

## SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH-BOHEMIAN BORDERLAND

### SPECIFIČNE ZNAČAJKE JEZIČNE SITUACIJE U JUŽNIM POGRANIČNIM PODRUČJIMA ČEŠKE

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#### *Abstract*

Owing to intense contacts with German-speaking territories, Czech lands, and in particular their border areas, were bilingual from as early as the Middle Ages. Germans started to settle in Bohemia in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century and remained a substantial minority there until the end of WWII. In 1945-1946, on the basis of a decision adopted at the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, they were moved out of the country. Nevertheless, the historical national structure of the population still has a bearing on the present language situation in the Czech Republic, especially in its border areas. Despite efforts of the Czechoslovak government in the second half of the 1940s to prioritise Czech national aspects, the Czech language retained a complete system of German surnames, whose frequency is strikingly higher in the border areas compared to the interior of the country. These surnames also show area-specific semantic motivation and phonological features, pointing to territories from which the ancestors of South-Bohemian Germans once arrived in Bohemia.

#### *Sažetak*

Zahvaljujući intenzivnim kontaktima s teritorijem njemačkog govornog područja, češke zemlje, a naročito njihova granična područja, bile su dvojezične već od srednjeg vijeka. Nijemci su se počeli naseljavati u Češkoj u kasnom 10. stoljeću i ostali su značajna manjina do kraja Drugog svjetskog rata. Godine 1945.-1946., na temelju odluke donesene na Potsdamskoj konferenciji u ljeto 1945., premješteni su iz zemlje. Ipak, povijesna nacionalna struktura stanovništva i dalje utječe na sadašnju jezičnu situaciju u Češkoj, posebice u njezinim graničnim područjima. Usprkos naporima čehoslovačke vlade u drugoj polovici četrdesetih godina prošlog stoljeća, češki jezik zadržao je kompletan sustav njemačkih prezimena, čija je učestalost izrazito veća u graničnim područjima u odnosu na unutrašnjost zemlje. Ta prezimena također pokazuju specifičnu semantičku motivaciju i fonološke značajke, ukazujući na teritorije iz kojih su nekad stigli preci Nijemaca južnjaka u Češkoj.

#### **I. PRELIMINARIES**

Czech lands,<sup>1</sup> particularly along their borders, were bilingual from as early as the Middle Ages. From the earliest days of Czech history, neighbouring German-speaking territories fostered rich and diverse links, economic, political,

and cultural. As a result, most inhabitants of the Czech lands, especially along the border, had a command of German.

Intense contacts between the two languages also brought about mutual linguistic influence. Consequently, Czech adopted a number of German words and idioms, and, to a lesser extent, Czech words made their way into German, especially into the former German dialects and Austrian German. The intensity of German influence on Czech varied historically, depending on the num-

<sup>1</sup> The term *Czech lands* is used to refer to Bohemia, Moravia and the part of Silesia that is now within the Czech Republic.

bers of Germans living in Czech lands, and on their economic and political position. Over centuries, along with the German language came German proper names, both personal and place names. Germans probably started to settle in Bohemia from as early as the late 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The influx of Germans grew stronger at the time of the economic and political rise of Bohemia under the House of Přemysl in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, peaking in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> and in the early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most Germans were coming to the country in the process of so-called 'colonisation': settling and tilling previously unexploited areas. In this way, a relatively continuous belt of German settlements was formed around the borders of the country. A considerable proportion of Germans living in Czech towns were patricians, the wealthy merchant and craftsman families controlling municipal administration and guilds. Their leading position is reflected in the language of administrative documents: the first national language used in addition to Latin was German (from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century), while Czech occurred as late as the end of the century. The Hussite movement in the 15<sup>th</sup> century weakened the position of the German language in Bohemia. Since the majority of German patricians were opposed to the Hussites, they were forced to leave, eliminated, or decided themselves to flee. This period marks the end of German minorities in most towns in the interior of Bohemia, while in Moravia and Silesia the position of German was weakened to some extent. The authority of Czech as the language of the church and science grew stronger in the Hussite period. A new rise in the German population in the Czech state came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in its second half. The Habsburgs, who ruled Bohemia from 1526, appointed Austrian Catholics to administrative posts and supported the influx of German Catholic noblemen into Bohemia. The most difficult period for the Czech language came in the wake of the Battle of Bílá Hora. Following the defeat of Czech Protestant estates and the strengthening of the Habsburg supremacy, the predominantly Non-catholic Czech nobles and burghers had to leave the country. Bohemia and Moravia saw an influx of military aristocracy of

various nationalities, especially Catholic nobles from Romance countries and German nobles from Austria and Bavaria. The German population in Czech lands continued to grow at the time of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). In the south of Bohemia, the war resulted in a sharp split between ethnic Czechs and Germans; German settlers predominantly inhabited the mountain areas of the Šumava, with deep forests, pastures, and glassworks.

