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In anticipation of the outcomes of censuses: persuasive practices as pre-interaction management

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ABSTRACT

The census can be understood as a society-wide, systematized and institutionalized interaction, before which actors, in anticipation of the census results, engage in specific activities in the form of debates, talks, and publishing and distributing various informational materials and artefacts. The general purpose of these activities is to persuade census participants to fill in a particular 'fact' which is in the interest of the persuading person or institution (the state, minority organizations, and activists). In the context of the Czech Republic, we focus on filling in the questions related to 'ethnicity' and 'mother tongue' and demonstrate that the census results on 'ethnicity' rather than on 'mother tongue' influence language policies in the locality. Specifically, we deal with the persuasion campaigns of the German and Polish ethnic minorities.

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Census; persuasive practices; pre-census situation; pre-interaction management; ethnic and linguistic minorities

Introduction

Although censuses are in many aspects similar to quantitative sociological surveys, they differ heavily in the fact that the results of conventional sociological research are based on a statistical generalization of a sample, whereas the census is exhaustive: it covers the entire population defined as the subject of the census.[1] The second significant difference between censuses and sociological surveys stems from the fact that the purpose of a census is primarily to provide data to the state that uses the results in order to make policies, including those relating to language and ethnicity.

However, the main difference between censuses and surveys is that censuses can easily gain political support due to their tangible effects and the involvement of the whole population.

Concepts pertaining to identity such as ethnicity, language and religion are particularly susceptible to this. Disputes can thus arise over the form of the census itself: whether it should be mandatory to provide those data[2], or whether one should be asked for them at all[3], in what way should the question be posed[4], or how to define

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those concepts.[5] Once the census is formally completed and ready for data collection, the focus of the political struggle passes from the narrow circle of statisticians and politicians who made up the design of the census to each of the census participants, who have considerable political power: to create data about themselves. The power to create demographic and social data can thus serve not only those who propose the census, but also those who participate in it by filling in the forms, and the enumerated persons can thus use it for their own ends or even protest against the state (cf. Brix, 1982; Cooley, 2022; Kertzer & Arel, 2001a, 2001b). The census is essentially a political practice in which various interest groups clash.

In this article, we focus on how censuses can be used by ethnic and linguistic minorities as a tool to achieve political power, and what practices they employ in the pre-census situation in order to achieve their goals. The article has the following sections: (1.) a theoretical and methodological introduction, (2.) the design of modern Czech censuses, particularly how they ask about ethnicity and mother tongue, (3.) the relation of Czech linguistic policies to census data, (4.) declaratory questions in the census as a precondition for large-scale persuasive practices, and (5.) why and how ethnicity and mother tongue have become subjects of persuasion in Czech censuses.

A note on theory and method

The census situation can be understood as a society-wide, systematized and institutionalized interaction, before which actors, in anticipation of the census results, engage in specific activities in the form of debates, discussions, talks, or the publication of various informational materials and artefacts. They address the potential results of the census, evaluate them, consider alternatives and their implementations in social life, that is, they perform management activities in the sense of Language Management Theory (LMT) (Nekvapil, 2016). The general purpose of these activities is to persuade census participants to fill in a particular 'fact' which is in the interest of the persuading person or institution. As these activities are conducted before the census itself, they can be taken as 'pre-interaction management' (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009). Pre-interaction management refers to the process of language management that takes place before the interaction to which it relates. The census, including pre-census stages, is a very complex social event, so it is appropriate to consider not only language management but also sociocultural management, particularly when it comes to ethnicity.

We distinguish three main pre-census actors: (1.) the state (via the Czech statistical office), (2.) minority organizations, (3.) individuals. Following LMT, persuasion by the state and minority organizations is institutional *organized* management, which takes place e.g. through outreach via leaflets, brochures, or promotional videos. Persuasion among individuals, unlike the first two types, is less systematic, less organized, sometimes spontaneous, and thus a part of *simple* language management in the LMT notion.

An analysis of leaflets, videos and information materials distributed by the organizer of the census, that is *Czech Statistical Office* (CSO), and by minority organizations provided us with information about *organized* persuasion. The *simple* persuasion was examined through semi-structured interviews with representatives of *Committees for National Minorities* (Výbory pro národnostní menšiny, hereinafter CNM), which are established

as an advisory body in municipalities and regions with a high proportion of population identifying with another ethnicity than Czech.[6] We contacted all 29 municipal CNMs in the country and succeeded in conducting 6 interviews, 5 of which were with representatives of CNMs and 1 with a representative from the national Government Council for National Minorities and at the same time the president of the *Assembly of German Associations in the Czech Republic*. Four of the interviewees claimed to be of Polish ethnicity, one of German ethnicity and one of Czech ethnicity. The interview covered topics of minority policy in their municipality and the census, with an emphasis on pre-census interactions. All interviews were conducted in Czech and took place in 2023, two years after the 2021 census itself. Since the interviewees were often representatives of minority organizations, their testimonies provided information not only about simple but also organized persuasion. In the materials distributed by CSO and minority organizations, and in the interview transcripts, we looked for explicit and implicit exhortations to indicate (a particular) ethnicity and language.

