

## THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF QUANTITY IN CONTEMPORARY CZECH: COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses ways of expressing large quantities in contemporary Czech, with a focus on constructions of the type *stádo koní* ‘a herd of horses’, that is, constructions which conceptualise large numbers of individuals not as simple sets of independent units but as groups. These constructions consist of a more general countable noun denoting the type of group (e.g., *stádo* ‘a herd’) plus a genitive plural form of a noun denoting the “grouped” entity (e.g., *koní* ‘horses-GEN.PL’). Such constructions are called “collective” and are viewed as an analytical way of conceptualising plurality. Using the theoretical background of the cognitive approach to language, and data retrieved from the corpus of contemporary written Czech, the paper discusses selected cases of this construction (i.e., *stádo* ‘a herd’, *hejno* ‘a flock’, *smečka* ‘a pack’ + a noun in genitive plural form), primarily with respect to animals, but also extended to other entities, including humans.

**Keywords:** Czech; quantity; plural; collective construction; cognitive linguistics.

### Highlights:

- Contemporary Czech can construe plurality in several ways. The first, prototypical case is when the plurality is construed as plurality “neutral”, denoting simply more than one entity. But there are also linguistic means that signal a “group” or “collective” construal that sees the given number of entities as one whole, one unit.
- The so-called collective constructions of the type *stádo koní* ‘a herd of horses’ consist of a more general countable noun denoting the type of group (e.g., *stádo* ‘a herd’) and a genitive plural form of the noun denoting the “grouped” entity (e.g., *koní* ‘horses-GEN.PL’).
- The analysis of collective constructions containing the nouns *stádo* ‘a herd’, *hejno* ‘a flock’, and *smečka* ‘a pack’ reveals that each of the three constructions is specific for certain kinds of animal, a specific type of group organisation and/or behaviour, and the given type of group has relatively stable associations.
- The prototypical uses can be extended in several directions: to other kinds of animal, to inanimate entities, and to humans; to groups organised and behaving in a different way; to different evaluative meanings. The extension to those other than the typical group’s members can be accompanied by re-categorisation of the grouped entities. The extensions to groups of people are frequently accompanied by negative and pejorative associations. However, the corpus data reveal some “exceptions” as well.
- The way various types of quantity are expressed in the language is seen as part of a more general cognitive ability, i.e., of the numeric or mathematical cognition, and of the lay (folk, naïve) theory of mathematics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Quantity is one of the key aspects that people perceive, conceptualise, and express in their language. Although because of their similar perceptual and cognitive abilities it may seem that all people should perceive quantity in a similar way, languages differ in this respect (e.g., Corbett 2000; Beller – Bender 2008). In this study, I discuss the various ways of expressing quantity in contemporary Czech, a highly inflected West Slavic language. I analyse constructions that conceptualise higher numbers of individuals not as simple sets of independent units but as groups, as wholes. I call such constructions “collective” and view them as a particular way of conceptualising plurality, analogous to so-called singulative constructions used with uncountable nouns (see part 2). I will focus on three specific cases of this collective construction, each of which applies to counted entities in the genitive plural form: *stádo* ‘a herd’ + noun-GEN.PL, e.g., (1), *hejno* ‘a flock’ + noun-GEN.PL, e.g., (2), and *smečka* ‘a pack’ + noun-GEN.PL, e.g., (3):

- (1) *stádo*                      *krav*  
herd-NOM.SG      cow-GEN.PL  
‘a herd of cows’
- (2) *hejno*                      *ptáků*  
flock-NOM.SG      bird-GEN.PL  
‘a flock of birds’
- (3) *smečka*                      *vlků*  
pack-NOM.SG      wolf-GEN.PL  
‘a pack of wolves’

These constructions are primarily used with respect to animals, but they can be extended to other entities, including humans.

Using the theoretical background of the cognitive approach to language, and data retrieved from the SYN2020 corpus of contemporary written Czech (Křen et al. 2020),<sup>1</sup> I ask the following questions:

- a) Which entities can be quantified using the selected constructions?
- b) In what ways can the prototypical uses be extended?
- c) What do these constructions tell us about the Czech “interpretation” of the world (the Czech image of the world or linguistic worldview; Bartmiński 2010) and the Czech conceptualisation of quantity?

I will begin by summarising the relevant theoretical background (part 2), before going on to present an analysis of the chosen constructions (part 3). Finally, I discuss the results from the perspective of a cognitive approach to language (part 4).

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<sup>1</sup> The SYN2020 corpus of the Czech National Corpus (Křen et al. 2020) is a synchronic, representative, and referential corpus of written Czech. It contains approx. 100 million words split equally between fiction, non-fiction, and journalistic texts.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2. QUANTITY IN CONTEMPORARY CZECH

In contemporary Czech, quantity is expressed by many different linguistic means, such as the word class of numerals (with various subtypes, e.g., Karlík 2017), lexical units of other word classes that express quantity, selected syntactic means (such as repetitive constructions expressing quantity), and the grammatical category (grammatical meaning) of number. The latter is expressed in Czech nouns (see below), adjectives, verbs, and most types of numerals and pronouns. Quantity is also present in the semantics of some nouns (e.g., *hmyz* ‘insect-SG’, *národ* ‘nation-SG’; singularia tantum derived by word-formation means such as *-stvo* or *-í* and denoting groups of people or certain amount of “material”, e.g., *lidstvo* ‘humankind-SG’, *listí* ‘foliage-SG’) and verbs (verbs denoting repeated action, e.g., *dělat* ‘to do repeatedly and habitually’ (cf. Danaher 2003), or distributed action, e.g., *pozavírat* ‘to close one by one’).

