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Czech Forms of Foreign Proper Names Viewed by the Public

Abstract

The paper is based on the enquiries addressed to the Language Consulting Centre of the Czech Language Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, which have been published (together with the relevant answers) in an online database, enabling its users to carry out detailed searches thanks to elaborate linguistic annotation. The focus is on enquiries related to Czech forms of foreign proper names, especially toponyms. The queries concerning this topic are analysed not only from the quantitative point of view (i.e. what categories and types of names, along with which source languages, cause problems most frequently), but particularly from the point of view of the enquirers' attitudes to the issues they discuss. Besides the cases when the client only tries to obtain certain information, enquiries connected with uncertainty about the appropriateness of the usage of Czech forms of foreign proper names are recorded; these queries are sometimes connected with the explicit negative criticism of these phenomena.

1. Introduction

The paper is devoted to exonyms, i.e. "name[s] used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken, and differing in [their] form from the name[s] used in the area where the geographical feature is situated" (ICOS Terminology Group, n.d.). Specifically, it will focus on the following questions: Is the general public in Czechia interested in exonyms? What questions concerning exonyms do they ask linguists? Which exonyms do these questions refer to? And what specific opinions on exonyms or attitudes to their use do Czech users have? The entire material for this analysis is available thanks to the Database of Language Enquiries provided by the Language Consulting Centre.

In this paper, attention will be paid to the published enquiries and answers belonging to the field of proper names, concerning particularly the issue of exonyms. These enquiries will be analysed not only from the quantitative point of view, but especially with respect to the enquirer's attitude to the given issue (speakers' opinions, attitudes, and choices on exonym use have also been surveyed in Finland by Raukko, 2017, pp. 114–121). Besides the cases when the client of the Language Consulting Centre only tries to find out certain information, notable queries are also connected with doubts about the appropriateness of using Czech forms of foreign names, or even directly with their negative criticism.

Even though the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has, among other points, the "reduction of exonyms" in its current work plan on its web pages[1] (cf. also Kadmon, 2004, p. 87), this reduction does not concern common everyday communication (which would definitely not be a realistic task), but the "context of geographical names standardization and effective UN communication".

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[1] See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/wg8.html or http://ungegn.zrc-sazu.si/Home. The issue of exonyms from the point of view of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms has been reflected in numerous publications (e.g., Jordan et al., 2011; Jordan & Woodman, 2016).

2. Language consulting in Czechia

A traditional part of the activities of the Czech Language Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences is formed by providing linguistic consultations to the general public, having a tradition of more than one hundred years.[2] At present, the Language Consulting Centre is operated telephonically by the Department of Language Cultivation. All enquiries concerning the Czech language are answered by one of about ten linguists free of charge; only written answers are usually subject to a charge.[3] It must be stressed that, according to Pravdová (2015), linguists advise, recommend, explain, give reasons, hold a dialogue with enquirers and expect that the users of the Czech language will accept their advice. However, they cannot prescribe or ban certain linguistic behaviour (p. 2; see also Uhlířová, 2002, p. 443). More information about Czech language consulting was published in English by Uhlířová (1997, 1998), Ludányi (2020) and Prošek (2020), among others.

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[2] Language consulting, i.e. an institutionally organized form of language maintenance, is traditionally operated in many European languages. Uhlířová (2017) puts it well, writing that it is a kind of cultural service (linguistic management) provided by linguists to the benefit of the general public. She writes further that the individual language consulting centres are active in specific national-linguistic and social-political conditions, and that they differ in terms of institutional organization departing from various traditionally established 'codification styles' from academic to commercial ones, and they also differ by the scope of their activities. She adds, however, their basic mission is the same, that is, answering linguistic queries obtained from both non-professional and professional members of the public, giving particular linguistic advice and instructions for linguistic behaviour. It can be added that linguistic consulting can often be beneficial even to its providers, as Uhlířová (2017) mentions further on that the queries from the public manifest the current linguistic problems and needs of language users, the actual state of everyday use of the language in speech and individual or group attitudes of the speakers to the language and speech. Further, as one of the criteria of language usage, linguistic queries are considered to be a valuable source of sociolinguistic information that can have either an immediate or long-term feedback effect on the decisions of linguists as linguistic managers.

