

PROVERBS AS SPEECH ACTS IN ENGLISH AND CZECH

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1. Introduction

Among phraseological units, proverbs constitute the most complex category, propositional phrasemes, in that they are communicatively self-contained units which may serve as ready-made textual components. However, what makes them special is not only the fact that as propositions they are complex discourse units and so different in nature from verbal, nominal or adjectival referential phrasemes of the collocational type, but especially the fact that they are representative of social attitudes and stereotypes, cultural patterns and traditions. As such they have been of interest to a wide variety of disciplines, ethnography, folklore and literary studies, anthropology, etc., while linguistics has been relatively slow to show interest. Until recently, proverbs have been studied in their decontextualized, canonical form, typically as lemmas in collections, classifications and dictionaries of proverbs (Lauhakangas, 2001; Manser, 2007). This, however, is beginning to change as Wolfgang Mieder (2004: 134) observes, “Today it has almost become a cliché to point out that proverbs must be studied in context, but it took a long time for anthropologically oriented proverb collectors to go beyond mere texts and look at the use and function of the proverbial materials in actual speech. [...] Modern scholars trained in the theoretical aspects of speech acts and performance look at proverbs as part of active verbal communication.” It is certainly true that with the arrival of pragmatics and discourse and conversation analysis, attention turned to the function of proverbs in text and it seemed obvious that proverbs can be identified with particular speech acts. With the new developments in phraseology it was recognized (Čermák, 2007: 66–71) that phrasemes just as units of regular language are subject to formal transformation and functional shift in text. This, of course, may influence the illocutionary force of proverbs and their textual role. Accordingly, the study aims to examine the speech act status of a selected sample of proverbs in discourse in order to ascertain what the presumed speech act functioning of proverbs is really like when they are used in context.

2. Linking proverbs and speech acts

In linguistics it has become a commonplace to say as Huang (2007: 39) does that “[...] the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, an action within the framework of social

institutions and conventions. Put in slogan form, saying is (part of) doing, or words are (part of) deeds". The concept of proverbs as speech acts has been around for quite some time now and an early example of how this speech act perspective is applied to proverbs is found in Norrick (1985: 26–7), who reasons that "[...] if utterances of proverbs mean what they say on the literal level but go on to expand this meaning idiomatically in texts, then they classify as indirect speech acts in the sense of Searle (1975a). I can say *Praise a fair day at night* and mean what I say about praise and days, while at the same time conveying to my general hearer a general warning which he derives from my utterance". In effect he suggests that the use of an indirect speech act creates what in pragmatics is called a "conversational *implicature*", a meaning which the speaker wishes to convey, but does not explicitly express in order "to disguise his true feelings, to leave himself an escape route", "to avoid personal commitment and refutation", etc. (*ibid.*). Unlike a direct speech act, an indirect speech act is, in the words of Yule (1996) "[S]peech act where an indirect relationship exists between the structure and communicative function of an utterance". In Norrick's example it is the imperative (*'Praise ...'*) which is used not to order as its default reading is, but to warn (see also Searle, 1975a). Assuming that proverbs represent, as pointed out by Norrick, indirect speech acts, it seems that Sadock's (1972, 1974) explanation of the illocutionary force of indirect speech acts is particularly applicable to proverbs. According to his hypothesis, utterances that constitute speech act idioms require no inferencing at all to get at their meaning as their respective illocutionary force is conventionally attached to them.

In an article dealing specifically with communicating with proverbs Harnish (1993: 283–4) describes the prototypical proverb as "[...] a traditional saying having a fixed general sentential form, alluding to a common truth, with some (rudimentary) literary value, used with (broadly) constative or directive force. [...] Proverbs can be classified in terms of their form (sentential, phrasal; declarative, imperative) and their force (constative: explanation, inducing an attitude; directive). The nature of proverbs also determines their function and the way they are used to communicate." He then develops the following Proverb Inference Schema: A speaker uttering a proverb intends: (1) to allude to a relevant common truth; whereby (2) he wants to (a) explain the situation or (b) direct the hearer's action or (c) induce an attitude in the hearer; (3) the hearer is meant to apply the proverb and determine (a), (b), or (c). Only if both speaker and hearer fulfil their parts is communication successful.

The popularity of the concept of proverbs as speech acts is documented by Dairo's recent study (2010) in which he researched selected Yoruba proverbs in terms of speech act analysis and, compared to Harnish's description, even extended the range of speech acts performed by proverbs. In keeping with the standard view, Dairo concludes (2010: 441) that: "Any utterances made by language users in whatever form are speech acts; therefore, a proverb, as a rhetorical variable, is used to perform certain acts. The analysis of proverbs in this paper has shown that they are used severally to perform acts of adjudication, expression of facts, warning or admonition, giving advice, issuing caution, and giving directives." By contrast the present study will attempt to show that for several reasons proverbs in text do not always count as speech acts in themselves and that accordingly the simple equation proverb-speech act needs to be modified.

Although well known, for the sake of completeness and in order to specify the theoretical framework within which the proverbs will be analyzed, the following widely accepted classification of speech act types proposed by Searle (1975b) will be used: 1. representatives or constatives (statements expressing belief, such as assertions, statements, claims, conclusions, reports, remarks, explanations, etc., representing the world, making the words fit the world), 2. directives (statements expressing desire, want, e.g. requests, orders, advice, instruction, recommendations, suggestions, questions, permissions, prayers, pleading, making the world fit the words via the addressee), 3. commissives (statements expressing the speaker's intention, e.g. promises, vows, offers, refusals, agreement, threats, warning, making the world fit the words via the speaker), 4. expressives (statements expressing dis/pleasure, e.g. congratulations, elicitation, welcomes, praises, blaming, apologies) and, finally, 5. declarations (statements bringing about changes in the world through their utterances: declaring war, pronouncing a couple man and wife, adjourning a meeting, etc.).

Inasmuch as "speaking a language is performing acts according to rules" (Searle, 1969: 36–7), the felicitous performance of a speech act is dependent on the fulfilment of certain conditions required by these rules. When describing speech acts, Austin (1962: 6) explained the importance of the appropriate conditions or circumstances as follows: "[...] to utter a sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do so." Austin's felicity conditions which must be met if a speech act is to be properly performed were subsequently developed by Searle. They are usually exemplified by the speech act of promise. If an utterance such as *I will always love you* (about 1,280,000,000 results in Google search at the moment of writing) is to be recognized as a promise, it has to comply with the content conditions (it must be about a future event), it has to meet the preparatory conditions (the event will not happen by itself and it must be desired by the hearer), the sincerity condition (the speaker intends to carry out the action) and finally the essential condition (the utterance creates an obligation for the speaker to what has been promised).

According to Searle's speech act formula, a speech act consists of two components: illocutionary force (F) + proposition (p). While force is the action side of the speech act, the proposition is the content of the speech (consisting of reference + predication). The tricky question is how we know what the illocution is. Basically there are two answers. First, starting from the proposition it is the context that should make it clear what the speaker intends to do through his utterance. In deciding the illocutionary force we may be helped by an IFID, or an illocutionary force indicating device, i.e., some kind of means, prototypically a performative verb, which explicitly names the illocutionary act being performed (*I warn you that, I order you to, I promise that*, etc.), or some other means that draws attention to the illocutionary force of the utterance (e.g., word order, stress, intonation). Second, there are certain kinds of utterances that appear to be conventionally associated with a certain kind of speech act. This seems to be the case with established proverbs: illocutionary force is a fixed part of their meaning. Once we have identified a sequence in the text as a proverb, we presumably know its illocutionary force as we have learned it as part of the meaning of the proverb. The hypothesis is that the

proverb itself then functions as an IFID, i.e. a device indicating its default illocutionary force. In addition there are other signals that may help us identify a proverb. Some of them are mentioned in Norrick (2007) and include prominent positions of proverbs in discourse such as speech summaries and story closings with evaluation functions, also foregrounding of proverbs with special voice shifts and intonation, framing devices such as “we always say, as the saying goes, as they say”, etc. However, if truth be told, the illocutionary force (speech act function) of proverbs is rarely explicitly stated in standard reference books, which may cause difficulties when assigning speech act reading to proverbs both in and out of context.

