The most frequent Hungarian surnames. A study of some aspects of contrastive surname typology[1]

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Abstract: In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in geolinguistic and typological-statistical research with an international focus in the field of surname studies. This paper will look at some of the major questions and possibilities in the case of the Hungarian surname stock. I shall carry out a typological-statistical analysis concentrating on the 100 most common surnames, focusing on certain methodological aspects, which, in my view, have received less than due attention in earlier studies. The research also aims to point out some characteristics of the surname stock in question in comparison with other European surname systems.
Keywords: surname, typology, frequency, methodology, geolinguistic, Hungarian.

Research into surname systems

The surname stock of a language, country or community allows researchers to gain insight into many different fields of study, according to the interests and methods of various disciplines and interdisciplinary approaches. Accordingly, in the majority of European countries significant efforts have been, or are being made to describe the structure, composition and geographical distribution of their surname stock. The findings, unsurprisingly, show noteworthy differences, which are often linked to national borders and the historic-geographic presence of a language and its speaking community.

Naturally, some characteristics of a certain surname stock can become more striking if analysed in comparison with other surname stocks, while a comprehensive study of the entire European surname stock could provide a better understanding of the linguistic, geographical, cultural, social, and historic characteristics of the European population. In order to do this, certain conditions must be met. Similar studies have to be carried out in several countries, based on the most representative name corpuses available and using a similar methodology, so that the findings are comparable. This presupposes large-scale international cooperation and coordination efforts, while the

expertise and participation of researchers of the given countries would of course also be necessary.

Studying the European surname stock would be a truly European research topic and is a great potential project, duly supported by today's information technology. There have been several initiatives and studies of this kind in the literature (e.g. Caffarelli 2005, Scapoli et al. 2007, Cheshire et al. 2011, Bloothooft et al. 2014, Shokhenmayer 2014, and their listed references). However, there is need for typological-statistical analyses (a typological and frequency study of the most frequent surnames), geolinguistic studies (the compilation of a European surname atlas) and even lexicographic efforts (the compilation of a European surname dictionary). These would be complementary and mutually presuppose each other, as well as serving as auxiliary tools for further research.

As a contribution to these efforts, I shall look at some of the major questions and possibilities in the case of the Hungarian surname stock. Based on examples from abroad, a typological-statistical analysis concentrating on the 100 most common surnames shall be carried out. I shall focus on certain methodological aspects, which, in my view, have received less than due attention in earlier studies. The paper also intends to point out some characteristics of the surname stock in question in comparison with European surname systems. The study aims to provide insight into the Hungarian surname stock and into possible ways of processing it in the future that could be used in Hungarian or international comparative studies, while also reaching certain possible conclusions concerning international research projects with a similar focus.

The general characteristics of the Hungarian surname stock

In order to know what insights can be gained from it, regarding which periods and processes, the historical background of the surname stock to be processed must be known (cf. Kálmán 1978, Farkas 2009a).

The historical Hungarian surname system was formed from the 14th century onwards in the territory known as historic Hungary. (This implies a delay of several centuries compared to Western European surname systems, while also meaning that the process happened earlier than in Northern and Eastern European languages.)

Surnames of non-Hungarian origin were partly born in this territory, but also introduced later by immigrant populations settling in Hungary, especially following the the end of the Ottoman conquest (at the end of the 17th century). Among certain ethnic groups (the Germans, Croats and Slovaks) the use of surnames became widespread quite early on, while among others it happened later and partly as a result of external influences. The official registration of surnames, which brought their spontaneous evolution to an end, was introduced in the late 18th – early 19th century.

As a natural consequence of language contacts, linguistic and onomastic assimilation took place – primarily, though not exclusively, in the direction of the dominant language, i.e. Hungarian. From the mid–19th to the mid–20th century the conscious Magyarisation of surnames was widespread, as a result a large number of surnames of non-Hungarian origin were given up in exchange for Hungarian ones.

