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## НАРОДНАЯ ЭТИМОЛОГИЯ НАИМЕНОВАНИЙ ЦЕЛЕБНЫХ ТРАВ В ТЕШИНСКОЙ СИЛЕЗИИ: ОЧЕРК СОВРЕМЕННОГО СОСТОЯНИЯ

**Аннотация:** Народная этимология является интересным источником информации о восприятии мира носителями языка. Предположительно, соответственно изменениям в обществе будет изменяться и восприятие номинации, например названий целебных трав. В ходе исследования среди современных носителей местного диалекта трех поколений в 13 населенных пунктах Тешинской Силезии проверялись активные и пассивные знания диалектных названий и знание или понимание их этимологии. Результаты показали, что современные носители языка не ощущают мифологическое происхождение названий, а стремятся найти его в воздействии или применении травы, или же в аналогии ее внешнего вида с предметами, животными и т. д. Современное население Тешинской Силезии в большей мере уже отошло от традиционного мифологического восприятия мира. А если оно ему известно, то оно воспринимается как часть ушедшей в прошлое традиции, а не как составляющая переживаемой реальности. Подтвердилось, что под влиянием образования, изменения уклада жизни, индустриализации и урбанизации Тешинской Силезии в течение XX в. безвозвратно пропали также активные и пассивные знания мифологического фона, связанного с раньше употребляемыми наименованиями целебных трав.

**Ключевые слова:** лекарственные растения, славянские языки, народная этимология, этнолингвистика, чешский язык, диалекты, Силезия.

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## FOLK ETYMOLOGY OF MEDICINAL PLANT NAMES IN TĚŠÍN SILESIA: A PROBE INTO THE CURRENT STATE

**Abstract:** Folk etymology is an interesting source of the information for understanding the world view by users of the language. It can be assumed that the conception of nomination, e.g. the names of medical plants would follow the changes in the society. The questionnaire survey conducted across three generations of contemporary users of the regional dialect in 13 villages all over the Těšín Silesia explored active and passive knowledge of dialectic names of the medical plants and their etymology. The survey has shown that contemporary speakers of the language are no longer aware of mythological justification in those names. They find motivation for naming mainly in the effect or use of the herb, or in its external resemblance to objects or animals, etc. Today's inhabitants of the whole Těšín Silesia region are already largely free from the traditional mythological perception of the world. If they know it, they perceive it with great reserve as part of an outdated tradition, but no longer as a valid part of reality they experience. We find that the active and passive knowledge of folk names of medicinal plants, as well as the mythological background associated with formerly commonly used names, was irretrievably lost in Těšín Silesia under the influence of education, lifestyle changes, industrialization, and urbanization of the environment during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** herbs, Slavic languages, folk etymology, ethnolinguistics, Czech language, dialects, Silesia.

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The region of Těšín Silesia is a place of contact and mutual influence of three ethnic groups: Czech, Polish and partly also Slovak. It forms a transition zone between three cultures, three national languages (perhaps for this reason with a significant role of the local dialect) and the territory of the three present-day countries. The specifics of the historical development of Těšín Silesia and its distance from the centre of the state, the religious situation and the late colonisation of the mountainous parts have contributed to the development of an environment that has long retained a certain degree of isolation and preservation of archaic elements (see [6] for more details).

The culture and language (in the sense of the regional dialect) of the whole of Těšín Silesia can be characterised as homogeneous, regardless of national borders, both past and present. For the purposes this study, however, the term Těšín Silesia is used to refer only to that part of the region which is located within the territory of the present-day Czech

Republic. The primary code of communication here is the Těšín dialect, which belongs to the group of Silesian dialects and the Polish-Silesian subgroup and which has a transnational character (it extends into the present territory of Poland and can be characterized as an interdialect). Research shows that it is still preferred by the local population as a means of unofficial communication (within the family, with friends, neighbours, when shopping, in oral communication at the workplace, between teachers and pupils outside the classroom), but it quite often overlaps with official communication [1; 10]. It is a commonplace and powerful means of expressing identity and a carrier of regional culture. For many reasons, including the fact that it is a dialect or interdialect, it also carries and preserves elements of the distinctive heritage of local folk culture and worldview typical of the region.

The names used by indigenous people to refer to various phenomena in the world are linguistic evidence of the relationship between people and the reality that surrounds them. They reflect the tendency to generalise, search for analogies and correlations, prototypical ideas and acquired experience. The relationship between the scientifically proven origin of a name is often independent of the relationship of the name to reality, as intuitively felt by language users. Both types of etymology — scientific and folk — are sources of valuable knowledge for linguists: the former pointing to ongoing processes in language and society, and the latter to the way the world is perceived.