3. The methodology and samples

The investigation of whether proverbs are invariably speech acts with default illocution, and if not, then why, involved several steps. The first was the selection of test samples of ten English and ten Czech proverbs. The next was the analysis of their speech-act function in text ascertaining the presence or absence of their default illocution. This was followed by a comparison of the situation in the English and the Czech samples of proverbs.

The first sample to have been selected was the English one. The selection of ten (presumably most) frequent proverbs was made by combining two sources, Kimberly J. Lau’s (1996) ten proverbs most frequently used in American newspapers and František Čermák’s (2010) most frequent proverbs in his paremiological minimum based on the British National Corpus. It consists of the following proverbs: 1. *Enough is enough*. 2. *Easier said than done*. 3. *Every cloud has a silver lining*. 4. *First come, first served*. 5. *Forgive and forget*. 6. *Time is money*. 7. *Let sleeping dogs lie*. 8. *Better late than never*. 9. *Strike while the iron is hot*. 10. *Still waters run deep*. The incidence and use of these selected proverbs were checked using the BNC which includes 90% of written texts and 10% of transcribed speech. An effort was made to count not only instances when the proverb is in its full, dictionary or canonical, form (checked in Manser, 2007), but also all its transformations occurring in the BNC, e.g. any part of the proverb that can be reasonably regarded as an unambiguous allusion to it, in the belief that even a reduced, or transformed, proverb can be used to perform its default speech act and habitual illocutionary force. Accordingly the figure for a given proverb includes occurrences both in its canonical form and non-canonical transformations, lexical and grammatical variants, reduced (elliptical) forms and even fragments (provided they signal allusion to the proverb clearly enough).

As regards the Czech proverbs, there were two possibilities of designing the sample: to choose ten most frequent Czech proverbs or to use the Czech counterparts of the English sample proverbs. On consideration, the second alternative seemed more profitable as such a sample allows contrasting equivalent pairs in English and Czech. Most of these proverbs are quite frequent in Czech too. Interestingly, five of the proverbs are not only semantically, but also lexically close to their opposite number in the other language – *To se snadno řekne* / *This is easier said*, *Čas jsou peníze* / *Time is money* (actually a quotation translated from English), *Lépe pozdě než nikdy* / *Better late than never*, *Kuj železo* / *Strike while the iron* and *Tichá voda* / *Still waters*. The Czech sample consists of the following

proverbs ordered according to the corresponding English proverbs: 1. *Čeho je moc, toho je příliš. / Co je moc, to je moc.* 2. *To se snadno/lehko řekne, ale hůř udělá. / To se snáze/lépe řekne, než udělá/provede.* 3. *Vše(chno) špatné/zlé je k něčemu/pro něco dobré.* 4. *Kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele.* 5. *Odpusťte si, co jsme si. / Co jsme si, to jsme si.* 6. *Čas jsou peníze.* 7. *Nehas, co tě nepálí. / Co tě nepálí, nehas.* 8. *Lépe/Lepší pozdě než nikdy/vůbec.* 9. *Kuj železo, dokud je žhavé.* 10. *Tichá voda břeh mele/bere.*

Their use was examined in the Czech corpus SYN2000 which is closely modelled on the BNC. Somewhat surprisingly, it was found that the proverbs often tended to occur in several (canonical) variants and so counting their occurrences (including transformations) was even more laborious than identifying the English proverbs. For example, the frequent English proverb *Enough is enough* can be translated by two synonymous Czech proverbs which are so closely related that they can be regarded as morphological variants of each other, and so were treated as one equivalent. Otherwise, the fact that some of the English proverbs could be translated by more than one distinct Czech proverb was resolved by choosing only one of them. Admittedly, deciding whether the sequences were variants of the same proverb or two distinct proverbs was not always easy. Also, in both the English and the Czech sample, the search for the proverb may have missed some of the (especially fragmentary) instances of the proverb.

In both the English and the Czech sample the most difficult part of the search, though, was the identification of the speech act uses of the proverbs (when the proverb itself is a speech act) and non-speech act uses (when the proverb is embedded in another proposition having a speech act function of its own). Clearly, aspects of text, such as whether it represents a dialogue, direct or indirect speech in writing, etc., are of utmost importance here. In many cases the decision between speech act and non-speech act use is extremely difficult to make and inevitably sometimes even tentative. Among other things, the analysis has raised several questions: is there actually a straightforward relation between a speech act use and the canonical or non-canonical form of the proverb, and if the illocution can be carried by a non-canonical form of the proverb, can only a part of the proverb serve as an IFID?

4. Data analysis

The outcome of data analysis is presented in the form of a profile compiled for each proverb. The profile includes the total of the proverb's occurrences in a corpus, with the occurrences subdivided into instances (with both absolute figures and percentages given) where the proverb was used in the text on its own as a speech act (SA use), and instances where the proverb was used as part of a proposition performing its own speech act and did not have its original force. The latter are classified as non-speech act (non-SA) use of the proverb. The speech act use is described in terms of the proverb's illocutionary force, including both its general category (e.g. directive) and the specific subtype which is capitalized and sometimes commented upon. Both types of use are illustrated by representative examples in the profile. Finally, the profile gives the number of canonical forms (as given in the title of the profile and in dictionaries), variant full and reduced/truncated forms of the proverb (with examples).

As mentioned above, the compilation of each profile involved two tasks. The first was the identification of all instances of the proverb in the corpus, i.e. the search for all its lexical and grammatical variants, including fragments, in the texts. This included search for all the key words and their combinations in the proverb, which had to be done manually and proved to be a demanding process. The reason for looking for incomplete forms of the proverbs in the corpus is made clear below.

Even more difficult was deciding which of the occurrences represent the proverb as a speech act *per se* and which of them are occurrences where the proverb is part of a proposition with its own illocution. In other words, the goal was to identify what is and what is not the speech act use of the proverb. The working hypothesis is based on the idea that utterances divide into primary (direct) on the one hand and quoted, reproduced on the other, which was the starting point of the sample analysis. Primary utterances in which the subject directly expresses his own views, attitudes, observations, etc., can be both spoken and written (that is why corpora with both written and spoken texts are used). Reproduced or quoted utterances are divided in the literature into direct and indirect speech, depending on the way they are realised, and these modes are further subdivided into semi-direct (sometimes even semi-indirect) speech; some authors use the terms free direct speech and free indirect speech, etc.

The first assumption was that only proverbs used in primary utterances will have their original, default illocution, i.e. will function as speech acts (expressing the attitude of the speaker/writer), while all forms of quoted utterances only contribute to the illocution of the superordinate structure of which they are part, and so proverbs used as quotes or as part of quoted utterances will not have their original force. But, on closer examination, it appears that even proverbs used in quoted *direct* speech may operate in the recreated conversational situations in much the same way as they would in real situations, and accordingly can be viewed as speech acts with their own illocutionary force. Indirect speech, on the other hand, seems to lack this ability. Yet given that quoted (reported) speech comes in different modes forming a cline and given the variety of possible contexts, it is hardly surprising that often the decision whether a proverb does constitute a speech act or not is rather difficult to make.

