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Historical Aspects of Early Contacts of Slovaks with English

ABSTRACT

This study is devoted to tracing, presenting and linguo-culturally interpreting some of the aspects of the early history of the contacts of Slovaks with the English language. Although English in Slovakia started to be of interest to several men of letters already in the 18th century, the need for it as means of communication only arose in the US in the second half of the 19th century among Slovak immigrants. The paper focuses above all on Janko Slovenský's book as the first material assisting Slovaks in the acquisition of English, and analyses its content, educational merit and cultural value. Also surveyed is the history of the first dictionaries contrasting English and Slovak. The final part introduces the beginnings of English studies in Slovakia dating from the early 1920s, and their early development. The study offers insight into an educationally important subject that so far has only marginally received scholarly attention.

Keywords: Slovaks and English, historical circumstances, literary translations, emigrants to the US, Janko Slovenský, first English manual, early dictionaries, English at Comenius University

Zgodovinski vidiki zgodnjih stikov Slovkov z angleščino

IZVLEČEK

Ta študija je posvečena sledenju, predstavitvi in jezikovno-kulturni interpretaciji nekaterih vidikov zgodnje zgodovine stikov Slovkov z angleščino. Čeprav je angleščina na Slovaškem začela postala več avtorjem zanimiva že v 18. stoletju, se je potreba po njej kot komunikacijskem sredstvu pojavila šele v ZDA v drugi polovici 19. stoletja med slovaškimi priseljenci. Članek se osredotoča predvsem na knjigo Janka Slovenskega kot prvem gradivu, ki je Slovkom pomagalo pri usvajanju angleščine, ter analizira njeno vsebino, izobraževalne dosežke in kulturno vrednost. Raziskana je tudi zgodovina prvih slovarjev, ki so primerjali angleščino in slovaščino. V zadnjem delu so predstavljeni začetki anglistike na Slovaškem iz začetka dvajsetih let 20. stoletja in njen zgodnji razvoj. Študija ponuja vpogled v kulturno in izobraževalno pomembno področje, ki je bilo doslej deležno le obrobne znanstvene pozornosti.

Ključne besede: Slovaki in angleščina, zgodovinske okoliščine, literarni prevodi, izseljenci v ZDA, Janko Slovenský, prvi angleški priročnik, zgodnji slovarji, angleščina na Univerzi Komenskega

1 Introduction¹

Similar to the situation in much of the world, in Slovakia English is currently omnipresent in many spheres of communication, and of course in education as well. Moreover, it functions as the principal source of lexical borrowing, thus in many spheres having a considerable impact upon the Slovak lexis, above all by contributing numerous neologisms (cf., for example, Dolník 1999; Böhmerová 2015). Nevertheless, the history of the early contacts of the Slovaks with the English language is rather complex, and goes a long and actually a “distant” way back, much of it still to be revealed. This is naturally linked with the historical, social, economic and political circumstances of both linguistic communities.

The former absence of English in Slovakia can seem to be in contrast to the fact that knowledge of foreign languages always was, and still is, quite common for the inhabitants of the territory of Slovakia (cf. Lanstyák, Múcsková, and Tancer 2017). For centuries the Slovaks – as a nation in Central Europe – were multilingual, due to either ethnic coexistence and/or political reasons (cf. Doruľa 1977). Until 1868, when the so-called National Act (see also below) in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (historically also referred to as the Transleithanien)² restricted the official usage of languages other than Magyar, Slovak was used by much of the population, and had also been taught at schools. The official languages on the territory of present-day Slovakia were German, Magyar (in English rather non-specifically and actually inadequately often referred to by the political-historical term as “Hungarian”), and up to 1867 also Latin (cf. Buzássyová 1991, 1997). Many Slovak inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, including ordinary, uneducated people, were often multi-lingual, or at least bilingual, as in addition to Slovak they also had some command of one of the above languages. Moreover, there were also speakers of several other languages, above all Czech, namely in the circles of Protestants and some intellectuals, and to some extent also Ruthenian, Polish and French, the latter in particular among the 19th century nobility (Múcsková 2015, 2017).

Nevertheless, under the existing political circumstances, after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867, during the following decades on the Hungarian part of the former monarchy, i.e., Transleithanien, Slovak itself, just like some other national languages in it, was used neither in official communication, nor within any international communication. This was enacted by the so-called National Act XLIV/1868, in which Magyar was instituted as the only “national” language in the multi-ethnic Hungarian monarchy. Moreover, through a series of acts in 1879, 1883 and 1907, the teaching in Magyar was by law required in all levels of schools, from nursery schools to secondary schools, and regardless of their mother tongue, all pupils were required to master Magyar already by the end of the 4th grade (cf. Mosný and Laclavíková 2019).³

¹ The paper primarily includes findings from investigations carried out during the author’s three-month Fulbright Research Programme in the US in 2017 that involved investigation of the literary holdings of the Library of the Slovak Institute of Benedictine Abbey in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, as enabled by the Abbey. During this visit and period of research, thanks to John Carroll University in Cleveland and the distinguished Slavic scholar Gerald. J. Sabo, SJ, the author enjoyed the status of Scholar in Residence. Incorporated in the paper are also some of the results of the author’s earlier research.

² In German denoted as “Transleithanien”, i.e., south/east of Leitha - a *river* in Austria and Hungary and a right tributary of the Danube. The remaining part of the divided Monarch is denoted in German as “Cisleithanien”.

³ The linguistic status of non-Magyar nationalities in the Hungarian Monarchy became even more restricted after the so-called Apponyi’s Acts XXVI and XXVII were enacted in 1907.

One of the results of the developments set out above was that Slovaks did not hold any international offices, and, consequently, did not have any direct international political, commercial, or other contacts within which English would be needed. Hence, in Slovakia, in contrast to some other European countries, for a long time English did not rank among the various foreign languages used or learned, as it was not needed there. Although the beginnings of the prehistory of Slovaks are linked already with the Great Moravian Empire, i.e., the 9th century, the beginnings of the development of Slovak can be traced back to about the 10th century to the time of the disintegration of Proto-Slavic, when various sound differentiations took place (cf. Krajčovič 1981; Pauliny 1983). The beginnings of Slovak are traced by some authors to as early as the 11th and 12th centuries, while the existing findings can only support this claim with some pastoral formulae used at weddings or christenings, with toponyms included into Latin documents, and with orally preserved folk songs, fairy tales, legends, etc. (cf. Krajčovič 1981; Pauliny 1983). The first preserved Slovak continuous text is from *Žilinská kniha* (1378–1561) (cf., for example, Krajčovič 1981), namely the entry from 1451 (cf. Kuchar 2009). In the context of the historical multi-ethnic political units, and because of the scarcity of early written documentation that has been found, the presence of Slovaks in the multicultural political units was for a long time overlooked. Slovaks did not have any official international representation, hence did not have any direct diplomatic, political, commercial, or other contacts with the English-speaking countries. Thus, English was neither needed in Slovakia, nor was it taught at schools. It was only after the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, and much more evidently after 1993 when acquiring statehood, that Slovakia on its own came onto the international scene.

By following the story of the contacts of the Slovaks with the English language, the study deals with the various stages and circumstances of their development, highlighting their impact upon the specific features of the penetration of English into the Slovak linguistic community.