Following World War I Hungary lost most of its territory and population – mainly its ethnic minorities, but also a large part of its Hungarian population. Thus there were significantly fewer surnames of non-Hungarian origin in the territory of post-WWI Hungary. On the other hand, the stock of Hungarian surnames was dispersed in several neighbouring countries, and these were also subject to the name assimilation influences of the respective state languages.

In present day Hungary, national minorities constitute a relatively low percentage of the population, yet the surname stock preserves many surnames of foreign origin, as a result of the assimilation processes of previous centuries. The members of the largest ethnic minority in Hungary, the Gypsies, tend to bear surnames of Hungarian linguistic origin. Modern-day migration mostly affects the Hungarian name stock in terms of diversity rather than name frequency.

Name corpuses

For representative studies to be completed the most represenatative name corpuses accessible are required. The sporadic data in international literature concerning the most common Hungarian surnames, for instance, are – according to current knowledge – rather inaccurate or not fully representative (e.g. Caffarelli 2005: 241, 249–250; his data are based on M. Hajdú's earlier research: Hajdú 2003). When processing data one must be aware of what kind of corpus was used and thus, to what extent, and in what sense, it can be considered as representative.

It would be worthwhile to process the complete name stock of a language community or area. In the case of Hungarian researchers face a number of practical difficulties: no sufficiently representative data on the name stocks of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary are available. The most typical solution is to constrain the scope of study to the name stock of present-day Hungary, which is a feasible task. A study concerning the complete Hungarian surname stock would be fairly representative, yet only fully relevant within the geolinguistic area of the state.

The name corpus of the official population registry of present-day Hungary (more than 10 million items of data) became accessible for research in 2007. Mihály Hajdú compiled a dictionary of the most common elements of this surname corpus (1230 names borne by more than 1000 individuals each, merging the name variants; Hajdú 2010). This compilation will serve as the basis of the remaining part of the paper. Later Hajdú (2012) also published all the surnames of the corpus, with data regarding their frequencies, as a part of his large collection of surnames. In 2009 a similar name corpus became accessible with the addition of information of the name bearers' place of residence, which served as the base for geonomastic surveys of contemporary Hungarian surnames (DHS., Vörös 2010 etc., also an atlas of the top 106 surnames, merging variants: Vörös 2014).

These are comprehensive and representative databases, even allowing for sporadic mistakes occurring in recording. They are significantly more reliable than the national telephone subscribers' registry or the national elections registries used – out

of necessity – for the same purposes in certain other countries. Certain differences can be observed between the order of the most common surnames as given in the 2007 and the 2009 name corpus. It is the earlier, 2007 corpus that seems to yield itself better to a typological-statistical analysis, mainly because its data are now accessible to all researchers, and their dictionary format processing can be considered a suitable basis for further analysis, albeit being contestable at certain points.

As the study of synchronic surname corpuses is often used as a reliable source for drawing backward conclusions concerning earlier centuries, it is always a welcome opportunity to be able to work with representative historic sources as well. In the current case, the national censuses of the early 18th century (in 1715 and 1720, 170 thousand persons) can serve this purpose. The data represent most of the territory of historic Hungary, and the surname stock dates from the period preceding most of the great population movements following the end of the Ottoman rule and comes before the time of conscious name Magyarisations. These censuses serve as the basis of Hungarian historical surname geography studies (Fodor and Láncz 2011; Fodor 2013, 2015; DHHS.; Vörös 2013), which yield data for territories belonging to several different countries today, and their historic populations.

Finally, it is to be noted that a digital database of the history of official surname changes in Hungary from 1815 to 1932 is now accessible as well (DOSCH., 66 thousand cases). The use of this also allows the study of the characteristics of the artificial surname system of the Hungarian language, constituting a smaller but organic subset of the Hungarian surname stock.