Czech linguistic tradition sees the category of number in contemporary Czech nouns as a grammatical category that is based on the opposition “one” (expressed prototypically by the singular form, e.g., *pes* ‘a dog-SG’) versus “more than one” (expressed prototypically by the plural form, e.g., *psi* ‘dogs-PL’; e.g., Karlík – Večerka 2017). In the past, the opposition was more complex: “one” (singular) versus “two” (dual) versus “more” (plural). There are still some dual forms in contemporary Czech,<sup>2</sup> but they are interpreted as plural, i.e., expressing “more than one”. The system has been simplified during its historical development to an opposition with two values (“one” versus “more”; singular versus plural). According to the number hierarchy (Corbett 2000, p. 38), contemporary Czech has only the first two types of number (singular and plural) from the possible four types (singular – plural – dual – trial). Contrary to some other linguistic traditions, Czech linguistics does not usually use the category of countability (e.g., Dušková 1988, pp. 49 – 59) or the opposition “mass” versus “count”, even though it could also be applied to Czech material (e.g., Dočekal 2017; see below as well).

The prototypical examples of the category of number in nouns are represented by nouns that use the singular form to refer to one exemplar and the plural form to refer to more than one exemplar. This is typical of nouns that refer to countable entities that the speakers perceive and conceptualise as distinct, separate individuals, such as nouns denoting people, larger animals, larger inanimate objects, etc. “Larger” in this case refers to a size that corresponds to the human ability to perceive (what we are able to see as distinct, e.g., what is not too small) and conceptualise (what we consider as worth distinguishing as individual “units”). Some authors add that the conceptualisation related to the oppositions singular versus plural and mass versus count is also influenced by cultural experience. Wierzbicka (1988, pp. 499 – 560),

<sup>2</sup> E.g., some forms of nouns denoting body parts that appear in pairs, e.g., *oko* ‘an eye’, *ucho* ‘an ear’.

for example, has shown that the use of singular and plural forms in nouns denoting fruits and vegetables may be influenced by the way we manipulate and eat them.

Many Czech nouns behave in a less typical way with respect to grammatical number. For example, there are *singularia tantum* (e.g., abstracts or nouns denoting mass materials such as *voda* ‘water’ that tend to have the singular form only),<sup>3</sup> *pluralia tantum* (e.g., nouns such as *dveře* ‘a door’ that have the plural form only and use it to refer to both one or more instances), and nouns that are used predominantly in one of the numbers (e.g., *vrásky* ‘wrinkles-PL’ tends to be used more frequently in the plural because there is usually more than one wrinkle; cf. Panevová – Ševčíková 2011; Jirsová 1981).

In contemporary Czech nouns, the grammatical category of number is expressed prototypically by inflectional morphemes (endings, e.g., *list* ‘a leaf-N.SG’, *listy* ‘leaves-N.PL’), but the opposition “one versus more” can also be expressed by other linguistic means (cf. the word formation type *-í* for *singularia tantum* such as *listí* ‘foliage’ mentioned above). Some authors (e.g., Dušková 1988) also note that there are specific constructions that enable the speakers to use mass nouns as countable, and consequently express “one unit of something” or the plurality (e.g., *bread* or *kindness* can be made countable by such constructions as *a loaf of bread*, *an act of kindness*, e.g., Dušková 1988, p. 58). This type of construction is sometimes called a singulative or partitive expression. The first noun in the construction denotes the amount, package, or measure (cf. terms such as a measure noun, a unit counter, a minimal unit noun, an individuating or partitive sense, summarised in Nurmio 2023; the more general term classifier is used as well, e.g., Allan 1977). The singulatives and similar constructions exist in various types in different languages, and they typically represent an example of an individuation strategy (cf. Nurmio 2023). The Czech “version” of the construction “a loaf of bread” would consist of a countable noun denoting the counted unit or measure + the mass noun in the genitive singular form, e.g.:

- |     |                       |               |
|-----|-----------------------|---------------|
| (4) | <i>bochnik</i>        | <i>chleba</i> |
|     | loaf-SG               | bread-GEN.SG  |
|     | ‘a loaf of bread’     |               |
| (5) | <i>dva bochníky</i>   | <i>chleba</i> |
|     | two loaf-PL           | bread-GEN.SG  |
|     | ‘two loaves of bread’ |               |

The countable noun denoting the counted unit or measure tends to be specific for each mass noun and is related to the extra-linguistic experience and to the way

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<sup>3</sup> If the plural form of these nouns occurs, the meaning is typically more concrete, e.g., it signals various kinds or portions (e.g., *minerální vody* ‘mineral-PL water-PL’ denoting, e.g., several different kinds or several bottles of mineral water).

people measure and manipulate the given entity (metonymic character of this relationship seems to be frequent, e.g., bread is produced in *loaves*, tea is served in *cups*, soup is served in *talíře* ‘plates-PL’). We can interpret such constructions as specific means that enable the speakers to linguistically “see” (construe) reality in a specific way. The existence of such constructions in a language provides speakers with a greater number of linguistic means by which they may construe reality.<sup>4</sup>

Here we should consider the contrastive situation of countable nouns and the construal of the situation where more than one entity is present. In what ways can the existence of more than one entity be linguistically expressed in contemporary Czech? If constructions exist that enable Czech speakers to treat mass *singularia tantum* as countable and talk about them in the plural, are there similar constructions that would offer the speakers different options for construing the plurality?