Furthermore, not only must proverbs be used in primary utterances (whether actual or recreated) to have their original force, they also have to be used in an appropriate way, i.e. they must meet certain (felicity) conditions. So even when a proverb appears in a primary utterance, it will not have its original force if it is syntactically embedded in a superordinate structure as a modifying or complementing element, or if used metalinguistically. Another important condition without which the force of the proverb apparently cannot be deployed is the preservation of the original tense of the proverb, i.e. the present (see above the necessity of a promise to fulfil the content condition, that is to be about a future event).

As far as the form of proverbs is concerned, the situation is similarly complex. Although proverbs which realise their default illocutionary force are typically in their full canonical form, it need not always be the case. Sometimes the proverb in canonical form is part of indirect speech, sometimes a fragment of a proverb including a specific word combination may replace the full form and express the respective illocution (*A já vás měl za filozofa! Inu, tichá voda!*). Also, a full-length proverb in which the tense was changed

(*Hubovalo se a hudovalo, pohoršovalo a rozčilovalo nad tím či oním, avšak **co bylo moc**, to bylo příliš; Who did he think he was? Well, **enough was enough**.*), or which was modified in some other way (*They can play at being **still waters** that run deep.*), may lose its illocutionary force and change into a descriptive statement. As a result, there are a number of borderline cases whose classification is inevitably tentative. In addition, it is not always easy to describe what kind of force the proverb is precisely associated with, and dictionaries of proverbs are often not very helpful in this respect. Due to the polysemy and ambiguity of some of the proverbs, the interpretation was found to depend very much on the context, which problematizes the idea of simple, default inferencing the illocution.

4.1 The English sample

The starting point of the investigation was the English sample. The data is exemplified selectively as the full-scale presentation is beyond the scope of this article. It is presented in the form of a profile for each proverb. The profiles are ordered from the most frequent to the least frequent proverb in the BNC:

Profile 1: *Enough is enough*

Total: 86

Speech act use: 15 (17.4%)

Force: depends on whether the continuation of something undesirable is forbidden/not recommended or refused by the speaker. Hence two types,

(1) **directive** – ORDER, RECOMMENDATION (Stop it / Don't continue): 13

Examples: *Go home, Robin Williams, go home. Enough is enough. / I don't mind a joke, but enough is enough. We don't want to worry the ladies.* Borderline cases of speech act use: *It is time to say enough is enough. I give my commitment to the children.*

(2) **commissive** – REFUSAL (I refuse this / I reject this / I won't tolerate this): 2

Examples: *I am an avid Punch Reader, but enough is enough. / I don't want to make a will. Enough is enough. / The message from railway staff is clear – enough is enough.*

Non-speech act use of the proverb: 71 (82.6%)

Examples: *When will we say enough is enough? / ... and I have decided that enough is enough. I am now enjoying ... / How many computers do they need, before enough is enough? / ... eventually you became entitled to say 'enough is enough' and leave. / They don't seem to know when enough is enough. / Doesn't he ever think 'Enough is enough', I am not going through that again?* 33 instances of the proverb in the past tense: *The army decided enough was enough. My dad said last time enough was enough.*

Form: 53 canonical, 33 full-length and fragmentary variants (*enough was enough*)

Profile 2: *Easier said than done*

Total: 62

Speech act use: 28 (45.2%)

Force: constative – DISBELIEF (expression of skeptical attitude: I believe it is more difficult than it looks.)

Examples: *"Whatever happens, keep together. And hold on to the bundles!" – "Easier said than done!" Ruth yelled. / It's easier said than done, but I would if I could go back over*

it again. / *Oh that's what you told me, I know, but it's easier said than done, innit? / He made a mirthless sound. "Easier said than done. Look ... I have to go on with this particular trip." / Q: Oh come now! Easier said than done. A: Not at all; it could be done even here.*

Non-speech act use: 34 (54.8%)

Examples: *This was, needless to add, easier said than done. / Finding the perfect English house was easier said than done. / Managing to be positive when you are in pain is easier said than done / But for colleagues who have illness in the family or marital troubles, this is easier said than done. / Following Paul's route was easier said than done as there were so many confusing tracks. / Manufacturers say that's easier said than done.*

Form: 12 canonical, 50 full-length and fragmentary variants (*it/this/that is/could be/may be/was/proved easier said ...*)

Profile 3: Every cloud has a silver lining

Total: 46

Speech act use: 5 (13.0%)

Force: directive – REASSURANCE (Don't/Let's not despair, Be/Let's be optimistic; see OED quote (1895): *Don't let's be down-hearted! There's a silver lining to every cloud.*)

Examples: *"... Although it would be a help in reducing the number of suspects by one, I suppose. Every cloud has a silver lining, what!" / It won't be very good for the petrol companies that I've been visiting here today, but every cloud tends to have it's silver lining, and I, I think I can say with some confidence that ... / "I've actually lost quite a bit of weight recently," I said. "Every cloud, as they say." / But there's always a silver lining.*

Non-speech act use: 41 (87.0%)

Examples: *Mind you, every cloud had a silver lining. / And you know what they say every cloud having a silver lining. / Oh, well, they say every cloud has a silver lining. / The tiny bit of silver lining on the cloud is a new application by ... / But there was a silver lining to the cloud ... / reformed shopaholics almost always speak of a silver lining to the cloud which hung over their lives*

Form: 6 canonical, 40 full-length and fragmentary variants (*Every cloud had/tends to have/having a silver lining; there is/was a silver lining to the cloud; fragments: a/the/0 silver lining, every cloud*)

Profile 4: First come, first served

Total: 31

Speech act use: 1 (3.2%)

Force: directive – ADVICE, INSTRUCTION (Do not procrastinate)

Example: *To claim these [free tickets], readers should present this page at the Festival Central Box Office at The Civic Theatre, Cookridge St from 10 am this morning. First come, first served. For more details, telephone 0532-462453.*

Non-speech act use: 30 (96.8%)

Examples: in 25 cases the proverb is used as a premodifier, mostly with 'basis' (22 times): *on the first come, first served basis*; other uses: *It was a case of first come, first served, Subscription is first come, first served.*

Form: 31 canonical, no variants

Profile 5: *Forgive and forget*

Total: 29

Speech act use: 6 (3.2%)

Force:

(1) **directive** – SUGGESTION: 5

Examples: *Hell, forgive and forget because it's all in a good cause ... / I say to her, "Forgive and forget, because times have change ..."*

(2) **commissive** – PROMISE: 1

Examples: *I'll never forgive and I'll never forget!*

Non-speech act use: 23 (96.8%)

Examples: *He was not a man who found it easy to forgive and forget / Can't you forgive and forget? / ... you don't know the meaning of the words 'forgive and forget'*

Form: 26 canonical, 3 full-length and fragmentary variants (*I'll never forgive and I'll never forget; forgive and put them behind you; forgive and be forgiven*)

Profile 6: *Time is money*

Total: 28

Speech act use: 8 (32.1%)

Force: **directive** – ADVICE (Don't waste time) (Manser (2007: 274): "The proverb was first recorded in this form in 1748, in Benjamin Franklin's Advice to a Young Tradesman [...]")

