

# The Typology of Changes in the History of Hungarian Surnames<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The history of a family and their surname was often fraught with numerous variants and different types of changes. The paper aims to provide an overview of the different types of these name changes in the case of the Hungarian surname stock. It presents the types of the formal and structural changes of surnames: entire changes, partial and regular structural changes (including: syntactic and morphological changes), partial and irregular structural changes (including: semantic changes on a formal basis and formal changes on a semantic basis), and partial formal changes (including: written and oral changes). It also presents the linguistic and extralinguistic factors that influenced these changes, and refers to further, non-structural and non-formal types of changes affecting other characteristics of surnames. The paper also studies briefly the types of changes in diachrony, aiming to identify the most typical tendencies among them. Some of the possible characteristics of surnames (e.g. archaic orthography, dialectal variation, morphological markedness) are treated here, which were sometimes affected by contradictory tendencies in different linguistic and extralinguistic contexts. The typology of changes presented here is partly language specific and characterises only the given historic, social and cultural circumstances, but partly conveys more general lessons to be learned about the nature of surname change.

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## Introduction

### Topic of the Paper

The aim of my paper is to give an overview of the types of changes and most characteristic tendencies that can describe the history of a surname as an existent element of the language and by definition an inherited type of personal names in the Hungarian linguistic and cultural context.

In the given framework I am in no position to address the problematic nature of the notions of ‘surname’ and ‘Hungarian surname’. When saying ‘Hungarian surname’, however, I mean not only surnames of Hungarian linguistic origin, but the whole of the surname stock used by members of the Hungarian language community (cf. Farkas 2010). My paper thus also includes the changes occurring to surnames of non-Hungarian origin in a dominantly Hungarian linguistic and cultural context, i.e. the phenomena of surname assimilation, although I cannot address these in great detail in the present paper (for more on this question, however, see Farkas 2009, 2012).

The Hungarian surnames that ended up in a dominantly foreign language context (which, over the course of 20th-century history, mostly meant non-Hungarian official state languages in Central Europe) would add valuable considerations concerning our topic.

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However, these changes are ruled by non-Hungarian linguistic systems, so I shall not deal with them here, for theoretical as well as practical reasons. It must be noted, however, that the formally ‘new’ Hungarian surnames and their bearers can easily appear in Hungary and thus cannot be separated from our current topic. Some typical examples for the phenomenon: Hung. *Füstös* ‘smoky’ > Rom. *Fistoş* ~ *Fustes*; Hung. *Görög* ‘Greek’ > Ukr. *Гупух* > Ukr. *Gyrykh* ~ *Hyrykh*; Hung. *Szabó* ‘tailor’ > Slov. [female] *Szabóová* ~ *Sabová*; Hung. *Sebes* ‘< Sebastian; or swift; or wounded’ > Serb. *Sebesics* etc.

### Identifying Surname Changes

Establishing and following the historic changes concerning a specific name on the basis of the sources is not always an easy task, for several reasons:

Due to the diverse and, compared with modern orthography, ill-structured orthographic practice, some (mainly phonetic) changes are impossible to follow, and certain (orthographic) changes cannot be considered necessarily relevant.

Behind the data found in the sources there can also be individual, *ad hoc* mistakes (misspellings), which may have become fixtures, yet may provide misleading data.

Usually, we are not familiar with the name use value of a recorded piece of data: we do not know whether that name was only used in writing or also in oral communication, and in what (social) context it was used in what ways.

The surname data concerning one particular person or family recorded at different points in time do not necessarily refer to a change (a cause-and-effect relationship), but can also record diversity (parallel or fluctuating name use).

### Preliminary Remarks

The topic of the typology of surname changes calls for some more general remarks to be made at the outset.

Name changes happen for a wide range of reasons, some lingual, some extralingual. These are, of course, mutually interconnected.

Name changes always occur in the linguistic and extralinguistic environment of the given period. These circumstances influence the triggers of changes, the exact way they happen and the features of the new name variants.

A name change can occur for the specific name bearer, or can happen when the name is transferred (inherited), i.e. when naming the next bearer of the name.

Name changes can happen naturally or artificially. The latter can involve processes that would be inconceivable and impossible to explain in the system of natural name changes.