[3] For further information see the English version of the websites of the Language Consulting Centre: Basic contacts: https://ujc.avcr.cz/jazykova-poradna/zakladni-kontakty.html; How the LCC works: https://ujc.avcr.cz/jazykova-poradna/jak-jazykova-poradna-funguje.html; LCC mission: https://ujc.avcr.cz/jazykova-poradna/co-je-jazykova-poradna.html

3. Database of Language Enquiries

Depending on the caller's consent, all the telephone calls of the consultation line are recorded and subsequently saved in an electronic database. The database of enquiries addressed to the Language Consulting Centre has been continually updated since 2016 (for more details concerning the technical aspects of the database in English, see Zajíc et al., 2018, 2019). Thanks to a web application, the general public can access a certain part of the database (see https://dotazy.ujc.cas.cz).[4] As of July 2022, the public part of the database included around 11,500 answers; this number is to increase gradually in the future.

After every telephone call, a linguist from the Language Consulting Centre of the Czech Language Institute manually assigns the record to particular linguistic fields and briefly describes the topics of the call. Subsequently, the data is saved in the internal database and the speech recognition software automatically transcribes the record into a written text. Further on, a linguist specializing in the given field processes the record and prepares the written version of the query and the answer (including the anonymization), which is provided by detailed linguistic annotation. After a check, the record is published on the web.

The database can be searched in several ways. The easiest one uses general searching on the introductory page. The user can enter a particular desired word or its part, a phrase etc., e.g., "exonymum" (Czech equivalent of the term *exonym*). As it has already been said, the answers are categorised thematically; another possibility is thus filtering based on the individual fields, categories, etc. (for example, field *Onomastika* 'onomastics', category *Užívání vlastních jmen* 'proper names in use', enquiry *Transkripce cizího jména do češtiny* 'transcription of a foreign name into Czech'). A more sophisticated method is

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[4] This modern instrument, publicly available since 2020, came into existence in the Czech Language Institute in cooperation with the Faculty of Applied Sciences of the University of West Bohemia. The database is an open, continuously updated and flexible instrument for reflecting the development of the Czech national language not from the usual perspective of the authors of linguistic manuals, but from the perspective of the language users themselves, as well as the Language Consulting Center (see https://dotazy.ujc.cas.cz/info/napoveda/).

represented by classification based on so-called detailed annotation, i.e. systematic registration of the linguistic categories connected with the enquiry and the answer – for example, it is possible to filter only queries concerning toponyms (or directly exonyms and endonyms), anthroponyms, or other names; further on, the user can search according to the language of origin of the individual words, etc.

4. Exonyms in the Database of Language Enquiries

Regarding onomastic issues, around 450 enquiries were published in this field at the ICOS congress time (August 2021). However, these records do not adequately represent all the queries concerning proper names answered by the language consulting centre. Hundreds of other enquiries connected with proper names are included especially in the fields of Morphology, Word-formation, Phonetics or Orthography – Capitalization. For this paper, the enquiries on exonyms have been filtered from all of these fields, including the field "Other", containing enquiries concerning terminology[5] or scholarly literature.[6]

Altogether, 99 enquiries concerning exonyms have been detected. As Table 1 shows, unsurprisingly, the most frequent enquiries are related to settlement names (names of towns and villages – in total 62). 15 queries concern names of administrative territories; this category is followed by hydronyms, names of natural territories, etc. In 6 cases the category of the name cannot be determined because of the general character of the given queries.

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[5] For example: "What is the technical term for a Czech geographical name corresponding to the name of the same object in a foreign language (e.g., if we use the Czech name *Řím* for the Italian city of *Roma*)?"

[6] For example: "Is there any source in which both the original and the Czech form of a given geographical name can be found?"

