

On the Issue of Mutual Conversion of Czech and Polish Toponyms – An Analysis of the Usus in the Light of Pragmatic Factors*

Der vorliegende Beitrag thematisiert die Übertragung geographischer Bezeichnungen zwischen dem Tschechischen und dem Polnischen. Er legt den Fokus auf die pragmatischen Faktoren, die im Entscheidungsprozess der Sprachnutzer:innen eine Rolle spielen. Die Analyse teilt sich in vier Bereiche auf: die Berücksichtigung der offiziellen Indizes von Exonymen, Tradition und Kodifizierung versus Zweck des Textes, historische und nationale Faktoren sowie der grenzübergreifende Faktor.

The article deals with the conversion of geographical names between Czech and Polish. It focuses on the pragmatic factors, which play a role in a decision-making process of language users. The analysis is divided into four fields: Respecting the official indexes of exonyms, tradition and codification versus the purpose of the text, historical and national factors and cross-border factor.

In Czech tourism promotional materials that deal with Polish realities and vice versa, their authors or translators often face the problem of translating geographical names. This paper will focus on the analysis of the toponymic usus of these two language users (translators, authors, and proof-readers) in the light of pragmatic factors. Participants in the survey focused on mapping toponymic usage perceive the conversion

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of these linguistic forms as problematic and agree on the need to unify or develop a clear procedure that could be used in these situations. It should be said at the outset that for many toponyms such clear-cut solutions cannot be recommended, and the uncertainty of users is unnecessary in the light of normative manuals. While maintaining a consistent approach, they can legitimately use the solution they judge to be the best for the text type.

Before we proceed to the analysis of toponymic usus, it is necessary to define this concept. We will use the theory of Wojciech Włoskiewicz, who is analysing this issue on the example of the Polish toponymy of the Hutsul region. His theory lies on the borderline between onomastics and prescriptive linguistics. According to him, in general the term usus is very rarely defined, but on the other hand linguists often use it in their works (cf. Włoskiewicz 2021: 196). Toponymic usus is defined as the regular (conscious or unconscious) selection of a particular variant or variants of a toponym by a given user. An usus, understood as a set, includes toponyms that the user selects repeatedly. The only objective facts are solely the individual ususes, while the collective usus is only an abstract set-theoretic construct (cf. Włoskiewicz 2019: 14).

Mapping of Tomonymic Usus

Our mapping of toponymic usus was conducted via an online survey from May to June 2022.¹ The task of the respondents, translators, and proof-readers whose working languages are both Czech and Polish, was to select 15 Czech equivalents for Polish toponyms and the same number of Polish equivalents for Czech toponyms. Within each question they had the opportunity to give their own solutions. The responses of 22 respondents were subjected to subsequent analysis.²

The initial hypothesis of this research, in line with the general postulates of translation studies assumed that users would translate into their native language more in line with the codification than into language B. Furthermore, based on the analysis of the situation of geographical names standardisation in both countries, there was an assumption that authors would follow the binding *Official List of the World's*

1 Cf. <https://www.surveio.com/survey/d/Q7M9S5Y2E9D1P2T3F> (accessed: 30 June 2022).

2 The composition of respondents was as follows: 10 Polish native speakers, 9 Czech native speakers and 3 identified themselves as bilingual. 91% described one of their most frequent roles as translator/interpreter, 27% also work as a proof-reader, 23% sometimes work as a teacher, 14% are authors and 9% of them work also as a guide.

Geographical Names (KSNG: 2013) when translating into Polish, whereas they would not be bound by a similar list when translating into Czech.

In order to create a set of questions, it was necessary to identify the most common problematic phenomena when converting toponyms between Czech and Polish. For this purpose, we used our own material excerpted from Polish and Czech tourism promotional materials. On their basis, a catalogue of the most common problems in the conversion of toponyms between Czech and Polish was created. These problems more or less overlap within the two languages, as we will see below.

An analysis of the survey results shows that the solutions of particular users for some toponyms really run in all directions. While the survey was anonymous, according to the initial questions, it was possible to filter the answers to the solutions of Polish or Czech native speakers. The brief asked respondents to choose a solution as they would normally do when translating or creating tourist brochures.

In general, it can be stated that there was a greater consensus among the respondents in the area of translating Polish toponyms into Czech. The agreement exceeding 50% was found for 8 equivalents of Polish toponyms and it did not matter too much whether they were from Polish or Czech native speakers. In the case of Czech toponyms translated into Polish, 6 equivalents of Czech toponyms exceeded the 50% agreement threshold among users.

The most fragmented field of answers among the respondents appeared for multi-word toponyms (*Kudowa-Zdrój, Pec pod Sněžkou, Královehradecký kraj*). For single-word toponyms, the widest range of responses was recorded for the toponyms *Domažlicko, Hlučinsko* and *Šumperk* and for the Polish toponym *Zaolzie*.

