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LANGUAGE UNDER STRAIN: SOMATIC EXPRESSIONS WITH ‘TOOTH/TEETH’ IN SLOVAK NEWS MEDIA (A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF EXPRESSIVE PHRASEMES IN POLITICAL AND WAR CONTEXTS)*

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This study investigates expressive phrasemes containing the word tooth/teeth as they appear in the Slovak daily journal SME. The primary aim is to highlight their linguistic forms and expressive functions within journalistic discourse, focusing on established phraseological patterns, stylistic devices (e.g., proverbs, sayings), as well as metaphorical and metonymic imagery. We examine the semantic structure of tooth in somatic phrasemes through conceptual profiling, drawing on the ethnolinguistic frameworks of Wierzbicka (1985, 1996), Bartmiński (2010), and Vaňková & Vitkovskaya (2014). Our objective is to uncover the cognitive structure and to assess its expressive potential within the specific thematic context of the war in

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Ukraine. The study employs methods of corpus linguistics and pragmatic stylistics, using textual data from a dedicated corpus of SME articles published between January 2022 and May 2023. This corpus was compiled by the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava at the request of the authors.

Keywords: *linguistics; expressive function; stylistics; ethnolinguistic approach; tooth*

1. Introduction

The proposed topic centres on the field of journalism, which holds a particularly influential role in shaping contemporary language use, especially—but not exclusively—in Slovak. Alongside the popular-educational sphere, journalism has acquired a central position in the development and evolution of language (Horecký, Buzássyová, Bosák et al. 1989; Patráš 2018; Mlacek 2008; Baláková 2011; Krško 2020). Several studies further support the emergence of a new trend in journalistic discourse: a marked increase in expressiveness, which constitutes a key focus of our research.

The structure of journalistic texts is distinctive in that it resists rigid classification according to extra-linguistic (stylistic) factors (Findra 2004). While journalistic texts are typically characterized by public accessibility, official tone, written form, monologic nature, absence of a direct addressee, and a communicative function, some genres—such as radio and television journalism—are dominated by spoken and dialogical forms. In many instances, subjectivity and expressiveness take precedence over factuality or objectivity. The dominant textual qualities are frequently influenced by immediacy and the desire to captivate the audience.

Journalistic style encompasses a neutral layer as well as a highly differentiated stylistic stratum, shaped by features associated with stylistically marked, notional, and idiosyncratic macro paradigms. As Findra (2004) notes, functional usage may also incorporate elements from the emotional-expressive macro paradigm. However, the application of such features must adhere to the standards of linguistic, stylistic, and communicative appropriateness.

We observe that contemporary journalistic style integrates expressive elements drawn from administrative, educational, and artistic styles. The effectiveness of this integration lies in the selection and contextual arrangement of stylistic devices, subordinated to the core communicative

functions of journalism. A notable tension emerges between standardization and cliché on the one hand, and the use of a wide range of emotionally expressive and stylistically marked units on the other elements that reflect the influence of the notional and expressive macro paradigms.

In this regard, metaphor and phraseology play a particularly prominent role. In accordance with the cognitive approach of Lakoff and Johnson (2002), we perceive metaphor as a basic principle of language and human thinking itself. Metaphors serve as crucial tools for framing and shaping media discourse, making complex or abstract phenomena accessible and emotionally resonant. As Kövecses (2002) shows in *Metaphor and Emotion*, metaphor is not only a linguistic but also a cognitive mechanism that mediates between affective experience and discursive practice. Similarly, Semino (2008), in *Metaphor in Discourse*, emphasizes the centrality of metaphor in structuring communication across domains, including journalism, where metaphorical patterns often influence public perceptions of political, economic, and social issues.

Phraseological units, and especially somatic idioms, further enrich journalistic expression. Idioms involving body parts encapsulate cultural models of experience and provide a condensed way of expressing attitudes, evaluations, and ideological positioning. Researchers such as Ana Sarić and Nina Spicijarić Paškvan examined idioms with “head” or “tongue”, demonstrating how bodily metaphors function as powerful cognitive and rhetorical resources. Their findings highlight that phraseological creativity in the media often relies on conventional somatic idioms while simultaneously recontextualizing them for persuasive or evaluative purposes.

