



# SLOVENIAN MICROTOPYNOMS IN THE BILINGUAL AREA IN HUNGARY

Matjaž Geršič\* 

Matjaz.Gersic@zrc-sazu.si

Mojca Kumin Horvat\* 

Primož Pipan\* 

\*ZRC SAZU 

Ljubljana, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

*Geographical names are an important part of the cultural heritage of every nation. They are a fundamental building block of all civilisations or cultures, filling space with meaning and developing spatial identities. Geographical names in languages with few speakers, such as Slovenian, are often endangered, but this is even truer of the geographical names of ethnic minorities, including the Slovenians of Hungary, the smallest cross-border Slovenian minority. The far western edge of Hungary, which lies between Slovenia and Austria, is called the Rába Valley. It includes seven settlements in which bilingualism is officially present. An outward sign of this bilingualism is bilingual road signs with the names of settlements. The main subject of this research was microtoponyms. One of the results of the research is a map with a glossary based on extensive fieldwork and a review of archival sources. It is primarily intended for the general public. It is hoped that it will help preserve these microtoponyms in people's memories and at the same time promote their everyday use in communication.*

---

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, cultural heritage, ethnic minorities, microtoponyms

---



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is an important task for researchers. An inseparable part of intangible heritage is language, which includes geographical names. See Figure 1 below as an example of a multilingual road sign as an external indication of the presence of multilingualism in the Rába Valley; place names in Hungarian, German, and Slovenian follow one another from top to bottom. Because of various processes, these names are especially endangered in cross-border areas, and so their examination in such areas deserves special attention. The smallest ethnic Slovenian cross-border community lives in western Hungary, in Vas County (Hung. *Vas vármegye*, Sln. *Železna županija*). According to the last census, conducted in 2022, 3,965 Hungarian citizens declare themselves ethnic Slovenians, or a third more than in the 2011 census, but the number of Slovenian native speakers declined. Only 1,547 residents declared themselves native Slovenian speakers, compared to 1,723 in 2011.



**Figure 1:** *Multilingual road sign (Hungarian, German, and Slovenian) in the Rába Valley (Source: Matjaž Geršič)*

## 1.1 Slovenians in the Rába Valley

In Hungary, ethnic Slovenians live close to one another in seven officially bilingual settlements in the ethnically Slovenian part of the Rába Valley. In the 2022 census, approximately 1,650 people there identified themselves as ethnic Slovenians. As attested, the Slavs first settled in the area between the Mura and Rába rivers in the ninth century (Olas 1995). In the eleventh century, the Rába Valley was covered in forests and swamps, and it was sparsely populated. In 1183, Béla III of Hungary established a Cistercian monastery dedicated to Saint Gotthart, a medieval saint that the town of Szentgotthárd (Germ. *Sankt Gotthard*, Sln. *Monošter*) was named after. To farm their land, the Cistercians required labour, which at that time was composed of local Slovenians and those that moved there from elsewhere. They formed settlements in the abbey area, some of which have survived until today (Kozar-Mukič 1984). Rábatótfalu (Sln. *Slovenska ves*) was the first settlement attested in written records (as *Villa Sclavorum*), as early as 1221 (Zelko 1996; Bajzek Lukač 2017). Until 1918, when the First World War ended, the Rába Valley Slovenians were politically, administratively, culturally, and economically united with the Prekmurje Slovenians in a single Hungarian state (Olas 1995). After the end of the war, a new border between the newly established states of Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was defined at the Paris Peace Conference. However, that was not an ethnic border, but it ran along a watershed (Fujs 1992). This delimitation loosened and severed the already well-established ties between the Rába Valley, which became part of Hungary, and the Mura Valley, which belonged to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. According to the Hungarian data of 1920, at that time the Rába Valley had 6,087 ethnic Slovenian residents and Prekmurje had 14,413 ethnic Hungarian residents (Fujs 1992). Contacts with the Rába Valley Slovenians continued to be unhindered and direct up until the 1948 Cominform Resolution, when Hungary also erected a barbed wire fence and built minefields, fire trenches, and watchtowers along the border with Yugoslavia, including the 102 km section that is now the Slovenian border. The Rába Valley Slovenians, who showed an affinity with Slovenia, began to be persecuted (Čačinovič 1992) and contacts between the ethnic Slovenians on both sides of the border further deteriorated. The situation slightly improved after 1964, but it was not until the fall of the Iron Curtain and Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 that there were no longer any major obstacles to crossing the border. All of this also had an impact on the use of Slovenian in the Rába Valley. Figure 2 below shows the official Slovenian-Hungarian bilingual area in Hungary, with the bilingual settlements shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 2:** *The official Slovenian-Hungarian bilingual area in Hungary (Source: ZRC SAZU Anton Melik Geographical Institute)*