The analysis of the extent to which the usus mapped through the survey coincides with norms and codification is discussed below. We divide the whole process of toponym conversion into two phases. Due to space limitations, we will focus on detail only on phase 1, where we will offer an overview of the most common issues illustrated by concrete examples from the survey. We will also point out the differences between Czech and Polish native speakers. For some problematic phenomena, we will use the official opinion of the Institute for the Czech Language and the Polish Language Advisory Service PWN to evaluate the suitability of the solution.

Conversation of Toponyms in Two Phases

In the first phase, which can be simplistically called pragmatic, we usually decide between an endonym or a possible exonym. Here we have the possibility to choose a translation strategy that allows us to avoid the necessity of adapting the foreign language element in the target language later, etc.

In the second phase, we have to incorporate the chosen equivalent into a sentence and adapt it to the target language system. For the purposes of this article, we will call this phase the adaptation phase. Each of these phases is characterised by specific linguistic problems and decision-making processes.³ The issue of this phase of toponym conversion between Czech and Polish will be dealt with in more detail in a separate study.

It should be noted that the relation between these phases is not always linear and can take on a cyclical form. Sometimes it happens that the user realises only in the second phase that he/she is not able to use the toponym in the sentence of the target language and returns to the first phase in which he/she chooses another solution that will make the problems of the second phase easier.

Phase 1 of Toponym Conversation – »Pragmatic«

This decision phase lies in the field of pragmatics. Considering the potential addressees and the purpose of the text, we choose here mainly between endonyms and exonyms.⁴ This choice is not always easy, and when searching for equivalents we should first of all use official lists of exonyms or geographical names, which will ensure that the result is in line with the standardised form.

The analysis of the lists of toponyms currently available for Czech and Polish was dealt with in a separate article (cf. Grigová 2021). In this analysis, it was found that the

3 In the future, it is possible to analyse the whole process of conversion on the basis of the factors shaping the toponymic usus according to Włoskowicz (cf. Włoskowicz 2021: 246–288). In his works he categorises these factors into two basic groups (individual and collective) for which he distinguishes other subcategories. In addition to the characterization of the individual factors, there is an important categorization of the criteria of toponymic correctness (cf. Włoskowicz 2021: 288–295).

4 Exonym is defined as: »Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated« (UN 2002: 10). Its opposite is an endonym, which is defined as: »Name of a geographical feature in one of the languages occurring in that area where the feature is situated« (ibid).

research and standardization efforts of researchers in both countries are not equal. The latest *Index of Czech Exonyms Official List of Geographical Names of the World* (KSNG 2013) contains 372 codified exonyms from the Czech territory. This list is considered binding in Poland and should be followed by users of Polish language. Its existence is also known to most Polish authors or translators, and it is freely available on the Internet.

In addition to the lists mentioned above, we have normative handbooks or dictionaries in both languages, but we do not find many of the toponyms we have studied there. The last resort to help us find suitable equivalents is Wikipedia. In many situations, however, according to the respondents, it can be a clue to the familiar form of the given toponym in the other language, as in the case of reliable wiki-articles we can find their documented uses.⁵ Other pragmatic factors that may influence the choice of an appropriate equivalent in the first phase of the conversion process include, for example, marketing or historical and nationality factors.

In addition to all these factors that influence decision-making in the first phase, there is the desire to avoid the subsequent potentially difficult adaptation of the foreign expression into the target language. In this endeavour, the authors most often choose the evasive manoeuvre of a non-congruent nominative indicative (appellative + proprium most often in endonym form without the need for inflection), e.g., *ve městě Golezów*.

Below follows an overview of the most common issues in toponym conversion in the first pragmatic phase.

Respecting Official Exonym Indexes – The Use of Endonyms

In the case of the direction of conversion from Polish to Czech, the official *Index of Czech Exonyms* is not considered binding and language users are relatively free to choose suitable equivalents.

The main factors that lead to the use of variants not listed in the exonym index are most often the greater difference between the toponyms in both languages, and the target group or purpose of the text (see section 2). Another factor may be the lower awareness of the existence of the Czech index and its more complicated accessibility. Many Czech users rely on information from Wikipedia, which can sometimes lead Czech users astray.

⁵ For example, *Hlučínsko – Země hulczyńska*. The Polish exonym *Hulczyn* is not codified in the official list, but it is apparently used in Poland, and Wikipedia provides evidence of this. At the end of the article, we find a link to a dictionary *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego, t. III: Haag – Kępy*, Warszawa 1882, where in the electronic version on p. 207 we see historical evidence of the existing codification of this name.

Polish linguistics seemingly make a similar assessment of the preference of endonym over exonym regarding the type of text. However, there is a marked difference due to the binding nature of the Polish *Official List of the World's Geographical Names* (KSNG 2013). According to it, endonym can be preferred in Polish only in the absence of a codified exonym.

