Surnames of Foreign Origin in a Language Contact Situation.
The Reasons and Ways of Their Changes and Their Influence on the Surname Stock in Hungary[1]

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Abstract

In historical Hungary the use of inheritable family names developed in a natural way among the Hungarian, German, Slovakian and Croatian population, while decrees prescribed the use of permanent family names for the still surnameless Gipsy, Jewish and Greek Orthodox (mainly Serbian) minorities later. Many names of foreign origin were changed spontaneously in language contact situations, according to the name stock of the dominant community throughout the centuries, while in the 19th and 20th centuries mainly by the means of official surname changes. As names could have become ethnic symbols, this process was influenced also by social, ideological and political factors.

This paper is a study of the use and the value of foreign surnames of minorities in a dominant linguistic and cultural context, as well as the process of the assimilation of these names and their bearers. It analyzes the different reasons for these surname changes, as well as the ways of spontaneous and conscious changes. It gives special attention to the question of how the linguistic characteristics of original foreign surnames and the existing Hungarian surname stock could influence the new surnames coined by the official surname changes in Hungarian history. The paper finally concludes that the foreign surnames and their changes also modified the structure of the surname system in Hungary, which needs further studies concerning this aspect as well.

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1. Introduction

For centuries, historic Hungary provided an environment which allowed for contact between ethnic groups, cultures, languages and name systems. Among the various influences that the contiguous name systems had on each other, two will be discussed more fully in this paper. The first is the effect of the dominant language and name system on the surname stock of minorities: on its rise, on the change of its use-value and, most significantly, its influence in modifying or completely replacing certain names. The second is the direct or indirect effect of foreign surnames on the dominant surname stock: on the rise of new names and name-types, on the choice of names and, as a result of these changes, on the composition and character of the entire surname stock of the country.

2. The influence of the dominant language and name system

The adjustment to the linguistic and cultural environment dominant in number or prestige can be regarded as a natural process, although in the latter centuries it may have been reinforced by peremptory order, or else, bureaucratic or ideological features.

The effect of this influence can also be observed in the rise of certain surname systems. In addition to the naturally developed Hungarian, German, Croatian and Slovakian surname systems that existed in historic Hungary, certain minorities adopted the practice of using mandatory surnames in response to external pressures. In the case of the Serbs, a state decree by Emperor

Francis I in 1817 made patronymics hereditary, whereas in previous generations, these names had changed from one generation to the next. In other cases, certain minorities used other languages as the source of their names: the Gypsies took their surnames from the Hungarian language, while the Jews typically adopted German surnames, also as a result of a decree of Emperor Joseph II in 1787.

The existing language contact situations also had an effect on already existing surnames. On the one hand, they resulted in the phenomenon of spontaneous name assimilation and, on the other hand, they resulted in conscious name changes. The former was a rather collective change, while the latter was individually initiated, even if typically influenced by external factors. The consequences of these changes were manifested not only in the spoken and written environment, but also in the official and unofficial use of surnames. A parallel can be drawn between the factors which caused these surname changes with those that influenced the life of the place-name stock or the use of Christian names in the multilingual country of that time of name Hungarianizations.

Although the discussion herein on the phenomenon of surname changes is limited to the Hungarian experience, it should be noted that similar patterns were occurring in other countries around the same time (for their systematic linguistic-onomastic analyses, see Alatis 1955, Maass 1958, Klymasz 1963, Schmuck and Dräger 2008, etc.).

3. The background of name assimilation

Elements that are different from the existing language and name system of a community can adjust in a natural way to its common forms, just as in the case of words adopted from other languages. Changes in surnames of foreign origin regularly include the movement towards increasing the efficiency of the spoken and written language by lessening the difficulties of the everyday use of certain names. Other factors are subjectively motivated – such as trying to conform to a language which is perceived as being prestigious, or an aversion to a language that is strange and unusual due to a feeling that it is unpleasant and unattractive. These are the factors that lie behind natural name assimilation.