Several options exist for a Czech speaker to signal that a certain group of entities is not seen simply as a random set or as a set of unconnected or unorganised individuals (typically expressed by the plural form of nouns, e.g., *krávy* ‘cow-PL’), but that the entities are interpreted as a specific unit, a group, a whole. Scientific literature describes strategies of this type as, e.g., collectives that conceptualise the group as a whole, not as a set of individuals (e.g., Corbett 2000, pp. 117 – 120). In contemporary Czech, the “group” or “collective” construal of a set of multiple entities can be signalled, for example, by a word-formation suffix (e.g., in collectives denoting groups of people or other living creatures, e.g., *žactvo* ‘pupils-SG’, *čtenářstvo* ‘readers-SG’; nouns of this type are typically *singularia tantum*, see above as well), or several types of numeral that imply that the counted objects “belong together” in one group (e.g., *čtvero* ‘four, a group of four’, *pětice* ‘a group of five’).<sup>5</sup> In objects that typically appear in pairs (e.g., shoes, skis, mittens), speakers can signal the plural (in fact, dual) conceptualisation using numerals that denote the number of sets (e.g., *dvoje boty* meaning ‘two sets of shoes’ versus *dvě boty* meaning ‘two individual shoes’; cf. Panevová – Ševčíková 2011).

The collective construal is also present in constructions such as *roj včel* (‘a swarm of bees’), which I will go on to analyse in more detail later. These constructions consist of a more general countable noun denoting the type of group (e.g., *roj* ‘a swarm’; the noun can be used in any case or number) and a genitive

<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that the countable (singulative) noun in the construction can stand metonymically for the whole construction as well; the mass noun is then inferred from the context (e.g., *koupit dva bochníky* ‘to buy two loaves-ACC.PL’ usually implies buying two loaves of bread). The same situation can be construed using the plural form of the mass noun that implies portions or kinds as well (e.g., *koupit dva chleby* ‘to buy two breads-ACC.PL’; see above).

<sup>5</sup> Numerals of the type *čtvero* are typically followed by a noun in the genitive form, which is similar to the analysed collective construction (see below the discussion about the so-called quantitative attribute as well).

plural form of the noun denoting the “grouped” entity (e.g., *včel* ‘bees-GEN.PL’ in (6); see examples (1), (2), (3) as well). If a plural form of the collective construction occurs, both the more general countable noun and the noun in the genitive form are in plural, e.g. (7):

- (6) *roj*                      *včel*  
       swarm-SG            bee-GEN.PL  
       ‘a swarm of bees’
- (7) *dva*    *roje*                      *včel*  
       two    swarm-PL            bee-GEN.PL  
       ‘two swarms of bees’

These constructions are formally similar to the above-described singulative/partitive constructions of the type *bochník chleba* (‘a loaf of bread’), but the nouns in the genitive are prototypically in the plural<sup>6</sup> and the meaning of the construction is different: instead of individualising, it signals a group, a collective construal of a set of individuals. The noun denoting the type of group is sometimes called a classifier (e.g., Allan 1977, Lehrer 1986, see below).

The noun denoting the group (and its type) in the collective construction is specific for various types of grouped entity, in a similar way to the singulative construction. The repertoire of nouns that can function in this position in collective constructions is large in contemporary Czech (cf. Klégr 2007), and ranges from general expressions such as *skupina* (‘a group’), which combine with many different types of grouped entity, to more specific expressions such as *sousoší* (‘a set of related/typically physically connected sculptures’). For example, Klégr (2007) lists many tens of synonyms for groups denoting people in general, for various social groups, for large amounts of people, and for smaller groups related by mutual interests or activities.

At the end of this section, it is important to mention that the singulative and collective constructions are always embedded in the complex context of the given language and its grammar. While the so-called classifier languages use classifiers systematically, languages like English or Czech usually have “only” linguistic elements (e.g., constructions or words) that are functionally similar to classifiers in the classifier languages (e.g., Allan 1977; Lehrer 1986). These linguistic elements may vary from language to language. In case of English, the prototypical form of the singulative and collective construction is NOUN1 *of* NOUN2 (e.g., *a herd of cattle*; cf. Lehrer 1986). In case of Czech, the prototypical form of these constructions is NOUN1 NOUN2-GEN. The genitive form of the noun denoting the mass or the grouped entity situates the Czech singulative and collective constructions in the

<sup>6</sup> The singular form of the noun in genitive is possible only in nouns such as *dobytek* ‘cattle-sg’ that denote groups of entities, i.e., that are “semantically plural” (see above and part 3 as well).

context of Czech genitive case and its meaning (especially the partitive genitive) as well as in the context of other NOUN1 NOUN2-GEN constructions that express quantity (e.g., constructions with numerals such as *pět knih* ‘five books-GEN.PL’, *několik knih* ‘several books-GEN.PL’). Many of these constructions have attracted scientific attention, because they seem to have asymmetrical relationship between meaning and form. – The noun in genitive is formally dependent on the noun denoting the quantity, even though it can be seen as the semantic head of the construction (cf. Kopečný 1953, 1956, 1957; Svoboda 1956a, 1956b; Poldauf 1957, and their discussion concerning the so-called quantitative attribute).

### 3. THE CONSTRUCTION *STÁDO* ‘A HERD’, *SMEČKA* ‘A PACK’, OR *HEJNO* ‘A FLOCK’ + A NOUN IN GENITIVE PLURAL FORM

In this paper, I focus on collective constructions (see Section 2) that consist of a noun denoting primarily a group of animals + a genitive plural form of a noun denoting the grouped entity (see example (6) above). I have limited my analysis to constructions with the nouns *stádo* ‘a herd’ (e.g., *stádo koní* ‘a herd of horses’, cf. example (1) above), *smečka* ‘a pack’ (e.g., *smečka vlků* ‘a pack of wolves’, cf. example (3) above), and *hejno* ‘a flock’ (e.g., *hejno ptáků* ‘a flock of birds’, cf. example (2) above). The nouns *stádo*, *smečka*, and *hejno* were chosen because they are commonly used, they represent three prominent types of organisation of animal groups as observed by people, and they can be extended to human groups. This allows me to study not only the use of the constructions with respect to animal groups, but also the semantic extensions to people. In the latter case, I expect to see the influence of anthropocentrism (e.g., Vaňková et al. 2005, pp. 59 – 66) and the emergence of evaluative meanings, probably negative.