Another relevant dimension is power relations as revealed in discourse. Chiang (2015) and van Dijk (2008) provide a theoretical overview of how power interplays with discourse, discussing various discourse-analytic approaches including critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, pragmatics, ethnography of communication, and interactional sociolinguistics. This helps frame how journalistic discourse is not neutral: the choice of metaphor, idiom, or style always carries implicit power relations, for instance by legitimizing certain viewpoints or marginalizing others.

Taken together, these perspectives underscore that journalistic style is not only a hybrid of functional layers but also a site where metaphorical and phraseological strategies interact with communicative norms. Media discourse thus emerges as a dynamic arena where conventionalized linguis-

tic resources-metaphors, idioms, and stylistically marked expressions are mobilized to balance neutrality with expressivity, and standardization with innovation.

2. Expressive-emotional lexical macro paradigm

The category of expressiveness is primarily manifested through increased subjectivity and emotionality, often bordering on stylistic coloration of expression. From the perspective of vocabulary stratification, the macro paradigm of expressive-emotional styles stands in contrast to notional and neutral lexical units (Huťková 2014). Expressive elements often draw attention through their phonetic form, morphological structure, or marked semantic features. Their factual basis is frequently overlaid with the speaker's subjective stance or personal engagement in evaluating a given phenomenon. In this sense, expressiveness emerges as a product of subjectivity, while emotionality functions as a subordinate component within the broader system of expressive features, enabling the expression of emotional attitudes toward the described reality.

The macro paradigm of expressive-emotional lexical stylistic features includes euphemisms, hypocoristic, dysphemism, pejoratives, augmentatives, diminutives, and vulgarisms. A special subset consists of fixed expressions, including expressive variants of single-word terms and figurative expressions such as metaphors, metonymies, and other tropes. Expressiveness can also be heightened by the inclusion of “atypical” elements within an otherwise expressively homogeneous text, producing a contrast effect that intensifies expressive perception (Huťková 2014).

Such contrastive effects may be achieved by colloquial, archaic, or dialectal vocabulary, and even, in some cases, through the incorporation of foreign or culturally unintegrated verbal units. For instance, evaluative lexicon in journalistic texts—reflecting the pragmatic dimension of media discourse—includes examples like the French *Oh, là là*, which has a broad spectrum of contextual translations ranging from the playful *But, but...* to the ironic *Let's look!* or *That's my thing!* Similarly, the English exclamation *Oh my God!* (often abbreviated to *OMG*), or the obsolete Latin-derived *punctum* (in the sense of *End!* or *That's enough!*) can serve expressive functions within the journalistic context.

A crucial component of this emotional-expressive macro paradigm in any language is the system of phraseological units. These elements form

the core of our study, as derived from the journalistic corpus of the daily journal *SME*. Our analysis focuses specifically on phraseological units that contain the lexical component *tooth*.

3. Somatic phraseology

Somatic phraseology reflects the anthropocentric orientation of language, revealing how speakers perceive and conceptualize the human body. Goshkheteliani (2020: 18) defines somatic phraseology as “multiword fixed expressions containing the names of body parts,” emphasizing its richness and diversity across natural languages. Phraseological units are often regarded as the most vivid, colourful, and expressive part of a language’s lexicon—“a kind of picture gallery,” as Goshkheteliani metaphorically notes, capturing lively depictions of national customs, traditions, and beliefs, as well as fragments of folk memory, songs, and fairy tales.

Within this framework, the lexeme *tooth* is categorized, following the centre–periphery model (Vaňková 2012), as a peripheral somatic expression of the second type—that is, a body part that belongs to another organ. In this case, the *tooth* is situated within the oral cavity and functions as part of facial description. From a stylistic perspective, *tooth* typically belongs to an asymptomatic, notional, and neutral register. This is evident in its primary, denotative usage, such as in expressions like *front tooth*, *painful tooth*, or *to brush one’s teeth*, which define the term in accordance with its basic anatomical and physiological function: a hard formation in the oral cavity used for biting and grinding food (KSSJ 4, 2003).

In contrast, in its terminological applications, *tooth* can appear within a notional yet stylistically marked (symptomatic) paradigm, particularly in professional or technical registers. In such contexts, the word *tooth* is often specified through adjectival modification and serves as part of anatomical terminology (e.g., *inguinal tooth*, *milk tooth*, *permanent tooth*, *canine tooth*). Additionally, *tooth* occurs in technical and engineering discourse (e.g., *screw tooth*, *gear coupling*), frequently in the form of compound nouns or derivations. In these cases, the original somatic meaning is metaphorically extended to denote mechanical or structural components inspired by the physical resemblance or functional analogy with human teeth.