In different language environments, surnames can take on new connotations because of similarities with vocabulary from the other language in question, e.g., in the Hungarian-speaking community, the German surnames *Fink, Finger* evoke the Hungarian word *fing* (= 'fart'), obviously making the bearers of the name feel uncomfortable. But surnames can also lose their meaning, e.g., the German name *Narr* loses its meaning of 'mad' in a non-German speaking community.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, during the modern age, surnames became ethnic symbols as well. Also at this time, nationalism became the dominant ideology of the 19th century, aimed at unifying the 'nation' politically, culturally, emotionally, and symbolically. An important factor of the nationalization process was the strengthening of the linguistic-ethnic character of the community. This manifested itself also in the growing importance of the surnames as ethnic symbols, determined by their linguistic character and typical usage in the community in question. This mechanism of assimilation, usually regarded as a natural process affecting the use of language and names, can turn into a phenomenon that is supported, or even partly expected, by the dominant community. However, from the perspective of a minority group, it can be seen as a means, or even a condition, of personal and social advancement, as well as an attempt to get rid of evidence of a foreign origin. These factors, in addition to other, personal motives, had an important, sometimes even decisive, role in the conscious change of surnames. It was not rare for these kinds of surname changes to occur in historic Hungary, where the otherwise dominant Hungarians comprised only half of the population; in addition, one has to remember that Hungary also existed within the boundaries of the even more multiethnic Habsburg Empire until 1918.

However, conscious name changes also took place between the two World Wars in Hungary, even though after the peace treaty in 1920 it had lost most of its minority groups, and with them many of its potential name changers. The last big explosion of "Magyarization" (i.e., Hungarianization) of surnames occurred in the years after World War II, with respect to name changes of the surviving Jews and also among the Germans who were regarded at that time as bearing a collective guilt. Later, primarily as a result of the political changes by the end of the 20th century in Hungary, some of the people who had inherited Hungarianized names from preceding generations, reverted back to their old surnames; but this has not become a common practice. (For a background on name assimilation from a socio-historical perspective, see Karády and Kozma 2002, Karády 2007, Kozma 2007; from an onomastic-linguistic approach, see Farkas 2007b, Maitz and Farkas 2008, Maitz 2008.)

In the case of minority groups that have lived for a long time in a given region, the process of assimilation could affect more than one generation. It starts with the borrowing of elements from the material culture, then with the borrowing of elements from the psychological-intellectual culture, accompanied by the development of bilingualism, possibly leading to a language shift. Regarding personal names, it is usually the naming fashion of given names that changes first, as a result of dominant culture influences. This is often followed by a change from the typical Indo-European "given name + surname" order to that which follows the particular use of personal name elements in Hungary. The evidence of this process, for example, can be found on the gravestones of a family in a Hungarian village with a German population: *Petrus Leitold →Leitold Franz → Leitold Ambrus* (Szilágyi 2005: 92–94). Although the spontaneous changes to surnames may have taken place quite early, the official act of changing the surname can be the final step in the process of name assimilation. (Often, this may be preceded by a change in the unofficial use of the surname.) However, despite the great number of official surname changes in Hungary, surnames of foreign origin were nonetheless preserved in great numbers. Their proportion in the almost exclusively Hungarian-speaking country of the present day can be estimated at 30–40%.

Several additional questions in the case of the name changes of Jews also occur in this regard (see this volume: Farkas 2008d). In general, for the process described above, many similarities can be found in the integration of immigrants in other countries, although the rate at which this occurred and the factors which motivated them can be quite different, depending on particular circumstances.

4. Spontaneous name changes

Surnames of foreign origin, if their linguistic character, phonological system or endings do not sound unfamiliar, can integrate well into the name stock of the dominant language. However, in other cases, they may go through changes of form and content of varying types and degree, or be completely replaced. Through these changes, several versions of the same name may become apparent, mainly in the written form.

