



Dear colleagues,

I am very sorry that I cannot be with you at this conference. Therefore, please allow me to share with you a few lines and thoughts this way.

This conference, which takes place in my home town, is extremely interesting not only because of its focus but namely with regards to its agenda reflecting the actual status of the development of onomastics. Let me please use this format to outline my three comments to join your discussions during which you will for sure address the contemporary development status of our discipline. I would like to share the knowledge gathered during my research activities in the area of onomastics that had started many years ago, in 1958 under the umbrella of the Institute for the Czech Language of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

1.

At that time, the “dimension of onomastics as a discipline” was fascinating, this also internationally. Extensive works on various kinds of proper names were published with the goal to collect material, provide its etymological explanation and interpretation namely from the perspective of historically oriented interdisciplinarity. There were also theoretical works created, yet, those ones rarely exceeded philological viewpoints. The majority of classification principles remained just appellative.

A rapid development of onomastics since the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century produced a new subdiscipline of onomastics – the general theory of onomastics. Thus, with the integration of the study of the proper names within the linguistic studies as its subdiscipline, the phase of etymological onomastics had been overcome. This new situation surfaced in three factors: a) in the enhancement of the relationship between the denotate and its proprial naming as a specific semiotic feature (*sui generis* feature) by onymia as a “second language layer”, b) in the study of general properties of proprial materia and its system, c) in the inclusion of the role of propria in communication and society. All of those efforts gave birth to the “functional onomastics”, to the discipline that operates with the concepts such as proprial system, proprial sphere of language, proprial object, etc. Every proprium is characterized by two types of features: proprially-generic features (i.e. to “constitute a proprium”) and proprially-determining features (i.e. to define a specific proprium with its respective function in communication).

The most important attribute of modern onomastics is its thinking perspective that relies on systematic and functionally-generic proprial categories that are always put into the communication context.

2.

While researching the generic and theoretical properties of the proprial language sphere – it is while looking into the substance of propria and their use – there always arises a need to create a new category or redefine an already existing one. A category of

transonymization can be mentioned as a good example here. Oikonym *Ostrava* contains the Slavic etymon *ostr-* (see for instance the Czech, Slovak and Polish *ostrý* – in English “sharp, quick, smart”). This, however, does not represent the correct naming intention. The true intention behind is the “location at the river named *Ostrava*”, and it is the hydronym itself which means “a quickly flowing river”. Thus, we do not speak about any derivation using the *-ava* suffix in this case. We see the hydronym transonymized into an oikonym instead. Because of the homonymic use of a hydronym and an oikonym, the need to differentiate appeared. As a consequence of the identification needs, the name of *Ostrava* river changed into a diminutive *Ostravice*. Explanation based on transonymization approach reflects the functional attribute of a proprial system.

### 3.

Every discipline of research is also characterized by its terminology. Because of various reasons, onomastic terminology diverts into three different directions, which go against each other quite often. It is stability, rapid creation of new terms, and the historical national tradition or tradition of onomastic schools. All of us know that terminology often struggles with ambiguities both with regards to the form and content. Standardization of onomastic terminology is paid a big attention both on the national and international levels. Consistent and unified codification has not yet been achieved though. It is out of question, however, that terminology is closely linked with the development of every discipline. It simply gives a clear picture about the status of the discipline. The critical importance of terminology should be reflected in the core terminological structure: one part to be represented by a stable, internationally adopted terminology, and the other part should consist of “variable” terminology, it is terminology that could be subject to changes in the light of the progress of the research activities. However, this is still rather a wish than a reality. Let’s demonstrate this on an example of numerous terms used for one of the core categories of onomastics: “pool, collection, richness of propria” – *onymia*, *onymica*, *onymicon*, *onomasticon*, and even *onomastics*. Ideally, we at least consistently use *onymia* to stand for “a collection of a pool of onyms”, *onomasticon* to be used for “the lexicon of propria”, and *onomastics* to stand for “the science about propria”. In case the research enforces a new term, let’s always try to define it from the perspectives of the generic theory of onomastics as precisely as possible. And never forget to consider if / how much a new term is really needed.

To conclude, please allow me to remember one particular situation that is behind the fact that this conference takes place in Ostrava.

In August 1968, shortly before the occupation of the former Czechoslovakia, the international Congress of Slavists was held in Prague. During one friendly sessions with the Bohemists from the former Pedagogical University of Ostrava, the predecessor of today’s University of Ostrava, the idea of opening onomastic studies in Ostrava was brought up. The suggestion was accepted, and the first onomastic seminar was opened in September 1968. And in 1969, a regular study program was put in place.

Onomastic studies in Ostrava celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year! Congratulations!

May the conference be successful, and I wish successful negotiations, fruitful discussions and pleasant experience to all of you!

Rudolf Šrámek