which include, for example, man, animate and inanimate nature or artefacts. Since the aim is not to note all the combinations of words and their variants, but to provide a general description of the use of “black” in all the three languages and to attempt to cover the whole issue, indicating the similarities and differences. It should be noted that the choice of the compared languages is not accidental: on the one hand, they are languages belonging to the same language group, which allows us to assume the existence of considerable similarities, on the other – Upper Sorbian, as a minority language, may differ from Czech and Polish on the subject matter discussed here.

The present article fits into the already quite rich current of research on the semantics of terms for colours in languages and cultures. Important studies dealing with this issue include, among others, two

volumes edited by Renata Grzegorzycykowa and Krystyna Waszakowa (2000, 2003), resulting from an international project entitled *Studia z semantyki porównawczej* [Studies in comparative semantics]. Their worked-out specifications concerning the methodology of description have inspired and modelled this study.

2. The symbolism of the colour black

In the European cultural circle, the symbolism of black is quite unambiguous – it is commonly associated with negative features. According to Władysław Kopaliński (2006: 48), blackness is a symbol of evil, hatred, immorality, deception as well as danger, destruction, catastrophe, sadness and tragedy.

In addition, the black colour symbolizes death and mourning.¹ Black as an expression of mourning is a Roman custom, borrowed from the ancient Egyptians (Kopaliński 2003: 194). Sometimes black is also associated with superstition, witchcraft, mysterious forces and fear. In Christianity, on the one hand, it is a symbol of sin, penance, Lent and Good Friday, and on the other – a sign of love and instinctive and maternal femininity, which is reflected in the numerous Black Madonnas as destinations of pilgrimages. Moreover, blackness is associated with hell, the devil and darkness (Kopaliński 2006: 48–49). Black, especially in the East, is also a symbol of inferiority and slavery (Kopaliński 2003: 194).

Similar meanings and symbols of this colour can likewise be seen in literature. An example is the black veil (Czech *černý závoj*) in the story *Čtyry doby* by Božena Němcová. Here the black colour appears in the context of Christian symbolism in opposition to white, light, shine and colour. A woman wearing a black veil goes upstairs, and her pilgrimage is accompanied by many negative attributes: dirt, danger, fatigue and disease, and above all by sin. When her sin is forgiven, the

¹ For centuries black, as the colour of mourning, has been used in funeral rites and in Holy Masses for the dead. Yet, now violet is more commonly used at funerals to emphasize Christian hope (Wrzała 2017).

black veil falls off her head, and she is again surrounded by light and colours (Vaňková 2003: 56–57). Therefore, blackness primarily means sadness, an atmosphere of gloom, pessimism and mourning, but also evil and horror. It is no different in literature, especially in Polish poetry (there are no relevant studies of Lusatian writers' works), where black is opposed to white and serves to express the opposite values: good – evil. Sometimes, as in Zbigniew Herbert's poetry, both achromatic colours have been considered key words, which serve to “bring out the poetic expression of a real image” (Badyda 2008: 67). In other Polish works, e.g. by Cyprian Norwid, they are used to describe the world of plants and animals (Teleżyńska 1994: VI–VII). In the literature of other nations we can find examples of using the symbolic meaning of black, e.g. the black wind as a hellish punishment for the fornicators in Dante's *Divine Comedy* or the black poodle symbolizing the devil in Goethe's *Faust* (Kopaliński 2006: 49).

This factually quite diverse and complex symbolism of black is confirmed by the combinations of words containing the term “black” and referring to human life and the surrounding nature.

3. Meanings and the connectivity of the terms for the black colour

Black undoubtedly belongs to the colours that are very closely related to the world of nature, and it is among natural objects that the pattern or prototype of this colour should be sought, which, according to Krystyna Waszakowa (2000: 22), constitutes the “centre of meaning of a given name of colours – category,” and “the prototypical reference of a given colour name is determined by the most typical, natural and the most common references of this colour, i.e. certain types of things, the best examples and patterns that this term evokes in the speakers' awareness.”

This is important information because, as Waszakowa rightly notes (2000: 23), “the basic names of colours as categories defined by the prototype reflect the image of the world in the human mind and reflect

its common (i.e. non-encyclopaedic) knowledge about this world.” She presents “hypothetical data” on the prototypes corresponding to the basic names of the black colour, among others, in Czech and Polish. Accordingly, as prototypes of the Czech term for “black” (*černý*), she gives: *night, coal, hair* and *eyes*. As for Polish, she adopts, following Ryszard Tokarski (2004), the division into quantitative black (the degree of darkness) and qualitative (quality of the colour) – in both cases *night* is the prototype (Waszakowa 2000: 23). No data are available on the Upper Sorbian language. Now let us consider the set comparisons found in the languages in question.