Although some of these changes take place only in the spoken language, most of them affect the written form as well, sometimes exclusively. These changes are: transcription, transliteration, and simplification of the written form. That is why, when adapting, for example, German surnames: a) letters unknown in Hungarian were replaced: *Groß > Grósz, Jäger > Jager* or *Jáger, Weinhardt > Veinhardt;* b) specific combinations of letters were simplified: *Hecker > Hekker, Hirsch > Hirs, Fröhlich > Frölich, Piltmann > Piltman;* c) changes occurred to reflect the common pronunciation in Hungarian: *Lohn > Lóhn, Vogel > Fógel;* or d) changes followed the pattern of the phonology of the other language: *Jakl > Jakli, Vindl > Vindel*. A characteristic change, for example, was the dissolution of initial consonant clusters, whose presence is not common in the Hungarian language; see the following examples from Slavic languages: *Hrabár*

> *Rabár, Tchor > Tihor.* In addition to the small phonological and/or orthographical changes, modifications of a greater degree also took place – affecting the phonetic character, the form, sometimes even the name-structure. In addition, semantic changes also took place: the Hungarianization of the surname could happen through a change of folk-etymological character, and also via the partial or complete translation of the name. (For spontaneous name changes in general, see Hajdú 2003: 752–761; for spontaneous changes of foreign surnames, see Fülöp 1985, Szilágyi 2005, Mizser 2007; etc.)

Integration of surnames of foreign origin into the dominant name structure did not necessarily mean finding the equivalent of the surname in form or meaning in the other language. The most important consideration was that the new name should be a surname which fit well into the other name system. Although the old surname often serves as the starting point for finding a new one, the finding of the new surname could also be independent of the old. This explains why many of the surnames of foreign origin were simply replaced by Hungarian ones of different motivating factors (e.g., denoting an ethnic group, occupation or a certain characteristic) spontaneously. This was a natural process, which also could happen to Hungarian surnames according to the changing circumstances of everyday life. Similar types of changes were characteristic of conscious name changes as well.

In a bilingual environment, or in multi-lingual environments, the use of surnames may alternate, and this can happen with various types of surname-pairs. These can manifest themselves as follows: a) alternative written forms (e.g., in today's minority language use: Hungarian *Kincses József* > Slovakian *Jozef Kinčeš*; Vörös 2007); b) alternative morphologies (e.g., as a historic data: Hungarian *Vásárhelyi* ~ Slovakian *Vásárhelyszky,* apparently according to the language of the census; Mizser 2007); and c) alternative meanings. (This was the practice of the one-time humanists, was typical among Jews, and also occurred later on in bilingual communities, e.g., *Bili > Fehér* 'white' in Slovakian and Hungarian, where the language loss led to an official change in a change-of-name petition from 1964, No. 7667, Archive of Ministry of Justice.)

5. Conscious name change: Hungarianization of the surname

During the last two centuries in Hungary, official name changes typically meant the Hungarianization of surnames of foreign origin, i.e., replacing them with a Hungarian sounding name, as made possible by a decree of Emperor Francis I in 1814. In the golden age of surname changes, which occurred between the middle of the 19th and the middle of the 20th centuries, approximately 300,000 surname changes took place in Hungary, most of which meant the Hungarianization of surnames. The act of changing surnames of foreign origin had an indirect effect on the whole of the Hungarian surname stock, especially because surname changes in several cases resulted in really new surnames being introduced into the existing Hungarian surname stock. (For a bibliography of literature on surname changes in Hungary, see http://nevvaltoztatas.elte.hu. For information on current research, refer to Farkas 2008b. For the history on surname changes in Hungary, see Karády and Kozma 2002.)

Basically three factors had a prominent role in the creation of the new surname stock and in the formation of its characteristics: a) the specific name-giving situation which was essentially different from that of the historic surname stock; b) the Hungarian surname stock that serves as a pattern; c) the original surnames of foreign origin, which often influenced the choice of the new name.

The creation of new surnames resulting from name changes was essentially different from the creation of the historic Hungarian surname stock. There are differences in the field of the external and internal historical linguistic factors that influenced name-giving, in the field of the motivating factors, methods, the original language stock, and the linguistic means of name-giving. The newly

created Hungarian surnames followed more or less the pattern found in the existing name system, but they were also determined by the names found in contemporary literature, the patterns found among formerly Hungarianized names and, most importantly of all, the creativity and preferences of the people who created these names for the purpose of changing their names (for these differences and their consequences, see Farkas 2008a).

