

Slide 1

Socio-Historical and Linguistic Aspects of Early Slovak Anglicist Lexicography

Ada Böhmerová

Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia

Introduction

This paper aims at highlighting several aspects of the rise and early development of Slovak Anglicist lexicography. As some of the first lexicographical works have nearly or literally vanished in history and are or were unavailable, so far very little has been known and published about this issue, though the first Slovak "harmless drudges" not only produced indispensable and valuable tools of communication for their compatriots who needed English, but also paved the way for more elaborate lexicographical works.

The beginnings of the history of Slovak Anglicist lexicography go back to the second half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, for many socio-historical and linguistic reasons, this lexicography could not have started in Slovakia, which we, Slovaks, slightly sentimentally, like to call "the heart of Europe". (Slide 2)

Although in Slovakia nowadays, as in many other countries, the knowledge, importance and prestige of English is considerable, more than a century ago it did not play any role in its territory. (Slide 3)

In the 19th century Slovakia formed part of the Hungarian section of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where the official languages were German, Magyar (in English usually referred to as Hungarian) and up to 1844 also Latin. (Slide 4)

Thus the inhabitants of the Monarchy, ordinary, uneducated people included, were often multi-lingual, or at least bilingual. But under the existing circumstances, Slovak, just like some other national languages, was not used in official communication or for the Monarchy's international contacts.

Early contrastive lexicography in Slovakia is associated with Latin. In 1763 Romuald Hadbavný (1714-1789), a Camaldolese monk, completed his extensive manuscript *Syllabus dictionarii latino/slavonicus* – a Latin-Slovak Dictionary. Another masterpiece of international importance was Anton Bernolák's 6-volume *Slowár slowenský, česko-latinsko-ňemecko-uherský* – Slovak-Czech-Latin-German-Magyar Dictionary published in 1825-1827.

(Slide 5)

Slovaks started to feel a need for English and a dictionary of it only later and in a distant land – in America. The early history of Slovak Anglicist lexicography in the New World can be divided into 3 periods (Slide 6):

1. Late 19th century – when dictionaries were part of language manuals for basic communication;
2. Beginning of the 20th century – when the first larger-size alphabetically ordered dictionaries appeared to assist with integration in the USA;
3. 1930-1969 – when extensive dictionaries were published:
 - a) for advanced oral and written communication in English;
 - b) for preserving a command of Slovak in the USA;
 - c) for making Slovak available to speakers of other languages.

1st Period

The main protagonist of the first period is the *American Interpreter*, partly a language manual and partly a dictionary and phrasebook. It was written to serve as a *sine qua non* tool for survival for early Slovak immigrants to the United States. This 126-page book was published in 1887

(re-published in 1892 and 1920) in Pittsburgh as the first Slovak book in America. (Slide 7) Its full title worded in the Eastern Slovak dialect is *Americký Tlumač ku naučeňu še najpotrebnejších, začatečných známoscoch z anglickej reči pre uherských Slovákoch v Amerike žijúcich* (American interpreter for learning the most important elementary knowledge of English for Hungarian Slovaks living in America). He used the Eastern Slovak dialect because the majority of the Slovak immigrants were from Eastern Slovakia (cf. Lifanov 2003, 2005) which was the poorest part of Slovakia of those times.

The author of the *Interpreter* was Ján Slovenský, with a name as ethnic as when an Englishman is called John English or a Frenchman Jean Français. (Slide 8)

Ján Slovenský (1856-1900) did not go to America to escape poverty, as most of his compatriots did. His biographer Čulen (1954) recounts that at the age of 23 he went there as an adventurer. He was educated as a teacher, spoke German, Slovak, Magyar, and Latin, and wanted to see the world. In 1879, together with his cousin Julius Wolf he joined the crowds heading for America, and settled in Pittsburgh where there was already quite a large Slovak community.

Ján Slovenský worked in a number of jobs – in a mine, a steel mill, as a carpenter, etc. Later he succeeded in getting a position at the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Pittsburgh.

