

# ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS OF CZECH NAMES OF INSTITUTIONS: A SYNCHRONIC/DIACHRONIC STUDY

**Radek Vogel**

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University  
Brno, Czech Republic

*vogel@ped.muni.cz*

## **Abstract**

*The quality of English equivalents of names of Czech public institutions seems to be improving, reflecting the massive spread of English and intensification of international relations over the last two decades. Focusing on names of institutions in education, public administration and armed forces, the paper examines practical needs for and onomatological problems of establishing clear, unequivocal and well-formed English equivalents of Czech institutional names. Most incorrect formations can be explained by ignoring differences between the concerned cultures and languages.*

## **1. Premises of the research**

The increasing international contacts in the present globalised world have brought the necessity of establishing translations of institutional names in the modern *lingua franca* of politics, economy and science, English. The practical need for clear, unequivocal and well-formed English equivalents of Czech names of institutions exists in various areas where international co-operation and competition takes place or where it is planned, decided and reported on – in the media, foreign relations, EU programmes, education, research and science, English teaching, etc. It is not surprising that this massive tendency has yielded frequent inadequate and confusing translations, resulting from differences in the cultural, social etc. environment, as well as from differences inherent in the respective languages.

This area of language use is particularly interesting nowadays as there already is, after nearly 20 years of full incorporation of the Czech Republic into the free world, a possibility of diachronic study and contrasting. Use of English for expression of Czech concepts can be compared and contrasted in the periods before 1989 (marked by relative isolation from the West), in the early 1990s (fast and often uncoordinated internationalisation) and the present time

(marked by some experience gained over time and tendency to establish systematic nomenclatures). Another stimulus for research in this area is improved availability of sources, as there exist English versions of many institutional web pages, at least in the basic extent.

## **2. Sources of institutional names**

For the purposes of this research, institutional names were sought in the fields of **education** (types of schools, education authorities, teacher training centres, etc.); **public administration** (government departments, agencies, local or regional authorities, etc.); and **armed forces** (division of armed forces, army institutions, military units, etc.). Such institutions are likely to have analogous equivalents in other countries, which leads to the assumption that there must also be substantial onomatological equivalents. Unlike the names of private companies and most cultural establishments, names of public institutions are usually descriptive, typically combining common nouns and adjectives, only sometimes including proper nouns performing a distinguishing function.

Closely related to the names of institutions are also official positions and titles of their staff, expressing analogies or cultural differences between communities and languages, depending on a particular instance.

## **3. Onomatological problems of English equivalents of Czech names of institutions**

Several onomatological problems stemming from the structural and cultural differences between Czech and English may be easily noticed and it is possible to classify them into several types as follows:

### ***3.1. Tendency towards literal translation***

A frequent mistake is to translate separately each individual word in usually multi-word compounds consisting of common nouns and adjectives, hoping that the structure of the whole naming unit is identical in both Czech and English. This results in formation of confusing or hardly comprehensible combinations in English (and vice versa, see e.g. misconception in translating *high school* as *\*vysoká škola*).

*obchodní akademie – \*business academy*

*finanční úřad – \*financial office*

*krajský úřad – \*regional office*

**Fig. 1. Incorrect literal translations from Czech into English.**

### **3.2. Use of false friends and internationalisms**

Similarly confusing as literally translated common words are interlanguage homonyms, so-called false friends, and among them especially internationalisms, assumed to be used with identical denotation in different languages. Fortunately, this type of onomatological mistakes is paid some attention in language teaching, which helps to eliminate the most notorious cases from a certain level of language knowledge. However, the author's personal experience is that Czech lower government officials in late 1990s translated the title of a US top official *Undersecretary (of Defence)* as *\*podsekretář* (roughly translatable back as *\*assistant to a secretary* or even *\*underassistant*) and assigned his visit accordingly low importance until the correct translation was suggested and the person's real position was identified.<sup>1</sup>