The peak of Germanisation of the Czech lands occurred in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Habsburgs aimed to establish a centralised state, with unified administrative and education systems, and a single official language – German. Czech was only spoken by serfs and the lower ranks of townsmen. The abolition of serfdom in 1781 prompted a migration of the rural population into the towns, making them Czech in character. From the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries onward, the gradual strengthening of Czech aspects was also made possible by the tireless work of the proponents of the Czech National Revival.

In the early years of this Czech National Revival (from the last third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1848)<sup>3</sup> German remained the language of science for Czech scholars, such as J. Dobrovský and František Palacký. Czech became more widespread in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the growing numbers and significance of the Czech bourgeoisie and Czech workers. Although the number of German inhabitants declined in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they still retained a significant position in politics and culture.

A major turning point in the relative positions of the two languages came with the creation of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918. The German minority lost its political influence, but continued to play an important economic and cultural role. In 1930, the Czechoslovak Republic was home to 3.2 million Germans, 22 % of the overall population. In particular, Germans populated the border regions of the country, as well as some towns in the interior (Prague, Brno, Jihlava). Following the Munich Agreement (September 1938), territories where in 1910 Germans constituted more than half of the population were ceded to Nazi Germany. The Protectorate of Bohemia

<sup>2</sup> Some records of the use of German in Bohemia and the early Czech-German conflicts can be found in the Latin chronicle by Cosmas, Dean of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs* dating from 1125.

<sup>3</sup> The Czech National Revival resulted in a transformation of a feudal community into civil society and in restoration of the Czech language.

and Moravia, created in March 1939, was subjected to strict Germanisation (office workers and civil servants had to take an exam in German, and German became a compulsory subject from the first year of school). After the defeat of Nazi Germany, a decision was made at the Potsdam Conference in 1945 to expel the German population from Czechoslovakia, in a process which was largely completed in 1945-1946. The number of Germans continued to decline even in the following decades, as from the mid-1960s German families were permitted to move out of the country on an individual basis /1/. Currently, the Czech Republic has a German population of roughly 39,000 /2/. Along with the decline in the German population, the number of linguistic Germanisms has been dropping rapidly. After WWII they only remained in use in spoken colloquial Czech. And as the oldest generations gradually depart, these originally German expressions go with them.

## 2. CZECHS AND GERMANS IN CZECH LANDS IN THE COURSE OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all aspects of the Czech-German relationship on Czech territory changed: the proportion of German population in the country, their political, social and power status, as well as the personal relationship between Czech and German neighbours. A process of this complexity cannot be described briefly, and it is therefore treated in three separate periods:

1. up to the end of WWII,
2. the 1940s and 1950s,
3. from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present.

### 2.1 PERIOD UP TO THE END OF WWII

In autumn 1918, after nearly four centuries of Habsburg dynasty rule, an independent Czechoslovak Republic (ČSR) was formed. The territories on its western border were largely populated by Germans. According to a census conducted on 1 December 1930, Czechoslovakia had a population of 14,729,536, of which 3,231,688 (21.9%) were ethnic Germans, most of whom, precisely 3,070,938, lived in the Czech part of the country. German inhabitants of the ČSR mostly lived along the margin of central Czech territory, in a belt up to 100 km wide in places. In five areas this pre-

dominantly German territory was interrupted by areas with a majority of Czech population. A. von Arburg and T. Staněk /3/ call the areas with a German majority *transfer* or *resettlement territories* (*Siedlungsgebiet*) because they were significantly affected by population migration after WWII in 1945, first by the forced departure of the original German inhabitants, and then by the coming of new settlers. However, these areas are also referred to as *the Sudeten*, *the borderland*, *border territory*, *border areas*, and also *mixed territory*. The core area of Czech lands is usually known as *the interior*. In October 1938, under the Munich Agreement signed at the end of September 1938, Czechoslovakia was forced to accept the occupation of almost the whole borderland by the Hitlerite German Wehrmacht. A territory of nearly 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 3,860,000 (according to the 1930 census) /4/, was included into Nazi Germany, representing 38 % of the original area and 36 % of the population. Estimates of the numbers of German and Czech inhabitants in the areas included into Nazi Germany vary according to the sources, statistical and scientific works, and archive documents. At the time of the latest census in 1930, the areas annexed by Germany had a population of registered ethnic Germans ranging from 2,820,000 and 2,853,000, and between 720,000 and 740,000 ethnic Czechs /5/.