The basis for the research was the author's 2015 publication "Plants and Their Names Used in Folk Healing in Těšín Silesia" [15], published as an output of a two-year study within the International Committee for the Study of Carpathian Folk Culture. By summarising the findings of publications over the last hundred years, it has been discovered that in Těšín Silesia, at least 173 species of herbs, shrubs, trees and mushrooms found in the wild, cultivated in fields, gardens or at home were practically used in human and veterinary medicine.

A follow-up questionnaire survey in 2016–2017 focusing on active and passive knowledge of selected names (mainly synonymic names with proven occurrence in Těšín Silesia and names where sources could not determine whether they refer to the Těšín or Opava part of Czech Silesia) was carried out in 13 villages among people of different ages, education and gender, so that no group dominated in any village.

140 usable questionnaires came back. Incomplete questionnaires were eliminated from the survey, as well as questionnaires by people who were not sufficiently connected to the language environment of the region (respondents who did not have a local origin or who indicated only Czech as their mother tongue and main language of communication). Answers that did not directly or indirectly answer the question were then also discarded. Only the part of the collected material that is directly related to folk etymology was used.

The survey will be enlarged in the near future. The plan is to include 18 villages, all covered by the same number of respondents so that it is possible to draw generalised conclusions about the linguistic situation on the basis of the material obtained, but also taking into account the internal division of the region into lowland, foothill and mountainous parts.

For the purposes of presenting the research results and the correlations between folk and scientific etymology, the studied folk names of medicinal plants were divided into categories according to the so-called motivation, i. e. what they were derived from. The names occurred in Těšín Silesia can be divided into several main groups according to their motivation from the point of view of ordinary language users: 1. Naming after the external appearance of a plant or its part; 2. Naming after the properties; 3. Naming after the effect; 4. Naming after the place and time of growth; 5. Naming after biblical or demonic characters; 6. Loanwords from other languages and original Slavic names etymologically opaque to language users [15]. In her monograph on the metaphors of folk plant names, Zdeňka Hladká states that

the most frequent motivations for the names are the external appearance of the plant or its essential part, the place and time of growth, and properties of the plant itself or its use [5, pp. 27–28].

For the sake of completeness, it should be stated that dialectical forms of names are transcribed according to the methodological recommendations for Silesian dialects of Czech [4, pp. 70–73].

For the group of plants used both in folk human and veterinary medicine, perhaps the most typical names are those derived from their effect (see [14] for more details). The name **krvavník** — common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*; the current Polish term *krwawnik* *pospolity*) is etymologically very transparent. The name is used by Polish — *krwawnik*, Ukrainian — *крвавник* [7, pp. 62–63] and some Russian dialects: *кровоавник/кровоавчик/кровоавник/кровоавец* [12, p. 475], but also by Croatian — *krvavka*. In other European languages, there are also names derived from the word for blood in Latin or German, which are the result of a similar etymological process [16, p. 177]. Václav Machek [9, p. 246] states that yarrow is “indigenous — not adopted! — remedy against bleeding from wounds, especially cuts and slashes”. By pointing to the “indigenous” origin, he defines the contrast to later domesticated applications of ancient Greek and Roman origin which were adopted in various ways. The basis for the old empirical experience is the fact that the tannin contained in the herb helps to stop bleeding. In their book *Naše rostliny v lékařství* (Our Plants in Therapy) [8, p. 388], Jaroslav Korbelář and Zdeněk Endris also mention folk uses for bleeding from internal organs. This is also confirmed by Josef Čižmář in his book *Lidové lékařství v Československu* (Folk Healing in the Czechoslovakia) [3, p. 110].

Josef Čižmář provides a double etymology: “In Silesia they stop it [blood] with the juice from yarrow, which is therefore called *krvavník* there” [3, p. 339]. In the same text, however, he adds an opposite etymology based on the effect: “A yarrow leaf stuffed into the nose causes bleeding, hence the name ‘*krvavník*’” [3, p. 111], but this is contradicted, for example, by the research of Ivo Stolařík in *Hrčava* [13, p. 219] and in other places of the East Slavic regions, such as Valeria Borisovna Kolosova who mentions its use for stopping nosebleeds in children [7, pp. 59–60].