2 Early Instances of Interest in English by Slovak Writers

The beginnings of the contacts of Slovaks with English are connected above all with the interest of Slovak men of letters in English literary works. However, as to English itself, not only had its command not been present in Slovakia, but in the earliest mentions of it in Slovak literature, English was even said to evoke a certain aversion. The Slovak classicist poet, archaeologist and natural scientist Ján Kollár (1793–1852) is known to have stated that because of its “non-harmoniousness” (in Sk “neľubozvučnosť”), he never had a particular liking for English, although he highly appreciated English classical writers and the depth of their ideas. In his *Pamäti z mladších rokov života*⁴ written in connection with his studies in Bratislava between 1812–1815 he mentions Oliver Goldsmith’s idyllic novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, referring to it in Slovak as *Wakefieldský farár*.⁵ As stated by Vojtech (2009), the text of the *Memoirs* was written between 1836–1842 and during Kollár’s lifetime it remained in manuscript form. In printed form the book was published as translated by Karol Goláň in 1950, 1972, and 1997.⁶

⁴ *Memoirs from the Younger Years of Life* (translated by A. B.).

⁵ Based on such mention, some sources erroneously used to state that he had translated it.

⁶ For editorial and textological information on Kollár’s *Memoirs* see Vojtech (2009, 518).

Another Slovak poet (as well as literary historian and Protestant priest) Bohuslav Tablic (1769–1832) used to be associated with the translation of the same English literary work, too. However, as Vojtech (2019, 354) points out, in *Poustevník z Warkworthu*, with the subtitle *Northumberlandská balada z anglického jazyka přeložená* (published in his *Poezye III* in 1809), Tablic actually translated the ballad of Goldsmith’s friend Thomas Percy *The Hermit of Warkworth* (1771). According to Vojtech (2019, 354), the reiterated misinterpretation was probably due to the similarity of the titles of the two works, as well as to the fact that Percy’s book, published in England, did not state the name of the author. Tablic is also known as having already translated Hamlet’s monologue by Shakespeare,⁸ with the central statement translated as “Být či nebýt, otázka jest vážná”⁹ (1806). These were followed by his translations of the poetry of the English classicist poets such as Alexander Pope and George Lyttelton, all published in *Anglické múzy w česko-slovenském oděvu*¹⁰ (1831). Such translations into Slovakized Czech were usually produced with the help of earlier translations into some other language, and with the assistance of the existing dictionaries of English and another language, as there were no English-Slovak dictionaries yet (cf. Böhmerová 2012; Vojtech 2004).

However, a different approach was undertaken by Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav (1849–1921), another Slovak man of letters, a prominent poet, dramatist, translator, lawyer, and later in life also a member of the Czechoslovak Parliament for a short time (1919–1920). He learned English exclusively because of Shakespeare, whose work, as he said in an interview with Albert Pražák (1955),¹¹ was very dear and pleasing to him, and was actually “po Biblii azda najmilšie”.¹² Thanks to this attitude, he taught himself English from a German textbook, and with the help of German and Magyar dictionaries of English he translated *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,¹³ as there were no Slovak textbooks or dictionaries of English available at that time in Slovakia. As stated by Pražák (1955) (cf. also Vojtech 2005), Hviezdoslav claimed that he undertook the translation of Shakespeare because of his ambition to prove that Slovak was a self-sufficient language. He felt delighted when translating *Hamlet*, realizing that he as a son of the poor northern Slovak region of Orava was introducing the “Prince of Denmark” into a language that used to be looked down upon. In his translation, he successfully demonstrated and testified to the literary qualities and sophistication of the Slovak language (cf. Pražák 1955, 27–28; Vojtech 2004, 92). Hence, the works of the greatest English dramatist were translated by the greatest Slovak poet.

3 Slovaks and English in America

By the time when Hviezdoslav’s translations of Shakespeare’s dramatic works were made, English had already for several decades, and on a daily basis, been encountered and later also

⁷ *Hermit from Warkworth. A Northumberland Ballad Translated from English* (translated by A. B.).

⁸ “Monolog z Hamleta Šekspírova”

⁹ “To be or not to be, that is a serious question” (translated by A. B.).

¹⁰ *English Muses in Czecho-Slovak Apparel*

¹¹ Pražák’s book was based on a series of personal meetings and discussions with Hviezdoslav between 1913 and 1921. The manuscript was finished in 1949 and after its translation into Slovak it was published in 1955.

¹² “after the Bible perhaps the dearest” (translated by A. B.)

¹³ Though translated in the 1910s, they were only published posthumously as late as in 1947 in his *Sobrané spisy básnické* (*Collected Poetical Works*), Volume XIII.

used in communication by some ordinary Slovaks. However, this communication took place not in Slovakia, but in the cross-Atlantic destination of Slovak immigrants in the United States where they went mostly to escape poverty and in search of a better life. The present section briefly introduces the basic information about Early Slovak immigrants to the US. Its core deals in detail with the analysis of the first manual of English for Slovaks in America, and the last subsection surveys some of the earliest lexicographical works written in the US for Slovaks to assist them in the usage of English.

3.1 Early Slovak Immigrants to the US

Sporadic arrivals of Slovaks to North America are known to have occurred at least since the 18th century, and included adventurers, clergymen, tinkers, or soldiers (some even fighting in the American Civil War in Lincoln's Army as *Lincoln Riflemen of Slavonic Origin*; cf. Janek 2021; Fedor n.d.).

The first massive influx of Slovaks to the US was in the 1870s. As ordinary farmers and common people in Slovakia suffered from poverty, years of poor harvests, epidemics of plague, and many of them also from national oppression within the Hungarian Monarchy, these were usually the main reasons why more and more Slovaks decided to travel to America. Most of them originally intended just to earn some money there to then bring it back home to improve the lives of their families. Later, more and more of them tended to settle in America for good. Already the Federal Census of 1920 stated that there were more than 600,000 Slovak immigrants in the US.¹⁴ They mostly went to work in coal mines in Pennsylvania, Illinois, and New York, or to the steel mills in Ohio, Michigan or Wisconsin (cf. also Bartalská 2001), and faced the hardships of unskilled foreign labourers, working in quarries, building railroads and doing hard, low paid and dangerous work. Moreover, similar to many immigrants from some other countries, they did not speak English – the language of their new homeland. Most of them only had elementary education, and even that in Magyar (which was a foreign language for them) after the Slovak language had been banned from schools, hence they were not really literate.

3.2 First Manual of English for Slovaks in America

For the Slovaks coming to the US, just like for any other immigrants, learning English as the language of their new homeland was indispensable for their survival and integration.

In this respect, of crucial importance for Slovak immigrants was the help extended to them by another Slovak immigrant with a rather symptomatic last name – Janko¹⁵ Slovenský¹⁶ (1856–1900).

The principal source of information about the life of Janko Slovenský is his biography by Čulen (1954). Although mostly stemming from Čulen, some additional information can

¹⁴ However, until 1899, Slovaks were not distinguished in US immigration records, as based on their coming from the Hungarian Empire they were registered as Hungarians in spite of the multi-ethnic character of that Monarchy.

¹⁵ His first name also occurs as Ján.

¹⁶ In Slovak, the word “Slovenský” is an adjective meaning “Slovak, pertaining to Slovakia”.

also be drawn from a brief entry in the 1992 volume of *Slovenský biografický slovník* (edited by Maťovčík) and from Bartalská's article (2001). A stylized life story of Slovenský is also offered in Čepček's novel *Zámorská balada. Životopis Janka Slovenského* (1982).