*gymnázium – \*gymnasium*

*college – \*kolej*

*vysoká škola – \*high school*

*Secretary of State – \*státní sekretář*

*State Department – \*státní department*

**Fig. 2. Translation confused by the existence of false friends and internationalisms.**

### **3.3. Neologising due to the absence of equivalent institutions**

Difficulty or even impossibility of finding an equivalent institution in a different culture and finding an appropriate naming for it leads to neologising, usually combining the two previously mentioned methods (i.e. literary translations – where appropriate in descriptive names – and use of internationalisms) with existing terms for cultural equivalents. This results in varying degrees of compromise between literal translation and translation by functional equivalents.

Not surprisingly, a complete lack of correspondence between institutions often results in quite acceptable descriptive translations, such as *The Institute for the Czech Language* for *Ústav pro jazyk český*. More problems occur when there are no exact institutional equivalents, i.e. when the correspondence between institutions is only partial. Following is a table providing English translations of different types of specialised secondary schools, published in the English versions of their respective web pages. This type of educational establishment corresponds roughly to a blend of British *city technology colleges* and *vocational schools* or *trade schools* (cf. Betáková 2006: 185), having no direct counterpart in the American system of education with its quite uniform high schools at the secondary level.

Similar problems face translators when searching for English equivalents to *střední odborné učiliště*, corresponding to *apprentice centres* or *vocational schools* again. Translation is complicated by the necessity of expressing the specialisation of such establishments (Czech names of institutions are generally more descriptive and structurally systemic than English ones, which frequently include geographical or personal proper names) and making overt reference to the level in the system of education. Professional education and training is organised in a different form and at different ages from the Czech Republic, so the assumed need to include the equivalent to the Czech adjective *střední* (*secondary*) or to make an explicit distinction between a more theory-oriented type of institution (*střední odborná škola*) and a more practical-training-focused one (*střední odborné učiliště*) often results in unnaturally sounding English naming, hybrid of the two languages, their onomatological conventions and institutional environments.

<b>Czech name of a secondary school</b>	<b>English translation</b>	<b>Sources</b>
střední průmyslová škola	secondary special technical school	Odehnalová: <i>Reading Material for Graduation Exam</i>
	technical college specialised in ...	Chudá, Chudý: <i>Topics for English Conversation</i>
	secondary special school of ...	Veselý: <i>Maturitní otázky z anglického jazyka</i>
	secondary industrial school (...)	<a href="http://www.praguetribune.cz/2005/2/17">www.praguetribune.cz/2005/2/17</a> (SPŠ Turnov)

	secondary technical school	<a href="http://www.spschbr.cz">www.spschbr.cz</a> (Střední průmyslová škola chemická Brno)
	secondary vocational school / vocational secondary school	<a href="http://www.sosehl.cz">www.sosehl.cz</a> (Střední odborná škola elektrotechnická Hluboká nad Vltavou)
	technical college	<a href="http://www.spseiostrava.cz">www.spseiostrava.cz</a>
střední zdravotnická škola	secondary school for nurses	<a href="http://www.oabk.cz">www.oabk.cz</a> (Obchodní akademie a střední zdravotnická škola Blansko)
	secondary medical school	<a href="http://www.zshk.cz">www.zshk.cz</a> (VOŠZ a SZŠ Hradec Králové)
	secondary nursing school	<a href="http://www.ckrumlov.cz">www.ckrumlov.cz</a> (SZŠ Český Krumlov)
	nursing school	Chudá, Chudý: <i>Topics for English Conversation</i>
	secondary special school for health workers	Odehnalová: <i>Reading Material for Graduation Exam</i>
	secondary health service school	<a href="http://www.zdravotka.cz">www.zdravotka.cz</a> (SZŠ Kolín)