Table 1. Number of enquiries in each category of exonyms

Name category	Number of enquiries
Settlement name – name of a town or a village	62
Choronym – name of an administrative territory	15
Non-settlement name – hydronym	7
Cannot be determined	6
Choronym – name of a natural territory	5
Urban toponym – name of a square	2
Settlement name – name of a municipality part	1
Settlement name – name of a building	1
Total number of enquiries	**99**

Source: research of the author.

Table 2 indicates the state (or a larger geographical unit) in which objects named by Czech exonyms are located. Again, it is not surprising that the clients of the Language Consulting Centre have been interested mostly in the names from the countries found in the geographic vicinity of Czechia (most often Germany and Poland), or localities frequently visited by tourists (Italy, Hungary, Greece etc.). A considerable number of questions on exonyms are, in fact, asked by translators of tourist guides or similar texts.

Table 2. Number of enquiries related to analysed exonyms classified according to their locations

Location of object named by exonym	Number of enquiries	Location of object named by exonym	Number of enquiries
Germany	16	Arabian Peninsula	1
Poland	16	Azerbaijan	1
Italy	6	Czechia[7]	1
Cannot be determined	6	Denmark	1

[7] The subject of one query was also an exonym belonging to a Czech city, particularly a German name *Karlsbad* for the famous spa locality of *Karlovy Vary*.

Location of object named by exonym	Number of enquiries	Location of object named by exonym	Number of enquiries
Hungary	4	France	1
Greece	4	Iraq	1
United Kingdom	4	Ireland	1
Belgium	3	Israel	1
India	3	Japan	1
Turkey	3	South Africa	1
Ukraine	3	Kazakhstan	1
Finland	2	Libya	1
Cuba	2	Mauritius	1
Mexico	2	Nigeria	1
Russia	2	New Zealand	1
Slovenia	2	Saudi Arabia	1
Spain	2	USA	1
Horn of Africa	1	Vietnam	1
Total number of enquiries	**99**		

Source: research of the author.

The analysed data has also shown that the demand for linguistic information regarding Czech equivalents concerns names from locations from almost all over the world. In some cases, the enquirers find it necessary to use an exonym even for a relatively little-known locality, for which no Czechified name has been formed so far. This is, after all, also supported by the queries trying to discover a (preferably online) source in which appropriate forms of Czech exonyms could be found out.

5. Attitudes of the Czech public towards exonyms

The next part of the paper will focus exclusively on the queries that are notable from a sociolinguistic point of view, that is to say, those in which the enquirers expressed a certain attitude to exonyms as such. There are 25 such enquiries. Thus, most queries concerning the adequate orthographic or pronunciation form of the exonym, its appropriate declension, derivation of an adjective etc. will be left aside.

The analysed data includes a wide spectrum of opinions on exonyms and attitudes towards them. Many of them are based on doubts about whether it is appropriate to use a certain exonym in a Czech text: for example *Segedín* for the Hungarian city of *Szeged* – though this exonym is traditional and established in Czech, the language users are probably afraid of some kind of misunderstanding or ridicule, based on the fact that the common noun *segedín* meaning 'Szeged goulash (a kind of meal)' is generally used in Czech. Conversely, other enquirers were reluctant to use an endonym, being aware of the fact that the given place is referred to by an exonym in Czech (e.g., *Lovaň* for *Leuven/Louvain*). In these cases, it is necessary to respect especially the type and purpose of the text and its expected recipients.[8] Some of them may, of course, know exclusively the Czech exonym and they might be surprised by the use of the endonym, while others may react completely contrarily.