In general, we can therefore conclude that in the case of translation into Czech we have more room for manoeuvre and if a consistent approach is followed when working with the text and if the chosen solutions are correct from the point of view of normative linguistics, it is really up to the user to decide whether to use an exonym or an endonym. When translating into Polish, we must first respect the official list and only if the exonym form is not codified, we can choose between an endonym or a non-codified exonym.

Next, we examine how the participants of the survey handled with the conversion of the toponyms that appear on the official lists. We start with conversion from Polish to Czech. The survey results for the Polish toponyms *Cieszyn*, *Wrocław*, and *Opole*, which have their Czech standardised exonyms (in locative case), are presented below. In this case, we observed a tendency for Czech native speakers and bilinguals to rather incline to standardised exonyms, while Polish native speakers chose endonyms more often.

The analysis of respect for the official list shows us, that the majority of Czech and bilingual respondents chose the exonym *v Opoli* (59% of all respondents). In case of *Wrocław*, most of the Czech and all bilingual participants (54.5%) also chose the traditional exonym *Vratislav*. In case of *Cieszyn* only 32% of respondents would opt for the standardised variant *Těšín* (with a significant majority of native Polish speakers or bilinguals). Only 23% would choose the second standardised option, *Polský Těšín* (balanced group in terms of native language).

An interesting fact is that during conversion of *Cieszyn* and *Opole* 41% of users would choose the endonymic variants *v Cieszyně* and *v Opoli*.⁶ According to a statement from the Czech language consultancy (Svobodová 2022), those variants are also correct. Endonymic variant *ve Wroclavi* (without the original *ł*) was chosen by 23% of respondents – 80% of whom were native Polish speakers.

When translating toponyms from Czech into Polish, the situation is different. Although we expected the opposite, compared to the Czech translations, respondents were less likely to stick to standardised exonyms, although compliance is required in this direction of conversion. It is possible that in some cases respondents chose

6 63% of them were Polish native speakers.

endonyms considering the type and purpose of the text (see next section) or relied on results from Wikipedia.

For the Czech hydronym *Bečva*, surprisingly, the majority of Polish respondents and many Czech native speakers (50% of all) opted for the endonym form *do Bečvy*. A quite similar group (45.5%), which included the majority of Czechs, opted for standardised exonym *do Beczwy*. In the case of *Jeseník*, 50% of the respondents (balanced in terms of native speech) chose the standardised exonym *w Jesioniku*. However, another numerically significant and balanced group (36.5%) favoured the endonym *w Jeseníku*. Respect for the official list is therefore not as strong as we would expect.

In case of a multi-word choronym *Královéhradecký kraj* exactly half of the respondents (balanced in terms of native language) chose the standardised exonym form *do kraju hradeckiego*. However, 6 respondents (27%) chose the endonym *do Kraju kralowehradeckiego* and 5 respondents offered their own solutions. So many different solutions lead to the conclusion that almost half of the respondents did not use the official list, even though it is binding for this transfer direction and native language was not important this time.

Tradition and Codification Versus Purpose of the Text

This criterion is related to the previous one and is crucial for deciding between endonym and exonym. It would be hard to find a user who would mention *Varšava* or *Krakov* in their Czech text in its original form. But in the case of *Vratislav*, for example, the Czech language user may decide that it would be more useful and practical for the recipient of the text to use the original endonym form (*Wrocław*).

According to the recommendations of the Czech Commission for Standardization of Geographical Names (Český úřad zeměměřický a katastrální 2016), exonyms only serve an auxiliary function within a given national community. The choice between the translated and the original version is governed by the type of text, even according to the *Internetová jazyková příručka*.⁷ In this respect, Polish linguistics views the use of endonyms in professional texts in a similar way, but only in the absence of codified exonyms. An expert from the PWN language consultancy (Wolański 2022) confirmed this.

⁷ *Internetová jazyková příručka* (Internet Language Reference Book) is an online resource developed by the Institute of the Czech Language. It offers comprehensive guidance on Czech grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and word formation.

The extent to which the factor of considering the choice of text type in selecting the most appropriate form of the toponym was reflected in the results of the survey is very difficult to assess, as respondents focused only on toponyms out of context. Although they found information in the assignment, that they were to proceed as if they were translating tourist brochures, it is possible that they would have proceeded differently and taken this aspect more into account when actually translating toponyms in their practice. For this reason, the results of the survey will not be evaluated here in terms of the purpose of the text.

Historical and National Factors

These factors are particularly relevant to the Czech border areas, where the Polish majority used to live and, in some cases, these geographical objects even had a Polish name before the Czech one. In this area, we often deal with a paradoxical situation where, for political or national reasons, the original Polish endonym has become an exonym in Polish. For illustration we can use for example the river *Olše*. The river used to be called *Olza* in Czech (as well as in Polish), but in 1960 it was artificially renamed to *Olše*, which some locals still resent and try to return the river to its original name.