As early as in the 1870s, Slovak immigration became very intensive as a result of cholera epidemics, crop failures, negative impact of industrialization on farmers, and the feeling of national oppression in their homeland. Tens of thousands of Slovaks, at first mostly men, were coming above all to Pennsylvania, to the mines in Pittsburgh, Scranton, Wilkes Barre and many other places. (Slide 9) In the first waves of immigrants practically no intelligentsia came. The newcomers were simple people with not much

education in rather low-level schools in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy. Moreover, they were mostly taught in Magyar, and not in their native Slovak, and so many could hardly read and write, or were even illiterate, hence socially very disadvantaged.

At the Consulate Ján Slovenský was in daily contact with these people, either in person or reading their letters in which they asked for advice. To assist them he started to publish a *Bulletin* (1895) in Slovak, and soon afterwards (1896) the newspaper *Amerikanszko Szlovenszke Noviny* (American-Slovak Newspaper). In 1887, as a premium to its subscribers, his *American Interpreter* was published. Only a single copy of the book is known to have been preserved. Thanks to its contents and the way it was written, the *Interpreter* was, and long afterwards remained, the most useful Slovak book in America. So far there exists no detailed analysis of this unique work.

Here we would like to present some characteristics concerning its socio-historical merit and linguistic features.

Above all, it proves to be an excellently designed manual to assist the linguistic and social integration of the early Slovak immigrants to the USA, at the same time supporting their need for literacy. (Slide 10) Initiating the immigrants into English, it briefly presents the spelling, simplified pronunciation, elementary grammar, thematically ordered basic Slovak-English vocabulary and a series of dialogues.

The vocabulary listing food (Slide 11) contains the names of the most frequent items known to the Slovaks also in their homeland, of course, all given in the East Slovak dialect, e.g. *muka* – flour, *krúpy* – barley, *kolbasa* – sausage, *slanina* – bacon, *kervavka*, *hurka* – blood pudding, *ch'eb* – bread, etc. However, included are also the names of food items that were not commonly known in Slovakia at that time, e.g. *ustrice* – oysters, or *ryžkaša* – rice, while the Slovak equivalent of the latter actually means “rice pudding”.

The transcription of pronunciation is graphically represented as assimilated to the Slovak phonetic system. Instead of the mixed vowel, which does not exist in the Slovak phonetic system, there is alternatively *e*, e.g. (diner) or the vowel is missing, e.g. (matn). Characteristically for the Slovaks, English long vowels, which are in general shorter than Slovak long vowels, are not always identified and represented as long, e.g. (pork). Similarly to the situation in Slovak, final lax consonants are de-voiced, e.g. (sasič). Slovenský's dictionary actually established the tradition of the simplified transcription based on the differences of the two phonetic systems, and similar transcription was also used in later dictionaries for the general public. The transcription also manifests what English sounds were and can be cross-linguistically difficult for Slovaks.

The lists of words and conversations offer a very detailed description of the new environment, so that the book could efficiently help the immigrants familiarize themselves with the life and situations they might experience, and the words necessary for their work, which for most Slovaks in the USA meant work in the mines. (Slide 12). To help them learn the basic words used in the mines, Slovenský gives with some of them not (only) the equivalents, but detailed descriptions of their meanings, which is the case of, e.g. *tipple*, *bin* and *hose*.

Along with presenting English, Slovenský also initiates the readers into the Americanized Slovak used by earlier immigrants, including such mining terms adopted into their Slovak as *ripy* (wooden supportive structures, from “ribs” in the form of the Slovak plural), *rúm* (part of the mine where coal is hewed), *bin* (container for mined coal).

The *Interpreter* is targeted at the communicative needs of the immigrants. As getting a job was crucial, the most extensive dialogues deal with work. (Slide 13). Of paramount importance was the question *Či môžu robotu dac?* – “Can you give me a job?” Many of the phrases and sentences

reflect very vividly the situation of the early immigrants, e.g. "I speak very little English", "I shiver with cold", "I am exhausted", though the general tone is positive and supportive.