According to the criteria proposed for collective nouns by Joosten et al. (2007), the nouns *stádo*, *smečka*, and *hejno* behave in a similar way as far as the conceptual profiling and the agreement with verbs and possessive, relative, and personal pronouns are concerned. When the singular form of the nouns *stádo*, *smečka*, and *hejno* is used, the verbal and pronominal agreement is also in singular form (e.g., *stádo krav běží* ‘a herd-SG of cows-GEN.PL is running-SG’). Phrases with attributes such as *velký* ‘big’ (e.g., *velké stádo* ‘a big herd’) profile the size of the group on “the collection” level (Joosten et al. 2007, p. 89) and phrases with attributes such as *mladý* ‘young’ (e.g., *mladé stádo* ‘a young herd’) profile the property of the members on “the member” level (Joosten et al. 2007, p. 89). Both the collection and the member level profiling are common in all three nouns, the nouns thus correspond to type 2 collective nouns delimited by Joosten et al. (2007, p. 93).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In some cases, an alternative construction containing an adjective derived from the noun denoting the given grouped entity (grouped animals) is possible (e.g., *vlčí smečka* ‘a wolf-ADJ pack’). This



The data for the research were retrieved from the SYN2020 corpus (Křen et al. 2020; see part 1); only texts with Czech as the original language were used. In the analysed subcorpus, there were 1,117 instances of the noun *stádo* (ipm<sup>8</sup> 7.69 in the given subcorpus), 608 instances of the noun *hejno* (ipm 7.69), and 447 instances of the noun *smečka* (ipm 6.03), but only some of them were relevant for my analysis. The data were supplemented by an analysis of semantically similar words (word embedding) using the tool SEMĀ of the Slovak National Corpus (Garabík 2020). This tool uses data from the Aranea corpora of texts from the Internet (Benko 2018).

### 3.1. STÁDO ‘A HERD’

The dictionary of contemporary Czech (SSČ 2012, p. 410) gives two meanings for the noun *stádo*: a large group of animals (especially ungulates) living together; masses of people who are unruly or who succumb *en masse* to various opinions or moods – meanings of this second type are marked as expressive, or even pejorative. According to the SEMĀ tool<sup>[2]</sup>, *stádo* is semantically similar to some other names for groups (*smečka*, *tlupa*, *hejno*), and to nouns denoting animals that typically live in or are bred in groups, especially domestic animals such as cattle (e.g., *kráva*, *koza*, *ovce*, *ovečka*, and the formally singular, but semantically plural noun *dobytek*), but also wild animals (*antilopa*). SEMĀ also lists wolves (*vlk*); words related to pasture and grazing are also present (e.g., *pastvina*, *pasoucí*, *spásat*, *pastevec*).

The analysis of the collective construction (i.e., *stádo* + a noun in the genitive plural form; example (1) above) in the SYN2020 data confirms that *stádo* typically refers to groups of larger herbivores with hooves, such as horses, cows, sheep or goats, but also to antelopes, lamas, and camels.<sup>9</sup> *Stádo* can also be formed by pigs<sup>10</sup> or elephants, hippos, and even prehistoric mammoths.<sup>11</sup> In some cases, *stádo* can consist of several types of animal, usually similar in some way (e.g., a herd of mixed domestic animals such as sheep and goats).<sup>12</sup> In several cases the use of the word *stádo* was unexpected, e.g., when referring to groups of monkeys (e.g., *stádo červených makaků* ‘a herd of red macaques’, *stáda divokých opic* ‘a herd of wild monkeys’), seals (*stádo modrošedých tuleňů* ‘a herd of blue-grey seals’), mammals

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“adjectival” construction tends to profile the “collective” level, but only some nouns denoting the grouped entities can be used in it.

<sup>8</sup> Instances per million.

<sup>9</sup> More than twenty kinds of herbivorous animals with hoofs were extracted from the corpus data, e.g., *stádo* ‘a herd-SG’ / *stáda* ‘herds-PL’ *koni*, *krav*, *daňků*, *bizonů*, *jelenů*, *ovcí*, *koz*, *jaků*, *losů*, *srn*, *žiraf*, *zeber*, *antilop*, *přímorožců*, *sajg*, *vikuní*, *velbloudů*.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *stádo/stáda prasat*, *vepřů*, *divočáků*, *kanců*.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., *stádo/stáda slonů*, *chobotnaticů*, *hrochů*, *mamutů*.

<sup>12</sup> When the noun *stádo* is in the plural, it is difficult to decide whether each kind of animal has its own herd, or whether the herds consist of several kinds of animal (e.g., *pasoucí se stáda dobytka a koni* ‘grazing herds of cattle and horses’).



that live in water, such as dolphins (e.g., *stádo delfinů* ‘a herd of dolphins’, *stádo kostatek* ‘a herd of killer whales’), or even fish (*stádo hlistounů červenohřívých* ‘a herd of red-breasted nematodes’), birds (*stádo drůbeže* ‘a herd of poultry’, *stádo slepic* ‘a herd of hens’), and insects (*stádo nymf* ‘a herd of nymphs’, a developmental stage of bugs).

In the prototypical cases of herds of cattle, horses, etc., the collective construction with the noun *stádo* tends to refer to such groups that do not seem to be overtly structured and do not seem to act according to some purpose (e.g., to hunt) in an organised way. There may be a tendency to see the animals as having a relatively uniform look and to be doing the same thing together (e.g., grazing or running).<sup>13</sup> There is also a certain limit to the minimum number of entities that can form a *stádo*: the examples from the SYN2020 corpus indicate that this number might be around six or seven (e.g., *stádo šesti slepic* ‘a herd of six hens’; *stádo sedmi koz a dvou ovcí* ‘a herd of seven goats and two sheep’).

