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# Czech onomastics and Czech onomastic school

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**Abstract:** The interest of both laymen and experts in Czech proper names has been documented since the earliest times, but onomastics as a scientific discipline began to form in the Czech lands only at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, initially as an auxiliary science of history, in which two branches gradually developed: a historical one and a philological (linguistic) one. In the second half of the 19th century, when research on proper names increasingly emphasised philological and etymological analysis, onomastics began to shift progressively from historical disciplines to linguistics. This process was completed in the second half of the 20th century, since when the contemporary concept of onomastics has prevailed. This article focuses on the development of Czech onomastics in the second half of the 20th century. The aim of this text is also to remind the greatest personalities of Czech onomastics and their works.

**Keywords:** Czech onomastics, Czech onomastic school, history, theory, methodology, toponomastics, anthroponomastics.

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### **L'onomastique tchèque et l'école onomastique tchèque**

**Résumé :** L'intérêt des amateurs et des spécialistes qui s'occupent des noms propres tchèques est justifié depuis bien longtemps, mais l'onomastique en tant que discipline scientifique n'a commencé à se former dans les pays tchèques qu'au tournant des XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles, d'abord comme une science auxiliaire de l'histoire dont deux branches se sont progressivement développées : une branche historique et une branche philologique (linguistique). Dans la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, lorsque l'étude des *noms propres* mettait de plus en plus l'accent sur l'analyse philologique et étymologique, l'onomastique a commencé à passer progressivement des disciplines historiques à la linguistique. Ce processus s'est achevé dans la seconde moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, période depuis laquelle le concept contemporain d'onomastique prévaut. Cet article se concentre sur le développement de l'onomastique tchèque dans la seconde moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'objectif de ce texte est également de rappeler les plus grandes personnalités de l'onomastique tchèque et leurs œuvres.

**Mots-clés :** Onomastique tchèque, école onomastique tchèque, histoire, théorie, méthodologie, toponomastique, anthroponomastique.

### **Die tschechische Onomastik und die tschechische onomastische Schule**

**Zusammenfassung:** Das Interesse von Laien und Fachleuten an den tschechischen Eigennamen ist seit den frühesten Zeiten bezeugt, aber die Onomastik als wissenschaftliche Disziplin begann sich in den tschechischen Ländern erst um die Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert herauszubilden, zunächst als Hilfswissenschaft der Geschichte, in der sich allmählich zwei Zweige entwickelten: ein historischer und ein philologischer (linguistischer). In der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, als die Eigennamenforschung zunehmend philologische und etymologische Analysen in den Vordergrund rückte, begann sich die Onomastik allmählich von den historischen Disziplinen auf die Sprachwissenschaft zu verlagern. Dieser Prozess wurde in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts abgeschlossen, seitdem hat sich das gegenwärtige Konzept der Onomastik durchgesetzt. Der vorliegende Artikel befasst sich mit der Entwicklung der tschechischen Onomastik in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Das Ziel dieses Textes ist es auch, an die größten Persönlichkeiten der tschechischen Onomastik und ihre Werke zu erinnern.

**Schlüsselbegriffe:** Tschechische Onomastik, tschechische onomastische Schule, Geschichte, Theorie, Methodologie, Toponomastik, Anthroponomastik.

## Czech onomastics and Czech onomastic school

MILAN HARVALÍK

The interest of both laymen and experts in Czech proper names has been documented since the earliest times, but onomastics as a scientific discipline began to form in the Czech lands only at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, initially as an auxiliary science of history, in which two branches gradually developed: a historical one and a philological (linguistic) one. In the second half of the 19th century, when research on proper names increasingly emphasised philological and etymological analysis, onomastics began to shift progressively from historical disciplines to linguistics. This process was completed in the second half of the 20th century, since when the contemporary concept of onomastics has prevailed.