As presented in Čulen's biography (1954), Janko Slovenský was the son of a German mother and a Slovak father. As a graduate of the Grammar School in Levoča and of the Hungarian *preparandia*¹⁷ in Kláštor pod Znievom (1875–1878), he became a teacher of children in families of Slovak noblemen. Then, at the age of 23, in search of youthful adventure, together with his cousin and close friend Július¹⁸ Wolf (1859–1930), son of a much-respected Kompachy citizen, they decided to travel abroad. It was actually by chance that, instead of heading for Africa as originally planned, they eventually went to the US (cf. Čulen 1954),¹⁹ just like many Slovaks and other Europeans at that time. He gradually worked in various menial and physically demanding jobs. However, thanks to his gift for languages, Janko Slovenský very quickly mastered English and in 1886 gained the job of a clerk at the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Pittsburgh. From his own experience, from his life among Slovak immigrants, as well as from his service at the Consulate where immigrants came with many problems and questions, he had close familiarity with the tremendous difficulties they were facing in their struggle to make it in the foreign country.

The help he extended to them was twofold and very precious. In 1885 in Pittsburgh he established the weekly *Bulletin* that, on its mere two pages, offered practical information concerning the lives of immigrants, as well as information about their homeland. In the fall of 1886 he started to publish the much more extensive *Amerikánszko-szlovenszké noviny*²⁰ (American-Slovak Newspaper) of which he was editor-in-chief till 1891. For the sake of assisting the Slovak immigrants in getting familiarized with English and learning it, in 1887 he attached to *Amerikánszko-szlovenszké noviny* a 131-page supplement *Americký Tlumač ku naučeňu še najpotrebnejších, začatečných známoscoch z anglickej reči pre uherských Slovákoch v Amerike žijúcich* (*American Interpreter for Learning the Most Important Introductory Knowledge of the English Language for Slovaks from Hungary Living in America*).²¹ The earlier sources mentioning it, for example, Čulen (1954, 156ff.; Maťovčík 1992, 296), and also numerous other later sources, unduly speak about it as a dictionary.²² However, as it will be highlighted below, it is actually a linguistic multifunctional manual and textbook.

In relation to those for whom *Americký Tlumač*²³ was designed, it might be noteworthy to mention that while being a free gift as a supplement to *Amerikánszko-szlovenszké noviny* (the paper selling only at five cents), it could also be purchased separately at the price of

¹⁷ Pedagogical school training future teachers.

¹⁸ Although christened Ján Július, as his first name he only used the name Július.

¹⁹ As Čulen (1954) writes (45ff.), as young adventurers they first wanted to go hunting to Africa, but after having been discouraged by numerous men warning them against the big heat and the dangerous animals on that continent, they took their advice and sailed to America.

²⁰ The title of the paper was spelled in a Magyarized orthography common at the time, with the addition of the grapheme “z” after the grapheme “s” to represent the sound [s].

²¹ Its cover page is shown in Appendix 1.

²² Cf., for example, also https://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janko_Slovenský%C3%BD (accessed November 9, 2022).

²³ Adhered to here is the original Slovenský's spelling of the title of the book with capital “T”, although at present a lower case “t” would be used.

two dollars, hence it was made affordable. In addition, it was delivered free of charge to Slovak pubs where the Slovaks used to gather after work. There those who could read would convey the contents to the others. Already by 1891 – before Slovenský left the editorship of *Amerikánszko-Szlovenszké noviny* and sold the paper to Peter Vítázoslav Rovnianek (1867–1933), a Slovak immigrant and journalist who had already earlier co-operated with him as co-editor – the paper had about 1,700 subscribers and their number later reached as many as 30,000. The present research has indicated that the paper can be credited for broadening the world outlook of Slovaks in America and, thanks to *Americký Tlumač* published as its supplement, it was also a unique, and historically the first, tool assisting in the linguistic integration of the Slovak immigrants in America.

To best serve the Slovak immigrants who mostly came from the poorest eastern regions, the Slovak parts of the textbook were written in Eastern Slovak dialects, mostly in the Šariš dialect, with the occasional admixture of Spiš and Zemplín dialectal features.²⁴ Since the first waves of immigration from Slovakia saw almost no members of the intelligentsia going to America, some of the newcomers were actually also learning how to read from this book. Hence, while Slovenský's book was teaching them English, at the same time it actually provided some basic education in their own language as well.

Based on the present research, it is justified to state that *Americký Tlumač* was the first Slovak linguistic description of English, the first (predecessor of an) English-Slovak dictionary, the first thematic phrase book, and the first manual for Slovaks to learn English. At the same time, it was also the first Slovak book published in the US, and the first Slovak book that was registered at the Library of Congress, where it is available in the European Reading Room. As stated in the imprint of the book itself, it was delivered to the Library of Congress by the author himself. On the page about Slovaks in America the European Department of the Library of Congress included the following brief statement²⁵:

Americký Tlumač (American interpreter),²⁶ the first Slovak-English dictionary serving the needs of the immigrants, was published by Jan Slovenský, in an eastern dialect. It readily became very popular because it aided the immigrants with their English language problems. Several other such works were published in subsequent years.

In Slovakia only one copy of this book is currently known to exist, and it is deposited in the Slovak National Library in Martin. With the exception of some previous attention paid to it by the present author (Böhmerová 1991, 2012), it is hardly known in Slovakia. Its existence is only briefly mentioned in *Slovenský biografický slovník* (Maťovčík 1992, 296), and there it is also labelled as a dictionary. The reason for this might be connected with the fact that Slovenský's biographer Čulen (1954) was for political reasons in disgrace in Slovakia under the previous regime. It is symptomatic that, as mentioned above, in both these sources it is wrongly referred to as "slovník", i.e., dictionary, though by its contents it is

²⁴ Cf., for example, also Lifanov 2003, Лифанов 2005.

²⁵ <http://www.loc.gov/tr/european/imsk/slovakia.html> (accessed November 12, 2022).

²⁶ In the quote the spelling as presented in the source is respected. As in numerous other sources, here the book is also referred to as dictionary.

a manual and a textbook. The inaccessibility of the book and the earlier mostly only second-hand information about it may have been the reason for such wrong identification of the genre of the book. Another finding concerns Rovnianek, who for several years cooperated with Slovenský on *Amerikánszko-szlovenské noviny*. Although Rovnianek in his *Zápisky za živa pochovaného* (*Records Written by a Man Buried Alive*, 1924) writes extensively about the journalistic work of Slovenský, including quotes from his articles, it is rather surprising that no mention of Slovenský's *Americký Tlumač* can be found in his autobiography in spite of the considerable linguistic, historical and cultural value of *Americký Tlumač*.

Americký Tlumač was based on Slovenský's experience as a teacher, a polyglot, and a Slovak immigrant to America who became a clerk at the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Pittsburgh, as well as on the sources available to him at that time. The writing of the book was driven by his aim to help his compatriots to make it in the US, so it is intended to be both a linguistic and a practical tool.

Based on an analysis of the text, it is evident that in the book *Americký Tlumač* Slovenský manifests a quite good command of English, especially considering that he managed to acquire it after just a few years of being in the US and, moreover, without any formal education in English, only by living in the American environment. The present research testifies to the fact that his book deserves high evaluation also from the point of view of methodology, as it is well structured, presents a relevant selection of themes and linguistic material, with a good sense of proportionality. It would be nice to know whether the writing of the book was actually based also on his teaching Slovak in America, if he did so, or his familiarity with other linguistic materials, but no information to that effect has so far been found.