Examples: *Remember: time is money, your money. / That costs time and time is money.*

Non-speech act use: 20 (67.9%)

Examples: *I discovered that time is money. / They know that time is money so they have a policy of buying it with ... / When time is money it can be a considerable saving.*

Form: 22 canonical, 6 full-length and fragmentary variants (*is money time?, time is not money, nor is money time, time was money*)

Profile 7: *Let sleeping dogs lie*

Total: 18

Speech act use: 7 (38.9%)

Force: **directive** – ADVICE, INSTRUCTION

Examples: *However, there is no point in looking for trouble. Let sleeping dogs – together with sleeping princes and duchesses – lie, say I! / Wouldn't it be better to let sleeping dogs lie? / her grandfather had agreed, who was she to say different? Best to let sleeping dogs lie. / he would rather not go into that. Let sleeping dogs lie / In my opinion it would be better to let sleeping dogs lie as there would be no mileage to be gained from such move.*

Non-speech act use: 11 (61.1%)

Examples: *staff call your hound by name, and tiptoe past your room at night so as to let sleeping dogs lie / you see I'm all this time without pain and I think I'll let sleeping dogs lie. / It didn't occur to you to let sleeping dogs lie / the typical parental attitude is "let sleeping dogs lie" / Some sleeping dogs prefer to lie. / Not only are sleeping dogs allowed to lie, but also their owners.*

Form: 15 canonical, 3 full-length and fragmentary variants (*some sleeping dogs prefer to lie, not only are sleeping dogs allowed to lie, there were sleeping dogs*)

Profile 8: Better late than never

Total: 15

Speech act use: 12 (80.0%)

Force: constative – CONCLUSION, EXPLANATION

Examples: “Well, better late than never,” Quiss snarled. / ... and I think it’s better late than never ... / Better late than never! OXTON are in championship form with their recent run of success almost enough to have landed a Weightman Rutherford’s Liverpool Competition title. / Better late than never, I guess.

Non-speech act use: 3 (20.0%)

Examples: *It was better late than never for the 12 lucky winners ... / ‘Better late than never’ being his unoriginal version of the truth.*

Form: canonical 12, textual variants (*it is/was better late than never*)

Profile 9: Strike while the iron is hot

Total: 10

Speech act use: 2 (20.0%)

Force: directive – INSTRUCTION, ADVICE

Examples: *He was confident he’d brought her to the stage where he could lay her. Strike while the iron is hot. / “Sir John, the Springall house is empty now. Let us strike whilst the iron is hot!”*

Non-speech act use: 8 (80.0%)

Examples: *Maybe he would even mount a punitive expedition tonight, striking while the iron was hot, and all that. / She saw that this had really caught the other girl’s imagination, and hurried to strike while the iron was hot. / So I thought I’d strike while the iron was hot so to speak.*

Form: 4 canonical, 6 full-length and fragmentary variants (*strike while the iron was hot* (4), *striking while the iron was hot, strike whilst the iron was hot*)

Profile 10: Still waters run deep

Total: 9

Speech act use: 3 (33.3%)

Force: constative – EXPLANATION (conclusions based on surface impressions can be misleading)

Examples: *One at least, she said, was a man. Still waters run deep, she said. / “It’s a case of still waters running deep,” a Swiss diplomat explains.*

Non-speech act use: 6 (66.7%)

Examples: *When a young man looks like that you think about the phrase Still waters run deep. / but now she murmured, “Still waters, shall I drop a penny in your depths, and make a wish for your thoughts?” / It is said that ‘Still water run deep’.*

Form: canonical 5, textual variants (*still waters running deep* (2), *still waters that can run deep* (1), *still waters, shall I drop a penny in your depths*)

4.2 Results of the English sample analysis

The ten proverbs in the English sample occurred 334 times (see Table 1), the most frequent proverb *Enough is enough* 86 times, the least frequent among them, *Still waters run deep*, 9 times. Of these 334 instances, 87 were rated as being a source of illocutionary force and 247 were classified as non-speech act uses, i.e. the proverb did not perform a speech act on its own, but was a part of a proposition with its own illocutionary force. This means that the sample proverbs in the BNC acted as independent speech acts only in 26.0%, while in 74.0% they were not used with their conventional illocutionary force. The prevalence of non-speech act use was found in all but one proverb where the ratio is reversed. This exception was *Better late than never* (3 : 12), and in one case, *Easier said than done*, the proportion of speech act and non-speech act uses was almost equal (45.2% of speech acts). By contrast, the proverb *First come, first served* was used as a speech act on its own only once (3.2% of its 31 occurrences). As mentioned in the profile for this proverb, the main reason is that in 25 instances the proverb is used as a premodifier mostly in the expression “on the first come, first served basis” where the reference to the proverb is indisputable, but without the original force. Although a margin of error must be allowed for, the disproportion between the ascertained speech act (SA) and non-speech act (non-SA) uses is such that we must conclude that the proverbs under examination are simply not used as speech acts with very high frequency, and that English proverbs in general may be used in this way far less frequently than the decontextualised image of proverbs might lead us to believe.

Table 1. The ratio of speech act (SA) and non-speech act (non-SA) uses of the English sample proverbs in the BNC

No.	proverb	SA use	non-SA use	total
1	<i>Enough is enough</i>	15	71	86
2	<i>Easier said than done</i>	28	34	62
3	<i>Every cloud has a silver lining</i>	5	41	46
4	<i>First come, first served</i>	1	30	31
5	<i>Forgive and forget</i>	6	23	29
6	<i>Time is money</i>	8	20	28
7	<i>Let sleeping dogs lie</i>	7	11	18
8	<i>Better late than never</i>	12	3	15
9	<i>Strike while the iron is hot</i>	2	8	10
10	<i>Still waters run deep</i>	3	6	9
	total / %	87 / 26.0	247 / 74.0	334 / 100.0

The figures in the table suggest that there are factors at play which prevent the default illocutionary force associated with each proverb from being realized. The logical step is to check whether the explanation may not be connected with the existence of non-ca-

nonical variants of the proverbs. The incidence of canonical and non-canonical form discovered for each of the sample proverbs in the BNC is presented in Table 2. Again we can see great differences between proverbs, starting with the absence of any variants (*First come, first served*), the prevalence of non-canonical forms (*Easier said than done, Every cloud has a silver lining*), to a relatively balanced occurrence of canonical and non-canonical forms, especially in proverbs with small incidence (proverbs No. 9 and 10). We may speculate that the reasons for such an uneven distribution may be variously related to the form and content of the proverb, but the fact remains that the overall difference between the distribution of canonical and non-canonical forms of the sample proverbs (55.7% and 44.3% respectively) is nowhere as dramatic as the distribution of speech act and non-speech act uses of these proverbs (1 : 3). This indicates that the non-canonical use of the proverb is not an overriding factor explaining the smaller incidence of speech act use of the proverbs, and that proverbs with both canonical and non-canonical form may be used as speech acts (or, conversely, as parts of statements with unrelated illocutionary force).