Through the dialogues the author also gives the readers extensive and useful guidance and valuable advice on practical matters. E.g. the first sentence in the dialogue at the bank "I want to deposit some money" is followed by "What interest do you pay?" One of the sentences at the clothes store is "I cannot buy at that price, it is too dear. Can't you come down a little?"

Ján Slovenský's *Interpreter* is both highly user-oriented and user-friendly and is a unique linguistic and socio-linguistic manual, which played an important role for early Slovak immigrants, but it is also a historically valuable and probably the first work in Slovak Anglicist linguistics. Of course, it would be very interesting to compare in what ways other linguistic communities of immigrants to the US or elsewhere assisted their compatriots who similarly found themselves "speechless" and "helpless" in a foreign land. For the Slovaks, in this respect, Ján Slovenský undoubtedly accomplished a pioneering achievement.

2nd Period

The second period can be represented by Paul Kadak's *The Practical Slovak American Interpreter* published in 1905. (Slide 14). No data about the author and his life are available. His *Interpreter* is inspired by and structured analogously to Slovenský's. However, it already contains what most probably was the first alphabetically ordered 2-way Slovak-English dictionary, with about 2700 English and 3700 Slovak entries and their equivalents. The prevalence of Slovak entries shows that the need for finding the English translations was still primary. On the other hand, the very

presence of the part with English entries indicates that by then the Slovak community had made some progress in communicating and reading in English, as the dictionary lists not only the commonly used but also some less known English words, including terms, e.g. “bylaw”, and literary vocabulary, e.g. “burlesque”. Still, the equivalencies are very simple, mostly represented by a single word.

The phonetic transcription in it is in some respects more rudimentary than in Slovenský’s dictionary. For example, instead of the long mixed vowel it introduces the vowel (ö) which exists neither in English nor in Slovak, probably doing so under the influence of the transcription used e.g. by the Germans or the Hungarians, e.g. *burden* (börden), *burst* (börden). Several other early dictionaries, supposedly based on Slovenský’s *Interpreter*, are mentioned in some sources, but the dictionaries themselves were not available.

3rd Period

The third period is characterized by more extensive dictionaries, with more complex entries. They were written by two other Slovak American authors – Filip Anton Hrobák and Jozef Konuš. (Slide 15) They had reacted to the changed socio-linguistic situation in the USA when by the 1930s there was already at least one US-born generation of immigrants of Slovak descent. Though they spoke English, many of them used Slovak at home, and in the areas with a large Slovak community¹ several parochial schools offered education in Slovak.

Filip Anton Hrobák (1904-1964) was born in Cleveland in a family of Slovak immigrants. He graduated from New York University in 1929 and taught chemistry, history and Slovak at various American schools. He was also a journalist and an activist in the Slovak community (cf. Böhmerová,

¹ The total number of Slovak immigrants by 1920 amounted to 620 000 (Kučera, 1990: 20-25).

1991: 38). Between 1929 and 1938 he taught at the Benedictine High School in Cleveland, Ohio, where he started to write his *English-Slovak Dictionary* (1944) for those who wanted to preserve and cultivate their Slovak linguistic heritage. Only one copy of his dictionary is known to exist in Slovakia.

The dictionary is estimated to contain about 14 000 entries. (Slide 16) Although the entries are still rather simple, the equivalencies already include many synonyms, represent the polysemy, and sporadically give collocations and phraseology. Welcome for those with an already weakening command of Slovak certainly were the grammatical data accompanying the Slovak entries.

The most prolific early Slovak American lexicographer was Jozef Konuš (1900-1994). (Slide 17). At the age of he 13 arrived with his mother to join his father who was already working in the USA as a miner. Konuš came from Prievidza – a Slovak mining town where Old High German was partly preserved, thanks to which he very quickly learned English, and successfully completed his university studies in Latin and Germanic philology. He taught at various schools. As he spoke six languages, he was later hired by the FBI as a cryptographer. He spent his last years in Florida.