4. Tooth conceptual profiles

The etymology of the Slovak word *zub* (*tooth*) traces back to Proto-Slavic *zq̂bъ* (**ĝembh-*, **ĝmbh-*), associated with biting and chewing (Králik 2015: 689). Synonyms listed in Slovak dictionaries include *chair*, *teether*, *incisor*, *fangs*—lexemes often derived from zoological contexts and metaphorically transferred to human domains, sometimes with expressive or humorous overtones (e.g. *milk tooth*). Comparisons to *pearls*, *seed beads*, or *tusks* are also common in colloquial usage.

Within the framework of somatic phraseology, we identify four conceptual profiles of the lexeme *tooth*, as drawn from cognitive ethnolinguistics (Wierzbicka 1985, 1996; Bartmiński 2010, 2016; Lakoff & Johnson 2002; Vaňková 2012; Vaňková & Vitkovskaya 2014; Rohrer 2007; Pastorková 2023, 2024):

1. Function,
2. Appearance/Shape,
3. Localization, and
4. Gesture.

1. Function

The primary conceptual profile of *tooth* is functional: to bite or grind food, as reflected in its basic dictionary definition (KSSJ 2003). This core meaning is metaphorically extended in technical contexts (e.g. *tooth of a gear*, *tooth of a key*) where structural or mechanical analogies apply.

Teeth also symbolize strength (*animal fangs*), health (*checking a horse's teeth*), or maturity (*wisdom tooth*). This instrumental function is reflected in phraseological units such as “*Let's eat so the belly doesn't think the devil has taken the teeth*” (Baláková 2011: 98).

2. Appearance / Shape

Visual features—such as size, shape, colour, and number—play a key role in phraseological conceptualization. White teeth represent cleanliness and health; by contrast, yellow, dark, or “leaky” teeth signal decay or disease. Stereotypical modifiers like *white*, *healthy*, *sharp* frequently occur. The distinction between *animal* and *human* teeth, as well as *real* and *artificial*, also appears, with animal teeth often linked to sharpness or aggression (*fangs*, *teethers*).

Though biologically adults have 32 teeth and children 20, these figures hold little conceptual significance in phraseology. Instead, numerical references often appear a phraseological unit—*few teeth* may imply weakness (“*like a frog*”), while in older expressions, *teeth* metaphorically represented monetary value (e.g. “*Log cabins have teeth, but walls even more*”, Záturecký 2018: 224).

3. Localization

Teeth are anatomically localized in the mouth, but this aspect is largely irrelevant to phraseological expression. Although they shape the face and contribute to speech production, these functions are more commonly associated with the *mouth* or *tongue* in phraseological units.

4. Gestures

Gesture-based phraseological units include both literal and figurative expressions:

- a) Real gestures: *grit one’s teeth* (disagreement, determination), *hold one’s tongue behind one’s teeth* (silence), *tap one’s teeth* (certainty).
- b) Emotional/physical states: *hold on tooth and nail* (effort), *speak through teeth* (reluctance), *grind one’s teeth* (anger), *clench one’s teeth* (pain, restraint).

The expression “*show one’s teeth*” or “*grit one’s teeth*” may convey aggression or resilience—but also laughter, depending on context. The verb *expose* (*teeth*) is emotionally marked and often negatively charged.

Other phraseological units represent failure or defeat: “*break one’s teeth on something*”, “*knock one’s teeth out*”, or “*wipe one’s teeth*” (i.e. gain nothing, have plans thwarted). For example, “*Wipe your teeth, little wolf*” expresses unmet expectations (Habovštiaková & Krošlaková 1996: 71).

Finally, expressions rooted in religious or cultural contexts carry deep emotional weight, such as the biblical “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*”, signifying despair or divine punishment (Smiešková 1988: 172). The well-known retributive phrase “*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*” similarly reflects notions of justice and moral reciprocity.

Based on the outlined conceptual profiles of the lexeme *tooth*, which reflect functional, visual, spatial, and gestural dimensions, we proceed to examine how these dimensions are realized in actual language use—specif-

ically, in the phraseological patterns occurring in journalistic texts. To this end, the following section outlines the corpus-based methodology used to identify and analyze emotionally expressive somatic phrasemes containing the word *tooth* in Slovak media discourse.