Table 2. The distribution of canonical and non-canonical forms among the English sample proverbs in the BNC

form/proverb	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	total	%
canonical	53	12	6	31	26	22	15	12	4	5	186	55.7
non-canonical	33	50	40	–	3	6	3	3	6	4	148	44.3
total	86	62	46	31	29	28	18	15	10	9	334	100.0

Before an attempt is made to account for the low incidence of speech act uses among the sample proverbs, we may consider the distribution of illocutionary force (speech act types) among the sample proverbs in the BNC (see Table 3). Out of the 87 instances in which the sample proverbs perform speech acts, 49.4%, are constatives (also known as representatives or assertives), closely followed by directives (47.1%), while the third type, commissives, is only marginal (3.5%). However, seven out of the ten proverbs function as directives, and only three as constatives. Two of the primarily directive proverbs (*Enough is enough, Forgive and forget*) were also used as commissives. The discrepancy between the prevalence of directive proverbs and the prevalence of constative uses among the proverbs is due to the exceptionally high proportion of constative uses in one proverb, *Easier said than done*. Directives in the sample express especially advice, instruction, order, recommendation, and marginally reassurance; constatives express mainly disbelief, then explanation and conclusion. The fact that the two instances of commissive use are concomitant with directive use appears to follow from the semantic closeness between the two types: both are volitional acts differing only in the agency, the addressee in directives, and the speaker in commissives. So, *Enough is enough* is used both directly (order, recommendation) and commissively (refusal). Similarly *Forgive and forget* functions as a directive (advice) and as a commissive (promise), though only after it has been heavily adapted (*I'll never forget and I'll never forgive*).

Table 3. The distribution of illocutionary force (speech act types) among the English sample proverbs in the BNC

force/proverb	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	total	%
constative	–	28	–	–	–	–	–	12	–	3	43	49.4
directive	13	–	5	1	5	8	7	–	2	–	41	47.1
commissive	2	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	3	3.5
total	15	28	5	1	6	8	7	12	2	3	87	100.0

It has been pointed out above that the distribution of speech act uses and non-speech act uses (26.0% and 74.0%) on the one hand and that of canonical and non-canonical forms (55.7% and 44.3%) on the other suggest that these two are, generally speaking, not interdependent. A brief look at the profiles confirms this: *Enough is enough* – only 15 speech act uses, 53 instances of canonical form, *First come, first served* – only one speech act use, though all of the 31 occurrences are canonical in form; conversely, of the 62 occurrences of *Easier said than done*, only 12 are canonical in form, yet 28 instances are speech acts. Clearly, whether a proverb in the text functions as a speech act or not depends on something else than just its form: the crucial factor is the conformity of its use with the felicity conditions of the given speech act. The analysis shows that the felicity conditions generally favour the use of the proverb on its own, either as a statement in a spoken dialogue or in reported direct speech. By contrast the felicity conditions fail or tend to fail when the proverb is used metalinguistically or in indirect speech, and especially when the proverb or its reduced form is used as part of a wider structure (noun phrase) or as a clause element. However, not even the appearance of a proverb in a dialogue automatically ensures its speech act function, just as its being incorporated in a hierarchical structure does not necessarily preclude speech act reading. As might be expected, the actual reading is sensitive to the specific circumstances of the context and the specification of the precise circumstances favourable to the fulfilment of felicity conditions is definitely a goal to be pursued.

4.3 The Czech sample

The proverbs in the Czech sample proved to be far more varied in terms of form than the English proverbs. The format of the profiles is the same as in the English sample; also their order is the same as that of the corresponding English proverbs:

Profile 1: *Čeho je moc, toho je příliš* / *Co je moc, to je moc*

Total: 37

Speech act use: 28 (75.7%)

Force: commissive – REFUSAL (I refuse this / I reject this / I won't tolerate this)

Examples: *Skromnost sice šlechtí, ale čeho je moc, toho je i příliš. / Jejich kapacita a výkon bývají účtyhodné ... , Jenže čeho je moc, toho je příliš a ani vysoce efektivní nástroje ... nejsou všemocné / Zájezd byl laciný, ale čeho je moc ... Spát v autobuse není jen tak, ani když je dobře vybavený na delší cesty. / Člověk se samozřejmě nepohorší nad pár sprostými*

slovy, ale co je moc, to je příliš. / nevěděli jsme, jestli se v sovětském vedení neobjeví názor: Co je moc, je příliš, o tenhle korunovační klenot nepřijdeme.

Non-speech act use of the proverb: 9 (24.3%)

Examples: *Rovněž tady platí podle mne úsloví: Čeho je moc, toho je příliš. / ... si pro jednou dodali odvahy a řekli si – čeho je moc, toho je příliš / Stern sice tvrdí, že jeho touha uspět měla jediný cíl – aby ho lidé milovali. Ale čeho je moc ... / skončí to, až Západ pochopí, že čeho bylo moc, toho bylo příliš.*

Form: 21 canonical, 13 full-length variant (*co je moc, to je hodně, co je moc, je už příliš, čeho bylo moc, toho bylo příliš*), 3 fragmentary (*čeho je moc*)

Profile 2: To se snadno/lehko řekne, ale hůř udělá /

To se snáže/snadněji/lépe/lehčeji řekne, než udělá/provede

Total: 44

Speech act use: 35 (79.5%)

Force: constative – DISBELIEF (expression of skeptical attitude: I doubt the feasibility of)

Examples: *To se samozřejmě snadno řekne, ale hůř udělá. Naštěstí existuje ještě / „Dostat se ven,“ řekl Vilém. To se lehko řekne, ale hůř provede. / To se snadno řekne, ale obtížněji realizuje, když si uvědomíme... / Někam, kde by byl klid. To se lehko řekne. Ale kde ho dnes najdete? / ... uvnitř církve. Ale to se lehčeji řekne, než udělá. V církvi není mrtev Bůh, v církvi je. / „Ne, miláčku, se trompe, to se ti lehko řekne, ale zkus vyřešit takový případ!“ / Jo kurva, to se lehko řekne... A co Josef doma...*

Non-speech act use: 9 (20.5%)

Examples: *Joanna si však uvědomovala, že se to sice snadno řekne, ale hůř provede. / Jí se to lehce řekne, pomyslel jsem si. / Tobě se to snadno řekne ... viděl jsi je včera. / Víím, že teď se to snadno říká, ale chybou možná bylo, že Kouba chtěl*

Form: 10 canonical, 9 full-length variant (*To se snadno řekne, ale obtížněji realizuje*), 25 fragmentary (*jó, to se lehko řekne, on má celý Státy pro sebe*)

Profile 3: Všechno/Vše špatné/zlé je k něčemu/pro něco dobré

Total: 46

Speech act use: 27 (58.7%)

Force: directive – REASSURANCE (Let me/us not despair, Don't despair, Be optimistic, Let's be optimistic)

Examples: *„No vida, všechno zlé je k něčemu dobré,“ zaradoval se Hawkeye / „aspoň budu moci chodit – vše špatné má své dobré – Ale víš / ještě do půlky července nebudu závodit. Všechno zlé, ale může být pro něco dobré. / za bod můžeme být rádi. Všechno špatné je k něčemu dobré, utkáni pro nás bylo / „Jak vidíš, všechno zlé je k něčemu dobré,“ dodala s úsměvem / přežili jsme to, život jde dál a všechno špatné je i k něčemu dobré.*

Non-speech act use: 19 (41.3%)

Examples: *Přísluví praví, že vše zlé je k něčemu dobré. / Všechno zlé je prý k něčemu dobré. / po nevyhraných zápasech dospěl k poznání, že vše špatné je... / Ne náhodou Jakub Šára říká, že všechno špatné je pro něco dobré / šalamounským prohlášením tety Kateřiny, že všechno zlé je pro něco dobré / se v tuto chvíli mohlo zdát konstatování všechno špatné pro něco dobré poněkud zlomyslné.*

Form: 33 canonical, 11 full-length variant (*vše špatné bývá i pro něco dobré, Všechno zlé má svou lepší stránku, vše špatné má své dobré*), 2 fragmentary (*všechno špatné pro něco dobré, vše špatné je ...*)