**Figure 3:** *Bilingual Slovenian-Hungarian settlements in Hungary (Source: ZRC SAZU Anton Melik Geographical Institute)*

## 1.2 Microtoponyms

Microtoponyms (Sln. *ledinska imena*, from *ledina*, see below) are the names of small uninhabited areas (Snoj 2009) that refer to the basic characteristics and properties of village land (Kladnik 1999) and share the destiny of the Slovenian language in the Rába Valley. In addition to the declining use of Slovenian, they are also threatened by

agricultural modernisation. Their scholarly analysis is the only solution for preserving them, along with appropriate dissemination of findings to the professional community and the general public.

The Slovenian term *ledina* initially referred to a compact piece of land with the same land use, such as a meadow, pasture, field, or orchard (Jarc 2004). Such parcels formed as a result of changes in the clan and tribal society in the early stage of Slovenian ethnogenesis (Fabčič 2010). Larger pieces of such land were divided into smaller ones due to changes in farming (e.g., the introduction of manuring and crop rotation) and various social processes, such as inheritance, sale, and expropriation, whereby individual segments could obtain their own names.

The word *ledina* is derived from the Indo-European root *\*lend<sup>h</sup>*, which means “vacant or uncultivated land”. Words with this root in other European countries also designate a clearing in a forest, stubble field, fallow land, steppe, territory, land, barren landscape, or valley (Snoj 1997:296). Microtoponyms designate the basic characteristics and properties of village land (Kladnik 1999). The division of the village space into these microlocations derives from the permanent collective conceptions of the natural division of space. The boundaries between these individual pieces of land are often natural divides, such as riverbeds, foothills, terrace scarps, transitions in slopes, or ridges. These units of land thus express the basic characteristics of the natural environment and all human alterations to it created to improve these characteristics (Penko Seidl 2011). Most of these microlocations were named by locals and some by surveyors that performed the measurements for the land cadastre (Ribnikar 1982). In turn, some microtoponyms are nothing but general geographical terms adapted to a specific geographical characteristic, with their spelling indicating a proper noun (Fabčič 2010). Due to contemporary processes leading to changes in the countryside, a microlocation may no longer have a single land-use category. Thus, it may no longer mean what it originally did, but locals still perceive it as a whole, even though its land use is now varied. Even though the names may no longer reflect the original characteristics of these locations, they have nonetheless remained the same (Penko Seidl 2011). In the Habsburg Monarchy, microtoponyms were first systematically recorded on the Franciscan cadastre maps. In the Habsburg hereditary lands, these maps were produced from 1818 to 1828, and in Hungary they began to be produced from 1850 onward (Kladnik 1999); before that, they had only been preserved through oral tradition (Fabčič 2010).

However, an irreplaceable source, especially for establishing the current use of microtoponyms and their dialect versions, is local informants. The best informants are the elderly because they are familiar with both the local living environment and the lifestyle there. Usually, the best information can be obtained from farmers, forest workers, hunters, and fishermen (Klinar *et al.* 2012). A great challenge in collecting microtoponyms has to do with recording and standardising them because the informants provide them in the local dialect. Even though microtoponyms are limited to a specific territorial community with its own collective memory, their heritage significance makes it vital to also preserve them in writing. Writing these memories down is the only way to prevent these names from sinking into oblivion (Halbwachs 2001). Microtoponyms can be recorded in several ways. They are most frequently recorded on maps, preferably in combination with an accompanying text providing additional explanations. Such maps can also be produced and made available online, where an audio recording of dialect pronunciation can be added to the microtoponym, along with explanatory photos and other material. In the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, microtoponyms were common not only in the ethnic Slovenian areas of the Rába Valley, as in the case of oeconyms. Their special feature is that many of them reflect the Slovenian language.