The research has shown that the name is widely known: 104 out of 140 people knew it at least passively and 43 of them were able to match it with its scientific name in Polish or Czech. Those who did not relate the dialectical name to yarrow were governed in their guesses by the metaphor of the red colour of the juice oozing from the stem of the herb or its use in folk medicine to stop bleeding from wounds (5 respondents). The reason for such good knowledge of the folk name can be put down to the fact that in Polish terminology, the name is the same. The answers of all the respondents who addressed the question on the origin of the name *krvavník* point unreservedly to the motivation of the name of the herb by its effect: out of 140 respondents, 26 stated that it stops bleeding, 14 that it cleans the blood, and 3 that it is used to treat high blood pressure.

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that in the dialects of today's Czech Republic, the name *krvavník* is also used for perforate St. John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), where the base for naming is its property: bright red juice oozing from the broken stems. However, this variant is not an option in the Těšín Silesia — it has been ruled out by the results of research which clearly identified it with yarrow. The name *krvavník* itself is generally quite popular and in different regions or even stages of language development, it denotes different genera of herbs in Slavic languages (see for example [9, p. 55] which also mentions *Ficaria*, greater celandine — *Chelidonium*, great burnet — *Sanguisorba*).

**Hlistník** (in Těšín Silesia there is also an analogous name **hlistovačník**) — centaury (*Centaurium vulgare*; *tysiącznik pospolity*). In *Česká a slovenská jména rostlin* (Czech and Slovak Names of Plants), Václav Machek considers the name *hlistník* domestic and Old Czech, motivated by the effect of “supposedly killing nematodes, worms in the abdominal viscera” [9, p. 182]. Josef Čižmář writes that a decoction of ferns and “*hlistník*” — centaury or tansy is quite often used in the treatment of roundworms [3, p. 62]. Jaroslav Korbelař and Zdeněk Endris mention its use in cases of inappetence, symptoms of indigestion, and as a stimulant for general weakness [8, p. 468].

The results of the questionnaire survey showed dominance of the knowledge of the scientific Polish name *glistnik jaskółcze ziele* — greater celandine (*Chelidonium maius*) over the folk name which refers to the centaury (in her comprehensive text on folk nomenclature, Jadwiga Waniakowa does not mention any name of centaury with the root *glist-* in any Polish dialect [16]). Passive knowledge of the folk name was reported by 24 respondents, while only 4 people from the surveyed villages related it to centaury. However, 9 more respondents identified it with the Polish scientific name for the greater celandine. The estimate of the folk name’s motivation is unreliable in this case: out of only 4 responses, 2 respondents associated the name with an effect against intestinal parasites and 2 mentioned the use against warts as a motivation.

**Čantoryjka** or **čantoryja** is a synonymous dialectical name for the centaury (*Centaurium vulgare*; *tysiącznik pospolity*). It is a corruption of the Latin name for the genus *Centaurium*. Latin names were generally adopted from the scientific community through herbaria and the urban medicinal trade, less frequently through schools. The process of the transfer of names to the folk language was intensified by the practice of copying and compiling one’s own recipes and herbaria, whose linguistic quality was always largely determined by the education and knowledge of its writer. *Centaurium* has undergone a similar process in many other languages (Slovenian, Croatian, Slovak and Polish), and for Polish alone, Jadwiga Waniakowa lists 30 dialectical variants derived from the scientific Latin name [16, p. 171].

In Těšín Silesia, there is a strong connection between the names *čantoryjka/čantoryja* and the peaks of Čantoryje. Velká Čantoryje (995 m above sea level) is the highest peak in the Czech part of the Silesian Beskids. Czantoryja Mała (866 m above sea level) can be found three kilometres further away in the present-day territory of Poland. Folk etymology linking centaury to the names of mountains has been frequent in ethnographic literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day: “The name Czantoryja originated, according to some linguists, from the word ‘czartoryja’, which means a place dug up by devils. This view is supported by folk tales <...>. Another version derives the name Čantoryja from a plant called *czantoryjka* — common centaury (*Centaurium erythraea* Rafn.), used since ancient times in folk medicine. This plant used to be widespread on Čantoryje and used to decorate its meadows with tiny pinkish-red flowers” [2, p. 196].

The results of the questionnaire survey show relatively good passive knowledge of the folk name: 72 out of 140 respondents. However, only 25 can identify it with the centaury. Four people are even convinced that *czantoryjka* is the Polish scientific name (compare the relationship between the dialect as a general means of communication and the normative Polish language in the region — see [1]). Six more respondents identified the herb incorrectly. In 30 cases, respondents answered that the name is associated with the fact that the plant was found the slopes of Čantoryje and two linked it with the Latin name *Centaurium*.