5. Data and methods

The research part of paper investigates the expressive potential of somatic phraseological units (phrasemes) containing the lexeme *tooth* through an analysis of their conceptual profiles, which participate in the broader cognitive structure of the word. These profiles – *appearance/manifestation, localization, function, and gesture*—serve as interpretive frames for identifying and categorizing expressions with heightened emotional or evaluative charge.

The analysis focuses on phraseological units that exhibit metaphorical or metonymic motivation and that can be situated within the macro paradigm of emotional-expressive lexical features. Such features are characterized by an inherent subjectivity, emotionality, or stylistic markedness—traits considered central in contemporary journalistic discourse, particularly under socio-politically tense conditions.

To examine the viability, semantic plasticity, and contextual variability of these phrasemes, we analyse authentic textual material sourced from the Slovak National Corpus, specifically:

- a) the journalistic subcorpus of the SME daily journal¹ (spanning the years 2022–2023), and
- b) the reference subcorpus of public-informative journalistic texts² (prim-10.0-public-inf).

These corpora provide a representative sample of current Slovak journalistic language and enable comparative analysis across time and genre.

¹ The corpus sme01-2022az06-2023 was published on 07/07/2023 in the range of 34,473,536 text units. It contains texts from the pages of the SME daily from January 2022 to June 2023.

² The current version of the prim-10.0 corpus was created on 28/04/2022 and made available on 15/06/2022 in the range of over 1.68 billion tokens. This subcorpus contains 1,163,232,349 tokens, 931,861,092 words.

Our working hypothesis (H1) builds on the theoretical framework outlined in the preceding sections:

H1: The SME corpus contains emotionally and expressively charged somatic phrasemes involving the lexeme *tooth/teeth*, which are contextually associated with socio-political events, particularly the war in Ukraine.

This hypothesis is explored through the following research question:

RQ1: How do emotional-expressive somatic phrasemes containing *tooth* or *teeth* manifest in the SME corpus, and to what extent do they contribute to the linguistic representation of negative emotional or political contexts—particularly those related to the war in Ukraine?

In our analysis, we focus on established Slovak phraseological units and their usage in contemporary journalistic discourse. For clarity and cross-linguistic accessibility, these expressions are presented in literal English translations alongside explanatory glosses. Particular attention is paid to their communicative function, emotional load, and stylistic relevance in the context of political commentary, crisis narratives, or ideological framing.

6. Corpus Analysis and Findings

In the SME daily corpus (01/2022 – 06/2023³), the lemma *zub* ('tooth') in all its morphological forms occurs 614 times. For comparison, in the reference subcorpus of public-informative journalistic texts from the main written corpus (prim-10.0-public-inf), it appears 32,144 times. This significant discrepancy reflects both the narrower time range and the focused stylistic domain of the SME corpus.

When applying collocation analysis based on the logDice function⁴, the noun *necht* ('nail') ranks first among the strongest collocates of *tooth* and appears second in the ranking based on T-score and frequency. These occurrences almost exclusively belong to the fixed phraseological unit "*to hold on tooth and nail*" (*držať sa zubami-nechtami*), a highly expressive, figurative unit denoting desperate persistence or maximal effort.

³ SME01-2022AZ06-2023

⁴ The setting of collocations in both compared corpora is the same: attribute: lemma; range -5 to 5; min. frequency in corps: 5; min. frequency to the extent given: 3.

This phraseological unit is used across diverse journalistic domains:

- a) Domestic politics (e.g. “to hold on to government positions tooth and nail⁵”),
- b) Sports discourse (e.g. “The Finns are holding on to the zone tooth and nail⁶”),
- c) and sporadically in war-related contexts, especially Ukraine (e.g. “Ukrainians are clinging to normal life tooth and nail⁷”).

Despite its semantic intensity and frequency (676 occurrences), the phrase is not the most dominant collocational unit in the corpus.

The verb *brúsiť* (‘to grind’) ranks first in the logDice collocate list, with 1,278 occurrences, although not all of these are phraseological units. A qualitative inspection of over half the occurrences revealed that the expression *brúsiť si zuby na* (lit. *to grind one’s teeth on*) overwhelmingly appears in its phraseological unitatic form (16 of 17 verified instances), predominantly in sports journalism and only once in a political/war-related context.