Profile 4: Kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele

Total: 21

Speech act use: 6 (71.4%)

Force: directive – ADVICE, INSTRUCTION (Do not procrastinate)

Example: *je jen omezený počet lístků, takže „kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele“ / Přece kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele, přesněji má lepší šanci / „Ano,“ odvětil Martin rozpačitě. „Ale kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele“ / ale to počká, až s tím budete hotoví. Kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele. Počkám v kuchyni.*

Non-speech act use: 15 (28.6%)

Examples: *Tady platí, kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele. / chová se systémem „kdo dřív přijde ten dřív mele“ / a přišli s tím, že kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele? / budou uloženi zájemci podle hesla – kdo dřív přijde / místa Prahy jsou plná a kdo dřív přišel, ten dřív mele / Co může být výhodné pro toho, „kdo dřív přijde“, naopak komplikuje život uživatelům / politikům by mělo být jasno, že i tentokráte kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív a líp semele.*

Form: 14 canonical, 4 full-length variant (*Kdo dřív přijde, ten peníze získá, kdo dřív přišel, ten dřív mele, kdo dřív přijde, ten vyhrává*), 3 fragmentary (*kdo dřív přijde*)

Profile 5: Odpusťme si, co jsme si / Co jsme si, to jsme si

Total: 34

Speech act use: 19 (55.9%)

Force: directive – SUGGESTION

Examples: *Odpusťme si, co jsme si, řekl Pepíček. / Co jsme si, to jsme si, už je jiná doba, fangle / „Starý brachu, co jsme si, to jsme si!“ řekl pan Prag, / a pozdravil. „Podívej, co jsme si, to jsme si“ / Co jsme si, to jsme si, bude to takříkajíc fifty fifty. / Tak chlapi: co jsme si, to jsme si, a do smrti dobrý!*

Non-speech act use: 15 (44.1%)

Examples: *přetahování minulosti do budoucnosti pod heslem „odpusťme si, co jsme si“ / minulosti často odbývají rčením „co jsme si, to jsme si, hlavně že jsme Slováci“. / si Francouzi s Němci řekli co jsme si, to jsme si, o minulosti se nemluví. / Rčení „co jsme si, to jsme si“ v listopadu 1989 reálně platilo. / měl ten dívčí idol výraz „Co jsme si, to jsme si, když se kácí les, lítají třísky!“ / Jak se to zpívá?: Odpusťme si, co jsme si.*

Form: 34 canonical

Profile 6: Čas jsou peníze

Total: 41

Speech act use: 19 (46.3%)

Force: directive – ADVICE (Don't waste time) (Manser (2007: 274): “The proverb was first recorded in this form in 1748, in Benjamin Franklin’s Advice to a Young Tradesman [...]”)

Examples: *protože hlavně v Americe platí, že čas jsou peníze / Žid věděl, že čas jsou peníze a že tajemstvím jejich platnosti jako daru / Autor publikace Čas jsou peníze, Lothar*

J. Seiwert / *Stále častěji se také ukazuje, že čas jsou peníze.* / „Ovšem i pro nás platí pořekadlo, že čas jsou peníze,“ stěžuje si Ing. Stasek. / *Říkává se – když už jsme u těch hodin – že čas jsou peníze.* / *Čas se stal penězi i u nás.*

Non-speech act use: 22 (53.7%)

Examples: *Hušner se ušklíbl: „Čas jsou peníze, dolary, tomu snad pan Johnson porozumí“ / Přišel se pobavit. Dívá se na hodinky. Čas jsou peníze. Jeho čas. / marnění času, neboť čas jsou peníze a člověk je otisk svého zaměstnání / jenomže čas jsou peníze, ale ne na hotovosti. / I můj čas jsou peníze. Pošta chce mnoho peněz za málo kvalitní / Čas jsou peníze aneb na co ještě čekáme?*

Form: 40 canonical, 1 full-length variant (*Čas se stal penězi*)

Profile 7: *Nehas, co tě nepálí / Co tě nepálí, nehas*

Total: 15

Speech act use: 4 (26.7%)

Force: **directive** – ADVICE, INSTRUCTION

Examples: *Jestli ti můžu radit, nikdy nehas, co tě nepálí.* / „Co tě nepálí, nehas,“ řekla Nadja ve skříni a dodala / *tož to jsem nečekal, nikdy, bratře, nehas to, co tě nepálí / Co tě nepálí, nehas. Kategorický imperativ nedovoluje libovolnému*

Non-speech act use: 11 (73.3%)

Examples: 58. *Darovanému koni na zuby nekoukej.* 59. *Nehas, co tě nepálí.* 60. *Neštěstí nechodí po / na prostém odmítání přísloví co tě nepálí, nehas, je založena myšlenka dobrovolného hasičstva / se zase řídí příslovím, co tě nepálí, nehas / Stále platí nehas, co tě nepálí. / Odpíračů hesel „nehas, co tě nepálí“ a „z cizího krev neteče“ / Zásada „nehas, co tě nepálí“ však dnes slouží nebezpečným*

Form: 14 canonical, 1 full-length variant (*nehas to, co tě nepálí*)

Profile 8: *Lépe/lepší pozdě než nikdy/vůbec*

Total: 15

Speech act use: 11 (73.3%)

Force: **constative** – CONCLUSION, EXPLANATION (This is definitely a preferable solution/outcome)

Examples: *A to náhlé urychlení? Lépe pozdě než vůbec.* / *K tomu lze říci jen jedno – lépe pozdě než nikdy.* / „Radši pozdě než nikdy, paní Weltonová,“ *podotkl / trochu později, než by si člověk přál, ale lepší pozdě než vůbec.* / *Doma ale kupodivu ještě nebyl recenzován. Lepší pozdě než nikdy.* / „Máš teda pěkně divný úřední hodiny.“ „Lépe pozdě než nikdy,“ řekla.

Non-speech act use: 4 (26.7%)

Examples: *aby mi to vzkázala hned na začátku, ale lepší pozdě než nikdy.* / *Radši později než vůbec, říkali si záchranáři před cestou*

Form: 12 canonical, 3 full-length variant (*Raději jedeme pozdě než vůbec, Radši později než vůbec*)

Profile 9: *Kuj železo, dokud je žhavé*

Total: 13

Speech act use: 0

Force: **directive** – INSTRUCTION, ADVICE (Seize the initiative!)

Non-speech act use: 13

Examples: *přišel filmu na chuť a kuje železo dokud je žhavé. / Musí však kout železo, dokud je žhavé / Prezident chce „kout železo, dokud je žhavé,“ / A můj tatínek kul železo, dokud bylo žhavé. / Musím kout železo „Táta de!“ / Rychle jsem kul železo, dokud teda bylo žhavé / „To je fajn,“ kul železo, dokud bylo žhavé. / 50. Odvážnému štěstí přeje. 51. Kuj železo, dokud je žhavé. 52. Kdo se bojí, nesmí do lesa.*

Form: 1 canonical, 10 full-length variants, 2 fragmentary (*Musím kout železo, kul železo svoje*)

Profile 10: *Tichá voda břehy mele/bere*

Total: 22

Speech act use: 6 (27.3%)

Force: **constative** – EXPLANATION (Conclusions based on surface impressions can be misleading; často nás překvapí jednání někoho, od něhož se to nejméně čekalo)