The methodological questions of processing the data

The first step of a typological-statistical analysis of a name corpus at one's disposal is the compilation of a frequency list. The inevitable methodological question in this respect is the lemmatisation of different name variants, and the extent of lemmatisation. The smallest degree is to merge orthographic variants, this can also be extended to the pronunciation variants beyond these. This question also arises concerning the lists of the most frequent surnames. Six lexical types can be found among the 100 most frequent surname variants, which have been entered into the list in two orthographic versions (*Kiss~Kis* 'little', *Balogh~Balog* 'left-handed etc.', *Papp~Pap* 'priest', *Szűcs~Szücs* 'skinner', *Veres~Vörös* 'red', *Hegedűs~Hegedüs* 'fiddler'). In some respects it would be possible to merge certain morphological, or even certain semantic types as well, although this is fairly rare in the literature (cf. Tesnière's method, quoted by Kremer 1996: 1263–1266).

Further analysis will rely on the data of Hajdú's surname dictionary (2010) lemmatised to a medium degree. However, as a methodological experiment, I have also carried out a similar analysis of the 100 most frequent individual surname variants. In the current case, no significant differences can be found between the results of the two methods:
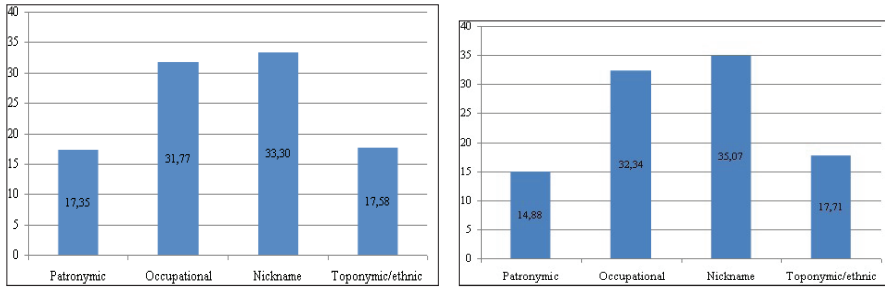
Figure 1. Percentage of surname types: 1a: lemmatized (left), 1b: non-lemmatized (right)

Another basic methodological question is whether the proportions of names or the proportions of name bearers should be used as the base of calculations. Each will provide different results, as in the case of the 100 most common Hungarian surnames, analysed below, following the same methodology:
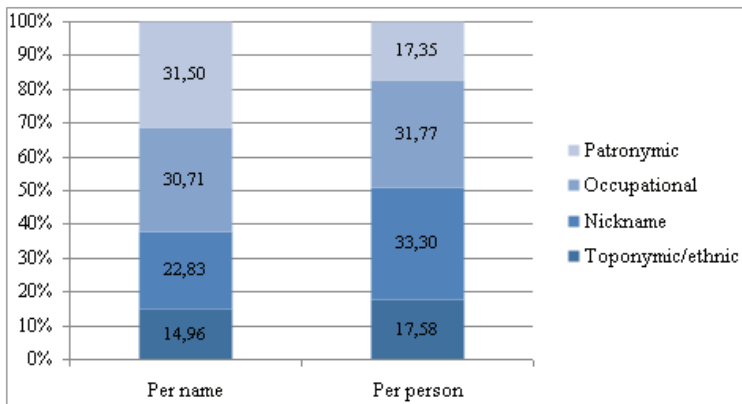

Figure 2. Percentage of surname types: according to names and according to name bearers

Both methods (according to names or according to name bearers) could offer useful comparisons on a international level (cf. e.g. Shokhenmayer 2014, Bloothooft et al. 2014). However, the latter can be considered more informative, and is also one of the methodological bases of an ongoing international research project (European Surname Typology Project; see below). Thus in the following I will mainly calculate with the number of individuals bearing the names.