Waszakowa’s *night* as the prototype of black in Czech and Polish is confirmed by comparisons occurring in both languages whose dictionaries give their double meanings: Czech (*být*) *černý jako noc* – “(as) black as night”: 1. “deep black” (especially, hair, eyes, etc.), 2. “(morally) repulsive, disgusting”; and Pol. *czarny jak noc* – “(as) black as night”: 1. “totally, perfectly black,” 2. favourably of “a dark-skinned person” (cf. *ktoś czarny jak noc* – “someone is black as night,” liter. “someone with dark skin and dark hair”). In the Upper Sorbian language, the comparison *čorny kaž nóc* has been registered in the Upper Sorbian text corpus HOTKO, but these are single examples, cf. *Jej so zdaše, zo je so barba jeho wočow wot zeleneje na čornu kaž nóc přeměnila* (Žadyn happy-end. Zběrka lyriki a krótkeje prozy, Budyšin 2001).

In Czech and Polish dictionaries, the Czech lexeme *černý* and the Polish *czarny* are most frequently defined as “having the colour of black coal” (in Polish, also the colour of pitch). In Upper Sorbian dictionaries, which are all bilingual, the lexeme *čorny* is defined by its German equivalent *schwarz*. This reference is confirmed in all of the three languages by the fixed comparison meaning “very black in colour” (e.g. eyes, hair, skin), but also “burned (e.g. meat),” cf. Czech *černý jako uhel* – “(as) black as coal”; Pol. *czarny jak węgiel* and USorb. *čorny kaž (morwe /mortwe) wuhlo*. All of the confronted languages have the following similes: Czech *černý jako saze* – “(as) black as soot”; Pol. *czarny jak sadza*; USorb. *čorny kaž sazy*, as well as

Czech *černý jako smůla/smola* – “(as) black as pitch”; Pol. *czarny jak smola*; USorb. *čorny kaž smola/kolmaz (kolmaz* “lubricant”). They are used to say that someone or something is dirty. These extended meanings also occur in the combination: Czech *černý jako kominík* – “black as a chimney-sweeper”; Pol. *czarny jak kominiarz*; USorb. *čorny kaž saznik*. Further, the Czech word meaning “dirty” occurs in (*být*) *černý jako kolomaz/od kolomazi* – “(as) black as lubricant” and *černý jako bota* – “(as) black as a shoe.” One should also note the Czech *černý jako zem* – “(as) black as earth” and the Pol. *czarny jak ziemia*, while the USorb. *čorny kaž zemja* appears only twice in the corpus, and the examples of its usage come from older literature and refer to bread and pies.

Other recorded comparisons testify to the extended meanings of “black/dark-skinned” → “tanned” (However, this seems to concern mainly Czech and Polish: Czech (*být*) *černý jako mouřenín* – “black as blackamoor” and Pol. *czarny jak Murzyn*. In Upper Sorbian we have one example of a plural usage, recorded in its corpus: *Hdyž za čerstwym powětrom hrabajo z pincy wuběžachmy, běchmy čorni kaž čornuši* (Jan Cyž, *Černje na puću do swobody. Dopomnjenki wot nowembra 1944 do kónca léta 1945*, Budyšin 1979). In Czech there is also one such a comparison *černý jako ašant* – “black as the Ashanti people” (ethnic group in Ghana). Moreover, the colour of the skin can be described by the Czech *černý jako eben* and the Pol. *czarny jak heban* – “(as) black as ebony.”

Some comparisons predominantly refer to hair (and animal hair), cf. Czech *černý jako havran* – “black as a raven”; Pol. *czarny jak kruk* – “(as) black as a raven” and USorb. *čorny kaž wróna* – “as black as a crow” (also the older form: *čorny kaž rapak* – “(as) black as a raven”), and also Pol. *czarny jak aksamit* and the older USorb. *čorny kaž bobak* – “as black as fright,” *čorny kaž kadolb* – “as black as a chimney.” In several or in all meanings, i.e. “black, dirty, tanned,” there are comparisons: Czech (*být*) *černý jako cikán/cikánka* – “as black as a Gypsy” and Pol. *czarny jak Cygan*, Czech (*být*) *černý jako čert* i (*být*) *černý jako ďábel* – “as black as the devil”; Pol. *czarny jak*

diabel meaning “dark haired, dark-skinned,” but also “dressed in black.” Moreover, the meaning of “pitch black” has appeared in the Polish bookish comparison *czarny jak atrament* and the older USorb. *čorny kaž mór* – “as black as the Plague.”