The new names naturally conformed in character to the dominant language and name system, which also is reflected in the widespread use of the term *névmagyarosítás* ('Name Magyarization', 'Name Hungarianization') used to describe this phenomenon. (A similar approach can be found in other countries as well, e.g., in corresponding articles in *Names*, Journal of the American Name Society, the terms *Anglicization*, *Americanization*, and even *Canadianization* can be found, but the presence of the term *névmagyarosítás* in Hungary seems to be especially dominant. In general, see Farkas 2008c; for the terms cited here, see Maass 1958: 148–149, Alatis 1955, Klymasz 1963.) The official laws regarding name changes further reinforced this tendency by prescribing that: "foreign sounding names, created in an un-Hungarian way", in addition to other restrictions, could not be chosen, with the exception of special cases that deserved special consideration. (Similar views regarding name changes could be expressed in the laws of other countries as well. The application of such principles was, and still is, the responsibility of ministerial officials, depending on their linguistic competence. For these principles, see Farkas 2002.)

Although the surnames that were created by name Hungarianization are Hungarian surnames, we can regard them not only compared to the historic surname stock (judging them sometimes to be 'wrong names'), but also as just new elements of the name stock, similarly to the new word formations of the language reform movement of the past (which, as a cultural movement, also aimed to strengthen the Hungarian word stock by creating a great number of new words instead of using foreign ones, most assiduously at the beginning of the 19th century).

6. Name Hungarianization on the basis of surnames of foreign origin

6.1. Those who Hungarianized their surnames usually chose their new names based on their previous foreign name: on the form of the previous name (especially the initial letters), or its meaning (for the motivating factors, see Farkas 2003: 151–157). However, there are also cases where a new name is added to an old one, thus creating a double surname (e.g., *Fischer > Keresztes-Fischer; Deutsch > Hatvany Deutsch),* even though this was quite a rare phenomenon, also due to the official restrictions.

6.2. The most typical way of changing names was to choose a new name that started with the same letter as the old. A possible explanation for this was for reasons of practicality, as in this way, the initials, which often appeared in older times on many personal belongings, could be preserved. But there may have been a psychological motivation as well: by preserving something from the old name, something of the old self could be preserved as well. In addition, using the initials offered a starting point to find a new name from the unlimited number of possible choices. This practice became so typical that even in the last decades, there could be name changers who believed that this is the only pragmatic way to change a name.

It should also be discussed how initial letters that do not exist in Hungarian, or differ from the Hungarian pronunciation, were perpetuated in new surnames. For example: the *W* of German surnames is typically replaced by *V* in Hungarian *(Wurm > Vajda, Vas, Vidor)*; *Quintz* becomes *Koltai* or *Kulcsár;* the initial letter of the name *Singer*, which is quite frequent among Jews, continues in names starting with *S* (*Simonyi, Somló, Sugár*), but more frequently in names starting with *Sz (Szabados, Szántó, Székely, Szemere, Szigeti*). The practice of retaining initial letters can

also be illustrated by other examples, such as the fact that only a few new Hungarian surnames start with *Cs,* as it was not a common initial letter in the foreign surname stock.

In addition to the initial letter, other parts of the original surname could also be used: more sounds and letters could be retained or, with minor modifications, a new name could be created out of the old one, as can be seen in the following examples: *Bényász > Bányász* 'miner', *Pecs > Pécsi* 'from the city Pécs', *Bamberger* (pronounced: *Wamberger*) *> Vámbéri* '*vám* toll + *bér* wage/rent + *-i* derivational suffix'.

6.3. In modifying the new name to fit into the dominant name system, derivatives, endings, or the second parts of compound names played an important role, either by cutting off the unfamiliar-sounding endings, or by creating an ending that was more suitable for Hungarian names (see Juhász 2007a, 2007b; Farkas 2008a; cf. also Ladó 1981). Even though these factors were important in the creation of new surnames in general, the focus of this discussion is on the consequences that came directly from the possible correspondence of the foreign and Hungarian name elements.