### 1.3 The Rába Valley subdialects of the Prekmurje dialect

Slovenian has nearly forty dialects and countless subdialects, making it the Slavic language with the most dialect differentiation and one of the most dialect-rich languages in Europe, especially given that there are relatively few speakers in of the language in Europe (about two million) covering a small geographic area (Logar 1996). Many factors contributed to the long process whereby Slovenian split into dialects and dialect groups (Logar 1996; Toporišič 1998). In terms of dialect classification—which, based on more recent language development, divides the Prekmurje dialect internally into the Dolinsko, Ravensko, and Goričko (literally lowland, flatland, and highland) subdialects—the local Rába Valley dialects belong to the Goričko subdialect of the Prekmurje dialect in the Pannonian dialect group. They are spoken in the following eight villages in the Rába Valley: Felsőszölnök (Sln. *Gornji Senik*), Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*), Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica–Ritkarovci*), Orfalu (Sln. *Andovci*), Szakonyfalu (Sln. *Sakalovci*), Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*), Apátistvánfalva (Sln. *Števanovci*), and Újbalázsfalva (Sln. *Otkovci*; though administratively, this village is actually part of Apátistvánfalva). In terms of the distinguishing linguistic features and the historical and administrative division of the Rába Valley, the subdialects can be divided into two groups that differ from one another primarily in terms of the development of their vowels and consonants. The

two groups are the local Felsőszölnök dialect, spoken in the villages of Felsőszölnök (Sln. *Gornji Senik*), Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*), and Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica–Ritkarovci*), and the local Apátistvánfalva dialect, spoken in the villages of Apátistvánfalva (Sln. *Števanovci*), Újbalázsfalva (Sln. *Otkovci*), Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica–Ritkarovci*), Orfalu (Sln. *Andovci*), Szakonyfalu (Sln. *Sakalovci*), and Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*).

## **1.4 Research questions**

The aim of this study is to investigate how microtoponyms function as part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Slovene minority in Hungary. To this end, the study addresses several key questions arising from the theoretical concepts of language and identity, collective memory and cultural landscape. The following research questions were formulated:

- 1) What is the linguistic composition of microtoponyms in the Rába Valley, and how does it vary between settlements?
- 2) To what extent do Slovenian microtoponyms still survive in local language use?
- 3) What naming patterns and semantic motivations underlie the microtoponyms recorded in the Slovene-speaking settlements of the Rába Valley?
- 4) How do the microtoponyms reflect the historical land use, ownership, and ecological characteristics of the area?
- 5) How is the multilingual character of the Rába Valley expressed in the microtoponymic landscape, and what does this reveal about past and present inter-ethnic relations?

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is based on interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives that combine sociolinguistics, toponymy, collective memory studies, and minority identity formation. The theoretical framework is based on three main strands: (1) language and identity in borderlands, (2) microtoponymy as an expression of cultural landscape, and (3) collective memory and place attachment.

### **2.1 Language and identity in border areas**

Language serves not only as a tool of communication but also as a symbolic marker of ethnic identity, especially in border regions where different national, linguistic, and cultural influences overlap. As Fishman (1999) and Edwards (2009) argue, minority languages are central to the self-perception of their speakers and play a crucial role in

maintaining community cohesion. In the case of the Rába Valley, the retention, or erosion, of Slovene reflects broader processes of assimilation, language shift, and national policy towards minorities. The idea of the linguistic landscape (Landry & Bourhis 1997) is also relevant here, especially in the context of bilingual settlements and their toponymy. The public display of place names in minority languages can be interpreted as an assertion of linguistic rights and identity, especially in border areas (Gorter 2006).

## 2.2 Microtoponymy and the cultural landscape

Toponyms are part of what Tuan (1977) calls topophilia – the affective bond between people and places. Microtoponyms, as discussed by Kladnik (1999) and Fabčič (2010), are primarily associated with local collective knowledge and oral traditions and encode ecological, economic, and historical dimensions of the landscape. As such, they form an essential part of a community's intangible cultural heritage. The theoretical basis for the study of microtoponyms comes from ethnolinguistics and cultural geography. They are regarded as “linguistic fossils” (Radding 2006), often preserving historical land use practices, property relations, and even mythological or religious associations. Their gradual disappearance is therefore not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a form of cultural loss.

## 2.3 Collective memory and spatial identity

The concept of collective memory, as developed by Maurice Halbwachs (2001), offers an important perspective on how communities remember and reproduce knowledge about space. Microtoponyms are remembered and transmitted through oral narratives between generations, often by elders familiar with traditional land use (Klinar *et al.* 2012). Nora (1989) distinguishes between *milieux de mémoire* (memory environments) and *lieux de mémoire* (memory places), and microtoponyms can be interpreted as both: they are embedded in everyday life and at the same time serve as mnemonic anchors. This perspective is in line with current efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of minorities through documentation, mapping, and public dissemination. The act of recording and visualising microtoponyms, especially in dialectal form, can be understood as a strategy of resistance against cultural erasure as well as a way of strengthening community identity in a transnational context.