Our analysis leads to the conclusion that the only reference of black to coal and soot² as well as pitch and a chimney-sweeper can be recognised as identical as to their meanings in all the three languages. Other combinations of words are typical of one or two of the languages (most frequently Czech and Polish).

Among the permanent combinations of words with the black colour, there are also references to the world of plants and animals. These are two-part names, one of the components being the adjective *černý* – *czarny* – *čorny*, used in its literal sense. Black refers to the colour of some plant element (mainly fruit or bark) or animal’s plumage, hair and colour. These types of combinations mostly function as names of species, in which it is the colour that defines a given species defines, cf. plant names: Czech *pepřovník černý* – “black pepper” (Pol. *pieprz czarny*, USorb. *čorny popjerjowc*), Czech *borovice černá* – “black pine” (Pol. *sosna czarna*, USorb. *čorna chójna*), Czech *lilek černý* – “black nightshade” (Pol. *psianka czarna*; USorb. *čorne wrónidlo*), Czech *topol černý* – “black poplar” (Pol. *topola czarna*; USorb. *čorny topoľ*); and animals: Czech *čáp černý* – “black stork” (Pol. *bocian czarny*; USorb. *čorny baćon*), Czech *medvěd černý* – “American black bear” (Pol. *niedźwiedz czarny*; USorb. *čorny mjedwjedź*), *datel černý* – “black woodpecker” (Pol. *dzięcioł czarny*; USorb. *čorny dypornak/dypak*, also *čorna žolma*). These examples show that the black colour does not always appear in all of the compared languages, cf. Czech *pilous černý* – “wheat weevil” (Pol. *wolek zbożowy*; USorb. *čorny račk*). It can also happen that Upper Sorbian (in the light of its lexicographical and corpus data) sometimes lacks the term for a given species, cf. Czech *lyska černá* – “Eurasian coot”

² References to coal and soot also appear in other distant languages and cultures, e.g. in Japanese (Zakrzewska 2012: 188).

(Pol. *lyska zwyczajna*; the textual corpus of Upper Sorbian notes only two equivalents in the sources dated to the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th cc.: *lysak* oraz *čornojta kačka*), Czech *volavka černá* – “black heron” (Pol. *czapla czarna*). It is rarely the case that black appears in Upper Sorbian names and is absent in the other two languages: USorb. *čorna wrónowka* – “bog bilberry”; Czech *vlochyňě bahenní*; Pol. *borówka bagienna*.

Thus, in all three languages the name of the colour performs the same function and is used in the same meaning, but there is no full equivalence between the compared languages. This results from the specificity of botanical and zoological nomenclature. In turn, the lack of a given term in the Upper Sorbian language is related to the status of Upper Sorbian and the Sorbian languages in general (their use is limited to certain communicative situations, mainly in the family, at school, in Sorbian institutions). As a result, many names of plant and animal species are missing; as a rule, the more specialized the name or term, the less likely it is to appear in the Upper Sorbian language (the speakers’ needs are satisfied by German). This also applies to expressions from the sociolect of hunters, e.g. Czech *černá zvěř* / *černá* – “boars” and Pol. *czarny zwierz* / *czarna zwierzyna*, or Pol. *czarna stopa* – “a field that was not covered with snow, so animals’ traces cannot be seen.”

“Black” also appears in various proper names (countries, seas, rivers, etc.), but also here there are some differences, cf. Czech *Černé moře* – “the Black Sea”; Pol. *Morze Czarne*; USorb. *Čorne morjo* and Czech *Černá Hora* – “Montenegro”: Pol. *Czarnogóra*; USorb. *Montenegro*, but also *Čornohórska*, *Čorna Hora*.

In the sphere of inanimate nature, which includes rocks, minerals, metals, etc., the term for the black colour is associated with objects of nature, expressing neutral and sometimes positive connotations. Such should be considered, inter alia, the Czech *černé uhlí* – “bituminous coal, black coal”; cf. Pol. *węgiel kamienny* (but also the archaic *czarne złoto* / *czarny diament*); USorb. *kamjentne wuhlo*, and the metonymic extensions: Czech *černé kovy* – “technical iron,” *černá metalurgie* –

“iron metallurgy,” *černé řemeslo* – “metal crafts” and the Czech *černé umění* – “printing” and the Pol. *czarna sztuka*.