One way in which these name changes occurred was simply by attaching endings to the foreign surname, and this way creating a more Hungarian sounding name form, e.g., *Novák + -i* (suffix expressing origin from a place or descent) *> Nováki; Mayer + -fi* (patronymic) *> Mayerfi.* In other cases, the endings of the names were exchanged, e.g., *Ettlinger > Etlényi; Hoffmann > Hoffmányi* (by creating an *-ányi/-ényi* ending which also could be seen as a typical ending in Hungarian). By cutting off part of the ending of the old name, it was also possible to create names that sounded Hungarian, e.g., *Adamics > Ádám; Bartalovics > Barta; Egresits > Egresi; Murátin > Muráti.*

Name endings also played an important part in the forming of new surnames created by translation. Sometimes they retained the original structure: *Petrovics > Pető/fi, Hirschler > Szarvas/y;* whereas, at other times, the endings became prudently absent: *Kralovics > Király* (**Király/fi* would have been a ridiculous and nonsensical surname with its meaning: 'son of the king, [crown] prince'). But the most remarkable situations are those where the elements created by loan translation receive a typically Hungarian ending (as a suffix or compound) to be fitted into the Hungarian surname system: *Nasch [csemeg(e)] > Csemegi; Wünder [csuda] > Csudányi, Kosztka [csont] > Csontváry, Schönnagl [szép + szeg] > Szépszegi.*

6.4. The meaning of the original surname could also influence the creation of the new one. It was not as common as keeping the initial letters, but it was still fairly typical. It can be neither confirmed nor denied that the rich stock of the often compounded German surnames starting with *Rosen-* (besides reflecting a common sentimental-romantic name taste) had an indirect effect on surname Hungarianizations in the 19th century. At that time many names of similar character appeared without any German precedent: *Rózsa, Rózsás, Rózsai, Rózsafi, Rózsaági, Rózsavölgyi, Rózsahegyi, Rózsamezei* (Farkas 2008a; cf. Maass 1958: 144). A very typical phenomenon was the more or less accurate translation of the original name (very often by using a suitable ending also): *Cimpian > Mezei; Domszky > Hazai; Krieger* or *Voicsik > Csatár* or *Csatári; Wilhelm > Vilmos.* In other cases, we can find free translations, that is, semantic connections between the old name and the new: *Müller > Molnár* 'miller'; *Molnárfi* 'miller + *fi*'; *Malmay* 'his mill + *-i*'; *Malmosi* 'miller + *-i*'. Other examples are *Molnár < Müller; Müllner, Mühlstein, Eichmüller, Schikmüller;* or also *Malmos < Mühlflus* or *Mühlstein;* etc. The new name may even have an opposite meaning to the original: *Engel* 'angel' *> Ördög* 'devil', or *Ördög > Angyal* (both cases were recorded).

When the original name was polysyllabic, the new name could either be connected with the first part, the last part or to the meaning of the whole surname. On the one hand: *Földes* 'earthy'

< Feldheim or *Feldmann,* and *< Grünfeld* or *Reichenfeld*. On the other hand: *Rosenfeld > Rózsai* 'of the rose'; *Weinfeld > Boros* 'vinous'; *Gartenfeld > Kertész* 'gardener'; *Blumenfeld* or *Feldmann > Mezei* 'of the field'; *Grünfeld > Földes* 'earthy'; etc.

6.5. The practice of loan translation increased the number of surnames, semantic types, and also morphological types (e.g., a change of name from *Thürmenstein* to *Toronykői,* where the suitable stem variant of the suffix should be *-kövi*), that are remarkably new compared to the historic name system, according to the freedom of name creation. (For their analysis, see Farkas 2008a.) The number of such new names grew to such an extent that even one of the most zealous supporters of name Hungarianization wrote the following: 'He had better stay *Buchberger* than change to *Könyvhegyi* [= of the book mountain] since, even if we deny it, when we hear *Könyvhegyi*, we immediately think of *Buchberger*' (Telkes 1906: 14). Therefore, this case highlights the fact that the new name and its bearer would always be associated with the unwanted mark of their foreign origin.