The present state of Czech onomastic research owes as much to the status of onomastics among other scientific disciplines as to the theoretical and methodological foundations applied in the study of proper names in Czech onomastics. In fact, in order to ensure as comprehensive an analysis of proprial material as possible, the findings of non-linguistic disciplines are used as well, while the linguistic approach combines synchronic and diachronic perspectives in terms of methodology. According to [Ivan Lutterer](#), “the quality of toponomastic (as well as onomastic, note by M. H.) research can only be guaranteed by an organic combination of various methods, both traditional and non-traditional, where their applicability is verified, and they are applied to an appropriate extent. Any doctrinairism is harmful in onomastics, but that is true of any scientific activities after all” ([Lutterer 1983: 88](#)). As stated by [Rudolf Šrámek \(1999: 50\)](#), as a result of the non-linguistic methods, onomastics was and still is considered an auxiliary science of history (in the Czech lands, Poland and Germany in the 19th and early 20th centuries), topography (Switzerland, the Netherlands), sociology (USA), demography (Austria) and aesthetics (France). At the beginning of the 1980s, the position of onomastics in the system of social sciences was discussed extensively in the Czech onomastic journal *Zpravodaj Mistopisné komise ČSAV* [Bulletin of the Topographical Committee of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences]. In the present Czech understanding, the study of proper names is perceived as a relatively independent linguistic discipline, which, however, naturally involves close cooperation with the representatives of other disciplines, in particular, with historians, archivists and geographers, as well as with sociologists, psychologists, ethnographers,

archaeologists, natural scientists and lawyers. This tradition, already emphasised by the founder of modern Czech onomastics, Vladimír Šmilauer (1895–1983), has been applied in the study of proper names to this day. In its theoretical and methodological principles, which are based on the analytical studies of proprial material, Czech onomastics further develops the general onomastic theory, relying on the traditions of structuralism of the Prague Linguistic Circle and emphasising the functional aspect and the systemic concept of proper names as a structured whole, while taking into account the current state of onomastic research abroad (cf. [Knappová et al. 2000: 24](#); [Harvalík 2004: 9](#)). The Czech contribution to general onomastic theory also lies in the elaboration of theoretical and methodological foundations for the analysis of individual proper names and onymic systems and sub-systems. In terms of theory and methodology, Czech onomastics is particularly close to the study of proper names in Slovakia and Poland, as well as in other Slavic countries, of course. Significant overlaps can also be found in the view of proper names in Czechia, the German language area and Scandinavia.

It was the definition of the appellative and proprial spheres of language, which has contributed strongly to the profiling of onomastics as a linguistic discipline. With regard to their specificity, which is given primarily by their functions, proper names are generally considered to represent the “second layer of language” in general lexicology. It can be defined as the aforementioned opposition of the appellative and proprial spheres of language; however, it has been demonstrably proved ([Šrámek 1999: 11](#)) that this binary opposition cannot be understood as an absolute opposition but as an opposition of two different relationships between the naming and the named within the same language.

In his detailed overview of the history of Czech onomastics, [Rudolf Šrámek \(2007b\)](#) distinguished the following stages in its development: (1) the pre-scientific period (up to the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries), (2) the first half of the 19th century, (3) the second half of the 19th century up to 1913, (4) the period from 1913 to 1945, (5) the period from 1945 to the end of the 1960s, (6) the period from the 1970s to the present.

Given the scope of this article, it focuses on the second half of the 20th century, when the aforementioned view of Czech onomastics was established, and on the most important, mainly book-length works created in this period. The aim of this text is also to remind the greatest personalities of Czech onomastics and their works. Since the period 1950–2000 is sufficiently distant in time, the development of Czech onomastics in this period (with exceptional overlaps with later times) can be assessed comprehensively and objectively. An overview of the current state of Czech onomastics is beyond the scope of this article.