The name of this river is also hidden in the specific Polish name *Zaolzie*. The area is physically located in the Czech Republic (the area south of the *Olše* River, where a large Polish minority lives), but the toponym is Polish. It is viewed in a polono-centric way and there is no full equivalent in Czech. This is why it had the largest variance of individual solutions (v *Těšínském Slezsku* (*polsky Zaolzie*), *Záolží*, *Zaolží* and three respondents mention that they make their decision according to the type of text or context). The most frequent equivalent was the term *Těšínsko* (50%), which is according to our assessment the most suitable (chosen mainly by Polish native speakers). *Těšínské Slezsko* and *Záolší* were chosen by 14%.

We can find the official equivalent for the area on Czech territory – the term *České Těšínsko* – in the *Polish Official List of Geographical Names of the World* (KSNG 2013). In consultation with the *Institute for the Czech Language* (ÚJČ), it was stated that there is no official standardised variant in Czech, and therefore it is recommended to use the original Polish form *Zaolzie* with a possible parenthetical addition or translator's comment.

Let us have a look at the opposite direction – the Polish town of *Kudowa-Zdrój*. In the Czech index, we find the variants *Chudoba/Lázně Chudoba* in italics. It is a

town that was part of Lands of the Bohemian Crown for a long time in the past. The Czech name dates to the middle of the 16th century. The town received its Polish name in 1945.

Not even 80 years have passed, and the original Czech name is now considered outdated. According to the Czech expertise, the endonymic variant in the form *v Kudově-Zdrój* is evaluated as correct. However, an exonymous solution *v Lázních Chudobě*, *v Chudobě*, is also admitted. If we add up all the solutions operating with the Polish name, we find that 18 respondents voted for them, while only 4 voted for the Czech name. For the texts we are examining, the use of the Polish name with a possible indication of the Czech name in brackets is certainly desirable in this case.

Cross-Border Factor

This factor concerns mainly oronyms and hydronyms which denote objects on the territory of both countries (*Bělá Jesenická – Biała Głucholaska*, *Rychlebské hory – Góry Złote*, *Králický Sněžník – Masyw Śnieżnika*, *Hrubý Jeseník – Wysoki Jesionik*). The situation in the conversion is complicated by the obvious difference of these names in both languages and the frequent unfamiliarity with the form used in the neighbouring language.

The question is whether to translate these toponyms at all if we are talking about a given geographical object on the other side of the border. If we are referring to a part of a geographical object located in the territory of a neighbouring country, the most appropriate solution is to use both the endonym and the exonym in parentheses *Biała Głucholaska (Jesenická Bělá/Bělá)*.

However, the participants did not know which part of the geographical object they were referring to, so they were only searching for a general equivalent. To illustrate this, we present a few solutions from the survey, but again we are not able to assess their adequacy for the above reason.

For the oronym *Zlatohorská vrchovina*, a linguistically balanced group of respondents (59%) chose the exonym *Góry Opawskie*. 18% of respondents (Czech and Polish native speakers) were apparently influenced by the formal similarity and chose the variant *Góry Złote*, which in Polish refers to a different mountain range (*Rychlebské hory*).

In the case of the translation of the oronym *Masyw Śnieżnika*, the majority of answers, regardless of native language, were for the correct option a) *Králický Sněžník*. Two respondents suggested a solution with the original in brackets. Interestingly, the incorrect option c) *Kralický Sněžník* with short *a* was chosen by three native Czech speakers.

In the case of the conversion of the Polish name of the river *Biała Głucholaska* into Czech almost half of the respondents (especially Czech native speakers) opted for the standardised Czech name *Jesenická Bělá*. 32% of the respondents would use an evasive manoeuvre and kept the Polish exonym – řekou *Biała Głucholaska*.

Hrubý Jeseník was among the toponyms with one of the highest rates of agreement among the respondents. 63% of the respondents chose the exonym *do Wysokiego Jesionika*. Surprisingly, 13% of the respondents opted for the strange hybrid solution *do Hrubého Jeseníka*, which uses Czech genitive case with the grapheme <é> and Polish ending. Two Czech respondents chose the endonym variant *do Hrubých Jeseníkův*.

The initial hypothesis of this research was that the users would translate into their native language more in line with the codification than into language B. Furthermore, based on the analysis of the standardisation situation in both countries, there was an assumption that the authors would follow a binding official list of the world's geographic names when converting to Polish, whereas they are not bound by this when converting to Czech. The results of the survey show that this is not the case in practice and that these factors do not have much influence on decision-making. Our research continues with the analysis of the second phase of conversion – the phase of adaptation.

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