The following question is how many names the frequency list to be analysed should contain. Many possibilities from the 1, 3, 5 or 10 most frequent to the first 1000 can be found in the literature. The current study works with a list of the 100 most common surnames for several reasons: this list contains a rather varied and fairly representative data set; there are examples for the processing of such lists from different countries;

and several of the most recent, comprehensive and contrastive studies are also based on this kind of list (see e.g. Bloothooft et al. 2014 or Shokhenmayer 2014 presented at the latest ICOS congress). 100-strong lists can provide a basis for meaningful comparisons within the Hungarian literature as well. Yet the typological distribution of the name corpus varies according to the scope of the list, so any one data analysis of this kind will lack an absolutistic value. It is worth illustrating this tendency of proportions changing on a rudimentary graph. In the case of the current corpus, the following happens (cf. the distribution of the German surname stock: Shokhenmayer 2014):
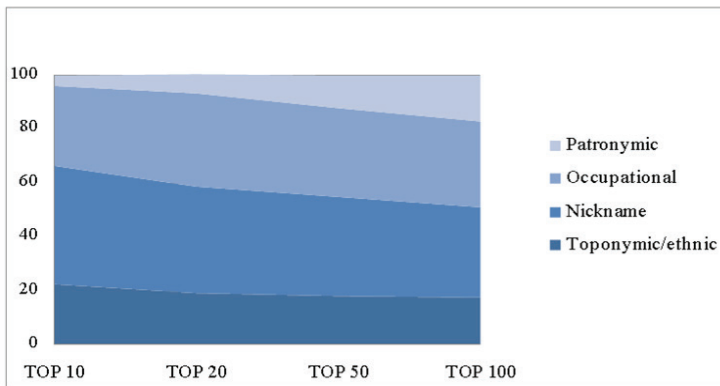

Figure 3. Percentage of surname types: from top 10 to top 100

Another practical and theoretical question is whether the surnames of Hungarian origin or the surname stock of Hungary should be analysed based on the name corpus. In the list of the non-merged variants there are none, and in the list merging lexical variants there is only a single surname of non-Hungarian origin, namely *Novák* (of Slavic origin, 84th). In the present study I believe it more useful to carry out a representative typological-statistical analysis of the surname corpus of Hungarian origin. As in the case of the 100 most frequent surnames, such an analysis will also be relevant for the whole surname stock of Hungary. However, it would be worthwhile to carry out a similar analysis of the surname stock of non-Hungarian origin as well.

The final methodological question is the question of categorisation, chiefly the surname typology to be used for the analysis. The more exact, etymologic-semantic categorisation is a relevant possibility, even so it can be more revealing to rely on the naming motives of the one-time namers. There are several well developed and detailed typologies of the latter kind – which are mutually inconvertible into one another – even within the Hungarian literature (Hajdú 2003: 761–773, Farkas and Láncz eds. 2009: 15–16, Fodor 2013: 522–523, Slíz 2015 etc.). However, to allow the international comparison of findings the most widely used typology must be chosen – the one that uses four categories: a) Patronymics, b) Occupational names (titles, dignities), c) Nicknames, and d) Toponymic (and ethnic) names.

Motivation-based typologies have some inherent uncertainties. In order to remain consistent, the interpretations of Hajdú's dictionary (2010) shall be used in the following. However, as a test, I have coded the material of the 100 most frequent lexical types in three different ways within the framework of the name typology mentioned above: I followed the explanations of the two Hungarian surname dictionaries (Kázmér 1993, Hajdú 2010), and my own judgement. All three versions allow for multiple motivations (which has been taken into account), but not in the same way. Consequently, even though all three analyses are professionally adequate, the findings are more or less different.
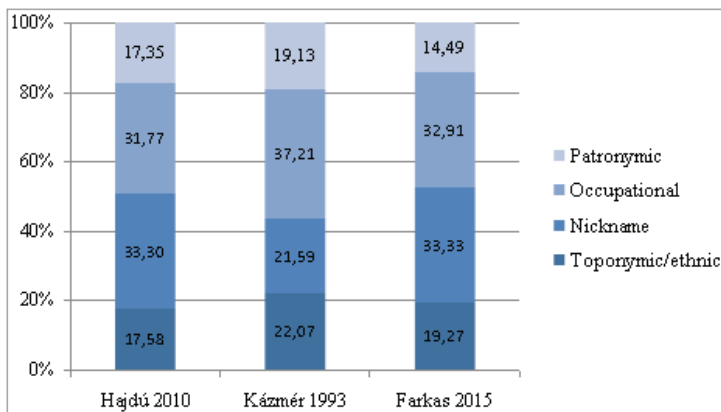

Figure 4. Percentage of surname types: according to different authors

This serves as a reminder that if findings are to be made comparable on an international level, further efforts must be made towards harmonisation in the field of the categorisation of names.