As the analysis has shown, the book is systematically and transparently structured and designed.²⁷ It can be believed that using it was easy and efficient both for learning and for teaching English with regard to the communicative needs of the immigrants, but no information concerning its reception has been found by the present author.

In the Preface (*Predmluva*) the author states that he wrote the book upon the request of his compatriots. At the same time, he stresses the indispensability of mastering English for their successful functioning in their host country, thus contributing to their general education, as well as to their chances for integration:

Človek môže byť schopný, spôsobilý lebo učení, keď mu al'e reč chybi, je aj pri dálnych príležitostoch ne v stave svoju schopnosť dokazac, co zapričiňi, že zodpovednu službu na neho ničto ňezveri.

*Keď človek v Amerike pokračovac chce, musí na každý pád v stave byť še v anglickej reči vyjadric. Pravda je, že učenie z počatku česko padne, ale vytervalosc a dobra volá premože šicke českosce.*²⁸

²⁷ For its contents see Images 2 and 3 in the Appendix.

²⁸ "One can be able, gifted or learned, but when one does not speak the language, he cannot prove his abilities, hence nobody is going to assign to him any responsible duty. When one wants to progress in America, he must definitely be able to make himself understood in English. It is true that at first the learning is difficult, but perseverance and good will overcome all difficulties." (Translated by A.B.)

As evident also from the quote, while pointing out that learning English might not be easy, as a good educationalist he also encourages his learners to have perseverance and positivism. However, what is even more decisive, he gave them a gift – a unique and unprecedented tool to enable and facilitate their learning English.

Part 1 describes in Slovak and in considerable detail the basic features of the English language, its spelling, pronunciation, grammatical characteristics of parts of speech, including a list of the forms of irregular verbs, and the last section offers *Najpotrebnejšie slova ku mluveňu* (*The most important words for speaking*). In that section, the selected Slovak words and their English equivalents from various thematic areas relevant for the life of the immigrants are listed, together with the “Slovakized” transcription of their pronunciation, and their meanings are given. The themes, among others, include time, family, body, food, illnesses, and professions.

Part 2 is intended to be a basic conversational manual. It lists in Slovak greetings, comments, phatic communion expressions, questions and statements concerning the same themes as in Part 1, but also extended by some other ones, for example, shopping, at the post office or in a bank, the latter related to the fact that immigrants used to send their earnings to their homeland.

Though the book and its merits deserve high appreciation, it necessarily also bears the marks and limitations of being the forerunner in this genre, as well as manifesting in many respects the impact of the historical conditions within which it was written. In the following, the evaluation of some of its features, both with regard to the times when it was conceived and in the context of later English studies, will be presented.

Primarily, the immigrants needed to master the spoken form of English, which in the book was represented by the author’s own simplified transcription based on graphemes used in Slovak and on how the English sounds and words were perceived or heard by them. His was most probably the first ever phonetic transcription of English for the Slovaks – before any international system of phonetic transcription existed.²⁹ However rudimentary Slovenský’s representations of pronunciation might seem from our contemporary point of view, he in many ways, and for the first time, documents some of the rather specific difficulties that Slovaks encounter in English pronunciation, which can also at present be exploited for pedagogical purposes, as well as for contrastive English-Slovak research.

The sounds not existing in Slovak are represented by their approximations, hence, for example, *father* was transcribed as *fadher*, or schwa as *ö*, which can still often be the case at present in lay materials. No bracketing for the transcriptions is used. Numerous transcriptions are marked by the fact that Slovenský was self-taught and most probably could not resort to any pre-existing transcription source, so his transcriptions cannot be judged by our contemporary standards. However, from the pragmatic point of view, they did a good service to the Slovak immigrants to make themselves understood in America. What is of more interest is that the

²⁹ The first international alphabet was published by the French linguist Paul Passy in 1888. Even if it had existed earlier and Slovenský would have known about it, its graphemes could not have been understood and/or adequately pronounced by the users of his textbook.

textbook also documents some specific cross-linguistic phonetic differences that can also at present go unnoticed, and occasionally have an impact above all on the pronunciation and assimilation of borrowings from English into Slovak.

The first one to be dealt with here can be exemplified by *bacon*, transcribed by Slovenský as *békn*, or by *rose* transcribed as *rós*. Actually, such transcriptions are a result of systemic differences, namely that English falling diphthongs are not paralleled in the Slovak phonetic system. Slovaks thus have difficulty in hearing the second element of the diphthong, although they have no problems pronouncing such vocalic or semi-vocalic sequences or diphthongs. The same consequences of this linguistic situation can still be found today, namely in English borrowings and their problematic or questionable lay or even standardized assimilation. Among the thousands of English words, Slovak has recently borrowed *catering* that at first got pronounced – and now is even codified – as [ketering] (see footnote 29 below), i.e., without a diphthong in the first syllable. Already earlier, Slovak borrowed the word *teenager* that because of having been similarly “misheard” resulted in the assimilated variants [tinežer], [tínežer], [tineizer] and [tíneizer], all of them codified and listed in the representative Slovak dictionaries.³⁰ The above accounts for the fact that this relatively non-transparent cross-linguistic situation has resulted in several codified variants of the assimilation of these English borrowings, while the cross-linguistically adequate one is only [tíneizer], the other ones being non-systemic and even erroneous (cf. Böhmerová 2006).

The previous example of *teenager* also manifests the problems with vocalic length and its perception. Both English and Slovak have long and short vowels, but in English their mutual difference is smaller than in Slovak, so in English the pronunciation of a long vowel is shorter than in Slovak. The result is that English long and short vowels are not always well distinguished by Slovaks. That is also the reason why in *Americký Tlumač* the pronunciation of the word *barley* is given as *barli* instead of *bárli*, or why *cheese* is transcribed as *čis* with a short *i*. This accounts for the above-mentioned Slovak pronunciation variants of the English borrowing *teenager*, namely (as also spelled) *tinedžer*, *tínedžer*.

In the same way that it pioneered phonetic transcription, Slovenský's book is also the first known description of English grammar for the Slovaks – grammatical description covering as many as 25 pages. With Slovak explanations and commentary, Slovenský presents what he calls *Najpotrebnejšie³¹ z anglickej grammatiky* (literally: *The most important from English grammar*). In his book, and for the first time, the then existing Slovak linguistic terminology (to the extent known or accepted by the author) was used for describing the English grammatical system. Within this historical context, it is not surprising that some terms do not comply with the present terminological labels. Several can be considered inadequate, for example, *irregular verbs* are denoted as *neriadne slovesá* (literally: *improper/unorderly verbs*), some other expressions or terms are by now outdated, for example, *mena číselne* – now *čísllovky* (numerals), or they are presented in eastern Slovak dialectal grammatical forms, for example, *sklonovaňie*

³⁰ The representative dictionaries of the Slovak language are jointly accessible online at *Slovníkový portál Jazykovedného ústavu Ľudovíta Štúra Slovenskej akadémie vied* (Dictionary portal of Ľudovít Štúr Linguistic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences). Available at <https://slovník.juls.savba.sk/> (accessed November 9, 2022).

³¹ Here for authenticity, Slovenský's spelling with the unusual diacritical mark “ň” has been respected.

menoch podstatných, cf. standard *skloňovanie podstatných mien* (declension of nouns). The systematically presented grammatical phenomena are exemplified and accompanied by Slovak translations, hence the presentation of the grammar is very clear. In addition, all the grammatical data and examples are thoroughly accompanied by their translations.