Examples: *A já vás měl za filozofa! Inu, tichá voda! / snažil se o chabý odpor Vítězslav. „Tichá voda břehy mele.“ / „Tichá voda břehy mele,“ povídám / Často vás překvapí. Tichá voda břehy mele. / ovlivňovat nenápadně, tzv. způsobem „tichá voda břehy mele“. / a já vzpomněl na tichou vodu, která podemílá břehy. / dávné rčení nám radí: „Střež se psa a tiché vody!“*

Non-speech act use: 16 (72.7%)

Examples: *opice tančí na břehu do taktu písně „Tichá voda břehy mele“. / má člověk dávat pozor na tichošlápky a že tichá voda břehy mele. / To není tichá voda, to je zpětný proud! Ten neumele nic / nového čipu pěkně charakterizuje rčení „tichá voda břehy mele“. / uvést více (např. zakázané ovoce nebo tichá voda).*

Form: 12 canonical, 1 full-length variant (*Tichá voda staví mosty, ale břehy mele*), 9 fragmentary (*tichá voda*)

4.4 Results of the Czech sample analysis

Although the Czech sample consists of proverbs equivalent to the English proverbs in meaning, the results suggest that the way in which these proverbs are used in each language is different. First of all the distribution of the Czech proverbs is different: the Czech equivalent of the most frequent English proverb *Enough is enough* comes only fourth in the SYN2000, the English equivalent of the most frequent Czech proverb *Všechno špatné je k něčemu dobré* is third in the English sample. Similarly, there are differences in order between the proverbs *Čas jsou peníze / Time is money* (third and sixth respectively) and *Tichá voda / Still waters* (sixth and tenth respectively), etc.

Next, Table 4 shows that of the total of 288 occurrences of the ten Czech proverbs, 155 (53.8%) were classified as performing a speech act in its own right, 133 (46.2%) were analysed as being part of a speech act performed by another utterance. Although speech act use prevailed, it was by a mere 7.6%. Speech act use predominated in five proverbs, namely Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8; the remaining five proverbs were more frequently *not* used as independent speech acts. The largest proportion of speech act occurrences was found in proverb No. 2, *To se snadno řekne, ale hůř udělá / To se snáze řekne, než udělá*, almost 4/5 (79.5%) of cases. It is closely followed by proverb No. 8, *Lépe pozdě než nikdy*, which was

used as an independent speech act with its default illocution in 73.3%. The proportion comes close to being equivalent in proverb No. 5, *Opustme si, co jsme si / Co jsme si, to jsme si*, with speech act uses constituting 55.9% and non-speech act uses 44.1%.

This stands in marked contrast to the English proverbs of which only one, *Better late than never*, was used as a speech act more frequently than otherwise, while in the remaining nine English proverbs non-speech act use was prevalent. By comparison, this was the case in only five Czech proverbs, which means that in four Czech proverbs the distribution of speech act and non-speech act use was the opposite.

Table 4. The ratio of speech act (SA) and non-speech act (non-SA) uses of the Czech sample proverbs in the SYN2000

No.	proverb	SA use	non-SA use	total
1	<i>Čeho je moc, toho je příliš / Co je moc, to je moc</i>	28	9	37
2	<i>To se snadno/lehko řekne, ale hůř udělá. / To se snáze/lépe řekne, než udělá/provede</i>	35	9	44
3	<i>Vše(chno) špatné/zlé je k něčemu/pro něco dobré</i>	27	19	46
4	<i>Kdo dřív přijde, ten dřív mele</i>	6	15	21
5	<i>Opustme si, co jsme si / Co jsme si, to jsme si</i>	19	15	34
6	<i>Čas jsou peníze</i>	19	22	41
7	<i>Nehas, co tě nepálí / Co tě nepálí, nehas</i>	4	11	15
8	<i>Lépe/Lepší pozdě než nikdy/vůbec</i>	11	4	15
9	<i>Kuj železo, dokud je žhavé</i>	0	13	13
10	<i>Tichá voda břehy mele/bere</i>	6	16	22
	total / %	155 / 53.8	133 / 46.2	288 / 100.0

Counting canonical and non-canonical occurrences (Table 5) proved far more difficult in Czech than in English. As in the English proverbs, the canonical forms of the Czech proverbs prevail over non-canonical, in fact even more than in English (66.3%). Once again the differences between individual proverbs are quite remarkable. One of them was used only in its canonical form (No. 5), three almost so (Nos. 6, 7, 8); on the other hand, there is one proverb which is systematically used only in non-canonical form (No. 9) and one whose non-canonical forms are distinctly prevalent (No. 2). As with the English proverbs, these differences generally seem to have semantic and especially lexical reasons. Whenever the proverb contains a distinct lexical item or collocational sequence whereby the proverb can be easily identified, the proportion of its non-canonical instances increases (*Kuj železo*, *To se snadno řekne*, *Tichá voda*). Again, there does not seem to be any specific relation between speech act use (53.8%) and canonical form (66.3%), in fact there are many examples to the contrary, although the discrepancy between the distribution of speech act uses and canonical form is smaller than in the English sample.

Table 5. The distribution of canonical and non-canonical forms among the Czech sample proverbs in the SYN2000

form/proverb	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	total	%
canonical	21	10	33	14	34	40	14	12	1	12	191	66.3
non-canonical	16	34	13	7	–	1	1	3	12	10	97	33.7
total	37	44	46	21	34	41	15	15	13	22	288	100.0

Finally, Table 6 shows the representation of different illocutionary points or speech act types among the Czech proverbs. Unlike the English sample in which two proverbs (*Enough is enough, Forgive and forget*) are used with two types of force (directive-commissive) the Czech proverbs seem to be more clear-cut and each stands for just one kind of speech act. As might be expected from the fact that the proverbs are translation equivalents, the Czech proverbs were found to have the same three kinds of force as the English proverbs, constative, directive and commissive. The same proverbs in both samples were used as constatives (Nos. 2, 8 and 10), and the same proverbs were used as directives with two exceptions: proverb No. 1 was employed only as a commissive (in English it was mostly directive and only twice commissive) and proverb No. 9 was not used as a speech act at all (in English it was used twice as a directive). The reason for the complete absence of speech act use in this proverb (*Kuj železo, dokud je žhavé*) is that it is used mostly as part of a finite verb phrase (after the verbs *mušet, chtít, začít*) or as a verbal collocational phraseme (in the past, in 3rd person); the proverb's one and only canonical occurrence is item 51 in a list. On the whole, the distribution of constative and commissive illocution markedly differs compared to the English sample. In the Czech sample constative force (33.5%) is by 16% less frequent, while commissive force (18.1%) by almost 14.6% more frequent than in the English sample.

Table 6. The distribution of illocutionary force (speech act types) among the Czech sample proverbs in the SYN2000

force/proverb	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	total	%
constative	–	35	–	–	–	–	–	11	–	6	52	33.5
directive	–	–	27	6	19	19	4	–	–	–	75	48.4
commissive	28	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	28	18.1
total	28	35	27	6	19	19	4	11	–	6	155	100.0

5. Comparison of the English and the Czech sample of proverbs

As has been suggested in the previous section, although the proverbs of the two samples are semantically equivalent (the Czech sample consists of translation equivalents of the English proverbs), the overall picture is to some extent different. Most of the differ-

ences are mentioned in 4.4, here some of the major dissimilarities are recapitulated. The English sample based on the BNC is by 46 instances of proverbs larger than the Czech sample of equivalent proverbs in the SYN2000, even though three of the English proverbs are actually matched by two closely related Czech proverbs (Nos. 1, 2 and 5), which could have increased the number of their occurrences in the SYN2000. Also the distribution of individual proverbs of the matching pairs was different: the frequency order of the Czech proverbs corresponds to the frequency of the matching English proverbs in only two cases out of ten (Nos. 2 and 5).