A name change can be initiated by the community (natural and typically spontaneous name changes) or by the individual, the latter being the name bearer (artificial and typically conscious name changes) or the person registering the name (artificial and typically spontaneous name changes).

Name changes can occur on the oral or the written plane of name use.

Name changes can happen as unofficial processes or, following the required historic developments, in an official (or at least more official) fashion.

Some of the changes are linguistically more ‘regular’ (more predictable), while others are more ‘irregular’ (less predictable). Among the former we find for example the surname changes related to phonological changes, while among the latter the surname changes based on slips and errors.

In the following, I will not be able to present and consider all of these remarks in detail, but when giving an overview of the possible types of changes, I shall refer to some of these considerations.

### **The Framework of Surname Change Typology**

The most fundamental, complex changes concerning a surname are its creation and termination.

There are several questions we could address in connection with the creation of a surname, including the interpretation of the category of ‘surname’, the background of the process, the differences between natural and artificial surname creation and their various possible ways. As for the elimination of surnames, the (traditional and/or legally regulated) order of name inheritance, demographic correlations and the potential effects of name changes are some of the questions that could be dealt with.

However, I do not have the opportunity and the intention to address these issues here. In my paper I shall focus on giving an overview of the possible types of surname<sub>1</sub> > surname<sub>2</sub> changes. I am also going to ignore changes here when a surname becomes a different type of proper name or a common noun.

I wish to present the system of changes in the stock of Hungarian surnames according to the following typology:

- entire changes;
- partial and regular structural changes (including: syntactic and morphological changes);
- partial and irregular structural changes (including: semantic changes on a formal basis and formal changes on a semantic basis);
- partial formal changes (including: written and oral changes);
- and finally: other, non-structural and non-formal types of changes.

The typology I created and present here is based on the typologies of place name changes by István Hoffmann (1993, 1999) and Valéria Tóth (2005, 2008), as well as on the typology used for surnames by János N. Fodor (2010). The examples cited here are taken from many different sources (primary and secondary literature, impossible to list them here), and written as they were found there (especially in the case of surnames of foreign origin: sometimes in a partially already Magyarised, i.e. Hungarianised form).

## The Typology of Surname Changes

### Entire Changes

The entire change is a type of name changes, when an utterly new surname takes the place of the previous one. The new name is the manifestation of some kind of new name giving motivation, e.g. an individual characteristic, naming a relative, etc. (*Nagy* ‘big’ > *Süket* ‘deaf’; *Szabó* ‘tailor’ > *Somogyi* ‘from Somogy county’; *Horváth-Szabó* ‘Croat + tailor’ > Sl. *Gergulits*). With artificial name giving, the motivation can be just the name taste (Ger. *Schnierer* > *Bérczváry* ‘peak + castle + -i suffix’; Ger. *Schmidt* > *Zongor* ‘old Hungarian name’).

Entire name change is sometimes realised through using an alias (*András* > *András ~ Kovács* > *Kovács*), sometimes through double surnames (*Schwarcz* > *Fekete-Schwarz* > *Fekete*; *Bába* > *Bába-Tóth* > [*B. Tóth* >] *Tóth*).

### Partial and Regular Structural Changes

The next main type of surname changes is the type of partial and regular structural changes. These can be the changes of the syntactic structure (the level of functional name constituents) or of the morphological structure (the level of the name elements within the functional parts). In both types it is possible to add or retain a structural part. The possibility of changing such a structural part is more limited.

#### *Changes of Syntactic Structure*

Changes of syntactic structure are changes pertaining to the functional name constituents of a surname, in the case of double surnames.

This change can be the addition of a new name constituent, whose origin can be in family names or nicknames (*Andok* > *Kis Andok*), but also a completely new name creation as well, in the case of name Magyarisations (*Karleusa* > *Keresztes-Karleusa*). The creation of double surnames was administratively limited for different considerations throughout most of the 20th century, but for the past decade this type of name change has been rapidly increasing: connecting the two family names at marriage has become a new, legally possible form of marital names in Hungary, and these names can be given to the children of the couple, too.

The change can involve the omission of one name constituent of the surname as well (*Löki-Nagy* > *Nagy*, *Pándi Deák* > *Pándi* or *Deák*). Behind this there are usually practical considerations, especially the intention of a simpler name use.