### **3. METHODS**

Because the borders of the settlements in the Rába Valley, as known at present, have slightly changed through history, this study focused on the area covering seven cadastral districts from the second half of the eighteenth century. This area largely overlaps with that of contemporary settlements; the greatest difference may be observed in Szentgotthárd (Sln. *Monošter*), where only the hamlet of Rábatófalú (Sln. *Slovenska ves*), which was an independent settlement until 1983, was included in the study. Research comprised deskwork and fieldwork. The first stage of the desk research was based on archival sources, and it resulted in a field map, which was used in the fieldwork with the informants. The basic archival sources used were maps. The oldest source containing microtoponyms is Austria-Hungary's land cadastre, which, for the cadastral districts examined, was produced between 1857 and 1858. The land cadastre maps are georeferenced and freely available online, but they cannot be imported into a local geographic information system. The second-oldest source used was the maps produced as part of the military survey conducted between 1927 and 1931. These maps were first digitised and then georeferenced. Microtoponyms from various sources, including from field research, are collected in the volume *Vas megye* (Vas County; Balogh *et al.* 1982). The text contains maps, which were also digitised and geo-referenced. The only vector data used were the 1998 data at a 1:10,000 scale provided by the Hungarian Surveying and Mapping Authority. The microtoponyms from all these sources were transferred onto an integral large-format field map, separately for each settlement. These maps, along with the gazetteers produced, formed the basis for field research. The representatives of the Slovenian minority in the Rába Valley arranged for us to meet with the locals in each settlement, so we could review the collected names together, determine whether the locals knew or used them, and ascertain whether they knew which locations they referred to and what they meant (see Figure 4 below). All these conversations were also tape-recorded. A total of seven meetings were held, and interviews were conducted with sixteen individuals. Seven of the interviewees were men and nine were women. The interviewees were selected by Mr Martin Ropoš, an excellent expert on the local environment, long-time mayor of Felsőszölnök (Sln. *Gornji Senik*), and long-time chairman of the Slovenian National Self-Government in Hungary. All interviewees were over 50 years old and had different professions, including forester, journalist, farmer, local politician, and teacher at a bilingual school.



**Figure 4:** One of the meetings with locals in the Rába Valley (Source: Matjaž Geršič)

The third stage of research again involved deskwork, as part of which the data were organised and analysed and material was prepared for dissemination and publication. Each name was recorded in three ways: in broad phonetic transcription, narrow phonetic transcription, and standardised transcription. The following principles of broad phonetic transcription were used:

- The stress position is indicated with an acute (é), grave (è), or circumflex (ê) (e.g., *Cirék*, *Cèsta*, and *Bêrek*).
- The length and quality of a stressed vowel: the symbol ò indicates short close /o/ (*Gospòčko*, *Vèlka šònžet*), and the symbol è indicates short close /e/ (*Jèlica*).
- The circumflex indicates short open /ɛ/, thus allowing a distinction between short close è /e/ and short open ê /ɛ/ (*Čètinje* vs. *Bêgnjec*).
- The macron indicates posttonic length in Hungarian names (e.g., *Fèrčān pūsta*, *Māggorōš*).
- Syncopated vowels are not written (*Sóverca* = *Severica*, *Ciglénca* = *Ciglenica*).
- Long diphthongs are written as *ej* and *au* (*Bréjg*, *Potáučec*).
- In the local Apátistvánfalva subdialect, the short diphthongs *ie* and *uo* are transcribed as è (*Pèterin bréjg*, *Cèsta*) and ò (*Slovènski pòtok*).
- The labialised mid-front vowel is transcribed as ö (*Börgölin*).
- The labialised high-front vowel is transcribed as ü (*Lasicina lùknja*).
- Dialect consonant developments are transcribed as follows: *kj* (*Grájkje*), *ml* (*mn*) (*Kàmlovo*), *tj* (< *k*) (*Gláftje*, *Cèrtjef*), except in *Jarek* (and all word combinations with this base), which is transcribed as *Jarek* and *Djárek*, as agreed between the

informants and transcribers (the informants did not agree with the phonetic transcription (*Djárek*) of this word).