A great number, if not most recorded combinations of words, including, above all, phraseologisms, are related to the semantic sphere concerning humans (appearance, but also attitude, behaviour or character). It should be noted that quite often there are metaphorical and metonymic shifts here. In relation to man in the literal sense, “black” refers to his/her external appearance, including the aforementioned hair and eyes: Czech *černé vlasy/oči*; Pol. *czarne włosy/oczy*; USorb. *Čorne włosy, čorne/čornej woči*. Similarly, “black” refers to the colour of the skin, e.g. the Czech *černý člověk* – “a person belonging to the black race, with dark skin,” *černé plemeno* – “black tribe,” *černý otrok* – “black slave” and the Pol. *czarny człowiek, czarne plemię, czarny niewolnik* (old usage, Pol. *czarny towar* – “African slaves for sale”) – cf. USorb. *čorny čłowjek*, but *kmjen čornuchow / čornuchowski kmjen*; the combination “black slave” has not been documented. Among the recorded examples, there is a shift in the meaning expressed with the adjective “black” from “skin colour” to “the continent inhabited by black people, Africa” (Czech *černý kontinent*; Pol. *Czarny Kontynent / Czarny Ląd*; USorb. *čorny kontinent*) or 1. “inhabitants of black Africa,” 2. “part of Africa to the south of the Sahara, mostly inhabited by black population” (Czech *černá Afrika*; Pol. *Czarna Afryka*; USorb. *čorna Afrika*). In addition, in Czech and Polish, shifts in meaning from “skin colour” to “a type of activity (art, music, etc.) performed by black people” have been recorded: Czech *černá/černošská hudba, černé/černošské blues*; Pol. *czarna muzyka, czarny blues* (also *czarny soul*). There are no such set phrases in Upper Sorbian, which may be related to the fact that they belong to some specialist lexis (cf. the remarks above).

Referring to the skin colour, *black* also conveys the meaning “dirty”: Czech *černé nohy, černé ruce* – “dirty hands, dirty legs”; Pol. *czarne nogi, czarne ręce* (cf. also *czarno za/pod paznokciami* – “black, dirty nails”); USorb. *čorne/čornej nohi/noze, čornej ruce*.

In the context of *black* referring to the colour of the skin, there remain obsolete terms of diseases, e.g. “the Pestilence, the Plague” (Czech *černá smrt* – “the Black Death”; Pol. *czarna śmierć*; USorb. *čorna smjerć*) or “smallpox” (Czech *černé neštovice*; Pol. *czarna ospa*; USorb. *čorne jětra*). Additionally, Czech has the name of children’s disease *černý kašel* – “whooping cough” (Pol. *krztusiec*; USorb. *dušacy/dušaty/torhacy kašel*).

In the literal sense, the adjective *black* refers to human clothing, e.g. generally “black clothes” (Czech *černý oblek*; Pol. *czarne ubranie*; USorb. *čorna drasta*) or metaphorical “a simple, formal knee-length black dress” (Czech *malé černé*, Pol. *mała czarna*).

With regard to clothes, black can also connote “mourning, grief,” which is expressed in Czech and Upper Sorbian phrases meaning “to wear mourning”: Czech *být/bejt/chodit v černém/černým*, USorb. *čorny chodzić*. In Upper Sorbian there is also “material symbolising mourning, pall” – *čorny flor* (cf. Germ. *Trauerflor*).

Black clothes usually have negative connotations. In addition to mourning, they can mean extremely reactionary views, most often fascist. There are many examples of this type of connection with black, but they appear only in Czech and Polish: Czech *černé košile* – “hist. Italian paramilitary organization of a fascist character founded in 1923 by Benito Mussolini; its members wore black shirts; the Nazis, fascists (Italian Nazis); Blackshirts”; Pol. *czarne koszule*; Czech *černá sotňa* 1. “the extreme anti-democratic style in politics and its supporters; also a militia fighting the supporters of democracy,” 2. old Russian “militia created by the tsarist authorities from representatives of the social lower classes in order to fight the revolution and attack Jews, Armenians – the Black Hundred”; Pol. *czarna sotnia*; Czech *černá ruka* (also *řádit jako černá ruka*) “a perpetrator of some important action, wreaking havoc; originally a Serbian conspiratorial organization founded in Belgrade in August 1901 by a group of Serbian nationalists that organized the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand; the Black Hand”; Pol. *Czarna Ręka*. The few exceptions show slightly more complex connotations: Czech *Černí panteri* – “the

American political organization protecting black people in the United States and fighting for their rights; the Black Panther Party”; Pol. *Czarne Pantery* (the abbreviated name of *Partia Czarnych Panter*). Here, black does not only refer to black clothes, but above all to the symbol of the organization, i.e. the black panther. The reference to the skin colour is also important here.

All the above-mentioned combinations of words with *black* belong to the so-called winged words, or more broadly, to Europeanisms. This type of vocabulary has not been recorded in the Upper Sorbian language as a minority language, whose use is restricted to certain spheres of life (see above).