As already indicated, it was in the 1950s and 1960s that the development of Czech onomastics was strongly stimulated (cf. [Harvalík 2009, 2012](#)). At that time (for details, see [Lutterer 1975b](#); [Šrámek 1995a: 220–221, 2002a: 6, 2007b: 405–410](#)), a dictionary of place-names in Bohemia was completed by

Antonín Profous (Profous <sup>1</sup>1947, 1949, 1951, <sup>2</sup>1954; Profous & Svoboda 1957; Svoboda & Šmilauer 1960), a crucial study by Vladimír Šmilauer on the method of small types was published (1958), the Fourth International Congress of Slavists in Moscow called for the revival of onomastic research and for organisational arrangements through the establishment of international and national committees and onomastic departments in all Slavic countries, Onomastická komise při Československém komitétu slavistů [the Onomastic Commission at the Czechoslovak Committee of Slavists] was established, Místopisná komise ČSAV [the Topographical Committee of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences] was reorganised, becoming a control centre of Czech onomastic research, the Czech onomastic journal *Zpravodaj Místopisné komise ČSAV*, now *Acta onomastica*, began to be published, the preparation of *Základní systém a terminologie slovanské onomastiky* [The basic system and terminology of Slavic onomastics] (Svoboda et al. 1973; Vidoeski et al., eds. 1983) was initiated, and Vladimír Šmilauer's work *Osídlení Čech ve světle místních jmen* [The settlement of Bohemia in the light of place-names] was published (<sup>1</sup>1960, <sup>2</sup>2015). It is therefore not surprising that a group formed around Vladimír Šmilauer, rightly referred to as the founder of modern onomastics, which can be described as the Czech onomastic school (for details, see Lutterer 1975a).

The followers picking up the threads of Šmilauer's concept and theoretical and methodological foundations included linguists and historians, both from Czechia and abroad, especially from Germany and Poland (cf. Harvalík 2004: 21–22). Šmilauer's method of small types introduces a new concept of a toponymic type as a set of proper names characterised by the same or, to some extent, a similar word-forming structure, belonging to the same period of development and with compact geographical distribution. It is a more detailed classification of oikonyms, which considers not only derivational suffixes, as was the case before (e.g., names with the Czech toponymical suffix *-ice* or *-ín*), but also the oikonymic bases themselves and how they combine with individual suffixes.

In his monograph *Vývoj místních jmen a osídlení v povodí Orlic* [The development of place-names and settlement in the Orlice basin] (Lutterer 1969b), Šmilauer's disciple Ivan Lutterer elaborated on the relationship between the typology of oikonyms and the typology of settlement processes in Czech toponomastics from the linguistic perspective. In this work, the author "demonstrated the applicability of Šmilauer's renowned method of small types in research at a regional level, which was of paramount importance for both the promotion of this method and the development of the theory of onomastics: Lutterer fundamentally refuted the objections raised against Šmilauer's concept at that time by the representatives of traditionalist Slavic onomastics, claiming that the method of small types could only be applied to large areas" (Šrámek 1993–1994: 166). Further insights and contributions to the deepening of the method of small types were provided by studies based on the analysis of

materials from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, written mainly by [Ivan Lutterer](#) (1968, 1969a, 1971) and [Rudolf Šrámek](#) (e.g., 1965, 1999: 78–82). [Libuše Olivová-Nezbedová](#) (collectively [Olivová-Nezbedová 1995b](#)) applied Šmilauer's method to anoikonymic material.

Šmilauer's work inspired historians to take into account other scientific disciplines when studying settlement and support the history of settlement by other sources in addition to traditional written sources and the analysis of place-names. This opened up the possibility of making extensive use of a wide range of sources in studying the history of settlement, in particular, to elaborate and establish the chronology of consecration titles for church buildings (see [Boháč 1995: 40](#)). These issues were addressed comprehensively by the Czech historian Zdeněk Boháč, who contributed to this issue being thoroughly mapped in the Czech environment (cf. [Boháč 1970–1971, 1972, 1973](#)).