The second half of Part 1 of the book named *Najpotrebnejšie slova ku mluveňu* (literally: *The most important words for speaking*), presents a thematically organized basic Slovak-English vocabulary. It includes words and expressions for time, months, days of the week, family members, parts of the body, food, illnesses, domestic animals, buildings, church, public institutions, and so on – simply the most useful everyday vocabulary related to the previous experience of Slovak immigrants, as well as to their new life in America. Thus, listed in the section of food are the most common items like *chleb* – *bread*, the dialectal *bandurky* (now the standard is *zemiaky*) – *potatoes*, *kapusta* – *cabbage*, *meso* – *meat*, *slaňina* – *bacon*, *ryba* – *fish*, *syr* – *cheese*, *vajca* – *eggs*, *kolač* (standard: *koláč*) – *cake*. Among the more specific items listed are *kolbasa* (standard: *klobása* – central European smoked and specially spiced) *sausage* (made of pork meat) and *kervavka* (now standard: *krvavnička*) – *blood pudding*. Some items of Slovak food are missing in the list, among them *bryndza* – the fermented sheep cheese used on the most typical Slovak meal *bryndzové halušky* (*halušky* – small pieces of a dough made of grated potatoes, flour and an egg, boiled in water and strained). The reason for the absence of *bryndza* in the list of food items might be that, as a specific Slovak (as well as Rumanian) sheep cheese, it probably was not – and even at present mostly is not – available in America. Moreover, it anyway does not have any monolexical equivalent in English. Why *víno* – *wine* and *pivo* – *beer* are absent is surprising. However, with a bit of light-touch argumentation, the reason could be associated with the rather common routine that on the way home from work the first stop of the men used to be the saloon, hence these words, as with *whisky*, did not need to be learned from a textbook.

With regard to the new American life of Slovak immigrants, the list includes *ustrice* – *oysters*, which were not much known and were hardly consumed in landlocked Slovakia. Interesting is the translation of the word *rice* as *ryžkaša* (now having the form *ryžová kaša* or *kaša z ryže*), which in the given Slovak form literally denotes *rice pudding* (a meal made with rice boiled in milk, with sugar and butter added – a meal at present much loved in particular by Slovak children). Rice had not been grown in Slovakia, and was practically unknown there until after WWII,³² so Slovenský gives as its translation the name of the meal that they had become accustomed to making from rice in America, i.e., *ryžkaša*, and not the semantically appropriate but unknown *ryža*.

³² Rice was first brought to Slovakia by the Turks during their expansion, but did not get much known beyond their community. The first attempt at growing rice in Slovakia took place in the 18th century during the reign of Maria Theresa. It was brought by merchants from abroad and for more than a century it was occasionally used as food only in the households of the nobility, while remaining practically unknown to ordinary people (cf., for example, <https://www.teraz.sk/regiony/gastromomia-ryza-zemiaky/66215-clanok.html> – accessed November 9, 2022). Only much later, in 1948, was it experimentally grown in southwestern Slovakia in Kolárovo and in eastern Slovakia. However, it turned out that Slovakia does not have suitable conditions for growing rice (cf. <https://www.vtedy.sk/pestovanie-ryza-prva> – accessed November 9, 2022). While at present it is widely available on the food market, this was not the case when the late-19th-century Slovak emigrants left Slovakia.

There are numerous other culturally interesting lexicographical solutions. As the translation of *obed*, Slovenský gives *dinner*, though lexically the most common English equivalent of *obed*³³ as the meal eaten at noon is *lunch*. Nevertheless, as for the Slovaks, both in the past and at present, the largest meal of the day is eaten at noon, and in English the largest meal of the day is called *dinner*, Slovenský was probably the first Slovak author to give as its Slovak cross-cultural linguistic equivalent *obed*.

Part 2 of the book is conversational, probably being the earliest ever guidance for English conversation for Slovaks. It presents a survey of basic themes generally occurring in communication, like time, weather, at home, in a store, in town, etc. The conversations, sentence by sentence, are presented in Slovak, followed by English equivalents, and finally accompanied by pronunciation. Nevertheless, as a conversation book it is also specific, as included in it are above all the communication areas that relate to the physical and social conditions in which the immigrants lived, and to the difficulties that they faced. By guiding them through English, the author, their compatriot, tries to help them handle the situations and hardships of life as an immigrant.

The most important thing after landing in America was of course to try to find a job. To assist in finding one, Slovenský (1887, 79–85)³⁴ gives a very useful, extensive and practical selection of questions and answers for a conversation with a potential employer. With regard to the communication needs of the immigrant, at first the Slovak questions or statements are given, regardless of who states what constitutes the content of the utterance. In this way, the Slovak immigrant could easily find what he needed to say in English, and could also check the meaning of what is said by the American employer. Again, each English statement is accompanied by the transcription of its pronunciation. The most important question of course is: *Can you give me a job?* The conversation continues with questions on the type of job, experience, when can the man start work, and, as the man cares about his compatriots, too, it culminates with his indirect but important question: *But I have ten countrymen and I would like to get employment for all of us.*³⁵

As most Slovaks intended to work in mines or factories, the book also contains a section with lists of words related to mining, such words being of crucial importance for the Slovak community. The English expressions are accompanied by the transcription of their pronunciation and by their Slovak equivalents or explanations, if the realia differ cross-linguistically and specification of meaning is needed, or there does not exist any Slovak equivalent.³⁶ This is the case, for example, of English *bin* – *bin*, *velka drevena kasta, do ktorej še uhle sypaju, kym jich ďalej beru* (“a large wooden cask/container into which coal is loaded and then taken further”). As evident also in the above case, for semantic identity the explanation of meaning is preceded also by the English source word *bin* as a potential equivalent. This testifies both to the possibility and tendency of early borrowing from English into Slovak.

³³ *Obed* also means “noon”.

³⁴ For the scan of the first part of the job interview dialogue from p. 79 see Image 5 in the Appendix.

³⁵ In Image 5 in the Appendix the quoted statements are highlighted.

³⁶ For the scan of part of the English and Slovak words related to mining (from pages 92–93) see Image 4 in the Appendix.

Such a presentation of data, which also occurs with some other entries, deserves appreciation, especially when considering the author's lack of any prior lexicographical experience.

As manifested in the lexical and dialogical passages of the book, too, the earliest Slovak immigrants to the US, like Slovenský, at first usually found jobs in mines, foundries, quarries (by Slovenský transcribed as *kwowríz*), or building railroads, hence doing hard, low-paid and dangerous work. Thus, it is not surprising that, for example, in the chapter *At the doctor's*, we can also find the following conversation between an injured man and a doctor:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <i>Doktor, ten chlap ma zlamanu nobu.</i> | – Doctor, this man has a broken leg. |
| After checking the wound, the doctor says: | |
| <i>Ta rana nemože byc vybojena.</i> | – This wound cannot be cured. |
| <i>Noha muši byc odňata po vyšej členka</i> | – The foot has to be taken off above the ankle. |
| <i>Doktor, ja im nikdy nedovolim moju nobu odrezac.</i> | – Doctor, I will never allow you to take my foot off. |
| <i>Moj pracelu, ja jich život oratovac chcem.</i> | – My friend, I want to save your life. |
| <i>Oni muša rozhodnuc či žic lebo či zomrec chcu.</i> | – You must decide whether you want to live or die. |

Many hardships had to be faced before the Slovak or other immigrants to America could start to make a living and start sending money back home to their families. Thus in the book there is also a chapter about what might need to be said at a post office, how to ask about sending some mail or a package, or about filling in a money order. However, the need for such language also indicates some prosperity thanks to which many Slovak immigrants decided to stay in the US for good.