**Fig. 3. English equivalents of Czech *střední odborná/průmyslová/(...) škola* in Czech sources.<sup>2</sup>**

### 3.4. Cultural preferences of certain types of naming

An interesting area of onomatological problems are the changing names of institutions, either renaming in one language followed by adaptation of translation in the other, or reclassification of a given institution within the system, followed by necessary translational reaction. The onomatological choices are related to two key aspects, **accuracy** (i.e. tendency to refer to a clearly defined type of institution by a standard term, and **prestige** (institutions offer their services on the market, and certain names or their components seem to be more attractive due to better associations which they arouse). Thus, Czech *univerzita* appears to be more prestigious than (*vysoká*) *škola* and is often used as a translation for different equivalent naming items in English (*university / college / school*); Czech *úřad* seems to be the preferred choice

when translating English *agency / office / bureau / authority*, although *agentura* is sometimes also used in Czech for government agencies, but rather for newly established ones, without a long tradition within the system (cf. *CzechTrade: Česká agentura na podporu obchodu* and *CzechInvest: Agentura pro podporu podnikání a investic*<sup>3</sup> vs. *Národní úřad pro letectví a kosmonautiku* (*National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA*) and *Federální úřad pro vyšetřování* (*Federal Bureau of Investigation*<sup>4</sup>), both classed as independent government agencies). However, the names of the Czech intelligence agencies and security services, equivalent to the US *Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)* and *FBI*, have never contained the word *agentura* in Czech (namely, *Národní bezpečnostní úřad (NBÚ)* and *Bezpečnostní informační služba (BIS)*), probably due to possible confusion with or semantic contamination by private security service companies, *bezpečnostní agentura*.

Czech *ministerstvo* is applied for translation of both English *ministry* and *department*. At the beginning of the 21st century all 14 top executive authorities of the US administration were *departments* (and all 15 of them in 2008)<sup>5</sup>, with addition of the *Executive Office of the President*; the British government bodies were less homogeneous onomatologically, 7 out of total 11 were called *departments*<sup>6</sup> (compared with 12 of them in 2008)<sup>7</sup>, 2 offices (*Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Home Office*), 1 *ministry* (*Ministry of Defence*) and one used a purely traditional name (*Her Majesty's Treasury*) (Vogel, Mužíková, Zákostelská 2001: 67).

Prestige associated obviously with the term *univerzita* in Czech (and logically also its translation into English) is identifiable in the gradual but very evident process of modification of the names of Czech tertiary education establishments. In most eligible cases (i.e. when the institution is divided into faculties and carries out its own research) the previously used traditional names *vyšoká škola* or *učení* have been replaced in less than two decades by the uniform term *univerzita*, at least in their English translations. It is possibly just the fact that the law requires meeting several conditions to be classed as *university* (*univerzita*) and not *college* (*vyšoká škola*) that has made the recently established small institutions of tertiary education avoid using the word *univerzita/university*. The following table shows the original Czech name, the currently used Czech name and the currently used translation into English.

Original name in Czech (until 1990s)	Current name in Czech	Current English translation
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České vysoké učení technické	České vysoké učení technické	Czech Technical <b>University</b>
Vysoké učení technické	Vysoké učení technické (Brno)	Brno <b>University</b> of Technology
Vysoká škola báňská	Vysoká škola báňská – Technická <b>univerzita</b> (Ostrava)	VŠB – Technical <b>University</b>
Vysoká škola zemědělská (Praha)	Česká zemědělská <b>univerzita</b>	Czech <b>University</b> of Agriculture
Vysoká škola zemědělská (Brno)	Mendelova zemědělská a lesnická <b>univerzita</b>	Mendel <b>University</b> of Agriculture and Forestry
Vysoká škola ekonomická	Vysoká škola ekonomická	<b>University</b> of Economics
Vysoká škola veterinární	Veterinární a farmaceutická <b>univerzita</b>	<b>University</b> of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Vojenská akademie + Vysoká škola pozemního vojska	<b>Univerzita</b> obrany	<b>University</b> of Defence