The queries including a negative opinion on the use of exonyms have often been influenced by mistaken speculations or insufficient linguistic knowledge. The database has been recently extended by an enquiry concerning the use of the Czech exonym for the Japanese prefecture in which the Olympics took

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[8] This holds also for queries like: "Can I use the Czech exonym *Bílý Halštrov* for the river *Weisse Elster,* flowing also on the Czech territory?" This river, well known and important in Germany, springs in the westernmost part of Bohemia. However, it flows there as a brook and only for a few kilometres. From the point of view of the whole Czechia, its importance is therefore completely negligible and local. Neither its Czech nor its German name is generally known among the common Czech population. From the general point of view, the name *Bílý Halštrov* can be both an endonym and an exonym at the same time and the suitability of its use depends especially on whether the given text is intended for the general public or, for example, only for the inhabitants of the westernmost region of Bohemia, who are probably well acquainted with the Czech form *Bílý Halštrov.*

place in 2021: "I do not like the fact that in Czech *Tokio* is written with *'i'* after *'k'* (and not *Tokyo* as in the other languages). For what reason do not we use the original and correct name of the given city, in which the Olympics take place this year?"

It must be added that the form *Tokio* is a traditional and appropriate Czech form; the form with *'i'* is used also for instance in Slovenian, Polish, German, Spanish, Russian or Bulgarian. The enquirer considers only the "original" name to be correct, which is according to her the form *Tokyo*. However, the Japanese endonym is written by the signs 東京 and its appropriate Czech transcription would be *Tókjó*. The form *Tokyo* is an exonym used for example in English, or more precisely a form based on the simplified Hepburn or English transcription, which does not note the vowel quantity (for the dominance of English in transcription, cf. Raukko, 2017, p. 106). On the basis of the revised Hepburn transcription, used as an international standard for the transcription of Japanese to the Latin script, the form *Tōkyō* is appropriate. However, specialists in Japanese consider the use of the Hepburn transcription in Czech texts, especially those intended for the general public, inappropriate (see Barešová & Dytrtová, 2014, p. 16).

A notable problem concerning the use of exonyms in translation has been noticed in the attitudes of non-native Czech speakers: "I would need your advice whether it is appropriate to use the Czech form *Rachov* for the Ukrainian town of *Rachiv* (*Рахів*) in a Czech translation from Ukrainian (…). Ukrainians criticize and reject the Czech variant *Rachov*, assuming it is based on Russian." Although it is true that the Russian exonym for *Rachov* also ends in *-ov* (*Рахов*), it would be a mistake to suppose that Czech borrowed this form from Russian. In fact, the suffix *-ov* is typical of the formation of place names in Czech (cf. the names of Czech towns like *Prostějov, Chomutov, Havířov*). Its use is convenient especially for the unproblematic declension of the given name. Certain formal similarity of the established Czech exonym *Rachov* with the Russian *Рахов*, which may perhaps provoke negative emotions for political reasons, is thus caused only by the fact that both Czech and Russian are Slavic languages using the suffix *-ov* in place names (whereas in Ukrainian this suffix was changed to *-iv*).

Further on, the Database of Language Enquiries comprises several very similar enquiries in which established Czech exonyms are completely rejected. It can be discovered from the internal database that all of them most probably come from the same enquirer, who contacted the language

consulting centre several times regarding various exonyms and whose behaviour was always very emotive, expressive or even socially unacceptable (in these cases the formulations of the queries for the public part of the database must be subsequently considerably modified). For example, this enquirer asked with an obvious portion of irony: "Why do the Czech people call the German city of *Konstanz*, *Kostnice*? Is there perhaps any connection with the word *kost* ('bone')?" Actually, this name is not etymologically related to the word *kost*, for it was formed from the German dialectal form *Kostniz*.

The same enquirer also asked the following question: "How is it possible that in Czech the Danish city of *København* is *Kodaň*? I consider this unacceptable, no other nation does this. Moreover, this name should correctly be masculine in Czech as well as in Danish". The claim that exonyms are not used by any other nation is of course not true, cf. the English and French name *Prague*, German *Prag*, Polish, Spanish and Italian *Praga* etc. for the Czech capital called *Praha* in Czech. Some other languages use an exonym even for *København*, cf. English *Copenhagen*, German *Kopenhagen*, Swedish *Köpenhamn*, Polish *Kopenhaga*, French and Spanish *Copenhague*, Italian *Copenaghen*, Hungarian *Koppenhága*, Finnish *Kööpenhamina* etc. (cf. also Kadmon, 2004, p. 87). Since in Danish masculine and feminine merged into one grammatical gender and modern Danish has two genders (common and neutral), it cannot be claimed that the name is masculine in Danish. In Czech, the exonym *Kodaň* is feminine on the basis of its ending; the gender in the language of origin is irrelevant here.