To give his readers some local geographic information and cultural orientation, on the final pages of the book Slovenský lists the names of US states and also personal names, all with their pronunciations.

To conclude this section about *Americký Tlumač*, based on the present research it could be added that its author Janko Slovenský was certainly not a stereotypical Slovak or central European immigrant. He was neither poor nor undereducated. He was a qualified teacher and he spoke four languages: Slovak, German, Magyar, and Latin, before he learned the fifth – English (cf. Čulen 1954). He had not suffered from any ethnic or other oppression, as many of his compatriots had. In addition, he had actually neither wanted to go to America, nor had he intended to stay once he was there. As mentioned above, his arrival in America was in a way an accidental result of his other romantic and rather naïve adventurous plans for travelling. In spite of that, Slovenský not only became a Slovak immigrant to the US, but even a leading Slovak personality among the Slovaks in America, although his mother tongue was not even Slovak.³⁷ In addition, Slovenský can be highly credited for having been a pioneer in mediating English

³⁷ As stated above in the section on Slovenský's biography, his mother's nationality was German, but Janko's father was Slovak, at home they spoke much Slovak, and Janko identified himself as being of Slovak nationality.

to Slovak immigrants to the US, and in helping them to survive in and become integrated in their new home.

The merits of his *Americký Tlumač* can be summarized in the following way:

- The first Slovak book published in the US;
- The first description of English in Slovak;
- The first textbook comparing Slovak with English;
- The predecessor of dictionaries of English for the Slovaks.

Although only indirect information about its reception has been found for this research,³⁸ based on the content of the book and the situation of Slovak immigrants to the US, it can be assumed that in many ways – and not merely metaphorically – *Americký Tlumač* actually became a means of survival. It enabled Slovak immigrants to try to find a place to live, a job to earn money, to meet their basic needs and those of their families, and to start getting linguistically integrated. In this respect Slovenský fulfilled the statement he made in the introduction to *Americký Tlumač*, saying that the aim of the book was “tu žijúcim uherským Slovákom prostriedkom byc, ku privlastneniu najpotrebnejších začatečných známoscoch z anglickej reči, bez ktorých človek v Amerike pokračovac nemôže.”³⁹

The life story of Janko Slovenský was dramatic, full of hard labour and perseverance. Thanks to his dedication and abilities, he gave Slovak-Americans a very unique and precious gift – his *Americký Tlumač*, in English entitled *American Interpreter*. In a wider sense and beyond any ethnic boundaries, Slovenský's life and work are strongly marked by ethical humanism, since, especially during his working at the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Pittsburgh, and by authoring *Americký Tlumač*, he devoted himself to helping the poor and the needy. Though his life story had an early tragic end,⁴⁰ his work increased the chances of integration for immigrants from his small nation, and, at the same time, contributed to the first ever direct and extensive communicative contacts of the wider Slovak public, in this case the Slovak immigrants in America, with the English language. As noted above, the earlier and only limited contacts of Slovaks with English concerned only a few individuals from among Slovak men of letters.

In connection with Slovenský's *Americký Tlumač*, it is noteworthy that several sources mention its having had two or three subsequent editions, but for the purpose of this research they could not be located as having been preserved. In addition, probably because of the unavailability of the book and a considerable need for it or similar materials, several other authors later wrote manuals closely patterned on it. This includes, for example, Karol Záruba's *Tlumač a malý Slovníček anglicko-slovenský (Interpreter and a Small English-Slovak Dictionary)*, as mentioned in Čulen (1938, 300), which, however, has not been available for the present research. Moreover, Slovenský's *Americký Tlumač* could perhaps have also inspired, for

³⁸ As Janek states, after its publication *Americký Tlumač* “soon became the most sold item on the book market”.

³⁹ “To the Slovaks living here to be a means for acquiring the most necessary initial knowledge of the English language without which one cannot function in America” (translated by A. B.).

⁴⁰ At the age of 41, in despair, he took his own life after failing to succeed during the Gold Rush, as well as because of the failure of his marriage (cf. Čulen 1954).

example, Charlton Dixon (1904) in his reverse idea – to help Slovak-Americans keep up their Slovak he wrote a 133-page *Slovak Grammar for english [sic] speaking students* which was published by Slovenský's colleague Rovnianek (it is currently unavailable). As Čulen writes (1938), the linguistic quality of Dixon's (1904) book was rather poor, but it could still be useful for Slovak immigrants after numerous years of having lived in considerable isolation from their distant homeland. Gradually, the need for Slovak immigrants to keep up, revive and further develop their command of the language of their heritage was increasing. It was also for that purpose that Philip A. Hrobak later authored *Hrobak's English-Slovak Dictionary* (1944) and his 366-page textbook *Slovak Lessons* (1935), which for many years was used at several Slovak schools in America (for example, Benedictine Slovak High School in Cleveland). However, such materials are already beyond the scope of the present study.

3.3 Early English-Slovak Lexicography

Slovenský's *Americký Tlumač* with its sections presenting English-Slovak equivalents foreshadowed the rise of the actual dictionaries of these two languages. The need for them was increasing along with the increasing demand among Slovak immigrants in the US to improve their understanding and command of English. These works were mostly authored by Slovak teachers and clergy. Emil Nyitray's *Slovak-English dictionary* was published in New York (according to Hayeková [1979] in about 1900). Paul Kadak's *Praktičný anglicko-slovenský a slovensko-anglický Tlumač (Practical English-Slovak/Slovak-English Dictionary)* issued in 1905 contained about 3,700 entries, but with only one equivalent for each (with its English pronunciation). On a larger scale, though not higher lexicographical complexity, was Július Bučko's *English-Slovak dictionary* published in 1905 in Chicago, with 612 pages (cf. Čulen 1938, 300). However useful we can imagine these dictionaries to have been for the communicative needs of Slovak immigrants, they were rather simple alphabetical lists of basic equivalents presented within the capabilities and knowledge of their lexicographically unskilled authors.

Much more extensive and lexicographically more elaborate is Jozef Konuš's 628-page *Slovensko-anglický slovník*, published in 1930. The fact that it does not include pronunciation is because it was intended for users who could already speak some English (cf. Čulen 1938, 301), and thus were supposed to work out the pronunciation themselves. Konuš came to the US in 1913 at the age of 13, travelling with his mother, to join his father who had already been working there. As he said in a personal interview with the present author (in 1994 in Boca Raton in Florida), he very quickly learned English also thanks to the fact that he also spoke German. Actually, it was a dialect of Althochdeutsch⁴¹ locally preserved and still used in his childhood in the mining town of Prievidza in Central Slovakia where he came from. He stated that it was much closer to English than contemporary German is, which made it easier

⁴¹ In Prievidza in the 12th to 14th centuries there was a considerable influx of German colonizers, and in relative isolation their German developed into a different and actually rather archaising dialect. Hence, in youth Konuš spoke a dialect of ethnic Germans who up to the 20th century formed a significant section of the inhabitants of Slovakia. They are jointly referred to as Carpathian Germans; cf. <https://beliana.sav.sk/heslo/karpatski-nemci> (accessed November 9, 2022). Cf. also the documentary film *Smutné Jazyky. Dokument o živote Karpatských Nemcov na Slovensku (Sad Tongues. Document about the life of Carpathian Germans in Slovakia)* by Jozef Tancer and Anna Grusková (2018).

for him to master English. However, he also evidently had a talent for languages. He spoke six languages, studying Latin and German Philology in the US, and he worked as a teacher and later as a cryptographer.