**Verunka** — speedwell (*Veronica*; *przetacznik*), especially the European speedwell (*Veronica beccabunga*) and the heath speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*). The name also

originated with the penetration of the scientific Latin name among the people and its domestication. It can be assumed that the affinity with the common female name Veronika facilitated the process of domestication and fixation in the vernacular. Analogies with dialects of other Slavic languages can also be observed here: Slovak veronika, Ukrainian вероніка/вароніка/вероніка Russian лесная вероника, Croatian verunika/verona, Serbian веруника or Slovenian veronka [16, pp. 155–156].

The questionnaire survey showed that the name verunka is almost unknown among current users of the language: 11 people reported passive knowledge, but the vast majority of them (9 people) could identify it accurately. The question on perceived motivation was not answered in 137 out of 140 questionnaires. In 2 cases, the respondents indicated motivation by the Latin name Veronica and in only one case by the etymological religious legend of St. Veronica who used speedwell to cure the Roman emperor. This is a contamination of the legend of St. Veronica who wiped the face of the suffering Christ with a scarf and later cured the emperor Tiberius with it.

Naming according to the characteristic properties of the whole plant or its part is, as has been pointed out before, a typical way of creating folk names. Three examples were included in the research.

**Džuravjec**—perforate St John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*; dziurawiec zwyczajny). The motivation by the fine holes in the leaves, easily visible in the light, is clear in the Latin scientific name *perforatum* — perforated. This motivation is also widely used in other Slavic languages: in the Polish dziurawiec and the dialectical drziuownik [16, pp. 25, 130] or the Russian диравик, дырявник, дырявчик, or the analogously motivated modifiers дырявый/дырявлинный зверобой [7, p. 155, more details an alternative etymological interpretation in 12, pp. 472–479]. Some older authors were led by the extension of the etymology associated with holes to try to locate the origin of the Czech name třezalka in the Old Czech verb třezati (to prick, to scratch).

The results of the questionnaire survey showed good knowledge of the name, which, as in the case of krvavňik — yarrow, can be linked to the fact that Polish uses the same scientific name. Passive knowledge was demonstrated by 113 out of 140 respondents and active knowledge by 64. Only 2 respondents made the mistake of matching it with the current scientific name. Answers about the origin of the folk name concerned the perforated leaves in 25 cases. Six more answers describing the dots or spots on the leaves of St. John's wort can be added to these with some degree of reservation. Two answers state that the plant is said to be the blood of Jesus Christ. However, here we do not find a connection with the folk name džuravjec, but with its previously mentioned synonym krvavňik (see krvavňik — yarrow).

**Kani mleko** (regional synonyms zajiči mleko, gadži mleko) refers to various species of spurge (*Euphorbia*; wilczomlec) and is motivated by the juice flowing from the wounded plant, from which “kane mléko” (milk trickles) [9, pp. 139–140]. The name “mléko” (milk) for the vascular plant juice is common in Slavic languages in folk use (see [7, pp. 15–16]) and is also found in the Polish term wilczomlec.

The name kani mleko is not very well known among contemporary users of the language (15 out of 140 say that they have encountered the name, only 3 identify the plant accurately and 7 others guess the current scientific name in Czech or Polish based on the perceived motivation of the vascular juice — mléko in the folk use). However, when asked about the motivation of the name, only 6 of the 140 respondents stated that the origin of the name was the white (many mentioned pungent and poisonous) juice oozing from the broken plant.

**Varkočki, Panny Marije varkočki or varkoče** — common agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*; rzepik pospolity). The elongated yellow inflorescence has become the basis for the metaphorical name associated with a braid of golden hair.

The results of the questionnaire survey confirmed low knowledge of the folk name, both active and passive: 23 respondents know it, but only 11 of them can identify it accurately with the scientific name (1 incorrectly). Interestingly, only 8 out of 140 respondents stated that the habit of the herb is in the shape of a braid even though a rather transparent motivation can be assumed in this case.

It is natural that legends, myths and religious ideas as an integral part of everyday life are reflected in the linguistic environment, specifically in naming. The positive properties of medicinal herbs became naturally associated with the divine gifts brought to man by angels and saints. Often the depiction of a saint with a typical attribute as the language user knew it from church or with a story from the saint's life served as a motivation. Very often, folk imagery created an etymological legend which, thanks to its attractiveness and the “transparency” of its plot, was distributed further. Václav Machek, however, does not exclude the influence of monastic literature in some cases [9, p. 11].