### 2.2 THE 1940s AND 1950s

After WWII the territorial and administrative organisation of the ČSR was restored to the state of 29 September 1938. Because of the role the nearly three-million German minority played in the process of breaking up Czechoslovakia and owing to the intensifying Nazi terror during the war, an idea was gaining ground among the exiled political representation and the domestic resistance movement to partly or completely displace Germans from Czechoslovakia.<sup>4</sup> In 1942-1943 this requirement was accepted by the Allies, and a legal framework for the transfer of Germans was provided by the Potsdam Conference, held from 17 July to 2 August 1945. The period up to January 1946 is known as the "wild transfer". From

<sup>4</sup> The term "resettlement of Germans" is often substituted with "deportation of Germans" (*Abschiebung der Deutschen*), "expulsion of Germans" (*Vertreibung der Deutschen*), or by "post-war transfer of the German population".

January to late October 1946 the German minority was deported on the basis of officially approved and organised operations. According to an official report President Beneš received in early 1947, the transfer from Czechoslovakia included 2,170,598 Germans /6/; however, hundreds of thousands of Germans fleeing immediately after the war have to be added to this. Following the end of WWII, Czech lands became the scene of the most extensive migration and transfer in their history, affecting roughly five million people. After the expulsion of the German population the territory was resettled by Czechs and Slovaks, deeply and permanently affecting its ethnic, cultural and confessional structure.

### 2. 3 GERMAN INHABITANTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC FROM THE LATE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY UP TO THE PRESENT

In Europe, language is considered one of the principal features of ethnicity /7/. Similarly, according to research conducted in 2005 and 2009, language was identified as an essential attribute in the process of restoring the identity of Germans not transferred from Czechoslovakia, now living in North Bohemia /8/. The research has shown that the ethnic consciousness of the oldest generation is based on ancestors, language and homeland. These respondents still consider themselves to be Germans. The middle generation has shown some shift; some of them identify themselves as Czechs, particularly owing to being married to a Czech spouse and to the Czech environment they live in, others still consider themselves Germans. This, however, does not match their language competence, since they are gradually forgetting German, their mother tongue. Most respondents from the young generation think themselves to be Czech, and if they have experienced a shift in their original ethnic consciousness (usually through their grandparents or one of their parents), they may be considered to possess a dual ethnic identity. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Czechs and Germans in the border areas of the ČSR were usually bilingual. According to field social-anthropological research conducted in 2005 and 2007 among respondents from German or mixed marriages, Czech-German bilingualism was widespread in Czech territories inhabited by Germans between WWI and WWII, while German-Czech bilingualism was typical of the post-

war era /9/. The Germans who were allowed to stay in Czechoslovakia had to learn to communicate in Czech. The Czech language and upbringing were preferred even in mixed marriages involving a Czech/Czechoslovak partner. These findings are corroborated by other studies conducted in the mid-1960s, which suggested that 75 % of mixed marriages used only Czech for communication, and 68 % of the children in these families were brought up to be Czech /10/. The post-war forced transfer of the German population from Czechoslovakia marked a dramatic turning point in the history of the border areas, and the negative consequences of this event are still being felt, especially in social, economic and environmental terms, as well as those relating to civil society. Scientific literature uses terms like the social discontinuity of the border areas, the loss of traditions, heritage and customs which originated there, and the lack of feelings of belonging and attachment to the countryside and to the heritage left there by the original inhabitants /11/.

### 4. LANGUAGE SITUATION IN CZECH LANDS IN THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Though frequently used, the term *language situation* still lacks an unambiguous definition, and this is why its meaning varies across linguistic and sociolinguistic studies. The term may refer to: 1. the situation within a language, the relationship between the separate forms and components of a national language, or 2. the position of a language in a society, the functions of language and its forms and components in given social conditions. In the latter sense it refers to the relationship of a given language and the social factors and conditions of communication it operates in /12/. However, the term *language situation* may also be understood in a broader sense, to apply to the respective positions of languages operating within a country inhabited by various nations and nationalities, or within an area whose inhabitants, connected by social ties, are speakers of several languages. It is in this last sense that the term is used in the present study. Clearly, the language situation conceived in this way cannot be constant, but is bound to vary continuously depending on social, political and historical factors. This is how it has always been in Czech lands, and particularly so in the border area of South Bohemia. For a long historical period, the