Another highly frequent phraseological unit is *mať plné zuby* (lit. *to have full teeth*), meaning to be fed up. The adjective *plný*⁸ (‘full’) shows the highest co-occurrence rate with *tooth* in both corpora (2366 times in the reference corpus, 42 times in SME⁹). Its usage is frequent in political commentary:

⁵ SME 2023/03. Mistrík’s return to politics has frozen, he will not form a tandem with Heger. Daniela Hajčáková. (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

⁶ SME 2022/05. Ice Hockey World Championship 2022: Finland advanced to the finals, narrowly defeating the USA. Sportnet. (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

⁷ SME 2023/03. Ukrainians have won the winter and got used to the military service (writes Petra Procházková). (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

⁸ The first rungs also include the verbs to have and to be, but due to their overlap with auxiliary verbs, we do not subject them to special research.

⁹ T-score is based on a statistical method of hypothesis testing and is sometimes referred to as a measure of contrast. The higher the T-score, the less likely it is that words will be randomly distributed, i.e. the likelihood of fixed combinations of words (collocations) increases. The T-score also captures the frequency of grammatical units (which are usually more frequent than lexical combinations) – these grammatical collocations are not listed. The second of the listed settings, LogDice, reflects only the frequency of words, it does not take into account the size of the corpus.

- a) War in Ukraine (e.g. “If Putin forces Europe to accept a frozen conflict and everyone starts getting fed up...¹⁰”),
- b) Slovak politics (e.g. “The president is naturally fed up with it...¹¹”),
- c) Post-communist memory, and
- d) COVID-19 pandemic discourse (e.g. “We are all fed up with orders and fear...¹²”).

The adjective *dračí* (‘dragon’) ranks second by logDice in the SME corpus, though it is only marginally relevant. The expression *dračie zuby* (‘dragon’s teeth’), appearing 18 times, refers not to a phraseme but to anti-tank obstacles, based on visual resemblance. Its expressivity is thus mostly symbolic and situational.

Among verbal phraseologisms, the verbs *zafat’* (‘to clench’) and *vylámať* (‘to break out/off’) figure prominently:

- *Zafat’ zuby* (‘to clench teeth’) and its adjectival derivative *so zafatými zubami* (‘with clenched teeth’) occur primarily in sports and war rhetoric. Of the 10 corpus occurrences, one is war-related (e.g. “Today everyone is clenching their teeth... we must defeat the enemy¹³”) and expresses anger. Others connote endurance or effort.
- In sports, the phraseological unit conveys physical or psychological resilience, whereas in wartime discourse, it shifts toward resistance and emotional intensity.

The verb *vylámať* (‘to break off’) and the phraseological unit *vylámať si zuby na niečom* (lit. *to break one’s teeth on something*, i.e., to fail or be defeated), ranks 6th by logDice. All 10 occurrences are used figuratively, mostly in

¹⁰ SME 2023/02 Who wouldn’t want peace? Beata Balogová (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

¹¹ SME 2023/01 Common sense has prevailed in the Czech Republic. Matia Lenická (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

¹² SME 2022/02 Thousands of Canadians protested against vaccination, measures and the government. REUTERS (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

¹³ SME 2023/06, Zelensky is getting used to life without competitors and critics. However, he will have challengers in the elections. Visegrad Insight, Aleksandra Klitina (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

sports journalism. A near-synonymic expression is *vybit' si zuby* ('to knock one's teeth out'), which appears 9 times in the temporal corpus, 5 of which are clearly expressive, e.g. "The prosecutor's office, believing it would knock out its teeth again, made an extraordinary effort."¹⁴

Prepositional phraseological units are also significant:

- a) *Pod zub* ('under the tooth') occurs 601 times and is associated with food, desire, or acquisition (e.g. *dať si niečo pod zub* – to get a bite to eat).
- b) *Po zuby* ('to the teeth'), with 446 occurrences, predominantly collocates with military language: *armed, arming, guard, soldier*, etc. The phraseological unit *ozbrojený po zuby* ('armed to the teeth') is used 16 times in the corpus, of which 14 refer to soldiers or states.
- c) *Mať niekoho/niečo v zuboch* ('to have someone/something in one's teeth') appears 16 times and usually connotes anger or aversion, e.g. "The Kremlin had Galkin in its teeth long ago."¹⁵ A literal interpretation appears in 5 cases (e.g. "having poppy seeds caught in one's teeth"), but the majority are figurative and often tied to political or historical narratives.