Just as Šmilauer drew inspiration from Profous's dictionary *Místní jména v Čechách* [Place-names in Bohemia] ([Profous](#) <sup>1</sup>1947, 1949, 1951, <sup>2</sup>1954; [Profous & Svoboda 1957](#); [Svoboda & Šmilauer 1960](#)) when writing his book *Osídlení Čech ve světle místních jmen* [The settlement of Bohemia in the light of place-names], Rudolf Šrámek's work on the dictionary *Místní jména na Moravě a ve Slezsku* [Place-names in Moravia and Silesia] ([Hosák & Šrámek](#) <sup>1</sup>1970–1980, <sup>2</sup>2020) served him as a basis for formulating a model theory, which he presented in two papers published in the Czech linguistic journal *Slovo a slovesnost* ([Šrámek 1972, 1976](#)) and in a German-language article in *Onoma* ([Šrámek 1972–1973](#)). It should be recalled that, according to the model theory, the relationship between the person naming the object and the onymic object is affected by four broad semantic categories, which can be defined by the following questions: I. “where”, II. “who, what”, III. “what, which, and under what circumstances” and IV. “whose”. The significance of the model theory for onomastic research is especially evident considering the fact that the above semantic categories are generally valid and, therefore, applicable to all languages. The applicability of the model theory has already been sufficiently demonstrated not only in Šrámek's works but also by other onomasticians. Let us first mention [Jana Pleskalová](#), who applied it to anoikonymic material in her publication *Tvoření pomístních jmen na Moravě a ve Slezsku* [The formation of minor place-names in Moravia and Silesia] ([Pleskalová 1992](#)), thereby creating the first work focusing on Slavic toponomastics from the structural and model perspective and, at the same time, the first comprehensive description of the structure of Czech anoikonyms. The principles of the model theory, together with the structural and systemic view of place-names, also form the basis of the concept of the large-scale international project *Slovanský onomastický atlas* [Slavic onomastic atlas] ([Borek et al. 1988](#); [Bily et al. 1993](#)).

After two modern Czech dictionaries of place-names (oikonyms) ([Profous](#) <sup>1</sup>1947, 1949, 1951, <sup>2</sup>1954; [Profous & Svoboda 1957](#); [Svoboda & Šmilauer 1960](#); [Hosák & Šrámek](#) <sup>1</sup>1970–1980, <sup>2</sup>2020) provided a complete overview of

the entire Czech oikonyms, a strong emphasis on research into anoikonyms can be observed in Czech toponomastics over the last few years (in book form by Olivová-Nezbedová et al. 1995, also in a number of individual studies). These efforts will be crowned by the anoikonymic dictionary of Bohemia (see in particular Olivová-Nezbedová 1995a, 1998a, 1998b; Olivová-Nezbedová & Matúšová 1991a, 1991b; Olivová-Nezbedová & Malenínská 2000; Matúšová et al. 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009; *Slovník pomístních jmen v Čechách – Ústav pro jazyk český, avcr.cz*) and Moravia and Silesia (cf. Šrámek 1995b; Šrámek & Pleskalová manuscript; Šipková 2007a, 2007b; Čižmárová 2007; *Slovník pomístních jmen na Moravě a ve Slezsku – Ústav pro jazyk český, avcr.cz*).

Czech anthroponomastics has also achieved significant success, even at an international level. The etymologies of first names are explained in the publications *Průvodce našimi jmény* [Guide to our names] by František Kopečný (<sup>1</sup>1974, <sup>2</sup>1991) and *Jak se bude vaše dítě jmenovat?* [What will your child's name be?] by Miloslava Knappová (<sup>3</sup>1996, <sup>4</sup>2008, <sup>5</sup>2010, <sup>6</sup>2017). The first and second editions of the latter were published under the title *Jak se bude jmenovat?* [What will his/her name be?] (Knappová <sup>1</sup>1978, <sup>2</sup>1985); the latest, sixth, revised and expanded edition introduces, for example, more hypocoristics, more foreign-language forms of the names and current frequency data. Miloslava Knappová is also the author of the monograph *Rodné jméno v jazyce a společnosti* [First name in language and society] (Knappová 1989), the first Czech socio-onomastic publication and a ground-breaking work for both Czech and Slavic onomastics. The author succeeded in describing the regularities of the naming act in relation to the components of the communication process, linguistic culture, the Czech linguistic system, literary texts, and the motivation of naming. Her successful application of sociolinguistic insights to onymic material brought to light new possibilities for the analysis of onymic systems. Research into the hypocoristic forms of first names has also been developing strongly (Naděžda Bayerová, Miloslava Knappová, in book form by Svatopluk Pastýřík 2003).

