

The present thesis derives information from three main sources which helped us analyse how native speakers of four European languages perceive, understand and evaluate *youth*. We used dictionaries, corpora and a questionnaire research to study the meanings, metaphors, colours, images and emotions speakers connect with *youth*.

According to the dictionaries, the prototypical bearers of *youth* are creatures and plants. The dictionaries of synonyms prove that the meaning of the word *youth* partially overlaps with the meaning of the word *childhood*, and thus, depending on the context, we can understand *youth* either as a hyperonym of *childhood*, or as its synonym. In all the four languages a prototypical *young* person has not come of age and there is a secondary meaning of the word *youth* as a state of the body and mind creating an illusion of a younger age.

Czech phraseology shows that we speak about human *youth* using metaphors of birds' *youth* and unripe plants which gives our image of *youth* green colour. Czech proverbs characterise *youth* as a period of joy, growth, health, energy, mobility and learning on the one hand, and inexperience and unwisdom on the other hand. Some proverbs (*a young idler, an old beggar* or *who so learnt young forgets not when he is old*) exist in many languages, express general human wisdom and are probably of European origin. Apart from such proverbs we have encountered some purely national proverbs. Surprisingly only Spanish proverbs spot the connection between *youth* and love.

Some Czech proverbs as well as signs of the Czech sign language are based on human physical experience with space orientation. Physical *youth* is growing upwards which expresses the orientational metaphor YOUNG IS UP. Ageing on the contrary brings diminution of the body and health problems which force an old person to lie down and we can express that by a metaphor OLD IS DOWN. In accordance with Lakoff and Johnson (2002) we can say that physical YOUTH IS GOOD while physical OLD AGE IS BAD. However, we cannot generalise this opposition because inexperience and unwisdom are not valued while experience and wisdom as typical attributes of old age are highly valued. Neither *youth* nor old age is considered entirely good or bad. *Youth* is highly valued by Germans and above all by Spaniards who say *youth – divine treasure* (*juventud, divino tesoro*).