- Devoiced consonants at the end of a word are written as their voiced counterparts (*Mijálin bréjg* instead of *Mijálin bréjk*, *Žmìtin kríž*, except for *Tréjbeš* (and not *Tréjbež*), which is justified by the oblique case forms *Na Trbešé* → *Na Trebeše*).
- The devoicing *v > f* before voiceless consonants is transcribed in all positions (*Léjskofca*, *Cèrtjef*).
- Accentual or morphological doublets are separated by a slash (*Gábergje/Gábergje*).
- The first non-prepositional component of the name is capitalised: *Pri Bìvi*.

The characteristics of the standardised transcription of the collected microtoponyms:

- Standardised transcription of dialect diphthongs: *au* → *o* (*Potáučec* → *Potočec*), *ej* → *e* (*Kováčín bréjg* → *Kovačín breg*), *ij* → *i* (*Gičijna* → *Gičina*), *ie* → *e* (*Cielinã* → *Cèlina* → *Celina*).
- Standardised transcription of the dialect reflex for pretonic *i*: 1. (< *u*): *Cirék* → *Curek*, *Bikáuvcica* → *Bukovčica*, and 2. (< *e*): *Cimènt* > *Cement*.
- Standardised transcription of the dialect reflex for *a*: 1. in the suffix *-ac* > *-ac* → *-ec* (*Doléjnji kònac* > *Dolenji konec*, *Léjskovac* > *Leskovec*); 2. in the middle of the word (*Vèška páut* → *Vaška pot*).
- Standardised transcription of the dialect phoneme *ü* → *u* (*Mùzga* → *Muzga*), except if the name is of Hungarian origin (*Šürü êrdö* → *Šürü erdö*).
- Preserving the letter *ö*, which is generally standardised as *e* (*Sóvarca* → *Severica*), if the microtoponym is related to an oeconym (*Köleš breg*) or if it is of Hungarian origin (*Čiga föld*);
- Reconstructing syncopated or lost phonemes: 1. *i*: *Ciglénca* → *Ciglenica*, *Trnovca* → *Trnovica*; 2. *a*: *Rònc* → *Ronec*; 3. *h*: *Vrñji bréjg* → *Vrhñji breg*, 4. *v*: *Gròfosko* → *Grofovsko*, 5. *-lj*: *Stávlanca* → *Stavljanica*.
- Standardising dialect consonant developments: *gj* → *j* (*Bréjzgje* → *Brezje*), *dj* → *j* (*Djáarak* → *Jarek*, *Bréjzdje* → *Brezje*), *ml* → *mn* (*Kamnovje*, *Na Kamnu*), *šk* → *šč* (*Mála gáuška* > *Mala gošča*); omitting the cluster *čr* (*Črèšnjica* → *Češnjica*), the pleophony *-ere-* (*Čèreta* → *Čreta*), and the cluster *kl* < *tl* (*Bìnkli* → *Bintlì*).
- Standardising dialect final *-n* < *-m* (*Pod žlàkon* → *Pod žlakom*).
- Standardising *u*: 1. (< *ol*) (*Dúga zèmla* → *Dolga zemlja*); 2. > *vi* (*Rábina vilica* → *Rabina ulica*).
- Reconstructing the cluster *vi* (> *j*) (*Lipojca* → *Lipovica*, *Ridjàjca* → *Rjavica*).