When the noun *stádo* is extended to less typical cases (e.g., a group of dolphins), it can signal that the group is perceived to have features similar to a herd, e.g., not being led by somebody, not saliently organised, etc. In other atypical cases, such as herds of monkeys (*stádo opic*) or hens (*stádo slepic*), the construction can generate additional meanings: the groups of animals are evaluated negatively, e.g., because of their behaviour (monkeys), or the animals are re-classified and construed as domestic animals that are kept in herds (hens; this interpretation can be supported by the fact that hens usually do not fly well, i.e., they are less typical birds and they move on legs, as do the typical animals in herds).

Some collective constructions with *stádo* contained nouns denoting groups of inanimate objects, such as cars (*míříme ke stádu karavanů a dodávek v kamenném lomu* ‘we are heading towards a herd of caravans and vans in the stone quarry’) or clouds (*na dosah půlky měsíce jde stádo beránků* ‘a flock of small male sheep is going in reach of the half moon’). In the first example, “the herd of cars” suggests a large and disorganised group of vehicles. On the other hand, a “herd of clouds” represents an expression that is figuratively coherent: the clouds are referred to as small male sheep (*beránek*) and the typical name for a group of sheep is *stádo*, hence *stádo beránků*. (The expression *stádo beránků* can also refer to people. In such cases, it implies innocence or helplessness.)

Finally, *stádo* can refer to a group of people. The corpus data confirm that the collective construction *stádo* + genitive plural form of a noun denoting human beings tends to have expressive, typically negative connotations, as mentioned in the SSČ

<sup>13</sup> We know that there are often leading animals and that the animals are not uniform in reality, but at first (lay) sight the herd may seem unorganised and the leading animals may not be saliently different from the others.

dictionary (see above). The connotations could be the following: uncivilised, aggressive behaviour, a lack of one's own opinion, a lack of free will, motion in an unorganised uniform group that does not care about the surrounding environment, etc. For example: *zároveň se do vlaku nahrnulo stádo dalších víceméně pochybných cestujících* 'at the same time, a herd of other more or less dubious passengers rushed into the train'; *stádo vzbouřenců se vrhlo v komnaty* 'a herd of rebels stormed the chambers'; *stádo bezhlavých otupených lidí* 'a herd of headless, numb people'; *stádo udýchaných běžců* 'a herd of breathless runners'. The negative evaluation can be attributed to the fact that the expression *stádo* has been extended from animals to humans. Such extensions are typically negatively evaluating and expressive, which is in accord with the finding that language tends to be anthropocentric and construes humans as being "better" than animals (cf. Vaňková et al. 2005 and above).

Several individual instances are worthy of comment. One case of the comparative construction with *jako* 'as, like' containing the collective construction with *stádo* was found and it compared the behaviour of people to that of apes (*jako stádo primátů* 'like a herd of primates').<sup>14</sup> Another interesting case adapted the idiom *ani stádem volů* 'nor by a herd of oxen' (implying hard work) into the comparable construction *jako stádem bernardýnů* 'like a herd of Saint Bernard dogs' (*hledat ... rovnováhu bude těžké i se stádem bernardýnů* 'to seek ... the balance will be difficult even with a herd of Saint Bernard dogs'). In the following example, ants are personalised and keep insects as though they were herds of domestic animals, therefore the collective construction with *stádo* was used instead of the construction with *hejno* 'a flock' that is more typical for insects (see below): *starost o blahobyt a bezpečnost stád housenek se mravencům určitě vyplácí* 'the care for well-being and safety of the herds of caterpillars pays off for ants'. A case of blending (e.g., Turner 2015) that combines the mental space related to *stádo* with that related to slavery also appeared (*bez povědomí svobody není národ národem, to je stádo otroků* 'without the awareness of freedom, the nation is not a nation, it is a herd of slaves').

### 3.2. HEJNO 'A FLOCK'

The dictionary (SSČ 2012, p. 410) defines *hejno* as a larger group of animals, especially birds. According to the SEMĚ tool<sup>[3]</sup>, *hejno* is semantically close to various nouns denoting birds, above all to the general expression *pták* 'a bird' and to various kinds of bird (e.g., *dravec* 'a bird of prey', or specific bird species, such as *volavka* 'a heron', *racek* 'a seagull', *krkavec* 'a raven'). Two nouns denoting groups (*houf* and the diminutive *hejnko*) and one activity (*lovící* 'hunting') are also present.

<sup>14</sup> The comparative construction can be seen as a precursor to a fully metaphorical use where a group of people is called "a herd of primates"; however, such an example did not appear in the analysed data.

The data from the SYN2020 corpus suggest that the collective construction (i.e., *hejno* + a noun in the genitive plural form; example (2) above) typically denotes not only larger groups of birds, but also larger groups of fish or insects. Some cases of groups of mammals, groups of inanimate objects, and some extensions to groups of people were also present.

Constructions with several tens of bird species were found in the context, including domestic birds such as hens, wild birds such as pigeons, parrots, and many kinds of water fowl, such as geese.<sup>15</sup> The repertoires of fish and insect species were slightly smaller: the fish group contained various kinds of aquarium fish, but also piranhas;<sup>16</sup> the insect group consisted mostly of flying insects such as mosquitoes, flies, and bees.<sup>17</sup>

The collective construction with *hejno* refers prototypically to a larger group that does not seem to have an apparent hierarchical organisation, does not often act as a well-organised unit, and whose members are not easily distinguishable from each other. The type of motion may also play a certain role: members of *hejno* typically do not “walk”, but rather fly, swim, crawl, or hop.