As a result of such qualifications and scholarly dedication, Konuš became the most productive Slovak lexicographer in the US, as he also authored an *English-Slovak Dictionary* (1941) and an extensive close-to-medium-size *Slovak-English Phraseological Dictionary* (1969) containing about 34,000 entries (cf. Böhmerová 1991, 37). Though entitled “phraseological”, it is actually a general dictionary including extensive lexicographical data about each entry. In addition to mere equivalents, it also contains collocations, exemplifications and phraseologisms. Of course, it is marked by the fact that, though written by a Slovak, Konuš was not in direct contact with the Slovak community in Slovakia, of which there naturally are some traces. Thus present in the dictionary are numerous dialectal words or archaisms. However, its high and pioneering lexicographical merit is undisputable. In addition, it also has a cultural value, to which Jozef Škultéty refers in its introduction. He points out that the dictionary makes Slovak more accessible to speakers of English, and applauds the fact that it puts Slovak among those languages whose vocabularies have been compared to English (cf. Böhmerová 1991 38). Moreover, it also introduces numerous typical Slovak realia, mainly from the domain of household and agricultural tools, typical food, or vocabulary related to folk traditions and festivals. Of special value is the fact that, in addition to the general lexis, it systematically aims at including botanical and zoological terminology as well, and for better identification the terms are usually accompanied by their Latin equivalents. With regard to its extent and lexicographical qualities, Konuš’s *Slovak-English Phraseological Dictionary* could also have provided a unique service in Slovakia. For many years it was the largest dictionary of its kind on both continents. However, for political reasons connected with his working as cryptographer for the FBI, it was not available in Slovakia during the previous regime. It was actually banned, and Konuš’s name was absent from Slovak biographical dictionaries.

In Slovakia, the first English-Slovak dictionary was published as late as in 1946 (cf. Böhmerová 1991). It was compiled by Ján Vilikovský, Professor of Slovak and Czech Literatures. Though a relatively small-size dictionary, it contained as many as about 25,000–27,000 entries based on the originally only personally intended files of English-Slovak equivalents compiled during Vilikovský’s literary readings.

Hence, English-Slovak lexicographical works in the US for a long time by far preceded and exceeded those in Slovakia, which only appeared much later after Slovakia started to have more direct contacts with English and with Anglophone countries, but that topic is beyond the scope of the present paper.

4 The Beginnings of English Studies in Slovakia

As for many centuries Slovaks had been rather “hidden” within multi-national geographic and political units, and did not have any direct contacts with English-speaking countries, the need for English gradually arose only after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the foundation of Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Before that, with the exception of the early interest of some Slovak men of letters in English literature, and in particular in its

translation (cf. section 2 above), Slovaks in Slovakia had hardly any contact with English. Even after 1918 for quite a long time the presence of English was rather marginal.

Of importance for the future of English in Slovakia was the year 1923, when English started to be taught at Comenius University in Bratislava (founded four years earlier), specifically at its Faculty of Arts founded in 1921 (cf. Böhmerová 1991). The first teacher of English studies was the Keltologist Josef Baudiš (1883–1930). Similar to the situation in other academic disciplines, he was Czech, as, in contrast to Bohemia, at that time there were no university teachers of English in Slovakia, while in Bohemia in Prague, already in 1912, Vilém Mathesius had become the first university professor of English Studies and in 1926 founded the Prague Circle of Linguistics. Baudiš, who was inaugurated as professor at Charles University in 1919, came to Comenius University in 1923 and taught there for the rest of his life. Based on his wish, his specialization was defined as “Professor of Indo-European comparative linguistics and general philology, with affiliation to medieval cultures” (cf. Machek 1948). However, at the same time and for many years he also taught English studies, which had long been one of his interests, since he had already translated *The Poems of Ossian* from English (his translation was published in 1903). Another contribution to the beginnings of English studies in Slovakia was made by the Germanist František Kalda who in 1928 also started lecturing on English. Both Baudiš and Kalda served as Deans of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, Baudiš in 1925–1926 and Kalda in 1933–1934.

While several other lecturers also were involved in teaching English, the first full Professor of English Studies at Comenius University was Otakar Vočadlo (1895–1974). As a literary scholar who taught there between 1933 and 1938, he is to be considered the founder of English Studies at the university. He was the author of *Anglická literatura XX. století (English Literature of the 20th Century)*, (1932), and during his affiliation with Comenius University his textbook *Současná literatura Spojených států (Contemporary Literature of the United States)*, (1934) was published. Most unfortunately, because of the political situation in Slovakia at the threshold of WW II, he, like other Czech academics, had to leave the country. In his case this is to be especially regretted since he made the greatest contribution to the establishment and early development of English Studies in Slovakia, and could have continued in this work. It was also thanks to him that from the late 1930s onward English began to be taught by Comenius University graduates at Slovak Grammar Schools, preparing candidates also for university studies of English that, though at first only slowly and within Germanic Studies, started to develop after WW II. The Department of English Studies, later renamed the Department of British and American Studies, was established in 1966, and since then it has had thousands of graduates who work as teachers, translators, interpreters, editors, but also in other professions, for example, in the media, diplomatic services, governmental management, and so on (cf. Böhmerová 1991).

This account brings us already to the recent situation concerning English in Slovakia. Although a closer analysis is not the purpose of this study, let us point out at least some developments concerning the status of English and other languages in contemporary Slovak education.

Since 1966, when the Department of British and American Studies was founded, English Studies have continuously formed an important and attractive part of academic education.

Actually, most of the time the students enrolled in them have represented at least one third of all the students at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University, more than the number of students of any other language. A boost for the further development of English studies came after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, when contacts with the English-speaking world also started to become easier.

As for education at lower-level schools, for a number of years after 1989 English was the mandatory foreign language from the 3rd grade of elementary school. A change came in the school year 2019/2020 when a certain liberalization of the selection of the first foreign language was enacted, as mandatory school education offered also in other languages was demanded by the public. Consequently, English is now only one of the six languages that pupils and students can select, the others being German, French, Italian, Spanish and Russian. However, the real possibility of such choice can be, and often is, limited by the availability of teachers of those languages. At present teachers of English are the most common, and at the majority of schools English is taught as a mandatory subject. Education in a second foreign language, which has been a traditional requirement at schools in Slovakia since WWII, is mandatory from grade 7 of elementary schools, though depending on the availability of teachers it can be offered earlier, while at grammar schools a second foreign language is mandatory. Though this situation limits to some extent the institutional teaching of English at schools lower than university level, it provides variety in language education, and thus does not have to be perceived as being to the detriment of English. Moreover, at present, thanks to the media, including the internet, as well as to travel, co-operation with foreign countries, etc., English is widely present and intensively used in much of the written and spoken international communication in Slovakia and by Slovaks, and to some extent also much of the general public is fairly familiar with English and often encounters it.

5 Conclusion

This paper is based on extensive research into the materials and circumstances related to the early contacts of Slovaks with English. As the partial results of the investigation have already been summarized in each of the core sections, here I shall only point out what I consider to be the most prominent findings.

While the international presence of English is now considered a *conditio sine qua non* in communication and cooperation, English having the status of a *lingua franca*, in many countries it is commonly believed that this is a rather recent phenomenon concerning only several decades.