- Reconstructing the cluster *-čko < -sko* (*Gospòčko* → *Gosposko*).
- Reconstructing *h* (*Vrnja grájka* → *Vrhnja grajka*, *Podràstek* → *Podhrastek*).
- Standardising dialect adjectival endings (*Na Sòlskom* → *Na Solskem*).
- Names with an unclear etymology are only standardised phonetically (*Gùščin ograd* → *Güščin ograd*), *Malùj* → *Maluj*, *Zázda* → *Zazda*, *Pòd Láu* → *Pod Lo*, *Vorišče* → *Vorišče*.
- Omitting dialect morphological special features: 1. gender (*Préjk Rába* → *Prek Rabe*), *Stára šonžéta* → *Stara senožet*, 2. definite adjectives (*Bàbini djárek* → *Babin jarek*).
- The first non-prepositional component of the name is capitalised (*Pri Brvi*).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcome of the research conducted is 350 named geographical features in the Rába Valley. Twenty-three features have doublet names. The results are presented in a dictionary and a map. The dictionary articles for an individual settlement are provided in alphabetical order. A dictionary article consists of an accentuated headword in bold in broad phonetic transcription, followed by information on the name's location on the map, then the separator ▶, followed by the narrow phonetic transcription and standardised spelling of the name in its basic form. If applicable, oblique-case forms are also added to the narrow dialect transcription, usually the accusative and locative singular, and rarely also the genitive singular. This is followed by a documentary section citing the forms of the name as used in various sources, such as the Austro-Hungarian land cadastre (AH cadastre), the volume *Vas megye földrajzi neveikataster* (Geographical Names of Vas County; Balogh *et al.* 1982; shortened to *Vas megye*), the official 1:10,000 maps of the Hungarian Surveying and Mapping Authority from 1998 (topography), contemporary vector data (GURM), and the 1921–1931 military survey data (military survey). A semantic section follows, providing information on the category of the name (microtoponym, hydronym, etc.). The graphic symbol ⊙ (*izpeljava* “derivation”) introduces the etymological section, which explains the name's origin based on the following dictionaries: *ESSJ* (Bezljaj *et al.* 2005), *ESSZI* (Snoj 2009), *e-SSKJ* (Ahačič 2023), *SSKP* (Novak 2006), *SSKJ* (Slovar ... 2014), and *SZOTAR* (Bajzek Lukač 2019). The graphic symbol ⊗ (*komentar*, “commentary”) introduces any comments by informants shedding additional light on the characteristics of individual names. The cross-reference sign → indicates connections between synonymous names.



remain unknown due to unclear etymology. A total of 12% of the names are Hungarian, 3% are of mixed origin, and 1% are German. The presence of German can be attributed to the proximity of the Austrian border, as well as the fact that Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*) is officially a trilingual settlement due to the presence of a German-speaking minority there. The largest share of Slovenian microtoponyms (85%) was identified in Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica-Ritkarovci*) and the smallest (44%) was identified in Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*), which also has the largest share of Hungarian names (24%). The smallest shares of Hungarian microtoponyms (5%) were identified in Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica-Ritkarovci*), Felsőszölnök (Sln. *Gornji Senik*), and Szakonyfalu (Sln. *Sakalovci*). German names appear in Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*) (7%) and Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*) (3%). The most mixed-origin names (7%) can be found in Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*) and the fewest (0%) in Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica-Ritkarovci*). The share of names whose origin could not be established is the largest in Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*) (24%) and the smallest in Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*) (7%). The analysis thus showed that the largest share of Slovenian microtoponyms still known by the locals can be found in Kétvölgy (Sln. *Verica-Ritkarovci*) and the smallest in Alsószölnök (Sln. *Dolnji Senik*). Some official sources that only contain the Hungarian names thus do not reflect the actual use of microtoponyms in the field.



**Figure 7:** A trilingual microtoponym on a road sign (Source: Matjaž Geršič)

The analysis of the motivation for naming the microlocations shows the semantic value of an individual microtoponym. This piece of information is very interesting because, in addition to spatial identification itself, it conveys other characteristics of a named geographical feature. With regard to microtoponyms in the Rába Valley, it was established that they most often express ownership (24%). As a rule, these are two-word names, in which the first word expresses the owner and the second expresses either a geomorphological feature (a slope, gorge, or channel) or equates the named feature with another common noun. Ownership is primarily reflected through oconyms, or house names (e.g., *Dànistji bréjg*), which in Hungary are common only in areas inhabited by ethnic Slovenians or through a specific professional or other type of owner, such as the Church (e.g., *Pòpofska gáuška*) or a landlord or nobleman (e.g., *Gròfosko*). This is followed by a group of microtoponyms that contain common nouns (15%). They are typical examples of onymisation, or conversion of common nouns into proper nouns (e.g., *njiva* “field” > *Njifčica*, *potok* “creek” > *Potáučec*, *ribnik* “pond” > *Rìbnjak*). The naming motivation could not be established for 14% of the names, especially due to their unknown origin. Eight percent of the names reveal specific land characteristics, such as windiness (*Séleš fòldek*), flatness (*Ravèn*), steepness (*Stìmovec*), or wetness (*Bêrek*). Seven percent of the microlocations are named after plants, especially trees, such as birch (*Bréjzgjje*), beech (*Bùkonja*), and mulberry (*Malinine*), and only 3% are named after animals—for example, a snail (*Čìga fòld*), fox (*Lasìcina lùknja*), or pig (*Svìnski potòk*). Landforms provide the basis for 6% of microtoponyms. They primarily involve terms, such as *jarek* “channel” (*Jáarak*), *grapa* “gorge” (*Gràbe*), or *breg* “bank” (*Bréjg*). Five percent of microtoponyms contain another geographical name, especially the names of creeks and routes (e.g., *Doléjnjaseníčka páut* “Alsószölnök Route”, *Sakaláufski pòtok* “Szakonyfalu Creek”, and *Senìski potòk* “Szölnök Creek”). Two interesting examples in this regard are *Slovènski pòtok* “Slovenian Creek”, named after Slovenia or Slovenians, and *Bàlaton*, derived from the name of Hungary’s largest lake via transonymisation. The naming motivation was very diverse for 4% of the names, and so they were not included in any major group. A similar share of names derives from the names of peoples, especially the Turks (e.g., *Tòrnjak*), the Jews (e.g., *Židáufce*) and the Roma or Gypsies (e.g., *Cigàjnska gràba* “Gypsy Gorge”), and the cardinal points or words referring to other spatial relationships, such as *preko* “across” (*Préjk Rába*), *dolenji* “lower” (*Doléjnji vrčánci*), and *gorenji* “upper” (*Goréjnji pòtok*). Human activity is expressed in 3% of the names; for example, brickmaking (*Ciglénca*), horse riding (*Lájčur*), charging customs (*Còln*), and 2% of the names refer to various types of land use, such as orchards (*Áugradgje*), meadows (*Stári háj*), and mountain hayfields (*Šonžéte*), and colour, for example, white (*Béjli máust*), black (*Črne mlàke*), and brown (*Ridjàjca*).