The notion of *hejno* can occasionally be extended to less typical animals (e.g., *hejno sviňuch* ‘a flock of porpoises’, *hejno mořských koniků* ‘a flock of seahorses’, *hejna nejroznějších saurů* ‘flocks of various (dino)saurs’), and to inanimate objects. One case related to mushrooms was found (*hejno lišek* ‘a flock of “liška” mushrooms’). “Flocks” of inanimate objects typically consist of small, independently moving and operating machines such as drones, robots, or satellites (e.g., *hejno malých robotů* ‘a flock of small robots’; *hejna dronů* ‘flocks of drones’). Groups of some other inanimate (potentially) moving objects can also be conceptualised as *hejno* (e.g., *hejno stíhaček* ‘a flock of fighter-planes’, *hejno spících plachetnic* ‘a flock of sleeping sailboats’, *hejno kol* ‘a flock of bicycles’). “Flocks” of cells, molecules, small planets (*hejno buněk* ‘a flock of cells’, *hejno malých molekul vůně* ‘a flock of small molecules of smell’, *s hejnem jejích exoplanet* ‘with a flock of its exo-planets’), or abstract entities such as ideas, looks, or words were also attested (*hejno závistivých pohledů* ‘a flock of envious looks’, *z hejna jejích slov* ‘from the flock of her words’, *hejno myšlenek* ‘a flock of ideas’).

<sup>15</sup> Almost forty different kinds of birds were extracted from the corpus data, e.g., *hejno* ‘a flock-SG’ / *hejna* ‘flocks-PL’ *andulek*, *bažantů*, *holubů*, *labutí*, *hus*, *papoušků*, *drůbeže*, *vrbců*, *havranů*, *ibisů*, *kačen*, *kachen*, *kormoránů*, *koroptví*, *morčáků*, *racků*, *vlaštovek*, *slepíc*, *pávů*, *pelikánů*, *plameňáků*, *havranů*, *špačků*, *slavíků*, *snovačů*, *strak*, *supů*, *tetřevů*, *tetřívků*, *vlhvců*, *vran*.

<sup>16</sup> Examples: *hejno* ‘a flock-SG’ / *hejna* ‘flocks-PL’ *piraní červených*, *piraň*, *akvarijních rybiček*, *barakud*, *bradáčů šupinoploutvých*, *cípalů*, *gavřinovitých*, *makrel*, *skalár*, *sardinek*, *sleďů*, *teter kosočtverečných*, *úhořů*.

<sup>17</sup> Examples: *hejno* ‘a flock-SG’ / *hejna* ‘flocks-PL’ *baboček bodlákových*, *bělásků*, *hmyzu*, *motýlů*, *komárů*, *much*, *masaček*, *molů*, *kobylek*, *včel*, *sršňů*, *světlušek*, *vos*.

Personified inanimate entities such as angels can also form flocks (*hejno anděličků* ‘a flock of angels’). In most of these extended cases, the denoted groups labelled as *hejno* consist of entities that do not “walk”.

The extension to groups of people is also possible. In such cases, the associations tend to be negative, e.g., by associating a larger group of mutually indistinguishable members with some collective behaviour, evaluated as unimportant, vain, etc. For example: *hejno falešných idolů* ‘a flock of false idols’; *hejno podobných psavců 19. věku* ‘a flock of similar 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers’; *že ji psali čtyři pedagogové a celé hejno lektorů a redaktorů jejich práci kontrolovalo* ‘that it was written by four pedagogues and a whole flock of lecturers and redactors checked their work’; *hejno místních vykutů* ‘a flock of local scammers’. In the case of groups of women (e.g., *hejno mladých žen* ‘a flock of young women’), the derogatory associations are stressed by the fact that women in Czech can sometimes be pejoratively labelled as hens. In the case of *hejna tmavých trik* ‘flocks of dark T-shirts’, the low value ascribed to the given group of people is stressed by the metonymy T-shirt for the person that is wearing it.

However, some examples with neutral or positive associations were also found, and these typically denoted groups of children (see below), e.g., *hejno našich kluků a holčiček* ‘a flock of our boys and girls’.

### 3.3. SMEČKA ‘A PACK’

The dictionary (SSČ 2012, p. 396) states that *smečka* ‘a pack’ is usually a hunting group of dogs, wolves, etc., but that it can be extended to a pejorative expression for a group or gang of people. The corpus data reveal that the meaning is broader today (see below). According to the SEMĚ tool<sup>[4]</sup>, *smečka* is semantically similar to other names for groups (*tlupa, stádo, stádečko, klan, banda, rodinka*) and to nouns denoting animals that often form packs, such as wolves (*vlk, vlčice*), predatory animals in general (*šelma*), and dogs (*psisko, hafan, chlupáč, čokl*, most of these nouns have pejorative connotations) and their various kinds (e.g., *vlčák, borderka, pitbul*). Some activities or qualities of animals that form packs are also listed (e.g., *smečkový, uštěkaný, štekající*).

The collective construction (*smečka* + a noun in the genitive plural form; example (3) above) in the SYN2020 corpus typically refers to groups of predatory animals such as wolves, dogs, cats, lions, coyotes, or jackals.<sup>18</sup> The less typical types of animal packs contained rats (*smečka vyděšených potkanů* ‘a pack of startled rats’), alligators (referred to as *smečka zubatých predátorů* ‘a pack of toothy predators’), and sharks (*smečka žraloků* ‘a pack of sharks’).

<sup>18</sup> Examples: *smečka* ‘a pack-SG’ / *smečky* ‘packs-PL’ *vlků, psů, dingů, koček, kocourů, kojotů, lvů, šakalů*.

Some of the constructions with animal nouns denoted groups of animals (e.g., *spatřili smečku psů husky* ‘they spotted a pack of huskies’), but in some cases, the construction was incorporated into a more complex comparative construction starting with *jako* ‘as, like’ (*samopaly se rozštěkaly jako smečka zuřivých psů* ‘the machine guns started to bark like a pack of furious dogs’; see 3.1 as well). The comparative constructions typically built upon some recognisable features or behaviour of a pack of wild predatory animals (e.g., hunting, chasing, barking). The corpus data also reveal that the meaning of *smečka* is wider than the dictionary definition: not all packs of animals are conceptualised as hunting. In some cases, the noun refers to groups of animals that live together and seem to have been interconnected by various ties, i.e., they resemble a (human) family.

