Anoikonyms in Czech and Slovak Anoikonymical Dictionaries as a Source for the Research into Historical Dialectology

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The foundation and a necessary requirement for the study of dialects is access to reliable linguistic material that enables capturing the examined issues in all their complexity. This principle applies to the description of dialectal groups, subgroups or individual dialects of a specific language as well as to synthetic and theoretical studies that must necessarily be based on analytical research. Due to the development of linguistics as such and its individual disciplines, it is possible for earlier methods, procedures and interpretations to become obsolete over time, but the material remains the same. Thanks to the use of latest technology (tape recorders, video cameras and video recorders), the method of controlled interviews, application of questionnaires in field research and informed choice of suitable respondents, contemporary synchronic dialectology finds it relatively easy to gather an unprecedented amount of authentic material from all spheres of language; the work of researchers focusing on historical dialectology, however, is substantially more difficult1.

Because Czech and Slovak dialects have already been thoroughly described in many monographs, dictionaries and dialect atlases, and because traditional dialects are on the decline, contemporary dialectological research in Czechia and Slovakia is mainly oriented on the sociolinguistic aspects.
Even though the importance of studying language and historical dialectology for the understanding of the origin, development, territorial distribution and current status of individual dialect regions and phenomena and for the understanding of a national language as such is well known and recognised, the collection of material for such efforts is rather difficult. The sources documenting the history of Czech and Slovak dialects are limited to surviving written material of very varied character. Most of these documents are however written in standard language with a more or less random occurrence of dialectal phenomena. Until its codification by A. Bernolák in 1787, the Slovak language had no unified and socially binding form. There was a variety of forms reflecting various regional, stylistic and genre differences which performed a public function and featured interdialectal elements. Current analyses of historical Slovak documents from the pre-codification period (11th–18th century) also show the coexistence of Slovak with other languages. The occurrence of dialectal elements in historical Slovak writing depends not only on the nature of the document, but also their author or scribe (the less educated they were, the more dialectal phenomena appear in the text).

Without knowledge of the “living” speech, however, diachronic written material is necessarily limited and its heterogeneity and a lack of comprehensiveness in terms of area and time make it somewhat unreliable. Therefore, historical dialectology requires a sufficient quantity of documents from the same period and a contiguous area, which is an objective hardly possible to achieve using only appellative evidence found in written documents.

A suitable complementary source material that meets all the criteria above are proper names. Proper names have the same etymological roots as the related common nouns, but a different basic function. The task of proper names is to differentiate and identify specific objects from a class of similar objects. Once a common noun becomes a proper name, it loses the connotations associated with the appellative and the proper name becomes removed from language development, often preserving and retaining older linguistic phenomena. Even though the original lexical meaning of the word or word base the proper name was created from carries information about the onymic motivation that influenced the creation of the proper name, this motivation loses its relevance over time, being replaced by the meaning of the proper name which consists of a group of specific onymic markers. This is particularly true for anoikonyms which are characterised by a fixed link to a specific object or feature in the landscape and can therefore indicate the development status of the language in the given territory at the specific time.

Historical-comparative and particularly historical-lexicological comparative research of historical proper names as well as contemporary anoikonyms provides clear evidence of the regular development of Slavic languages from Proto-Slavic. The benefits of anoikonyms are their high frequency, their regular and dense distribution in the terrain and the number of word roots and word-formation processes used in their creation. They are particularly important for understanding the phonetics, word-formation and vocabulary of the given time period, but understandably less so for morphology and almost not at all for syntax.

Onymic material proves that in the past, many phenomena extended far beyond contemporary dialectal boundaries. Proprial areas generally represent an older stage of development than contemporary appellative areas, which is why the onymic isogloss typically defines a larger area than the isogloss for the same phenomenon in common nouns.
Not only do anoikonyms document earlier spatial distribution of various dialectal phenomena, they also contain now obsolete common nouns (e.g. Czech chřib, Slovak chríb ‘hill, mound’\(^{10}\)) or extinct toponymic meanings of some common nouns (e.g. Czech and Slovak čelo, today meaning ‘forehead, front part, façade’ and in the toponymy of both languages also ‘ridge resembling a forehead; ridge that is in a frontal position to other ridges in the surrounding terrain’\(^{11}\)) and phonetic dialectal changes that are no longer active\(^{12}\). Anoikonyms may also record former dialectal specifics of word-formation or morphology.