The present research testifies to the fact that for Slovaks the contacts with English, although at first only modest, were born not only much earlier, but actually at different times on two continents. At first, the research followed the Slovak immigrants to America where learning English was a highly demanding task, especially considering the difficult circumstances of life for the new arrivals. At the same time, learning how to speak English was for this community, as for many other immigrants, in many respects a matter of survival. In this context, much attention in this study has been devoted to Janko Slovenský's unique manual *Americký Tlumač*, and the valuable service that it provided both to his immigrant compatriots and,

indirectly, also to Slovakia. From the educational point of view, it was the first, and relatively complex and pioneering, manual of English for Slovaks. From the linguistic point of view, as also manifested by the present analysis of its structure and contents, it was the first description of English by a Slovak, and the very first step towards English studies. From a pragmatic point of view, it assisted Slovak immigrants not only in making it in the US, but also in their integration, advancement and acculturation, all this, at least originally, without any institutionalized instruction. In this respect, the book is a precious philological and cultural heritage for the Slovaks, as well as for Slovak Anglicists. With the research presented here I hope to make it more widely known nationally and internationally. A lot of recognition is also deserved by the earliest English-Slovak dictionaries which were compiled and published much earlier than those originating in Slovakia. However, the possibilities of examining such texts were to some extent hampered by the unavailability of some of these now rather rare historical sources.

The research once again documents that the need for foreign languages is indispensably conditioned by the existence of contacts – social, political, cultural, etc. – and the ensuing need for communication. This is also demonstrated by the investigation of the early history of the presence of English in Slovakia. Because of the lack of direct contacts, for a long time there was neither the need for English, nor the possibility of its integration into the contexts of Slovak life. Hence, in contrast to the beginnings of the contacts of Slovaks with the English language in America, their contacts in Slovakia lagged behind by more than half a century, and even then for many years they were far from intensive.

The research has also indicated that although – not only with regard to Slovakia – there exist tendencies to believe that English in the educational system is only a very recent phenomenon, in Slovakia it was already taught at some non-university level schools since the late 1930s, and more extensively since the 1960s. English has contributed to the international integration of Slovakia, but also to its range of previously existing multilingual education. Part of the present research has also been devoted to the early developments of university studies of English in Slovakia, with some comments on the recent situation.

The subject examined in this study has proved to be very complex, involving various aspects and considerations influencing the contacts of the Slovaks with English. The situation of a number of nations might be analogous to that of the Slovaks, whether with regard to English and early immigration to America, or with regard to the beginnings of the presence of English in the homeland, though in many other respects bearing rather specific national and culture-bound features. It is hoped that the results of this research will make a contribution, however modest, to what could perhaps evolve into wider cross-national research into the history of contacts with English and into the national histories of English studies. While in some countries such research already exists, cf. e.g. Peprník (2021), for Slovakia the present study is probably one of the first relatively extensive attempts at it.

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Appendix

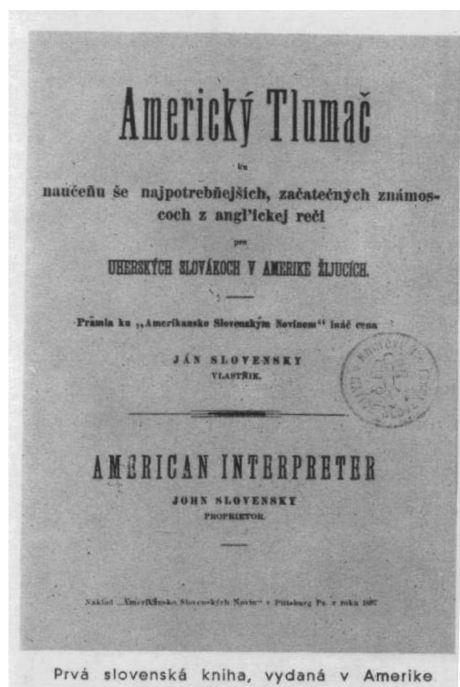


IMAGE 1

O B S A H.

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IMAGE 3

Minng. shaft. shaft-bottom. mine, pit. pit mouth. tipple.	ma ^{štaj} ning. šáft. šáftbodm. majn, pit. pit mauth. tippl.	baňictvo. šachta. spodek šachty. baňa. vchod baňi. vysoka drevena budova nad šachtu, dze še uhl'e vycahuju a z kadzi še dolu sypaju.
hoisting machine.	hojsting mášín.	mašina, ktera hore šachtu uhl'e caha, l'udzi a všel'ico potrebne do šachty spušča.
bin.	bin.	bin, vel'ka drevena kasta, do ktorej še uhl'e sypaju, kyru jich dal'ej beru.
track. airways. coal bed. foul damp. coke oven. larry.	trák. árvéja. kól bed. fauł dámp. kóck óvn. larry.	kol'ej v baňi. cesty pre povetre. uhl'ova žila v baňi. zkazené povetre. koksový pec. žel'ezný voz, z ktereho še uhl'e do pecu sypaju.
heavy charge. light charge. fork. scraper.	hevy čárd'ž. lajt čárd'ž. fork. skréper.	vel'ký naasyp. malý naasyp. vidla. dluže na koncu skrivené žel'ezo, s kterým še koks z pecu vycahuje.
barrow.	bárrou.	fúrik, na kterým še koks do vagona voží.
hose.	hós.	gumovy pytel, na koncu žel'ezna rurka, pomocu ktorej še koks a vodu chladzi.
miner. coal digger.	majner. kól digger.	havjar. uhl'o kopač.

IMAGE 4

O robotu.		
Dze je dozorca boss!	Where is the boss?	vher is dhi boss!
Boss! Ja h'edam robotu.	Boss! I am looking for work.	Boss! aj am luking for work.
Či mi možu robotu dač!	Can you give me a job?	kán ju giv mi a džab!
" " "	Can you put me to work?	kán ju put mi tu vork!
Či maju robotu pre mne!	Have you got employ-ment for me?	háv ju got employ-ment for mi?
Co znaju robic!	What can you do?	vhat kán ju dđ!
Ja znam robic hñed kažu vonkajša robotu	I can do most anykind of outside work.	aj kán dđ móst any-každ ov autsajd vork.
Či někdy na žel'e-nici robil'š!	Have you ever worked on a railroad?	háv ju ever vorked on a rejlród!
Haj paše! Ja som na žel'ežnici za ostatne dva roky robel.	Yes sir! I worked on a railroad for the last two years.	jes sür! aj vorked on a rejlród for dhi last tú jrs.
Ja potrebujem chlapa, ktery kameňe stre-ľac (lamac) zna.	I need a man who understands blasting rocks.	aj nid a män hđ on-derstánda blásting raks.
Ja znam vertac a znam obcorac z pušným prachom aj s dyna-mitom.	I can drill and also understand to hand-ke blasting powder and dynamite.	aj kán drill and also du onderstánd tu hándl blásting pau-der and dajnamajt.
Ja takže pracoval v kameňolome.	I have also been wor-king in a quarry.	aj háv also bin vork-ing in a kvarry.
Dobre, možu započac robic na rano.	Well, you can com-mence to work in the mornng.	vell, ju kán kommens tu vork in dhi mor-nng.
Al'e ja mám dzešec krajanoch a rad by som pre nás šickych robotu dostac.	But I have ten country-men and I would like to get employ-ment for all of us.	but aj háv ten kontry-men and aj vud lajk tu get employ-ment for ól ov os.

IMAGE 5