Some groups of inanimate objects such as robots, cars, or even electronic devices or programmes can be conceptualised as *smečka*, especially when the groups consist of larger numbers of these entities and the members are seen as acting together or as behaving aggressively as a mass. For example: *počkal jsem, až se převalí smečka aut* ‘I waited for the pack of cars to roll over’ (negative connotations); *farmář si pak takovou smečku robotů objedná* ‘the farmer will then order such a pack of robots’ (positive connotations); *smečka elektronických asistentů* ‘a pack of electronic assistants’. When abstract entities such as companies or fictive creatures are conceptualised as animals or persons, their groups can also be labelled as *smečka* (e.g., *do smečky těch stanic veřejnoprávních medií, která...* ‘into the pack of those public media that...’; *smečka přízraků* ‘a pack of ghosts’).

The noun *smečka* can also be extended to human groups, where it typically acquires a negative evaluation. A group labelled as *smečka* is typically engaged in an activity that resembles a hunting pack (*smečka pronásledovatelů* ‘a pack of pursuers’) or in some negatively evaluated activity (e.g., *smečky věrných psů diktátorských režimů* ‘packs of loyal dogs of dictatorial regimes’; *smečka prostitutek* ‘a pack of prostitutes’).

However, the data from the corpus (including other constructions with *smečka*, e.g., *vlčí smečka* ‘a wolf pack’ for a sports team) indicate that the noun is not always negatively evaluating. It can also refer to a family, a group of friends, or a group of people united by a mutual interest or engaged in a shared activity, such as a musical group or a sports team (e.g., *smečka českých jazzmanů* ‘a pack of Czech jazzmen’; *naše smečka vyhladovělých introvertů* ‘our pack of starving introverts’). In such cases, the label *smečka* suggests that the members have tight mutual or supportive relationships.

Several examples referred to larger groups of children (*smečka dětí* ‘a pack of children’). Some instances had negative connotations (*smečka fakanů s nudlemi u nosu* ‘a pack of brats with snotty noses’); some were positively evaluating (*je*

*součástí vlčí smečky přes 120 dětí ve věku od čtyř do osmi let* ‘he is a member of a wolf pack of more than 120 children aged four to eight years’).

The noun *smečka* can also be used for some mixed groups. The corpus contains examples of groups of children and domestic animals or several kinds of domestic animal (*smečka dětí a psů* ‘a pack of children and dogs’; *smečka čtyř až šesti psů s kocourem* ‘a pack of four to six dogs and a tomcat’; *zvířecí smečka k vám odjakživa patří, pamatuju si psy, kočky, papouška* ‘an animal pack has always been associated with you, I remember dogs, cats, a parrot’). One condition for a mixed group to be labelled *smečka* could be the quality of the mutual relationships between the members of the group.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The category of number in Czech nouns is considered a grammatical category based on the distinction “one entity versus more than one entity” (e.g., Karlík – Večerka 2017). Various “exceptions” to this prototypical model have also been described (e.g., Panevová – Ševčíková 2011). Although the category of countability and the opposition “mass (uncountable) versus count (countable)” nouns is not usually applied to Czech material in the Czech linguistic tradition, the “mass versus count” opposition can also be observed in contemporary Czech. For example, the mass nouns tend to have the singular form only. When the plural form exists, it is accompanied by a semantic change (e.g., concretisation – it denotes kinds, portions etc.). There are also constructions, sometimes called singulative or partitive (e.g., Dušková 1988; Nurmio 2023), that enable the conceptualisation of mass nouns as countable: a noun denoting a countable unit and the genitive singular form of the mass noun (e.g., *bochník chleba* ‘a loaf of bread’; examples (4) and (5) above). The singulative construction is not grammaticalised and the nouns denoting the countable units are specific for the counted entities or for types of counted entities. Entities such as bread can thus be conceptualised in two basic ways in Czech: as a mass, or as countable units.

I posed the question whether there is any parallel or analogical phenomenon related to the count nouns: Is it also possible to construe the plural of countable entities in several ways? I argue that there are indeed several possibilities. The first, prototypical case is when the plurality is construed as plurality “neutral”, denoting simply more than one entity. This type of plurality is typically expressed by paradigmatic plural forms of nouns (e.g., *pes* ‘a dog-SG’, *psi* ‘dogs-PL’). But there are also linguistic means that can signal a “group” or “collective” construal that sees the given number of entities as one whole, one unit. This type of construal can be expressed by such means as specific types of numeral (*dvoje boty* ‘two pairs of shoes’), specific word-formation means (see 2), or constructions such as *stádo koní*



‘a herd of horses’, which I have focused on. I have labelled these “collective constructions”.

The collective construction of the type *stádo krav* ‘a herd of cows’ (example (1) above) is formally similar to the singulative construction of the type *bochnik chleba* ‘a loaf of bread’, except that the noun denoting the grouped entity is in the plural form. While the singulative construction enables speakers to construe mass nouns as countable (e.g., as “portions”), the collective construction enables speakers to construe a group of entities as a whole, as one entity. Like the singulative constructions, the collective constructions are not grammaticalised in contemporary Czech and the noun denoting the type of group is usually specific for the grouped entity or type of entity. (The most general expression might be *skupina* ‘a group’.) In this study, I have focused on three frequent nouns that prototypically denote groups of animals: *stádo* ‘a herd’, *hejno* ‘a flock’, and *smečka* ‘a pack’.