Black, once a symbol of humility and modesty, has survived to this day mainly in priests and seminarians’ cassocks as well as in habits of some religious orders (cf. Kopaliński 2006: 49), e.g. the Czech *černá mše* – “an obsolete term for All Souls Mass celebrated in a black chasuble” or the Pol. *czarne bractwo* – “Jesuits.” In Czech the adjective *black* conveys very pejorative connotations in such expressions as *černý pták*, literary “a priest, clericist” (also “a fascist” or “an SS-man”) and *černý Řím* – “clerical or fascist”; Pol. *czarny* – contemptuously of a Catholic clergyman.

Black clothes are also associated with the clothes of the devil or sorcerer, and later also with a magician (Kopaliński 2006: 48), hence the Czech expression *černý anděl* – “the devil, Satan assuming a mask of goodness”; Pol. *czarny anioł*; USorb. *čorny jandžel* (this is also the meaning of the combination *čorny Jurij* that has no obvious connection). Here the meaning of black has been extended to all activities related to unclean forces: Czech *černá magie* – “magic using the power of evil; black magic”; Pol. *czarna magia*; USorb. *čorna magija*. Today this connection is chiefly used in a figurative sense as something difficult to know, learn, understand; something vague, mysterious. This semantic sphere additionally includes the Czech *černá mše* – “in the Satanic practice it is a parody of liturgy to call evil spirits; Black Mass” and the Pol. *czarna msza*.

In all the analysed languages, the colour black in relation to humans usually contains a negative assessment: Czech *černá ovce* (also *být černou ovčí*) – “someone compromising the community to which he/she belongs; outcast”; Pol. *czarna owca* and USorb. *čorna wowca / čorny boran*; Czech *černý hrdina* – “a literary or film hero with bad character traits; angry, perverse, demoralized”; Pol. *czarny bohater/charakter*; *czarna krew* – colloq. “a mean, bad character”; *czarny lud* – humorous “people or institutions to whom the propaganda ascribes all negative qualities in order to focus the reluctance of the society on them.” The following phrases also express negative feelings: Czech *být na černé listině* (cf. also *být černě zapsán*) – “have a bad opinion”; Pol. *być/znajdować się na czarnej liście*; USorb. *na čornej lišćinje stać* (cf. Germ. *auf der schwarzen Liste stehen*).

Certain exceptions are phrases expressing a positive assessment, e.g. the Czech *černý kůň* – “a person or thing that unexpectedly wins a competition by beating rivals who were initially thought to have a better chance of winning”; Pol. *czarny koń*; USorb. *čorny kón*, while the Czech *černý vzadu* in its second meaning: “a modest man, not trying to get an exposed position” is positive but its first meaning: “a person with great influence, acting covertly; éminence grise” rather expresses an unfavourable colouring.

The terms for the black colour used to refer to humans usually denote their bad mood and mental state. Here black expresses “gloominess, pessimism, a bad situation” and sometimes “aversion, hatred”: Czech *vidět něco v černých barvách / dívat se na něco černými brýlemi / dívat se na svět černě* – “be a pessimist”; Pol. *widzieć w czarnych barwach/kolorach / patrzeć na świat przez czarne okulary*, USorb. *čornje widžeć* (cf. Germ. *Schwarz sehen*); Czech *líčit/malovat/vylíčit něco černými barvami/v černých barvách/černě* – “present something in a pessimistic or tragic way”; Pol. *kreślić/malować / przedstawiać/ukazywać coś w czarnych barwach/kolorach / literary, malować czarnymi farbami / ubierać coś w czarne barwy*, as well as the USorb. *čornje hladać* – “look hostile, be hostile.” This semantic sphere also includes the following set phrases: Czech *černé myšlenky*

– “bad feelings, bad mood, depression”; Pol. *czarne myśli*; Czech *černý nevděk* – “meanness, ungrateful behaviour towards a person to whom gratitude is due”; Pol. *czarna niewdzięczność*; Czech *černý scénář* – “pessimistic predictions of the course of events”; Pol. *czarny scenariusz* (*coś przewiduje/zakłada*), and also the Czech *černé svědomí* – “guilty conscience,” *černý skutek* – “an evil deed, act,” *černé úmysly* – “bad intentions,” *bejt černej/švorc* – “have no money,” and the Pol. *czarna rozpacz* – “great despair, a sense of hopelessness, misfortune,” *czarna potwarz* – commonly “false accusation, slander, calumny,” *czarne podniebienie* – literary “malice, tendency to aggression.”

In the semantic sphere referring to humans we should also note the Czech *zapsat/zaznamenat něco černým písmem* – “remember as a tragic event” and the Pol. *zapisać (się) czarnymi literami*. Here *black* expresses “tragedy, sadness.”