As early as in 1930 he wrote the first extensive *Slovak-English Dictionary* containing nearly 30 000 entries. With no representative dictionary of contemporary Slovak available, he gathered his data by extensively excerpting above all from the accessible works of fiction. This procedure was naturally bound to result in a relative over-inclusion of bookish, archaic, dialectal and expressive words. However, Konuš very thoroughly undertook the search for and identification of English counterparts to the Slovak entries, also including botanical, zoological, technical, economic and legal terminology. His dictionary was a remarkable achievement in early Slovak Anglicist lexicography.

The year 1941 saw the publication of his *English-Slovak Dictionary*. But his largest work is the *Slovak-English Phraseological Dictionary* issued in 1969 and containing about 35 000 entries. (Slide 18) It was based on his former dictionary, extended to include verb complements, collocations, exemplification and a lot of phraseologisms (cf. the entries *noc* and *noha*).

The dictionary came out at a time when in Slovakia English had already been taught for several decades and the dictionary could have done wonderful service to students, teachers and translators. However, for political reasons, above all due to his professional affiliation, his lexicographical work was prevented from being accessible in Slovakia, and his name was not even mentioned in Slovak encyclopaedias and biographical works.

This third period already overlapped with the beginnings of Anglicist lexicography in Slovakia after WWII, but that is already another story.

Bibliography

Böhmerová, Ada (1991): Some Notes on the History of Slovak Anglicist Lexicography.

In: *Brno Studies in English* 19, pp. 35-44.

Böhmerová, Ada (1993): *Early Efforts of Slovak Lexicography – The Camaldolese*

Dictionary by Romuald Hadbávný. Article presented at the Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Honolulu, USA.

Čulen, Konštantín (1942): *Dejiny Slovákov v Amerike*. Bratislava: Nakladateľstvo

Slovenskej Ligy.

Čulen, Konštantín (1954): *J. Slovenský. Životopis zakladateľa prvých slovenských novín v*

Amerike. Winnipeg: Kanadský Slovák.

Hammerová, Louise B. - Ripka, Ivor (1994): *Speech of American Slovaks. Jazykové*

prejavý amerických Slovákov. Bratislava: Veda.

Hrobak, Philip A. (1944): *Hrobak's English-Slovak Dictionary*. Middletown: Jednota

Printery.

Kadak, Paul K. (1905): *Praktičný Slovensko-Anglický Tlumač. The Practical Slovak*

American Interpreter. New York: Slovak v Amerike.

- Konuš, Jozef J. (1930): *Slovensko-anglický slovník. Slovak-English Dictionary*. Scranton: Združenie Slovenských katolíkov v Amerike.
- Konuš, Jozef J. (1941): *English-Slovak Dictionary*. Pittsburgh: published by the author.
- Konuš, Jozef J. (1969): *Slovensko-anglický frazeologický slovník. Slovak-English Phraseological Dictionary*. Passaic: Slovenský Katolícky Sokol.
- Kučera, Karel (1990): Postavenie slovenského jazyka v Spojených štátoch. In: *Slovenská reč* 55 20-5.
- Lifanov, Konstantin (2003): K otázke podstaty jazyka východoslovenských publikácií z USA konca 19. - začiatku 20. storočia. In: *Slovenská reč* 68/6.
- Лифанов, Константин (2005): Язык восточнословацких публикаций в США (конец XIX - начало XX вв.). Lincom Europa.
- Maťovčík, Augustín, ed. (1987): *Slovenský biografický slovník (od roku 833 do roku 1990)*. Volume II, E-J. Martin: Matica slovenská.
- Maťovčík, Augustín, ed. (1992): *Slovenský biografický slovník (od roku 833 do roku 1990)*. Volume V, R-Š. Martin: Matica slovenská.
- Slovenský, Ján (1887): *Americký Tlumač ku naučeňu še najpotrebnejších, začatečných známosoch z anglickej reči pre uherských Slovákov v Amerike žijúcich. American Interpreter*. Pittsburgh: Náklad "Amerikansko Slovenských Novin".
- Zgusta, Ladislav (1971): *Manual of Lexicography*. Prague: Academia.