In a similar way to this active opponent of Czech forms of foreign proper names, some other critical enquirers also use the argument that they have not encountered exonyms in other countries; alternatively, they claim directly that it is polite and respectful towards the given country, if names are "not translated". Also, such objections appear that while endonyms are generally understandable, this is not true in the case of exonyms. However, the defenders of such opinions are not able to prove this in general – they present only their subjective feelings or randomly chosen examples that seem to correspond to their theory. All these arguments against exonyms at the same time occurred for example in a letter addressed to the public Czech television; subsequently, it was sent also to the Czech Language Institute by its author (only the relevant extracts have been chosen; numerous linguistic mistakes have been removed in translation):

Some time ago I watched a report from the German city of *Aachen*. However, I had to use the Internet to find out the real name of the city that you translated as *Cáchy*. I had never heard such a translation before. Of course, I know where and in which federal state *Aachen* is located. But why this translation? I think it is polite to use geographical names in the official language of the given nation. This is true only for the nations using the Latin script. If I, for instance, return from Germany, the road sign reads *Liberec*, not *Reichenberg*. During the floods in Prague years ago, even the French who are not able to pronounce the two following consonants were trying to use the name *Vltava*. It is only about expressing respect for the given country. Thus, why can you not use the word *Wrocław* instead of *Vratislav*? Not even the Germans call this city *Breslau*. To sum it up, why don't you use geographical names in the language of the given nation? I think you underestimate the knowledge of an average Czech in this field.

Another topic is the issue of the geographical names of the countries not using the Latin script. For example, the famous *Wuhan*, which you have translated as *Wu-Chan*. How shall I read it according to you? *Wu-Khan, WuČan*? Believe me, in eighty years the second official language of the European Union will be English. And what if a foreigner with a poor knowledge of Czech is watching the Czech TV news? Your attitude is confusing.

At the other end of the spectrum, a positive attitude to exonyms was expressed by a translator who wished to use a Czech name even for a locality that has no Czech exonym and whose name is used only rarely in Czech discourse: "Is there any Czech name for the lake *Partwitzer See* in Germany? I would like to use it in a Czech text".

6. Conclusion

The existence and use of exonyms not only in Czech, but also in other languages are absolutely natural and there is no reason to refuse them in ordinary texts, especially if they are completely established and well understandable (cf. e.g., Päll, 2005, p. 193). Rejecting all exonyms would mean that forms like **Wien*, **München*, **Berlin* or **Paris* (instead of *Vídeň*, *Mnichov*, *Berlín* or *Paříž*) would

be used and inflected in common Czech sentences, which does not happen in practice. On the other hand, in the case of less known, rarely used or unimportant names (from the historical point of view) no Czech exonym has been established, of course, and the use of some historical exonyms is being gradually abandoned.[9] Abandoning exonyms and preferring endonyms instead may be caused also by the influence of globalization, travelling, the need for international communication, etc. Dynamic changes accompanying the use of many exonyms not only in Czech also reflect the general social and political changes in the world (cf. e.g., Šrámek, 1997; Kadmon, 2004; Raukko, 2017).[10] From the other point of view:

> Exonyms also have the function of debordering, of integrating the alien into one's own cultural sphere, and are tools for international networking and acquiring a dense mental map. They are, in contrast to earlier concepts, including those expressed in resolutions adopted at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names recommending the reduction of exonyms, a category that transcends borders and facilitates international contacts, although it is also true that using exonyms requires political sensitivity. (Jordan, 2019, p. 12)

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[9] Then for example the situation described in the following query may appear to be problematic: "Should a travel guide in Czech use exonyms, i.e. Czech equivalents of foreign geographical names (e.g. *Krakov* instead of *Kraków*, *Čenstochová* instead of *Częstochowa*)? Since the text includes also names that have no Czech exonym, I am afraid of the disunity and the possible confusion of the tourists, who will see different writings at the place than the guide would indicate."