The 100 most frequent contemporary Hungarian surnames

Frequency and typological distribution

Knowing what proportion the most frequent names account for within the entire stock is revealing concerning the structutre of the surname stock. In China, for example, the most frequent surname, *Wang,* comprises 7% of the entire surname stock, in Sweden only 3% (*Johansson*), while in Poland it accounts for only 0.5% (*Nowak*) (Walkowiak 2014: 129). In the case of Hungary, the most frequent name comprises 2.4% (*Nagy*). Other data sets from several countries are also available (for the 10 most frequent surnames e.g. Eupedia). In the current case the data compared to the complete Hungarian surname stock – and comparable with the relevant international data – are as follows.

Table 1. The most frequent surnames in Hungary: percentage of the name bearers

Top lists	1.	1–10.	1–20.	1–50.	1–100.	Total
Name bearers	2.38%	16.93%	21,89%	29.05%	35.76%	100%

The typological-statistical distribution of the 100 most frequent Hungarian surnames has also been analysed, these represent one third of the complete pool of surnames in Hungary. The corpus was examined according to the methodology and typology presented above, taking into account the possible multiple motivations. The results, as already presented above, are the following:
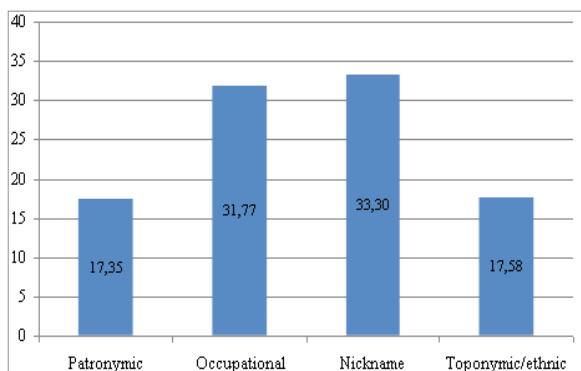

Figure 5. Percentage of Hungarian surname types, according to the methodology presented above

It is potentially revealing to complete an international comparison. Below, as an example, I have, as an exception, calculated with the number of names rather than the number of name bearers.

Table 2. Surname types in several European countries: the top 100 surnames, percentage of the names (based on Shokhenmayer 2014)

	Hungarian		German		Russian		French		British	
Name types	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Patronymic	1	32	3	22	1	59	1	46	1	35
Occupational	2	31	1	44	3	7	2	20	3	24
Nicknames	3	23	2	24	2	33	3	18	2	26
Toponymic	4	15	4	10	4	1	4	11	4	15

This table alone does not allow for far-reaching conclusions to be drawn, but illustrates the great diversity of surname stocks well. It can also be deduced that the Hungarian surname stock is the most typologically balanced of the the surname stocks presented here: the difference between the first and the last categories is the smallest

(only 17%). In the British data it is 20%, in the French and the German the difference is double (34–35%), and in the Russian it's three times larger (58%). The distribution according to the number of name bearers would have been more revealing, as would have been the possibility of looking at the broader Central European (geographical, historical, cultural) context of the country. But, unfortunately, the necessary data sets for these comparisons are currently unavailable.

The set of surname types

The four categories accounting for the 100 most frequent surnames offer potential for further analysis in terms of their composition and specific content (for this and those below, see Caffarelli 2005, Shokhenmayer 2014). Characteristics shared with other countries can be just as interesting as differences, as the few following examples – cited here, instead of a thorough analysis – illustrate.