The analysis also showed that the same name can occur multiple times in various settlements, where it refers to different geographical features (i.e., it does not refer to a creek that runs through several settlements). Such names are, for example, *Gràba* (in Szakonyfalu (Sln. *Sakalovci*)), *Gràbe* (Apátistvánfalva (Sln. *Števanovci*)), *Gràbe* (Orfalu (Sln. *Andovci*)), and *Gràbica* (Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*)); *Grájka* (Orfalu), *Grájka* (Szakonyfalu (Sln. *Sakalovci*)), *Grájka* (Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*)), and *Grájkje* (Apátistvánfalva (Sln. *Števanovci*)); *Járák* (Apátistvánfalva (Sln. *Števanovci*)), *Járák* (Rábatófalva (Sln. *Slovenska ves*)), *Járek* (Kétyölgy (Sln. *Verica–Ritkarovci*)), *Járek* (Orfalu (Sln. *Andovci*)), and *Járek* (Szakonyfalu (Sln. *Sakalovci*)).

The geographical and linguistic analysis of microtoponyms in the part of the Rába Valley inhabited by ethnic Slovenians clearly showed that Slovenian is used and present in that area. It is true that some names identified in the archival sources have already sunken into oblivion, but most are still alive among the locals. The fact is that the names themselves often no longer reflect the former land use or other characteristics of the feature named because the farming dynamics have changed and much of the land has been overgrown. Nonetheless, the names have remained unchanged. This trend is also evident in some other areas in which similar research has been conducted. Perhaps researchers began to deal with this issue a generation or two too late, but nonetheless most of the names will still be able to be preserved. Given the declining use of Slovenian, it seems that geographical names will be the last remaining beacon of Slovenian identity in this cross-border region, and so it is vital to preserve these names in any way possible.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The part of Hungary's Rába Valley inhabited by ethnic Slovenians is the smallest cross-border ethnic Slovenian area. Despite a slightly positive trend in the size of the Slovenian ethnic minority evident in the last census, the use of Slovenian in this region is under threat. Therefore, efforts to cultivate the minority's language are all the more important. Slovenian geographical names are a vital part of the language corpus and, via public signs, a primary symbol of the minority's presence in public space. Because some of them, such as the names of settlements, also have an official status, they will most likely remain the last symbol of Slovenian identity in this region. In addition to the names of settlements, there are also other types of Slovenian names present in the area. This article focuses on microtoponyms. It establishes that some of those identified in the primary sources are no longer known or used by the locals, but most are. However, they are greatly endangered because of various processes leading to changes in the countryside, such as agricultural

modernisation, urbanisation, and depopulation, which diminish their role. Hopefully, their identification, linguistic analysis, and cartographic representation presented here will contribute to their preservation both in living use and as an element of intangible cultural heritage of the Rába Valley and the Slovenian language.