Dobrava Moldanová's dictionary *Naše příjmení* [Our surnames] deals with the interpretation of Czech surnames (Moldanová <sup>1</sup>1983, <sup>2</sup>2004, <sup>3</sup>2010, <sup>4</sup>2015, <sup>5</sup>2019). In order to understand their system, the works of Josef Beneš entitled *O českých příjmeních* [On Czech surnames] (Beneš 1962) and *Německá příjmení u Čechů* [German surnames of Czechs] (Beneš <sup>1</sup>1998, <sup>2</sup>2020) are fundamental. The publication *Naše a cizí příjmení v současné češtině* [Our and foreign surnames in contemporary Czech] (Knappová <sup>1</sup>2002, <sup>2</sup>2008) provides a comprehensive overview of the position of surnames in contemporary Czech in terms of their origin and development, as well as grammar, spelling, and frequency. This work, which has already been published in a second expanded and updated edition, goes beyond the scope of Czech grammar books and is emerging as a codification guide. This publication was preceded by another work by Miloslava Knappová, *Příjmení v současné češtině* [Surnames in contemporary Czech] (Knappová 1992).

Other extraordinary publications of both Czech and Slavic onomastics include Jan Svoboda's work on Old Czech personal names and family names (1964). The publication of his dictionary of Old Czech personal names has recently been strongly advocated by Libuše Olivová-Nezbedová (2007). Jana Pleskalová's publication *Tvoření nejstarších českých osobních jmen* [The formation of the oldest Czech personal names] (Pleskalová 1998), the resource base of which consists of Old Czech anthroponyms documented in selected Latin texts from the 11th to 13th centuries, is of relevance both to the reconstruction of the oldest Czech anthroponymy and a closer understanding of word formation processes used in Czech at that time.

In recent years, Czech onomastics has also seen an increased interest in chrematonomastics and literary onomastics. A strong emphasis across the categories of proper names and subdisciplines of onomastics is placed on theory and methodology, the principles of linguistic culture, the study of proper names in communication, their position in standard language (including grammatical aspects), the standardisation of proper names, the application of linguistic culture in the proprial sphere of language, and terminology (cf. Harvalík 2002; Šrámek 2002c, 2002d). Teaching onomastics and cooperation with universities have traditionally been emphasised as well (Harvalík 1998; Šrámek 2004).

The theoretical works of Czech onomastics are mainly characterised by a functional and systemic understanding of onymy in the linguistic sense, the definition of the proprial sphere of language and the proprial and referential function, the definition of the onymic status of proper names, the theoretical explanation for structural, model and motivational analysis, etc. (Šrámek 2002b: XLI). Thanks to the sophisticated theoretical and methodological principles and systematic processing of Czech onymy, Czech onomastics stands out in international comparison.

Czech onomastics is also engaged in the international onomastic scene – this is evidenced by Czech contributions to encyclopedias and handbooks devoted to onomastics, to proceedings from congresses, conferences and symposia and papers in foreign journals and by the participation of Czech onomasticians in international projects, e.g., work on the international encyclopedia of onomastics *Namenforschung. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Onomastik* (Eichler et al., eds. 1995–1996) and on the encyclopedia of Slavic onomastics (Rzetelska-Feleszko et al., eds. 2002–2003), in the activities of international bodies, and their memberships in the editorial boards of foreign onomastic journals. In 2007, an extensive German-language collection of papers (counting 570 pages) by Rudolf Šrámek was published in Vienna under the title *Beiträge zur allgemeinen Namentheorie* (Šrámek 2007a). References to the works of not only Czech, but also Slovak and Polish authors can also be found in the works of Willy Van Langendonck (2007), Erika Windberger-Heidenkummer (2001) or Silvio Brendler (2008). It is the networking and mutual inspiration that guarantee the further development of the general onomastic theory and research on proper names in general.



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