This example also illustrates the case of mistranslation: the first element of the original German name is *Buche* 'oak' and not *Buch* 'book' – as it was interpreted in the process of the name change. More or less related to this example are the German names starting with *Fried* which, according to their etymology, is a form of the Christian name *Friedrich.* However, after the name change, these names lived on in the names of *Békés, Békési* or *Békefi* etc., created on the base of the translation *Fried > béke* 'peace'. (However, although *Békés* and *Békési* are also historic Hungarian surnames, *Békefi* is a typical artificial creation.)

6.6. The detailed typology of the choice or creation of names based on the old surname cannot be provided here, but its main types and tendencies can be identified. The importance of the above-mentioned possibilities can be seen also among the typical old/new name pairs. For instance, *Klein* typically becomes *Kis* (the meaning and the initial letter are the same), *Kovács, Kertész, Kemény;* while *Weisz* becomes *Fehér* or *Fejér* (orthographical variations of *fehér* 'white'), or *Vajda, Vámos, Varga;* etc.

7. The influence of Hungarianization on the Hungarian surname stock

Because of their different linguistic character and changed use value, surnames in a foreign language environment are especially susceptible to the possibility of change, i.e., an adjustment in favour of the dominant language and name system. During the last two centuries in Hungary, these changes happened first through conscious name change, in particular, through name Hungarianization. As a result, the number of surnames of foreign origin or foreign character dropped significantly. Although their numbers decreased overall, certain groups, for example the most typical Jewish surnames experienced an even more significant decrease (cf. Farkas 2008d).

Although in the Hungarian surname stock, new surnames and surname types appeared that conformed to the characteristics of the Hungarian language, they were more or less new in relation to the Hungarian name system, partly due to the influence of the foreign surname stock. (Here only these cases were mentioned in brief, although the topic is much wider.) If foreign names are compared with the adopted new Hungarian surname stock, further conclusions can be drawn. In general, name changes in terms of old and new surnames did not vary in number (as in the case of the Jewish changes, cf. Farkas 2008d). In addition, regarding their length, new names are statistically shorter than the old ones, taking into consideration the number of the letters as well as the syllables. This can be explained by the differences in length of surnames in the most important contiguous languages (German, Slavic) and Hungarian. (Most Hungarian surnames consist of 2–3 syllables.)

8. Conclusions regarding the surname stock of Hungary

Finally, three examples from the USA concerning Hungarian surnames are mentioned below (for the most frequent surnames in Hungary, see Erdész 2007).

1. *Horváth* is one of the most common (more precisely, the fifth most frequent) Hungarian surname existing today. It is a historic surname based on the ethnonym of Croatians in the Hungarian language *(horvát)*, but this is not what is most significant about it. Its frequency among Hungarians could also have contributed to the fact that it became a common noun (i.e., *Horwat*) in American slang to denote Hungarian immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century (Allen 1983: 316).

2. A Hungarian figure in "My Fair Lady" (the musical based upon G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*) is called *Karpathy* (more precisely, it should be written as *Kárpáthy*; in Shaw's play that figure had a different, not Hungarian name). This surname is the most successful proof of the Hungarianization of surnames in Hungary. It is completely missing from the historic surname stock, but for different reasons (including its appearance as a surname of a Hungarian literary hero), it became very popular among people changing names and fitted into the Hungarian surname stock quite well. It is estimated to be the 170th most frequent surname in Hungary nowadays, and the most frequent of its type, i.e., of artificial surnames as a result of name Hungarianization (as a case study, refer to Farkas 2007a).

3. In the American movie "Three to Tango" the following can be heard: "Novák, it's a Hungarian name, isn't it?", which is followed by the affirmative response: "Yes". This name is clearly of Slavic origin, but is also the only representative of the hundred most common surnames in Hungary which comes from a foreign language. It is estimated to be the 81st most frequently occurring surname in the country, therefore quite typical not only for the Slav-speaking countries in Central Europe, but also for Hungary.

The above-mentioned examples help to illustrate how the Hungarian surname stock consists of: 1. historic surnames of Hungarian origin; 2. new surnames created by name Hungarianization; and also 3. surnames of foreign origin. The exploration of their relationships, similarities and differences is a field of study deserving further research as well.

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