**Fig. 4. Expansion of the prestigious term *univerzita* / *university* in the names of Czech institutions of tertiary education.**

#### 4. Diachronic comparison

The openness to international contacts and experience in the last two decades and the related need for promoting one's institution abroad or for incoming foreigners have resulted in the possibility of diachronic comparison of English names of institutions in the Czech Republic. Before 1989 very few educational institutions or military units had their official English translations, as they were not required in practical life. Names of government departments and administrative institutions usually had their English versions; however, a large proportion of them have been renamed (often repeatedly) since then, altering the English equivalents accordingly. Generally, the higher an institution is placed in the hierarchical system (of public administration, education, etc.) and the more it is involved in international co-operation, the more appropriate and well-tested their English names are. The times when the *Chamber of Deputies* (*Poslanecká sněmovna*) of the Czech Parliament was translated (unofficially, though) as the *\*House of Commons* (and the *Senate* would later probably be termed the *\*House of Lords*) are gone,

fortunately. On the other hand, home-made translations without any linguistic consultation are still common in elementary and secondary schools.

Thanks to the international character of science and research, universities have progressed quite significantly in this respect; e.g. *Philosophical Faculties* (a term still in use in the 1990s) have become either *Faculty of Arts* or even *Faculty of Arts and Humanities*; similarly, *Pedagogical Faculties* have mostly adopted the English version *Faculty of Education*, although some (at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, at Palacký University in Olomouc or at Ostrava University) use (sometimes alternatively) the original, denotatively narrower naming (cf. Šmúlová 2008: 19).

## 5. Synchronic comparison

Synchronic comparison of English versions of institutional names has also become much easier recently, especially as a result of the above-mentioned tendency towards internationalisation, rapid spread of the Internet as a supply of updated authentic information, and linguistic plurality stemming from a relative autonomy of most institutions. Leaving aside the mostly internationally comparable administrative and military institutions and the largely idiosyncretic translations of various types of secondary schools, it is interesting to note how Czech professionals in English studies differ from one another in such translations, too. Following is a list of translations of *1. a 2. stupeň základní školy*<sup>8</sup> as used on web pages of English departments of faculties of education at selected Czech universities.

*národní škola / 1. stupeň ZŠ vs. 2. stupeň ZŠ:*

*primary school vs. lower secondary school* (Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno)

*basic school – grades 1-5 vs. basic school - grades 6-9* (Faculty of Education, Palacký University, Olomouc)

*primary school (pupils aged 6-11) vs. middle school (pupils aged 11-15)* (Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice)

*primary school vs. lower secondary school* (Faculty of Education, Charles University, Prague)  
(*SŠ* = *higher secondary school*)

**Fig. 5. Translations of *1. a 2. stupeň základní školy* by English departments of Czech universities.**



## Endnotes

- 1 For the organisation chart of the US Department of Defense see [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil). The structure of the department also includes the posts of the *Deputy Secretary*, *Assistant Secretaries* and *Assistant Under Secretaries of Defense*.
- 2 For more translation equivalents of individual types of Czech secondary schools see Šmůlová 2008: 23-33, providing also references to pre-1989 sources.
- 3 Cf. web page of the Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Czech Republic, [www.mpo.cz](http://www.mpo.cz).
- 4 Czech equivalent names of NASA and FBI are quoted according to their Wikipedia entries at [www.cs.wikipedia.org](http://www.cs.wikipedia.org).
- 5 Cf. the list of US government departments at [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov).
- 6 Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Department for Education and Employment; Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions; Department of Health; Department of Social Security; Department of Trade and Industry; Lord Chancellor's Department.
- 7 Cf. the list of UK government departments at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).
- 8 In Czech, *1. stupeň* at elementary schools is also traditionally referred to as *národní škola*; *2. stupeň* has no such popular alternative. Czech teachers unskilled in English also use completely confusing English mistranslations *1st grade* and *2nd grade* to distinguish between the two levels.

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