Zeman (2015) quotes a letter from a Czech TV viewer criticizing just this disunity in using exonyms/endonyms in TV programmes, while a TV viewer would decidedly prefer the use of exonyms, including obsolete ones, e.g., *Lázně Chudoba* for the Polish town of *Kudowa-Zdrój* (p. 292); see the geographical manual standardizing Czech exonyms "Index českých exonym" (Boháč at al., 2019, p. 70).

[10] Every language use can be interpreted also as a kind of act. Therefore it should be recommended to take care of the political sensibility, current geopolitical situation and historical context. Cf. e.g., the following inquiries: "Are there any rules for the use of foreign place names? I am writing about a Polish city that was called *Breslau* in the given period, now it is *Wrocław*, but in Czech *Vratislav* is used. I do not know which of these possibilities should I choose for a Czech text."

"What is the correct name of the Indian city *Bombaj*/*Mumbaí* in Czech? I believe the frequent form *Bombaj* is obsolete and it is appropriate to use the politically correct name *Mumbaí*. However, most Czechs do not know this name at all. I need advice on which form should be chosen for unified communication in a big Czech company."

This paper has dealt exclusively with toponyms. However, the Database of Language Enquiries contains also analogical queries concerning anthroponyms, focusing on the Czech equivalents of the foreign forms of given names (e.g.: "Should the English names of the members of the royal family be translated? For example, královna [queen] *Alžběta*, or *Elisabeth*? Princ[e] *Filip*, or princ[e] *Philip*?"; cf. e.g. Raukko, 2017, p. 94) or inhabitant names appropriate from the word-formation point of view (e.g.: "How could the inhabitants of *Pobřeží slonoviny* [Ivory Coast] be called? Could the form *Sloni* [Elephants][11] be used?"). Although the terms exonym[12] and endonym are traditionally used especially for geographical objects (cf. ICOS Terminology Group, n.d.; Názvoslovná komise ČÚZK, 2019), also their use in the area of anthroponyms, especially ethnonyms, maybe sometimes encountered (see Koopman, 2016, pp. 258–259),[13] therefore it is important to at least briefly mention the queries concerning the Czech forms of foreign anthroponyms here, for also these names are quite often of interest to the enquirers.

Thanks to the Database of Language Enquiries, the Language Consulting Centre has improved the service for its clients, who have thus gained an approach to the language data that is often a subject of common and repeated queries, as well as some rare topics. Linguists can reciprocally gain authentic data from the language users, which can enable them to investigate their needs and attitudes, carry out sociolinguistic analyses, develop the theory of language cultivation, etc.[14] Last but not least, this data can help the authors of language dictionaries or standardization manuals, including the onomastic

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[11] The Czech exonym for the Ivory Coast *Pobřeží slonoviny* contains the Czech noun *slonovina* 'ivory', which has been derived from the noun *slon* 'elefant', denoting literally 'elephant bone'. Czech speakers are aware of the presence of the stem *slon* in the exonym *Pobřeží slonoviny*, which is why somebody might have considered such a peculiar proposal of an inhabitant name.

[12] The term exonym was introduced in 1957 by the geographer M. Aurousseau and its use was globally recommended at the second UN conference on the standardization of geographical names in London in 1972 (cf. Harvalík, 2017).

[13] See also the general definition of the term *exonym* on the webpage of American Name Society: "a proper name which is used by outsiders to label a group. Such names may or may not be considered acceptable to the members of the group being labeled" (https://www.americannamesociety.org/names/).

[14] So far, the Database of Language Enquiries has been used for example in the following publications in Czech: Černá (2017), Dvořáková (2020), Mžourková (2021); in English: Prošek (2020), Štěpánová (2022).

ones, to adequately react even to the present impulses from the general public, for which these publications are intended.

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