Historical dialectology however finds value not only in historically recorded anoikonyms, but also in very recent material.

In 1963–1980, a large-scale project collecting Bohemian anoikonyms took place. At that time, the vast majority of Czech municipalities (86% from the total number of 8,119) received forms asking for a list of anoikonyms. Supplementary material was sourced from master’s theses or semester papers on onomastics and from several works by secondary school students. The result of this extensive collection project is a database of almost half a million anoikonyms\(^{13}\).

A similar project was carried out in 1964–1986 (locally until 1989) in Moravia and the Czech part of Silesia. The anoikonyms were collected through surveys, diploma theses, semestral papers, dissertations and direct field research. The collection of Moravian and Silesian anoikonyms contains almost 225,000 names from 96% of the studied area of Moravia and Silesia\(^{14}\).

Anoikonymic material was also collected at the historical department (today the Department of the History of the Slovak Language, Onomastics and Etymology) at the Štúr Linguistic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. The names were gathered from surveys implemented in 1966–1975 based on the methodology applied in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, from diploma theses and semestral papers (from 1965–1975), field research (1973–1977), from various publications and onomastic, linguistic, ethnographic and other journals, studies and articles from roughly the 1880s until 1975, from a survey of the Slovak Museum Society from the 1890s and from maps\(^{15}\). In total, almost 250,000 anoikonyms were collected\(^{16}\).

Due to the enormous scope of all three projects, it was impossible to collect all material in the field by trained experts. It was therefore necessary to turn to local volunteers. These were usually former private farmers, gamekeepers, local chroniclers, teachers and other persons who could be expected to know the location thoroughly and who were therefore assumed to be reliable sources of information. This characteristic implies that the questionnaires were often filled in by linguistically untrained laymen, which is why the specific form of the provided anoikonyms cannot be relied on completely. Names sourced from maps and magazines also are not entirely reliable. There are problems with accurately capturing dialectal phonological phenomena (where quantitative differences can be recognised and recorded by an expert, but hardly a layman) and with adaptation to the standard form of language.

Anoikonyms are created spontaneously and unofficially; they are mostly limited to a very small group of users in one village or several neighbouring villages. Because they are mostly used in their non-standardised form, almost exclusively in oral communication and without any regard for codification, their formal structure usually complies with the
rules of the local dialect[17]. Standardisation of anoikonyms (e.g. in maps, which is often inconsistent, particularly on older maps) has little impact on their common use.

15 The respondents, however, are aware that the dialect is not a representative register of the national language, so they try to adapt the anoikonyms to the “proper form”, undermining their authenticity.

16 This however does not apply to all levels of language in the same way and scope. While in traditional Czech and Slovak dialects, the most resilient dialectal elements are phonological and morphological features[18] that do not prevent understanding in oral communication between the members of various dialectal groups, and the first to disappear are lexical differences that make communication difficult, recorded anoikonyms show the opposite tendency. The lexical and word-formation dialectal features of collected anoikonyms are generally very reliable; their phonology and morphology is less certain. Stylistically and/or regionally marked forms at these two levels of language are for ordinary users the strongest signal indicating that the expression is part of the non-prestigious register of the language.

17 Standardisation generally occurs when there is an awareness of a correspondence between the dialectal form and the standard form; sometimes the effort to standardise leads to a hybrid form which is neither dialectal nor standard. In contrast, a lexical dialectal element in an anoikonym can be hardly replaced by a standard equivalent, as a common noun used as a proper name loses its links to the appellative vocabulary and its primary function is to designate. For similar reasons, it is unusual to come across standardised dialectal word-formation derivatives found in anoikonyms. The preservation of dialectal lexemes in anoikonyms can be helped by the fact that the respondents often do not know what is the standard equivalent of the given word or such equivalent does not exist at all.

18 This issue of an insufficiently reliable documentation of dialectal features however only applies to some of the anoikonymic material and it is generally possible to determine whether the recorded form is authentic. This particularly applies to the so-called regular regional changes, i.e. to cases when a standard phoneme or group of phonemes are in a certain territory regularly replaced by another phoneme or group of phonemes. In these cases, there are usually records of this process in many common nouns which can be used to determine with high levels of certainty that the anoikonym is written in the form in which it is actually used.