These meanings show a clear quantitative difference between Czech and Polish on the one hand, and Upper Sorbian, on the other. Many Upper Sorbian combinations of words are missing, probably due to the fact that they are often set phrases belonging to the higher register of this language.

In the semantic sphere concerning the world and elements, *black* refers to light in a natural way: Czech *černá noc* – “a dark night”; Pol. *czarna noc*; USorb. *čorna nóc*. Yet, here the resulting combinations of words in their figurative meanings largely concern man although in this case the time and rhythm of nature are equally important: day, month, moment, moment, period, etc., for example the Pol. *czarny okres w czyimś życiu/życiorysie/dziejach/historii* and so on, literary, difficult, unfavourable time. The term “black” has a negative connotation in the Czech *černý den* – “a tragic, unfortunate day”; Pol. *czarny dzień*; USorb. *čorny dzeń*. Any day of the week can be such a tragic day, but most often in all the languages the adjective *black* is related to a Friday: Czech *černý pátek* – “a day full of tragic events”; Pol. *czarny piątek*; USorb. *čorny pjatk*. Currently, in Czech and Polish this phrase has assumed an additional positive meaning as a day of sales: Black Friday. Sometimes unfortunate events follow one another and then we

talk about “a series of bad events”: Czech *černá serie*; Pol. *czarna seria*; USorb. *čorna serija*. In Polish and Upper Sorbian there are also set phrases: Pol. *czarna godzina* – “a period of the greatest difficulties, troubles; misfortune” and USorb. *čorna hodžina*; cf. Pol. *przychodzi na kogoś czarna godzina* – “someone begins to have difficulties and troubles” i *odkladać/zostawiać/zachowywać* itp. *na czarną godzinę* – “to stock up; to do things that will be useful in times of difficulty.” The Czech verbal expression *držet černou hodinku* means “to chat, to feast in the evening, in the dark”; therefore, the black colour is related to the time of the day and the amount of light. Additionally, it can refer to visual impressions as in the sayings: Czech *potmě každá kočka/kráva černá* and Pol. *w nocy wszystkie koty są czarne* (or *szare/bure*) in the meaning of “everything seems the same in the mass; in the crowd they all seem alike” and Czech (*bylo tam*) *lidí až černo*; Pol. *czarny tłum* – “a lot of people (gathered or in a small area).”

Other important objects of reference are clouds (Czech *černé mraky* – “black clouds”; Pol. *czarne chmury*; USorb. *čorne mróče*). In Polish *czarne chmury* is also used in the literary form as “announcing troubles, rows, unpleasantness” and in the phraseologism *czarne chmury (nad kimś) się gromadzą/zbierają/pojawiły/zebrały/zgromadziły/zawisły* meaning “someone is threatened by an unfavourable situation” (cf. Pol. *czarna dziura* – literary “a difficult situation from which it is impossible to get out” and *ktoś jest w czarnej dupie* – vulg. “someone is in a very unfavourable situation and has no change of improving it”).

In this semantic sphere, an example of a neutral or positive connotation can be the combinations of words: Czech *černý humor* – “presenting tragic things in a humorous way”; Pol. *czarny humor*; USorb. *čorny humor*; Czech *černá komedie* – “a kind of comedy in which serious matters are presented humorously”; Pol. *czarna komedia*; USorb. *čorna komedia*.

A very interesting semantic sphere is human activities in the field of economics and economy. Here, the meaning is shifted from “black, dark” to “secret, illegal, forbidden, secretive.” In this semantic sphere,

we can observe a lot of similarities between the compared languages, but also some significant differences. The Upper Sorbian language, clearly under the influence of German, is quite distinct. So we have various combinations of words in these languages: Czech *černý trh/obchod* – “illegal trade”; Pol. *czarny rynek/gielda*; USorb. *čorne wiki/wikowanje*; Czech *dělat na černo* – “illegally, without proper documents entitling to be employed”; Pol. *pracować na czarno* (cf. Pol. *czarna robota* – “simple, hard and poorly paid job”) and USorb. *čornje džělać* (cf. Germ. *schwarzarbeiten*); Czech *práce na černo* – “illegal employment”; Pol. *praca na czarno* and USorb. *čorne džěło* (cf. Germ. *Schwarzarbeit*). Sometimes Polish lacks similar phrases, e.g. the Czech *černý obchodník* – “illegal trader” and USorb. *čorny wikowar* – cf. Pol. *nielegalny handlarz*; Czech *černá cena* – “black market price” and USorb. *plácizna na čornych wikach* (cf. Germ. *Schwarzmarktpreis*) – cf. Pol. *cena czarnorynkowa*; Czech *černé konto* – “illegal bank account”; USorb. *čorne konto* (cf. Germ. *schwarzes Konto*) – cf. Pol. *nielegalne konto bankowe*; Czech *jet na černo* – “travelling without a ticket” (also Czech *černý pasažér* – “a passenger who does not have a ticket”) and USorb. *čornje jěć* (cf. Germ. *schwarzfahren*) – cf. Pol. *jechać na gapę*, and also Czech *černý posluchač rozhlasu* – “a person who illegally listens to the radio without paying subscription revenue” (Pol. *pajęczarz*) and USorb. *čornje poskać/stuchać* (cf. Germ. *schwarzhören*). There are still many references to *black* in this semantic sphere in particular languages: Czech *černý fond* – “illegal fund,” *černé mzdy* – “illegal wages” or Pol. *czarny PR/piar/pijar* – pejorative “all dishonest methods and propaganda activities aimed at discrediting competition.” As one can see, in this semantic sphere many set phrases with *black* have developed in more recent times. This sphere seems to be open and ready to include new references and combinations of words.