The swapping of certain name constituents of double surnames is also possible, but it must be very rare, thus I cannot cite a specific example for that type at present.

Changes in syntactic structure are typically motivated by extralinguistic factors.

### *Changes of Morphological Structure*

Changes in the morphological structure involve changes of the name elements: lexemes and suffixes.

This change can take the form of adding a new name element, primarily one of the typical name formants ( $\emptyset > -i$  [‘from somewhere, belonging to somewhere or to someone’]: *Illyés* ‘Elias’ > *Illyési*, Sl. *Hudák* > *Hudáki*;  $\emptyset > -fi$  [‘someone’s son’]: *István* ‘Stephen’ > *Istvánfi*, Ger. *Lackner* > *Lacknerfi*), but also with lexical elements (*Tóth* ‘Slav, Slovak’ > *Tóthfalvi* ‘Slav, Slovak + from the village of; from the village of Tóthfalu’).

The change may be the omission of the name element, primarily the suffixes ( $-i > \emptyset$ : *Árvai* > *Árva* ‘from Árva county’ or ‘orphan’, *Páli* > *Pál* ‘Paul’;  $-s$  [‘having something’] >  $\emptyset$ : *Kaszás* > *Kasza* ‘scythe’, *Kockás* > *Kocka* ‘dice’), but also with lexical elements (*Örökkéélő* ‘forever living’ > *Örökké* ‘forever’; *Serfőző* [ser ‘ale’ + főző ‘person who cooks’] ‘brewer’ > *Főző* ‘person who cooks’).

Finally, the change can involve swapping name elements, even of different kinds (*Nyolcujjú* ‘eight fingered’ > *Nyolcas* ‘eighth, number eight’; *Földházi* ‘from an earthen house’ > *Földi* ‘from the earth or field’; *Kerekes* ‘person who has got wheels or wheelwright’ > *KerékJártó* ‘wheel + maker; wheelwright’).

Behind the changes of morphological structure there are mainly intralinguistic factors. Addition is typically a result of the intention of morphological markedness, involving surnames of both Hungarian and foreign origin, while the other two types require a transparent Hungarian name structure. The most typical agent of these changes is the suffix  $-i$  ‘from somewhere, belonging somewhere or to someone’, in many cases as a participant of synchronic variability rather than clear-cut diachronic name changes.

### **Partial and Irregular Structural Changes**

Partial and irregular structural change is a type of surname changes, when the unpredictable structural changes are not compliant with the structural patterns of morphological and syntactic structures, but irregular in form. The relationship between the old and the new surname can be formal or semantic and the change can likewise be semantic or formal in character.

#### *Formally Based Partial and Irregular Semantic Changes*

As for formally based partial and irregular semantic changes, the surname is transformed into a different name, similar in its form, but different in terms of lexical and semantic structure.

The change can occur by adding lexical and semantic content in diverse ways (Sl. *Hostya* > *Ostya* ‘hostia’; Rom. *Kendris* > *Kenderes* ‘person who has got hemp’; Sl. *Kaszavits* > *Kaszaviszi* ‘carries a scythe’). This is one of the ways of spontaneous (or sometimes conscious) Magyarisation (in other term: Hungarianisation) of surnames. The change can involve a shortening of the surname (Sl. *Gasparovics* > *Gáspár* ‘Casper’), or, primarily with conscious name Magyarisations, an extension of the original (Ger. *Munk* > *Munkácsi* ‘from *Munkács* settlement). The artificial name changes, typically involving just a small part of the

name, most often the initial letter or sound also have to come under this category (Ger. *Berger* > *Bajor* ‘Bavarian’ or *Bíró* ‘magistrate’ or *Beregi* ‘from the Bereg region’ etc.). These changes are often also close to the type of entire name changes, but because of the definite intention and mode of preserving the initial of the original name, I discuss them here. Finally, we can also mention here a special type of change that cannot actually be analysed structurally, but results in a phonetic form which (only) seems to be morphologically transparent for the name users, as a result of an irregular transformation of the ending (Sl. *Krivácsik* > *Krivácsi*, Arm. *Murátin* > *Muráti*; cf. the typical surname ending suffix *-i*).