The analysis of the corpus data related to the corresponding collective constructions (e.g., *stádo krav* ‘a herd of cows’, *hejno ptáků* ‘a flock of birds’, *smečka vlků* ‘a pack of wolves’; examples (1), (2), and (3) above) offers the following answers to the research questions (see 1):

a) Each of the three constructions is specific not only for certain kinds of animal, but also for a specific type of group organisation and/or behaviour, and the given type of group has relatively stable associations. *Stádo* is thus primarily a large group of large herbivores with hooves that walk or run on longer legs, move or graze together, and do not seem to have a salient structured organisation with a saliently marked leader. *Hejno* consists typically of a larger number of animals that typically move together in a way other than by walking (they fly, swim, crawl, etc.). The organisation and behaviour of *hejno* seems similar to that of *stádo*. *Smečka*, on the other hand, consists typically of predatory carnivores and is conceptualised as a group behaving according to some intention – the members, e.g., chase somebody or hunt together. The group typically has a leader and some internal structure. Associations such as being dangerous and moving quickly (typically by running) may also appear.

b) The prototypical uses of the collective constructions can be extended in several directions: to other kinds of animal, to inanimate entities, and to humans; to groups organised and behaving in a different way (e.g., not all groups labelled as *smečka* in the corpus data refer to a hunting group, which is the dictionary definition); to different evaluative meanings.

The extension to those other than the typical group’s members can be accompanied by re-categorisation of the grouped entities. For example, an inanimate object (e.g., a robot) is conceptualised as an animal of a certain type (e.g., as a domestic animal such as a sheep or a horse, hence *stádo robotů* ‘a herd of robots’).



The extension from an animal to an inanimate thing is in accordance with the so-called Animacy Hierarchy (1<sup>st</sup> person > 2<sup>nd</sup> person > 3<sup>rd</sup> person > human > animate > inanimate; e.g., Corbett 2000, p. 90). The extension from animals to humans, on the other hand, seems to proceed in the opposite direction.

c) According to the theory of the linguistic image of the world (linguistic worldview; Bartmiński 2010), each language represents a certain interpretation of the world, including categorisation and evaluation of the world. This interpretation of the world can be reconstructed by analysing the language and its use.

The collective constructions analysed in this study reveal that contemporary Czech tends to group similar objects together, i.e., it prefers relatively homogeneous categories. The groups conceptualised by the collective constructions consist typically of one kind of entity. The collective construal of mixed groups is relatively restricted, e.g., to entities of a very similar kind (e.g., to relatively similar kinds of domestic animal) or to groups with certain features (e.g., certain types of relationship between members). *Smečka* seems to allow for slightly more heterogeneous groups than the other two types.

Some results of the analysis are also consistent with the general claim from cognitive linguistics (e.g., Vaňková et al. 2005, p. 62) that language tends to be anthropocentric and that the extension of the animal-specific expression to people is typically accompanied by evaluative associations that are negative. This is evident from the fact that although associations related to the given groups of animals can be (depending on the context) neutral or even positive, the extensions to groups of people are frequently accompanied by negative and pejorative associations.<sup>19</sup> People conceptualised as groups of animals lose some part of their human character. Such associations as the lack of one's own will and the presence of crowd behaviour and negatively evaluated or dangerous behaviour arise.

However, the corpus data also reveal some "exceptions" to the above-described tendency for animal-specific expressions to gain negative associations when extended to people. Groups of people conceptualised as *smečka* 'a pack' can gain positive evaluative associations when the strength of relationships and mutual support among members of the group is foregrounded (profiled, e.g., Croft – Cruse 2004, pp. 15 – 16). Groups of children conceptualised as *hejno* 'a flock' can also gain positive associations. The possible reason is harder to come by in this case, but associations such as playfulness or the way children move and act when they are

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<sup>19</sup> Similar tendency is observable in many other contexts as well. For example, verbs denoting animal-specific action such as *štěkat* 'to bark' are neutral when used about dogs, but pejorative when extended to people. Metaphorical mapping from animals to people and comparing people to animals can have negative associations as well (e.g., *chovat se jako / hůř než zvířata* 'to behave like/worse than animals').

together could play a role. The general cultural belief that it is good to have children or to have many of them could also be important. Only the groups of people conceptualised as *stádo* ‘a herd’ seem always to have negative associations.

The way we express various types of quantity in our language, including whether we conceptualise something as countable or as mass, as individuals or as collectives, can also be seen as part of our more general cognitive ability to perceive and cognitively manipulate quantity, i.e., of our numeric or mathematical cognition (e.g., Wiese 2003; Beller – Bender 2008; Storch – Dimmendaal 2014, esp. pp. 1 – 32; Rohstein 2017). The way we talk (and think) about quantity in our everyday life is also part of the lay (folk, naïve) theory of mathematics, which is one part of a more general lay (folk) theory of the world. Mathematical cognition and lay theory of mathematics are both important topics that deserve further investigation (not only) in Czech.

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## Konceptualizácia kvantity v súčasnej češtine: kolektívne konštrukcie

### Resumé

Štúdia skúma rôzne spôsoby vyjadrenia kvantity v súčasnej češtine, s osobitným dôrazom na konštrukcie, ako je *stádo koní*, t. j. konštrukcie, ktoré konceptualizujú väčší počet entít nie ako súbor samostatných jednotiek, ale ako skupiny, celky. Dané konštrukcie pozostávajú zo všeobecnejšieho podstatného mena označujúceho typ skupiny (napr. *stádo*) a genitívu množného čísla podstatného mena označujúceho zoskupené entity (napr. *koní-GEN.PL*). Pre tieto konštrukcie sa navrhuje termín „kolektívne“ konštrukcie, ktoré sa interpretujú ako analytický spôsob konceptualizácie kvantity. S podporou teoretických východísk kognitívneho prístupu jazyka a s využitím dát z korpusu súčasnej písanej češtiny sa štúdia zaoberá vybranými zástupcami danej konštrukcie, ktoré sa primárne používajú o zvieratách (*stádo*, *hejno*, *smečka* + podstatné meno v genitíve množného čísla), ale ktoré možno rozšíriť aj na ďalšie entity vrátane človeka.

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