The majority of patronymic surnames are based on Christian names, as is typical of European countries. These mainly reflect the Christian name giving tendencies of the middle ages and early modern age, yet do not allow for direct conclusions to be drawn concerning the naming fashions of these times (cf. Hajdú 2003: 255–368, Slíz 2011: 68–69 etc.). Christian names that were rarer (and thus more suitable for distinguishing individuals) tend to occur more often among surnames. Surnames considered to have a possible non-Christian patronymic origin are derived from Hungarian common words and most likely to go back to these words denoting personal characteristics or occupations directly, thus, are more likely, to belong to another surname category. A maximum of 3 of the 20 most frequent surnames can be placed in this category: possibly *Balogh* 'left-handed, bad etc.' (10th), partly *Farkas* 'wolf, Wolfgang' (11th) and the only unquestionable one, *Simon* 'Simon' (19th).

As for the surnames of occupational origin, similarly to many other countries (Brozović-Rončević 2004: 169), the most typical – which is nearly the most frequent one altogether – is *Kovács* 'smith' (2nd), the importance of which is also supported by the high frequency of the surname *Vas* 'iron' (40th). Concerning the occupational surnames that seem so typical in other countries (Shokhenmayer 2014), no name referring directly to breadmaking (even if *Molnár* 'miller' is the 8th), nor horse husbandry are represented on the Hungarian list. Meanwhile the subset of musicians is quite well represented: *Hegedűs* 'fiddler' (27th), *Sipos* 'whistler, piper' (38th), *Dudás* 'bagpipe player' (82th). At most 11 of the 20 most frequent surnames can be described as occupational: *Kovács* 'smith' (2nd), *Szabó* 'tailor' (4th), *Varga* 'shoemaker' (7th), *Molnár* 'miller' (8th), *Pap* 'priest' (12th), *Juhász* 'shepherd' (13th), *Takács* 'weaver' (14th), *Lakatos* 'blacksmith' (15th), *Szűcs* 'skinner' (16th), *Mészáros* 'butcher' (17th); and might be, in part, metonymically the surname *Farkas* 'wolf' for a hunter (11th). (For a deeper analysis, see Slíz 2015.)

Regarding surnames based on nicknames, the very first position on the frequency list was taken by a nickname, *Nagy* 'big'. Its antonymic pair, *Kis* 'little' is also very frequent (6th). A very common subset, quite typical in many countries is that of

colours, although these seem to be less characteristic in the Hungarian surname stock (cf. Caffarelli 2005: 255–257): *Fekete* 'black' (21st), *Vörös* 'red' (23rd) and *Fehér* 'white' (25th) are practically of the same frequency in the Hungarian surname stock; while *Szőke* 'blond' (67th) and *Barna* 'brown; but also from Barnaby' (85th) are less frequent. A maximum of 10 of the 20 most frequent surnames can be categorised as referring to personal characteristics. Descriptive ones are *Nagy* 'big' (1st), *Kis* 'small' (6th) and *Balogh* 'left-handed, bad etc.' (10th), while in a metaphoric sense and partially *Farkas* '[e.g. wild as a] wolf' (11th), *Pap* 'priest' (12th) as well as another five surnames based on ethnonyms (see below).

The subset of surnames referring to provenance tends to be towards the bottom end of the frequency list of the four surname types, as can also be typical of other countries (cf. Shokhenmayer 2014). The majority of surnames in this subset are those based on ethnonyms, which, however, can also refer to other characteristics of a person (they are possibly used in a metaphorical sense: nicknames, or names referring to occupation) (Farkas 2013). Among the other names of the category, several surnames that are derived from the names of counties can be found, most of these are in Southern Transdanubia, and played an important role in internal migration (*Szalai*, 26th; *Somogyi*, 37th; *Baranyai*, 53rd). The name of the capital is also found here (*Budai*, 57th). A total of 5 of the 20 most frequent surnames can be assigned to this category, and they are all ethnonyms.