19 The decision is more difficult with anoikonyms in which it may be impossible to decide if the provided form is standardised, dialectal or the reason of a typographical error. The reliability of a documented anoikonym can be verified in several ways and the probability that the provided form is correct or incorrect increases as more of these methods are used. The verification of the recorded anoikonym has the form of a confrontation, divided into two basic types: a) confrontation with appellative parallels – the recorded name is analysed with regard to the present and/or past state of the local dialect (utilising knowledge of the language situation of the given location), based on dialectal common nouns recorded in literature and research; b) confrontation with proprietal parallels – applied when the corresponding phonemic, morphologic or lexical phenomenon is not known from the appellative language sphere, but has been independently recorded by another respondent (or respondents) in another anoikonym (or anoikonyms), regardless of whether all the names come from the same municipality or region and form a continuous area or not.
Another approach (in some justifiable cases the first applied approach) examines the authenticity of records given by the respondent, based on linguistic and content analyses of other anoikonyms collected by the same respondent. If one or several “suspicious” forms appear next to some that are clearly wrong and the entire list shows signs of less than careful processing, the credibility of any problematic entry is greatly reduced.

The anoikonymic material for the Bohemian, Moravian-Silesian and Slovak dictionaries is verified using these methods and confronted with the current level of knowledge of the development of both languages and their dialects. All approaches to the processing and interpretation of the material are based on contemporary onomastic theory and the Brno approach in particular utilises the latest digital technology which allows interactive access to the material. The same approach is applied in the processing of Slovak anoikonyms. Even though the dialectal forms of anoikonyms are not relevant for onomastics as such, all three dictionaries record them with the intention to give access to this valuable toponymic material with very versatile usability to the wider linguistic and non-linguistic public.

It is understandable that the scope of this complicated topic could have been merely outlined here – we tried to discuss the issues on the more general level and not go into too much detail with too many specific examples, yet we hope that this paper at least partially showed that it is possible, with a certain amount of experience and a thoughtful application of suitable approaches, to utilise the synchronic material of anoikonyms as a rich source of information about the current and past situation of dialects.

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Noms de lieux, noms de personnes


NOTES

2. CUŘÍN 1968.
3. For the period between the 11th and 15th centuries, the main sources are documents in Latin. However, they contain settlement and non-settlement geographical names as well as personal names from the Slovak language territory.
4. For more information, see KOPECKÁ et al. 2011.
6. I.e. proper names identifying inanimate natural objects and phenomena on Earth and man-made objects on Earth not intended for habitation and firmly fixed in the landscape (SVOBODA et al. 1973, p. 62). The term anoikonym is used in Czech and Slovak onomastics primarily as the binary opposite to the term oikonym (settlement name). Toponyms are divided into oikonoms and anoikonyms according to whether they are the names of inhabited or uninhabited geographical objects. The Czech term for anoikonyms is pomístní jméno (pl. pomístní jména), in Slovak terénny názov (pl. terénné názvy). Slavic and international onomastics generally use the term microtoponym. In this system, toponyms are classified in accordance with the size of the corresponding toponymic object and from the perspective of the user of such names. According to the definitions published in the List of Key Onomastic Terms (http://www.icosweb.net/index.php/terminology.html, accessed 2015-11-05) by the International Council of Onomastic Sciences, a microtoponym or minor name is a “name referring to smaller objects like fields, pastures, fences, stones, marshes, bogs, ditches etc., and in general used locally by only a limited group of people”. While the List of Key Onomastic Terms does not define macrotoponym as such, it includes an entry for choronyms, defined as a “proper name of a larger geographical or administrative unit of land – e.g. Africa, Sibir’ (Siberia), Suomi etc.”, with a note reading that “in some languages the term macrotoponym is used for an inhabited large area”. In Czech and Slovak onomastics, the term choronym is used only in the sense of “proper name of a larger inhabited or uninhabited natural or administrative unit in terms of horizontal segmentation” (SVOBODA et al. 1973, p. 57).
Even though the exact meaning of the word is unknown (we only know it as the identifier of smaller elevations in the terrain), it is important for historical dialectology to determine at least the area in which names with the word chríb occur (ibid., p. 46).

The occurrence and distribution of phonological and word-formation variants of common nouns such as debra, čierťaž, prť etc. in Slovak anoikonyms was analysed by Milan Majtán in his monograph Z lexiky slovenskej toponymie [From the Lexicon of Slovak Toponymy] (MAJTÁN 1996).

Czech and Slovak are both inflected languages in which morphological variability is an important factor for the differentiation between the standard and non-standard language, including dialects.

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