7. Interpretation of Findings

Our initial hypothesis – that the SME corpus contains emotionally expressive somatic phraseological units involving the noun *tooth (zub)* and that these expressions frequently reflect the war in Ukraine—has been partially confirmed.

In the SME corpus, nominal collocations prevail (e.g. adjective *plný* 'full', noun *necht* 'nail', adjective *dračí* 'dragon'). This trend mirrors that of the general journalistic subcorpus, where the somatic expression *mať plné zuby niečoho/niekoho* ('to be fed up with something/someone') is dominant, though verbal phraseological units such as *brúsiť si zuby, zatať zuby*, and *vylámať si zuby* are also prominent.

¹⁴ SME 2022/05. Pčolinský's case is in court. Finally (commentary). Nataša Holinová (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

¹⁵ SME 2022/09 She was supposed to sing and be quiet. If Pugacheva ever deserved roses, it's now (commentary). (In: Slovenský národný korpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav L. Štúra SAV 2015. Accessed at: <https://korpus.sk>.)

The expression *mať plné zuby*—in Slovak also expressively paralleled by *mať toho po krk* ('to have it up to one's neck')—reflects the conceptual profile of measure. Its typical usage occurs in contexts dealing with:

- a) politics,
- b) war/conflict,
- c) totalitarian or social systems,
- d) sports, or
- e) pandemic discourse.

This phraseological unit has become a conventionalized expressive phrase in both journalistic and everyday spoken Slovak. On the positive–negative evaluative axis, the phraseological unit clearly resides at the negative pole. This is notable since *fullness* (e.g. a full stomach) is generally positively perceived. However, the prepositions *nad*, *po*, *cez* ('over', 'up to', 'beyond') shift the expression into a negative semantic space – suggesting excess, saturation, or emotional overload (cf. *nad hlavou*, *po krk*, *cez čiaru*).

Similarly, the high frequency of the phraseological unit *zubami-nechtami sa držať* ('to hold on tooth and nail') points to journalistic reliance on stereotypical figurative language, especially in sports, political, and war-related texts. The phraseological unit denotes:

- a) extreme effort,
- b) resistance to giving up,
- c) self-denial, and
- d) determination to endure in unfavourable situations.

Despite describing negative contexts, the phraseological unit also carries positively evaluated connotations – emphasizing persistence, courage, and agency in adversity.

The phraseological unit *zaťat zuby* ('to clench one's teeth') and its derivative forms (*so zaťatými zubami*, etc.) are also frequent. While often synonymous with *zubami-nechtami* in terms of emotional tone, the two expressions differ subtly across domains:

- a) In sports, *zaťat zuby* typically indicates effort and endurance,
- b) In political or wartime contexts, it may convey anger, disagreement, or internal resistance.

The emotional charge thus shifts depending on context—from stoic perseverance to silent protest or frustration.

The minimalist phraseological unit *mať niekoho v zuboch* ('to have someone in your teeth') is another clearly negative evaluative unit, usually directed at a person or group. It is mainly observed in political commentary, where it expresses hostility, disapproval, or moral condemnation.

Among minimalist phraseological units, we highlight *po zuby* ('up to the teeth'), whose collocational field is closely linked to the military domain. Originally used phraseological units to signify saturation or extremity, this phrase has undergone a semantic shift in contemporary journalistic usage toward the meaning *completely, fully* (e.g. *armed to the teeth*). This reflects a conceptual update driven by recurring usage patterns in war discourse. The thematic field itself (war, defence, arming) evokes negative emotion, further reinforcing the axiological alignment.

The frequent collocation *dračie zuby* ('dragon's teeth') is not a phraseme but a military term denoting anti-tank obstacle. However, its structure is still linguistically relevant—it reflects metaphorical conceptualization through appearance, particularly the shape (sharp, pyramid-like), characteristics (dangerous, hard), and function (piercing, damaging).

It can be stated that the word *zub* ('tooth') constitutes an important element in the linguistic image of the world, functioning not only as a referential lexical unit, but—particularly through phraseology—as a carrier of emotional and expressive meaning. This meaning is predominantly negative, though in some cases (e.g. effort-related phraseological units) ambivalently coloured.