communication continuum was represented by two different languages – Czech and German. In addition to their standard literary form, and, in the case of Czech, to non-standard colloquial forms, they also included local dialects: the South-Western dialect of Czech, and German dialects in the neighbouring regions of Germany and Austria (although with a number of strictly local distinctive features). Throughout centuries of coexistence and contacts in one territory, Czech and German exerted mutual influence. This Czech-German contact situation was manifested in Czech at the level of phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexis /13/. At the lexical level, that is in vocabulary, the processes included word borrowing (lexical loans) and calques, and resulted in an increased frequency of German proper names in Czech, particularly German surnames, toponyms and local toponyms. As stated above, German loans are disappearing fast from Czech along with the oldest generation of speakers, and so only German proper names are left to testify to the historical national structure of Czech lands. After WWII, German toponyms and local toponyms were quickly adapted to Czech or completely replaced with Czech names. However, what is even now typical of Czech lands, and particularly of the border areas of South Bohemia, is the high frequency of German surnames. Although in the 1940s the Czechoslovak government advocated adaptation of German surnames used by Czechs in favour of the Czech language, these official efforts produced little effect. Most people think of their surnames as an important part of their personal identities, and so the foreign character of the surnames was not a sufficient reason for change. Consequently, the system of surnames of German origin used by Czech has been almost completely preserved /14/. So what actually is the proportion of German name bearers among other names used in Czech population? J. Beneš /15/ states that in the 1950s and 1960s German surnames amounted to 8.5 % of Czech ones in Bohemia, and 6.7 % in Moravia (the ratio of their bearers was not identified). Similarly M. Knappová /16/ concludes that German surnames constitute roughly one tenth of the overall number of surnames in Bohemia. The latest and most extensive research by J. Matúšová /17/ shows that roughly 13 % of Czechs currently bear names of German origin. If these data are compared with the results of the present research conducted in the border area of South Bohemia,

which was largely populated by Germans for centuries, it is evident that the proportion of German name bearers in relation to the overall population of villages even now exceeds the national average. This is so despite the near-complete transfer of the German population into Germany in 1946-1947. Let us have a look at the numbers: At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, three quarters of the population of Prachatice were Germans, with Czechs constituting the remaining quarter. Both languages were spoken in the town. However, even today 18.36 % of the Czech inhabitants of Prachatice have German surnames, the most frequent ones being: *Bauer, Böhm, Fidler, Fiedler, Franz, Friedek, Geier, Jaksch, Jungwirt, Kindlman, Kopf, Krejsa, Lang, Nachlinger, Pešl, Rosa, Stuchel, Štádl, Toncar, and Weiss*. Even more Germans lived in Volary before WWII. According to the data from 1930, the population of Volary was 3,905, of whom 3,430 were Germans /18/. Out of the current population of the town of 3,871, 18.52 % are inhabitants with German surnames. The most frequent German surnames in Volary include *Andraschko, Böhm, Brož, Fischer, Geier, Harvalík, Honner, Klement, Lenc, Lukš, Mauric, Pešl, Pichl, Pinc, Skopal, Schneedorfer, Šturma, Švarc, Tischler, Trubela, Wagner, Wimberský, and Zach*. To provide a contrast to towns traditionally inhabited by Germans, the town of Netolice was included in the research. Historically, it has been Czech, but is situated in the border area of South Bohemia, encircled by towns which, in the past, had a predominantly German population. The population of Netolice in April 1945, before the transfer of Germans started, was 2,615, with only 110 Germans /19/. Despite this, 19.48 % of the current inhabitants of Netolice have German names, the most frequent being *Böhm, Cibuzar, Franz, Grill, Haisl, Mottl, Müller, Perner, Pfeffer, Pöschl, Raušer, Reidinger, Rendl, Rotbauer, Sitter, Steinocher, Šanda, Šmíd, Špiroch, Štohanzl, Šveller, Vincik, Wald, and Zimmerhansl*.<sup>5</sup> This comparison suggests that the proportion of inhabitants with German names is higher in the South-Bohemian borderland than in the interior of the Czech Republic. The higher frequency of German surnames is considered as

<sup>5</sup> As German surnames were used in the Czech environment, their form was affected by Czech. This applies to their spelling, phonology, and morphology. Their use in Czech communication resulted in their integration into the Czech morphological system and acquisition of the respective case endings.