## REFERENCES

- AHAČIČ, K. (ed). 2023. *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika*. Ljubljana. [Retrieved 20. November 2023] <http://www.fran.si>.
- BAJZEK LUKAČ, M. 2017. Slovenska zemljepisna lastna imena na Gornjem Seniku in v Porabju. In: L István (ed). *Nexus Linguarum Köszöntő kötet a 80 éves Nyomárkay István akadémikus tiszteletére*. Budapest: ELTE BTK Szlav Filológiai Tanszék. 15–24.
- BAJZEK LUKAČ, M. 2019. *Magyar-szlovén nagyszótár*. Akadémiai kiadó. [Retrieved 20 November 2023] <http://www.szotar.net>
- BALOGH, L., Barbalics, I., Bárdosi, J., Bokor, J., Guttman, M., Gyarmathy, M., Hajdú, M., Laky, R., Ördög, F., Pomogyi, J., Szabó, L., & Vörös, O. 1982. *Vas megye földrajzi nevei*. Szombathely: Vas Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága.
- BEZLAJ, F., Snoj, M., & Furlan, M. 2005. *Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika IV: Š–Ž*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC. <https://doi.org/10.3986/9616568191>
- ČAČINOVICH, R. 1992. Madžarsko-slovenski odnosi; Politični odnosi po letu 1945. In: A Dermastia (ed.). *Enciklopedija Slovenije*. Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga. 353–354.
- EDWARDS, J. 2009. *Language and Identity: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- FABČIČ, T. 2010. *Priopved izročila talov*. Lozice: Kulturno turistično športno društvo Zdravljica.
- FUJS, M. 1992. Madžarsko-slovenski odnosi. In: Dermastia, A. (ed.). *Enciklopedija Slovenije*. Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga. 251–353.
- FISHMAN, J. A. (ed.). 1999. *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- GORTER, D. 2006. Introduction: The study of the linguistic landscape as a new approach to multilingualism. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3(1):1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790710608668382>
- HALBWACHS, M. 2001. *Kolektivni spomin*. B. Rotar (transl). Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.
- JARC, V. 2004. *Ledinska imena pod Stolom, Begunjščico in Dobroč*. Radovljica: samozaložba.
- KLADNIK, D. 1999. *Leksikon geografije podeželja*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za geografijo. <https://doi.org/10.3986/9619044339>

- KLINAR, K., Škofic, J., Šekli, M., & Piko-Rustia, M. 2012. *Metode zbiranja hišnih in ledinskih imen: projekt FLU-LED v okviru Operativnega programa Slovenija - Avstrija 2007-2013*. Jesenice: Gornjesavski muzej.
- KOZAR-MUKIČ, M. 1984. *Slovensko Porabje / Szlovénvidék. Etnološka topografija slovenskega etničnega ozemlja – 20. stoletje*. Ljubljana, Szombathely.
- LANDRY, R. & Bourhis, R. Y. 1997. Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1):23–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X970161002>
- LOGAR, T. 1996. Pregled zgodovine slovenskega jezika. In: Kenda-Jež, K. (ed.). *Dialektološke in jezikovnozgodovinske razprave*. Ljubljana: Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU. 331–336.
- NORA, P. 1989. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, 26:7–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>
- NOVAK, V. 2006. *Slovar stare knjižne prekmurščine*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC. <https://doi.org/10.3986/9616568604>
- OLAS, L. 1995. Porabski Slovenci. In: Dermastia, A. (ed.). *Enciklopedija Slovenije*. Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga. 146–149.
- PENKO SEIDL, N. 2011. Ledinska imena v prostoru in času. *Annales*, 21(2):437–448.
- RADDING, C. 2006. *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forests of Amazonia from Colony to Republic*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smwx2>
- RIBNIKAR, P. 1982. Zemljiški kataster kot vir za zgodovino. *Zgodovinski časopis*, 26(4):321–337.
- SLOVAR SLOVENSKEGA KNJIŽNEGA JEZIKA. 2014. *Ljubljana: Založba ZRC*. [Retrieved 20. November 2023] <http://www.fran.si>
- SNOJ, M. 1997. *Slovenski etimološki slovar*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC.
- SNOJ, M. 2009. *Etimološki slovar slovenskih zemljepisnih imen*. Ljubljana: Založba Modrijan in Založba ZRC.
- TOPORIŠIČ, J. 1998. Slovenski jezik. In: A Dermastia (ed). *Enciklopedija Slovenije*. Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga. 34–38.
- TUAN, Y. F. 1977. *Space and Place the Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- ZELKO, I. 1996. *Zgodovina Prekmurja: Izbrane razprave in članki*. Murska Sobota.