The type of formally based partial and irregular semantic changes can involve the omission of lexical or semantic content as well (*Czank-Kiss* ‘a kind of tool’ + ‘little’ > *Czankis*).

Finally, the change can also involve swapping the existent lexical and semantic content for a different lexical and semantic content (*Zeke* ‘a certain kind of vest’ > *Eke* ‘plough’; *Pruszkai* ‘from *Pruszká* settlement’ > *Pruszklik* ‘a certain kind of vest’).

Thus the most typical change occurring here is the making meaningful of the existent surname.

#### *Semantically Based Partial and Irregular Formal Changes*

I consider another type of partial and irregular structural changes the type of semantically based partial and irregular formal changes. These occur among the natural name changes as well, but are more typical for artificial name changes. It is a special type of name change, as it presupposes a degree of bilinguality and always relies on the involvement of a foreign language in some way.

This change can involve literally translating the original surname (Ger. *Feldmann* or Rom. *Cimpian* > Hun. *Mezei* ‘from a field’; Ger. *Krieger* or Sl. *Voicsik* > Hun. *Csatár* ‘fighter’).

The change can be based on a looser or partial semantic relationship as well (Ger. *Goldschmidt* ‘goldsmith’ > Hun. *Kovács* ‘smith’, Ger. *Rozenberg* ‘rose hill’ > Hun. *Rózsafi* ‘rose + son of’).

The third logically possible option: a name change with no semantic or formal correlations does not belong here, as it is the type of entire surname changes already discussed above.

#### **Partial Formal Changes**

Partial formal change is a type of surname change which involves only the written or the phonetic form of surnames, causing a slight modification in the written or spoken form of the name, with no semantic or structural changes. Their detailed typology is purely formal and very long-drawn, and not even specific for this type of proper names. (For this latter reason the earlier name change typologies referred to in the *Introduction* do not even deal with these under the changes concerning the name type in question.)

In the following, then, I shall focus not on their detailed typology, but on presenting the main tendencies influencing these types of changes.

### *Changes in Written Form*

In written language in earlier centuries there was a great diversity of sound notation. The processes of simplification and standardisation that determined the history of orthography did, of course, involve the writing of surnames as well. They were diminishing the number of variants and pushing surnames towards modernisation and the phonemic orthography generally typical of Hungarian written language.<sup>2</sup>

For example the surname *Tót* ('Slavic, Slovak'), consisting of only three sounds, can be found in 27 different spelling versions in historic sources (thanks to the numerous potential representations of the sounds /t/ and /o:/ and the frequency of this surname). Even today we encounter 11 different spelling versions of the name in Hungary (*Tóth, Toth, Tót, Tot, Tóthh, Totth, Tooth, Toóth, Thot, Thót, Tóóth*), with 98.6% of the name bearers sharing the first orthographic type, *Tóth*. As this example clearly shows, in the case of certain particular sounds and letters (e.g. -t[h] at the end of surnames) there is a strong prevalence of the traditional spelling even today. But the great majority of Hungarian surnames are no doubt characterised by the non-traditional spelling, as with other names or common words (e.g. the standard spelling of the surname based on *kovács* 'smith': *Kovács* 98.7%, *Kováts*: 0.7%, with the other 10 possible varieties constituting only 0.6% of the cases).

At the same time, the use of foreign surnames could increase the number of written variants (e.g. in the case of a German surname, even apart from the variations of the German spelling, we find: *Schäffer, Schaeffer, Scháefffer, Scheffer, Schéffer, Seffer, Séffer, Schäfer, Schaefer, Schefer, Schéfer, Sefer, Séfer*). In the early 19th century an orthographic issue was resolved: surnames, it was ruled, had a special status (even among other proper names) in that they could retain their traditional spelling, avoiding further modernisation. Official administration in general also tended to preserve more and more the unchanging nature of earlier name forms.<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, certain phenomena that are just the opposite of the main tendencies of the history of orthography. The archaic name variants, dominant in the case of certain phonological positions and certain surnames, could also have a unifying effect, by force of analogy. Also, during the official name Magyarisation waves of the 19th-20th centuries, many name bearers opted for the archaic (by that time perceived as more prestigious) form of the surname to be taken. And even though from the 20th century onwards surnames created by artificial name formation also have to follow the rules of modern orthography, the state has made exceptions in some historic periods with certain personages for certain reasons, even by changing only the orthography of their existent surname into the more archaic form (*Kovács* > *Kováts*, *Tolnai* > *Tolnay*). The most popular archaism is changing the most typical surname ending, the suffix *-i* into *-y*, which is considered (erroneously, in fact) to be a sign of aristocratic or noble descent.