Surnames of ethnonymic origin are a very characteristic subset of the Hungarian surname stock. Even though there are relatively few actual such names in circulation, 7–8% of the entire Hungarian population bears a surname of this type. 10% of the 100 most frequent surnames, representing 19% of the name bearers of the list fall into this category: *Tóth* 'Slavic, Slovak' (3rd), *Horváth* 'Croat' (5th), *Németh* 'German' (9th), *Oláh* 'Rumanian' (18th), *Rácz* 'Serb' (20th), *Török* 'Ottoman, Turk' (28th), *Magyar* 'Hungarian' (39th), *Orosz* 'Rusyn [Ruthene], Russian' (62nd), *Lengyel* 'Pole' (71st) and *Székely* 'Sekler' (78th). The internal composition of this subset is very revealing in many ways, and would be an especially good subject for international comparisons (in detail, see Farkas 2013).

The 100 most frequent surnames: further lists and comparisons

Historical name stock

Thanks to the efforts of János N. Fodor the typological-statistical characteristics of the present day surname stock can be compared with the historical stock of surnames from 1715 (cf. DHHS.; Fodor 2013, 2015), following the methodology mentioned above.

Only 1 of the 100 most frequent surnames in Hungary today is of foreign origin (*Novák*, 84th, representing 0.33% of name bearers in the country; cf. Farkas 2010), while the Hungary of the early 18th century, significantly larger and more ethnically diverse, obviously offered more examples (totalling 6.74% of name bearers). One of

these was a German surname (*Schmidt*, 67th), the other dozen were all of Slavic origin (although *Polyák* (16th) may be of Hungarian origin as well): *Svec* (26th), *Rusznák* (31th), *Meszár* (43th), *Kolár* (52th), *Hornyák* (56th), *Mlinár* (62th), *Novák* (68th), *Hugyec* (76th), *Krisán* (95th), *Bednár* (98th), *Benyo* (100th). These belong to several types, but most of them refer to occupations. For historical and geographical reasons that cannot be outlined here, Slovak names are the most highly represented in the corpus.

The following comparison can be made regarding the 100 most frequent surnames of Hungarian origin.
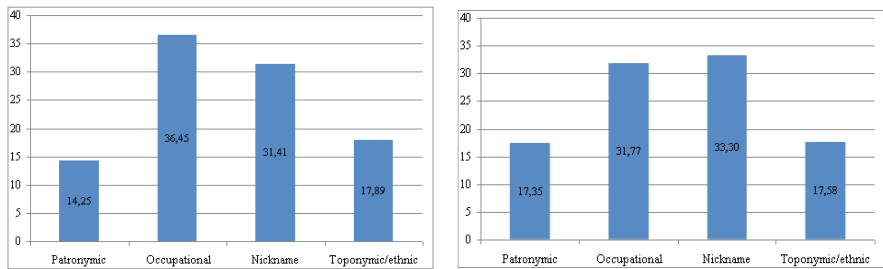

Figure 6. Percentage of Hungarian surname types: 6a: historical
(1715, left) and 6b: contemporary (2007, right)

As can be see, the proportions (as well as the absolute order of the categories) are only slightly different in the two historic periods. Most notably surnames of occupational origin lost some ground, cc. 5% (for the possible cause see Slíz 2015), while the gain of the patronymic subset is around 3%, that of the nickname type 2%. The ratio of names referring to provenance has practically remained unchanged. These changes can be explained by changes in time, geographical or, indeed, random factors, and thus do not allow far-reaching conclusions to be drawn from them in themselves.

The artificial name stock

To further present the potential of such an analysis, I will compare the 100 most frequent Hungarian surnames with the artificial name stock of the history of official surname changes (available database: DOSCH., 1815–1932). This list contains no surname of non-Hungarian origin, which is logical, considering the essential aim of the process, Magyarisation. The motivational background and emergence of this artificial name stock is essentially different from that of the natural surname stock (Farkas 2008), but to make the two comparable, I have attempted to use the same categorisation. This yields the following results.