Table 7. Distribution of speech act and non-speech act uses of proverbs in the English and the Czech sample

use	English proverbs	Czech proverbs
speech act	87 / 26.0	155 / 53.8
non-speech act	247 / 74.0	133 / 46.2
total / %	334 / 100.0	288 / 100.0

More importantly, the English and the Czech sample differ in the proportion of speech act and non-speech uses (Table 7). While in the larger English sample only 26% of the occurrences involve proverbs used as independent speech acts (hence in 74% the proverbs were not used as speech acts on its own), the number of speech acts vs. non-speech acts found in the Czech sample is not only almost equivalent (53.8% : 46.2%), but actually opposite, that is, speech act uses prevail over non-speech act uses. Given that the proverbs of the samples are equivalent and that the two corpora are of the same size and very similar in structure, the most likely reason for this disparity in speech act use appears to be a different way in which these proverbs, or proverbs in general, are employed by English and Czech speakers. Still, a more basic and crucial point to bear in mind is that proverbs in context are used as speech acts *per se* in just half the cases at best. It is only fair to reiterate, though, that distinguishing between speech act and non-speech act use is often very difficult.

As regards the illocutionary force, the use of equivalent proverbs in the samples included the expectation that even the default illocution of the matching pairs will be the same. Although this was confirmed, the distribution of two of the three types of force (see Table 8) was markedly different, which can probably be attributed to different frequencies of speech act use in the samples. Specifically, there are significantly fewer constative and more commissive uses in the Czech proverbs than in the English sample. Also, there are more directive uses in Czech than constative, while the opposite is true of English even though the number of constative proverbs (Nos. 2, 8 and 10) and directive proverbs (Nos. 3–7 and 9) is the same in both samples. Proverb No. 1 is commissive in Czech and both commissive and directive in English (also the English proverb No. 5 was once used commissively).

Table 8. The distribution of illocutionary force among the English and the Czech sample proverbs

force	English proverbs	Czech proverbs
constative	43 / 49.4	52 / 33.5
directive	41 / 47.1	75 / 48.4
commissive	3 / 3.5	28 / 18.1
total / %	87 / 100.0	155 / 100.0

Finally, the comparison of canonical and non-canonical forms (Table 9), although revealing some differences (a tendency to a greater incidence of canonical forms and fewer non-canonical in the Czech sample), shows that the direction of this proportion is the same (in both samples canonical occurrences prevail), which is in contrast to speech act vs. non-speech act distribution displaying an opposite tendency. Generally speaking, these findings are important in that they bring home to us the fact that a considerable portion of proverbs (at least one third) in either language are not used in their dictionary form in speech or writing.

Table 9. The distribution of canonical and non-canonical forms among the English and the Czech sample proverbs

form	English proverbs	Czech proverbs
canonical	186 / 55.7	191 / 66.3
non-canonical	148 / 44.3	97 / 33.7
total / %	334 / 100.0	288 / 100.0

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the occurrences of ten English proverbs in the BNC and their ten Czech counterparts in the SYN2000 has shown that only a limited number of them, ranging from 26.0% in English to 53.8% in Czech, can be regarded as constituting speech acts by themselves. This fact does not seem to have been significantly influenced by the fact that between 44.3% and 33.7% of occurrences in English and Czech respectively are non-canonical in form (the proverb is a lexical or grammatical variant of the canonical form, has an elliptical form or is reduced to one of its “signature” parts).

While the representation of constative, directive and commissive proverbs in the English and the Czech sample is more or less the same (3 constative, 6–7 directive, 1–2 commissive proverbs), when used in context as speech acts (87 and 155 instances out of 334 and 288 respectively), the representation of each type of force in the occurrences of the English and the Czech proverbs shows differences: more constative uses among the English proverbs, more directive uses among the Czech ones. This is due to the overall

representation of individual proverbs and to numerical differences in speech act and non-speech act use.

The initial assumption that the characteristic (canonical) form of the proverb which signals its presence in the text (in addition to other features) can be considered the proverb's IFID (with each proverb having a specific kind of force attached to it conventionally and permanently), though undoubtedly true, has to be modified in the sense that even the canonical form of a proverb is not a guarantee of speech act use (just as performative verbs may not be used performatively). For example, in the sentence *It is said that 'Still waters run deep'*, the proverb is a clausal subject, and although both the framing main sentence and the proverb alone are constatives, the illocutionary force of the whole sentence (with the proverb as an object) is that of assertion, while the force of the proverb (if used on its own) is that of explanation. Conversely, it is possible to find instances of reduced or modified proverbs in text whose default illocutionary force is preserved ("*Every cloud, as they say*"). The inevitable conclusion is that the preservation of the conventional default illocution of proverbs in context depends less on the canonical form than on the observation of the felicity conditions which, in turn, depends on the circumstances wherein the proverb is used. In particular, the use of a proverb in dialogue or direct speech is more likely to involve its speech act use, while reported indirect speech and/or syntactic subordination are less favourable to such use, and metalinguistic use precludes it.

All in all, proverbs are perhaps best conceived of as speech act idioms with default illocutionary force potential whose form (or at least some prominent parts of it) serves as an IFID. However, this potential can be realized only when the felicity conditions of the respective speech act are met. As the study has shown, this happens in text, especially written text, far less frequently than perhaps assumed. Also, the findings of the study suggest that the same proverbs (i.e., proverbs which are translation equivalents), occurring in comparable English and Czech corpora, are in some respects used differently in these two languages. In sum, the simple equation proverb-default illocutionary force must indeed be qualified by the proviso of felicity conditions fulfilment and by the understanding that there are many ways in which proverbs are used in text and some of them are not compatible with the proverb's conventional force (i.e. the proverb is not used as a proverb). In addition to drawing attention to the different uses of proverbs in texts the study highlights the importance of the felicity conditions in proverbs and the fact that these conditions have not been described so far. Their description may prove rather difficult for there may be conditions common to all proverbs and conditions specific only to some. However, this is a task for another study.

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Internet source

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PŘÍSLOVÍ JAKO MLUVNÍ AKTY V ANGLIČTINĚ A ČEŠTINĚ

Resumé

Studie zkoumá výskyt vzorku deseti anglických a jim odpovídajících deseti českých přísloví ve srovnatelných korpusech, anglickém BNC a českém SYN2000. Ověřuje, nakolik tato přísloví fungují v textu jako specifické mluvní akty s vlastní ilokucí, jak je známe v dekontextualizované podobě ve slovnících, a nakolik je ovlivňuje kontext, tj. stávají se pouze dílčí součástí propozice s jinou ilokucí. Ukazuje se, že poměrně značná část přísloví přestává v textu fungovat jako samostatný mluvní akt a mění se i jejich ilokuční síla. Toto zjištění otevírá otázku podmínek pro úspěšnou realizaci přísloví jako mluvního aktu, jejichž splnění je důležitější než to, zda je přísloví užito v kanonické či nekanonické formě (modifikované, zkrácené apod.). Z práce na studii vyplynulo, že popis přísloví z hlediska jejich pragmatické funkce je teprve na počátku a je spojen s řadou těžkostí (jako je určení konvenční ilokuční síly přísloví, identifikace přísloví v textu vzhledem k jejich značné formální variabilitě, určení, kdy přísloví představuje v textu samostatný mluvní akt a kdy nikoli atd.). Hlavní cílem studie je upozornit na tuto problematiku a nastínit možné přístupy.