This purely orthographic change naturally only plays out in the written form, with no consequences for oral language use. But there is also an atypical type of change, first occurring in the written and then the spoken form that is the abbreviation of one component

<sup>2</sup> The source of the specific name sets and numeric data here is Hajdú (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Even though we should remark that misspellings occurring while entering a name in a registry can still produce variations even among names of the closest relatives and even nowadays.

of a double surname into its first letter (*Benkő-Nagy* > *B. Nagy*). The pronunciation of these abbreviations, even if very rarely, could affect even the written form of the given surname (*B. Nagy* > *Bénagy*, the pronounced form of *B. Nagy*). The use of these abbreviations was legally not supported throughout the second half of the 20th century (resulting in *B. Nagy* > *Nagy* changes), yet the first letters of ancestors' surnames can now be registered again.

### *Changes in Spoken Language*

In spoken language, the diversity of dialects (more characteristic in earlier centuries) and to some extent different conditions of the phonetic system were prevalent. Thus the phonetic form of surnames was influenced by the phonetic history, dialectal history and general standardisation processes. With surnames of foreign origin there was also the process of spontaneous and conscious Magyarisation.

Looking at surnames, we encounter the same changes as in the case of common words and other types of names, for example the typical features of Hungarian: the phenomenon of vowel harmonising (*Bénda* > *Bende*, *Bertha* > *Bartha*), and the disappearance of consonant clusters (*Kmetykó* > *Metykó*, *Jakl* > *Jakli*), processes that could be especially typical for surnames of foreign origin. The standardisation of language and the increasing ubiquity of official administration, however, acted to diminish the diversity. This is also illustrated by the processes of the official surname changes in the 19th and 20th centuries: while some people changed their dialectal surname to the standard variant (*Körösztös* > *Keresztes*, cf. *keresztes* 'cross bearer'; *Ruzsa* > *Rózsa*, cf. *rózsa* 'rose'), it never happened the other way round: none of the name changers opted for a dialectal variant of a surname.

The written form of the name typically wished to reflect or follow the changes of the spoken form, as written language is only secondary to orality, and its standardisation arrived relatively late. It is to be noted, however, that in the more infrequent case, it was the written form that affected the orality: the unchanged, traditional orthography of a surname, in contrary to the general orthographic practice changed in the meantime, resulting in a change in the spoken form. This can happen to historic, now extinct surnames (written *Zach* ~ spoken [za:x] > [za:tʃ]), and to contemporary surnames due to hypercorrection in the pronunciation (written *Zántó* ~ spoken [sa:nto:] > [za:nto:]).

### **Other, Non-structural and Non-formal Types of Changes**

There are other changes in the history of surnames, which are also relevant, but do not influence the structure, the basic meaning and not even the spoken/written form of the name. Earlier typologies in the literature do not usually deal with these, and here I only enumerate them:

Other semantic components of the surname can also change: its etymological transparency, motivational content, information content and connotational-associative value. These changes, in turn, can serve as motivation for surname changes of other types.

The status of the surname can also change: spoken and/or written status, official and/or non-official status. The scope and mode of name use are also important factors throughout the life of a surname.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that the history of a family and their surname was often fraught with numerous variants and different types of name changes. The diversity of the surname stock and the typicality of surname changes, however, decreased over time in general, as official administration and linguistic standardisation became more and more dominant. Meanwhile the spontaneous and conscious Magyarisations of surnames of foreign origin has enriched the Hungarian surname stock, and the diversity of surnames and the typology of surname changes has also been enriched by the introduction of new surnames of foreign origin and the new types of artificial name changes.

My paper was an attempt at giving an overview of the many different types of name changes characterising the history of Hungarian surnames. The change typology presented here is partly language specific and characterises only the given historic, social and cultural circumstances, but partly conveys more general lessons to learn about the nature of surname change. Studying these questions, in my view, can be fruitful from both aspects.

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