The differences are striking. While the proportion of patronymic and occupational surnames is roughly the same, there are significantly fewer names in the category of nicknames among artificial surnames, and significantly more names in the category of provenance. These differences may be well explained by the naming fashions which

were affected by numerous factors (Farkas 2009b, 2012: 9–12). The overrepresentation (i.e. popularity) of surnames referring to provenance, for example, can be explained, among other things, by the fact that they are rich and varied, are morphologically the most characteristic in the Hungarian surname stock, and, in the contemporary surname stock their style is reminiscent of the names of nobles.
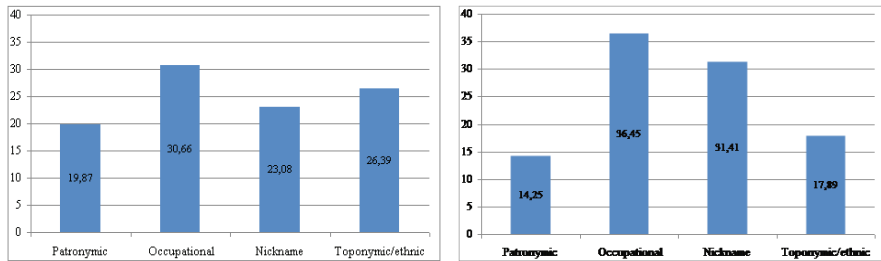

Figure 7. Percentage of Hungarian surname types: 7a: artificial
(1815–1932, left) and 7b: contemporary (2007, right)

The methodology that was used seems to be informative in examining the differences between the natural and artificial surname stocks as well.

Geonomastic studies

The geolinguistic study of surname stocks is a fruitful field of research in several European countries. However, a comprehensive analysis of a pan-European scope and using a unified methodology has yet to come to life.

The recently started initiative, the European Surname Typology Project (headed by Pascal Chareille and Pierre Darlu, France; in detail: Bloothooft et al. 2014) is aiming to provide a certain geonomastic analysis of the European surname stock. It is based on the typological-statistical analysis of the 100 most frequent surnames on the regional (e.g. county) level of European countries. Its results so far, encompassing several countries of Western Europe and concentrating on the four major surname types from a geolinguistic point of view, are noteworthy. Further geographic extension of the project would provide a great opportunity to gain further insight into the spatial distribution of the more elaborate patterns of the pool of European surnames. This is an especially important goal in terms of the wider context of the Hungarian surname stock, and also from a historical perspective. I have tried to incorporate the considerations of this project in my analyses presented above, with regard to the type of preliminary work, the general overview of the Hungarian surname stock and methodological questions.

The project in question, apart from its main scope concerning a typological-statistical analysis of the surname stock, could be a suitable framework for further geonomastic research. Next to the regional distributions, a comparison of the typological-statistical maps of entire countries and entire linguistic areas could be fruitful as well.

Studying the comprehensive maps of the surname types widespread in the whole of Europe (e.g. those originating from Christian names, animal husbandry or the names of colours) or the lexical maps (e.g. for 'Peter', 'smith', 'wolf', 'red') could also prove to be revealing. Or, for example, imagine the potential in drawing a map of European surnames in the category of ethnonyms. The analyses suggested here should not only be carried out based on the complete corpus of the top 100 surnames but also the proportions of the given typological categories.

Summary

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in geolinguistic and typological-statistical research with an international focus and crossing the boundaries of the field of surname studies. The accessible data are, however, diverse and often hard to compare with each other. Therefore there is great call for projects with harmonised/unified methodologies providing diverse results; among others, quantified in different ways and illustrated on various maps. International research projects so far have tended to concentrate on the surname stocks of Western Europe, so expanding the geographic scope of theese research efforts is yet another task to be undertaken.

My aim in this paper has been to make the characteristics of the Hungarian surname stock more accessible and better known. However, these data can also be analysed more reliably when studied together with the surname stocks of the broader or narrower regions of Europe.

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