evidence of the historical impact of the area on the national structure of this region, with consequences for the present. Another area-conditioned feature of the present language situation in South Bohemia is the set of semantic-motivational types of German surnames occurring in the region. The most frequent German surnames recorded in this study originated from toponyms. Significantly, an overwhelming majority are derived from place names in Bavaria, less frequently also in Austria; that is, in territories from which the ancestors of South-Bohemian Germans most likely arrived at some point in history. Examples of such names are: *Bernkopf* (a surname derived from place names in Austria: from *Bärnkopf*, Lower Austria); *Brandl* (a surname derived from a place name in other territories inhabited by Germans: from the place name *Brandl*, Upper Bavaria, Lower Bavaria); *Eppinger* (a surname from place names in various German-inhabited territories: from the place name *Epping*, Upper Bavaria, Upper Austria); *Kreiner* (a surname from the place names *Kreina*, *Krein*, Bavaria, Upper Austria, Saxonia); *Pisinger*, *Pišingr* (a surname from the place name *Piesing*, Upper Bavaria) and many others. An extensive category of German surnames in South Bohemia are those motivated by the names of crafts and craftsmen. Many of these professions and crafts include processing of wood, an activity once typical of the inhabitants of the Šumava and the Bavarian Forest. Such surnames include, for instance: *Binder* (from nouns denoting craftsmen processing wood: *Binder* = a cooper); *Draxler* (from nouns denoting craftsmen processing wood: *Drechsler* = a woodturner); *Sager* (from *Säge* = a saw, in Bavarian-Austrian dialects the surnames are typically used without umlaut – a sawyer, or from the Middle High German *sager* = a prattler); *Wagner* (from nouns denoting craftsmen processing wood: *Wagner* = a wheelwright); *Zimmermann* (from nouns denoting craftsmen processing wood: Middle High German *zimmer*, *zimer* = timber, timbering in mines, *Zimmermann* = a carpenter), etc. The final characteristic of the language situation in the South-Bohemian borderland treated in the present study is the phonological structure of some German surnames, reflecting features typical of South-German/Bavarian, and possibly also Austrian dialects. The most frequent correspondence identified in the present material was the Czech reflex *-a* replacing the German suffix *-er*. M. Gottschald /20/ suggests that, unless

such names are of Slavic origin, they originated from Austrian-Bavarian dialects. In the south of Bohemia such names include, for instance, *Lexa* (*Lexer*, from the personal name *Alexius*), *Loschka* (probably a craftsman processing leather, Middle High German *lösche*, *lösch* = a kind of fine leather), *Rejda* (*Reiter* = horseman), *Zitta* (Middle High German. *suter* = tailor, shoemaker). Another phonological feature which, according to J. Beneš /21/, can be encountered in the Šumava region is the change from *e*, *ö* to *i*. Among the names from the present corpus, this phenomenon is found, for instance, in *Pitr*, *Pitra* (from *Peter*) or *Pimr* (from *Böhm*). A similar phonological feature of German surnames used in the south of Bohemia is the *-al* suffix, which, along with the diminutive *-el* suffix, was originally found in Bavarian dialects used in the Czech territory, for instance in *Hanzal*, *Hanzl* (from the place name *Handzell*, Upper Bavaria). According to Beneš /22/, Bavarian dialects used in the Czech territory used to have *w* for the consonant *b*. Only one such change was identified in the present corpus, namely in the name *Šejvl* (from *Scheibler* = a carter carrying slabs of salt). The surname *Mádl* is a South-German dialectal variant of the original expression *Maidl* (a diminutive of the Middle High German *mait*, *maget* = a maid, a maid servant), and the surname *Chempef* (*Kempf*, *Kempfer*, Middle High German *kempe* = warrior) is derived from a Bavarian variant pronounced with a strongly aspirated *k*.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

A total of 39,000 inhabitants declared themselves as Germans in a census conducted in the Czech Republic in 2001, making them the third most populous national minority. However, in a long-term perspective the number of people of German nationality has been declining constantly in the country. In the ten years between two censuses the number of German nationals dropped by 9.5 thousand, nearly a fifth. At present, inhabitants of German nationality constitute a mere 0.4 % of the overall population. This decline is attributable to objective reasons involving the changes in the age structure of the population and the assimilation of the young generation.

Although similar general tendencies apply to the border areas of South Bohemia, the present language situation shows some specific

features reflecting the history and the development of national structure in the region.

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