Another name associated with the cult of the Virgin Mary is **slzički Pany Marije** — maiden pink (*Dianthus deltoides*; goździk kropkowy), motivated by the etymological legend that maiden pink grew from the tears that Virgin Mary shed after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This interpretation of the origin of the name is known in several Czech regions [9, p. 80]. A related variant of the legend refers to the bright spots on the leaves which originated as marks of the Virgin Mary's tears [7, p. 95].

The results of the questionnaire survey did not show widespread knowledge of this folk name among current users of the language in the Těšín Silesia region. 35 respondents knew the name passively and 10 actively. Nine guesses of the relationship between the folk and scientific name were wrong, but 7 of them interestingly found a relationship between the name and the dewdrops that stick to the leaves of the common lady's mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*) in the morning. All the answers to the known or felt origin of the name *slzičky Panny Marie* were in some way related to the tear: four respondents wrote that it “looks like a tear”, three that “in the morning it has a dewdrop in its petal” (this is a guess related to the common lady's mantle), and two respondents gave the etymological legend that the Virgin Mary accompanied Jesus Christ on the road to Mount Calvary and that it was from her tears over Christ's wounds that the maiden pink grew all along the way. It is interesting to note the relation of the red flowers and the “tears of blood” in traditional culture and the more transparent resemblance to the clear drops on the leaves of the flower as experienced by contemporary speakers of the language.

**Kačičec** — marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*; knieć błotna). Polish colloquial variants *kaczyniec/kaczeniec/kaczeńce*. As evidenced by the questionnaire survey, today's speakers of the language find its origin in the name of the shallow, often muddy water body — *kačok*, where the marsh-marigold grows. *Český jazykový atlas* (Czech Language Atlas) finds an etymology with the duck, an animal living near water, and at the same time gives a metaphor based on the colour analogy of a yellow spring duckling on rich green grass with yellow flowers and green leaves of the marsh-marigold [11, p. 272]. An analogy of the etymology of the Těšín-Silesian name derived from *kačok* instead of *kačka* (duck) can be found between the Czech *blatouch* and the Old Czech *blatúch* derived from swamp — *blata* or waterlogged meadow, similar to the Slovak *mlačník*, the more distant South Slavic *блатник* in Bulgarian,

the Serbian kaljužnica and калужница in Russian, and by analogy also in Ukrainian. The Russian dialectic лягушатник/лягушечник/лягушник has a very similar motivation to kačiňec [7, p. 43].

For the sake of completeness, it should be stated that different parts of Těšín Silesia, there are several metaphorical names for the marsh-marigold based on different imagery (kačiňec, voli oko, byči oko, łotoś — see [15]).

The results of the questionnaire survey showed: 64 of the 140 respondents know marsh-marigold under the name kačiňec and 111 know the name passively. Only 3 respondents made the mistake of matching the folk name with the Polish or Czech scientific names. As in the cases of krvavňik — yarrow and džuravěc — perforate St John's-wort, good knowledge of the regional folk name can be explained by the frequency of the analogous name in colloquial Polish kaczyńiec/kaczeniec/kaczeńce. As for the origin of the name, 41 respondents answered that it was based on the fact that it grows near water where ducks like it, 5 on the yellow colour identical to that of young ducklings. These 5 were complemented by one more general answer (“based on the size and appearance of a small duckling”).

In conclusion, the questionnaire survey conducted across three generations of contemporary users of Polish and the regional dialect in Těšín Silesia, with varying degrees of education, has shown that contemporary folk etymology no longer finds mythological justification in the names of medicinal plants. Speakers of the language find motivation for naming mainly in the effect or use of the herb, or in its external resemblance to objects or animals, etc.

This confirms the fact that folk etymology finds a connection between a name and whatever is closest to the language user's understanding of the world at the time. Today's inhabitants of the whole Těšín Silesia region are already largely free from the traditional mythological perception of the world. If they know it, they perceive it with great reserve as part of an outdated tradition, but no longer as a valid part of lived reality. We find that the active and passive knowledge of folk names of medicinal plants, as well as the mythological background associated with the formerly commonly used names, was irretrievably lost in Těšín Silesia under the influence of education, lifestyle changes, industrialization, and urbanization of the environment during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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