As it has been emphasized many times, the term for the black colour usually has negative connotations. However, there are (few) examples of set combinations where *black* connotes a positive assessment, e.g. Czech *trefit (se) do černého*, USorb. *do čorneho trje-*

chić/třělic (z něčim) – “achieve the goal, capture the essence of things; hit the mark” (cf. Germ. *ins Schwarze treffen*) – cf. Pol. *trafić w sedno / strzał w dziesiątkę*; Czech *mířit/zamířit do černého* – “be close, get closer to grasping the essence of something; touch the core of the matter”; Czech *(být/zůstat/držet se) v černých číslech* – “in the blank, with a positive balance” and USorb. *čorne ličby pisać* – “show profits.”³

The Polish phrases *czarny marsz* meaning “a march of people protesting against crime, especially against murders, usually taking place in silence” and *czarna procesja* – “a march through the streets of the city of people who want to demonstrate their support for a cause or commemorate a tragic event” have a positive connotation although black symbolizes tragedy, sadness and mourning.

The term for the black colour refers to various types of artefacts. It is impossible to list all the references in a short paper. However, it can generally be stated that in this semantic sphere, *black* is repeatedly associated with a neutral evaluation and conveys the meaning of “black” and “dark,” e.g. Czech *černá (školní) tabule* – “school blackboard”; Pol. *czarna tablica*; USorb. *čorna tafla* or Czech *černé brýle* – “glasses with dark lenses”; Pol. *czarne/ciemne okulary*, USorb. *čorna bryla / čorne nawoči*. Sometimes there may be a shift in meaning, cf. Pol. *czarny sport* – literary “motorcycle speedway”; Czech *černá kronika* – “(in a newspaper) the section on accidents, etc.”

Yet, at times we are dealing with a negative undertone, which is associated with a change of meaning; *black* connotes “evil” and “shameful,” cf. Czech *černá listina* – “a list of people or companies that have done something wrong, or things considered undesirable”: Pol. *czarna lista/księga*, USorb. *čorna lisćina* czy Pol. *czarna teczka* – “documents compromising someone.” This semantic sphere also includes “the name of the card game in which players avoid the card called ‘Peter’ – the only card without a pair; the player with this card in hand loses the game; Black Peter”: Czech *černý Petr*; Pol. *Czarny Piotruś*;

³ Also, for example in Japanese culture, “black” in economy, settlements or family budget means a profit (Zakrzewska 2012: 189).

USorb. *čorny pětr* (cf. USorb. with the phraseologism *čorneho Pětra prisunyć/přisuwać někomu* – “to blame someone for something” – cf. Germ. *jemandem den schwarzen Peter zuschieben*).

In such combinations as the Czech *černá skříňka* – “a device in an airplane (or other vehicle) recording data used to investigate the causes of a breakdown or a crash; blackbox”; Pol. *czarna skrzynka*; USorb. *blackbox* (cf. Germ. *Blackbox*) or Czech *černá známka* – “a marked area or section of road where there are particularly high levels of accidents; Black Spot Program” and Pol. *czarny punkt*, the term for “black” connotes “tragedy, grief” and not the literal meaning “black” (the box is actually orange so that it could easily be found).