Comparable findings are offered by Pastorková (2023) in her study on the conceptualization of *vlasy* ('hair') in Slovak, where she states:

"In all categories, we noticed a tendency to focus attention on those elements or phenomena that contain a negative evaluation; it is probably a natural categorization tendency of a person to highlight those aspects of reality that differ from what is perceived as common or 'normal' in society." (Pastorková 2023: 153–154)

Our results confirm that expressive somatic phraseological units involving *zub* are common, often stereotyped, and context sensitive. They tend to emphasize:

- a) appearance (shape, characteristics),
- b) measure (degree, intensity),
- c) gestures (clenching, biting), and
- d) emotion (anger, exhaustion, effort, defiance).

In journalism, these expressions become frequent, salient, and at times clichéd, with only a few (such as *po zuby*) retaining more innovative semantic developments.

8. Conclusion

Emotional-expressive somatic phrasemes containing the words *tooth* and *teeth* in the journalistic corpus predominantly occur in negative emotional and political contexts, especially those related to the war in Ukraine, domestic politics, and societal unrest. These phrasemes are used to convey a wide range of emotionally charged states, most often:

- a) determination and endurance (*to hold on tooth and nail, to clench one's teeth*),
- b) disagreement, resistance, or unwillingness (*with clenched teeth, to have someone in one's teeth*), and
- c) frustration, anger, or emotional exhaustion (*to have something up to one's teeth or neck*).

Although some expressions highlight resilience and perseverance in adverse circumstances, they often carry ambivalent or clearly negative emotional connotations. Their high frequency reflects the language's natural tendency to foreground negative values, particularly in communication about conflict, crisis, and political tension. This aligns with cognitive linguistic theories suggesting that people are more likely to verbalize and lexicalize emotionally or socially marked (especially negative) experiences.

In journalistic discourse, many of these phrasemes appear as clichés or conventionalized expressive units, contributing to the emotional framing of news stories. Despite their stereotypical usage, they maintain communicative strength through their concise form, bodily anchoring, and affective intensity.

Overall, somatic phrasemes involving *tooth/teeth* demonstrate how language encodes physical experience into figurative meaning, offering insight into both individual emotional states and collective societal attitudes, particularly in times of crisis.

The present study does not purport to provide a definitive account in relation to established perspectives. On the contrary, the empirical material collected reveals a number of avenues for further scholarly inquiry. Of particular relevance is the systematic examination of journalistic strategies

(e.g., bias, manipulation, ideological framings, political constraints), the analysis of which presupposes the application of tailored methodological approaches. Equally significant is the investigation of how readers perceive the phraseological units under consideration, which likewise constitutes a promising line of research. In this respect, the study attests to the rich potential inherent in exploring the complex interconnections among language, thought, perception, society, and culture, as well as the ways in which the world is cognitively apprehended through conceptual frameworks and anthropocentric categories.

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SAŽETAK

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JEZIK POD PRITISKOM: SOMATSKI IZRAZI KOJI SADRŽE LEKSEM ‘ZUB/ZUBI’ U SLOVAČKIM MEDIJIMA (KORPUSNO ISTRAŽIVANJE EKSPRESIVNIH FRAZEMA U POLITIČKOM I RATNOM KONTEKSTU)

U radu se istražuju frazemi koji sadrže leksem ‘zub/zubi’ u tekstovima objavljenim u slovačkim dnevnim novinama SME. Primarni je cilj istaknuti njihove jezične oblike i ekspresivne funkcije u sklopu publicističkoga stila, fokusirajući se na ustanovljene frazeološke obrasce, stilske figure (npr. izreke) te na metaforičke i metonimijske predodžbe. U okviru etnolingvističkog pristupa Wierzbicke (1985, 1996), Bartmińskoga (2010) te Vaňkove i Vitkovskaye (2014) ispituje se semantička struktura riječi *zub* u somatskim frazemima pomoću konceptualnoga profiliranja. Cilj je spoznati kognitivnu strukturu i procijeniti njezin ekspresivni potencijal u okviru specifičnoga tematskog konteksta rata u Ukrajini. Na korpus članaka objavljenih u SME-u između siječnja 2022. i svibnja 2023. primijenjene su metode korpusne lingvistike i pragmalingvistike. Korpus je kompilirala Slovačka akademija znanosti u Bratislavi na zahtjev autorica.

Ključne riječi: *lingvistika; ekspresivna funkcija; stilistika; etnolingvistički pristup; zub*