Interesting elements of this semantic sphere are the combinations of *black* with objects related to cuisine (food and drink). In this case, we usually deal with a neutral connotation. Despite the specificity of this sphere of human life, there are many combinations common to all the languages compared. It should be noted that the similarities most often concern basic products, e.g. Czech *černý čaj* – “black tea”; Pol. *czarna herbata* (also *czarna smola* meaning humorously “very strong tea”); USorb. *čorny čaj*, Czech *černá káva* – “coffee without milk or cream”; Pol. *czarna* (cf. *duża/mala czarna* – dated “a big or small cup of coffee,” *pól czarnej* – “a small cup of coffee”); USorb. *čorny kofej*; Czech *černá polévka* – “animal blood soup”; Pol. *czarna polewka* (old negative use: “soup served to the applicant as a sign of refusal”); USorb. *čorna poliwka* (one usage in the textual corpus). Today, however, the connotation changes now and again; this applies to products in which *black* refers to natural, wholesome, healthy and valuable products for the human organism, once considered to be of lower quality and poor people’s food, e.g. Czech *černý chleba* – “wholemeal bread, baked with wholemeal flour”; Pol. *czarny chleba*; USorb. *čorny chleba* (cf. Komorowska 2010: 111).

Apart from the aforementioned similarities, there are differences and combinations of words that are typical only for two or one of these languages, e.g. Czech *černé pivo*; USorb. *čorne piwo* – cf. Pol. *ciemne*

piwo; Czech *černá tlačěnka* – “an offal product made using animal’s blood”; Pol. *czarny salceson* – cf. USorb. *krejna kotbasa* (cf. Germ. *Blutwurst*); Czech *ryba/zajíc na černo* (also *načerno*) – “fish, hare in dark sweet souse”; USorb. *čorna juška* (cf. Germ. *Schwarzbrühe*) – cf. Pol. *czarny sos polski* – “sauce according to an old Polish recipe; to obtain its dark colour, plum jam and burnt straw were added.” The analysis of the above material shows that terms for the black colour connote both “black” and “dark.” Sometimes, in relation to artefacts, the adjective *black* also introduces the meaning of “dirty”: Pol. *coś jest czarne od brudu* – contemptuously “extremely dirty,” *czarna smola* – “something very dark and also filthy.”

Finally, the term “black” should also be mentioned in combination with the white colour. In this type of set phraseological expressions and phrases, black and white appear in opposition, but it is not only about good – evil. These combinations use the contrast and clarity of both colours: Czech *dělat z bílého černé/z černého bíle* – “insist that black is white”; Pol. *(robić) z białego czarne/z czarnego białe* (also *mówić czarne na białe/białe na czarne*); Czech *(nebýt) ani bílý, ani černý / (nebejt) ani bílej, ani černej* – “(be) somewhat bland”; Pol. *ani czarno, ani biało / ani czarne, ani białe*. Czech also has *neřici ani černé, ani bílé* – “not to comment on any matter, not to take a position.” On the other hand, in all the three languages there are winged words from Goethe’s *Faust* although they are used in slightly different meanings: Czech *(dát někomu něco/dostat něco od někoho/mít něco) černé na bílém*; USorb. *čorne/čorno na běłym* – “let or have something in black and white,” and Pol. *czarno/czarne na białym* – “undoubtedly, clearly, explicitly” (cf. Orłóś, Hornik 1996, p. 47). In Polish there is also *wykazywać komuś czarno na białym, że...* – literary “prove with convincing arguments.” In turn, in Upper Sorbian we note *běle a čorne/čorne a běle rěčeć někomu* – “unsuccessfully persuading someone.”

4. Summary

The conducted analysis has confirmed my initial hypothesis of a high conceptualization of the terms for the black colour in the three West Slavic languages. The similarities concern the direction of the development of the meanings and references of the terms for “black” within particular semantic spheres (e.g. in terms of meaning related to humans, black most often connotes what is bad, sad, dark and even tragic in people’s lives), as well as in the symbolism of blackness. Some prototype references (coal, soot) are also common. All this is another significant argument proving the hypothesis put forward by linguists (cf. Waszakowa 2003: 66) stating that there are some basic, universal patterns and models in human perception and conceptualization of the world. Moreover, this is suggested by the given English idiomatic expressions (equivalents) or the aforementioned parallels in the Japanese language and culture.

The presented examples of the differences relate primarily to the richness of combinations of the terms for the black colour with the names of objects to which they relate; the differences in the meanings of the individual phrases are rare. It should be noted that at this point the Upper Sorbian language differs since a clear influence of German can be seen in its certain semantic ranges. This is a result of its minority status and of the Sorbs’ bilingualism.

The Czech, Polish and Upper Sorbian dialect materials could certainly provide an interesting complement to the linguistic image of the world defined by the terms for the black colour used in these three languages. Taking the example of the Polish dialects, it can be said that the adjective *black* is commonly used regardless of the object being defined, and its meaning is connected with that of the adjective *dirty*. *Black* is also more common in dialects compared to the literary language. In the language used by the older generation, *black* is used, almost without exception, to denote a person with dark hair, called *brunet* in the literary language (Zaręba 1954: 18–19).

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