We restricted our analysis of the pre-census persuasion to practices taking place within the German and Polish minorities, as their organizations conducted large media campaigns inspiring to persuasion also at the level of individuals. This selection should not obscure that persuasion may also occur among members of other minorities.[7] However, being the first research on this topic, limiting ourselves to two minorities that are among the most numerous and linguistically-politically most active in the Czech Republic seemed to be a logical first exploratory step.

Design of modern Czech censuses and the questions on ethnicity and language

Censuses have taken place on the territory of the contemporary Czech Republic (and the former Czechoslovakia) at intervals of about ten years since the reign of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, during which time modern census-controlled statistics gradually took shape. Since 1880, all censuses have asked for information about either language or ethnicity or both. Contemporary Czech censuses[8] are carried out using the method of self-completion of forms that are sent out by post and, since the 2011 census, can also be completed online (with 85% of persons completing the 2021 census online) (PD 2021 / 2024, p. 14). Censuses are conducted on the basis of laws that are enacted before the relevant census. All census data must relate to a single moment, the so-called *decisive moment*. In the last census, this moment was midnight of 26–27 March 2021. The Czech censuses should then be a cross-section of the demographic, economic and social characteristics of the population at this designated moment.

Czech censuses have two basic analytical units: household and person. Census forms are filled in by household: for the whole household, data on the housing unit such as its address, number of rooms, area or heating method are filled in. In addition, the number of persons living in the household and their relationship to each other (e.g. family or partnership) shall be filled in as part of the household data. After completing the form for the household, the census sheets of the persons listed must be completed. These ask for data on the individuals, such as their occupation, number of children, place of birth, ethnicity or mother tongue.

Participation in the census is compulsory. This applies not only to the citizens of the Czech Republic, but also to the residents with long-term visas permitting them to stay in the country for more than 90 days. If a person does not participate in the census for any reason and does not send the census form (online or paper) by the deadline, she or he is contacted or visited by the census officer, with whose help they fill in the form. The fact that it is possible to find the uncounted person means, among other things, that the census organiser (CSO) has administrative data available to trace the uncounted person. Obviously, a large part of the data obtained by the census could be replaced by existing administrative data, which is why some countries (e.g. Sweden) no longer conduct questionnaire censuses and rely purely on administrative data (Baffour et al., 2013, pp. 413–414).

The modern Czech censuses have continually asked about 'mother tongue' (*mateřský jazyk*) since the 1991 census: this is defined in modern censuses as 'the language spoken to the enumerated person by the mother or those who raised them up during childhood' (PD 2011 / 2013, p. 19). Neither this definition nor the definition of ethnicity is directly stated in the questionnaire, but could have been found in the help instructions that were added separately to the questionnaire. In the 1991 and 2001 censuses, only one mother tongue was allowed to be completed.[9] In the 2011 and 2021 censuses, two mother tongues were explicitly allowed to be filled in. In all four censuses, the mother tongue question was mandatory. The question on mother tongue in the questionnaire directly precedes the question on ethnicity (see Figure 1).

The question on 'ethnicity' (*národnost*[10]) was present in the pre-1991 censuses[11], but in the 1991 census its definition was changed and since then it has been understood as 'belonging to a nation and it is left to everyone to freely express their affiliation according to their convictions.' (PD 1991 / 1995, p. 17). The question on ethnicity was already highly politicized in 1991: disputes were fought especially over the Moravian and Silesian

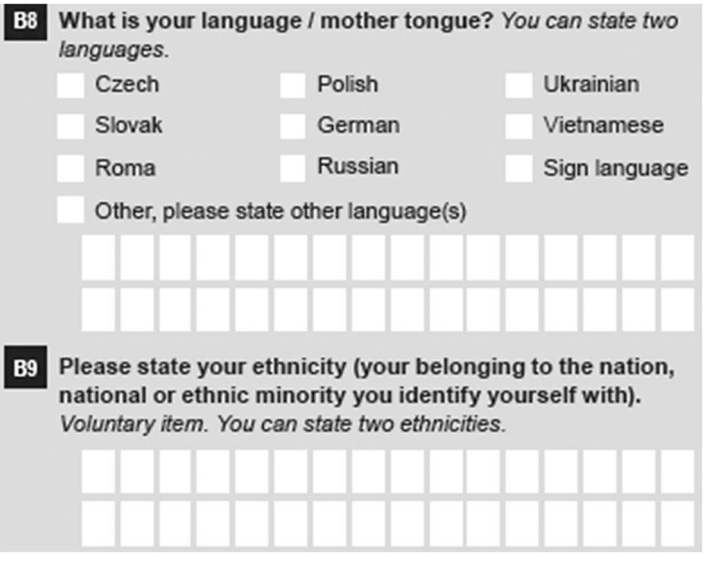

Figure 1. Questions on mother tongue and ethnicity in the English census form (Census 2021).

ethnicities, which in previous censuses were classified under the Czech ethnicity. Although this was not envisaged in the original census plan, the Silesian and Moravian ethnicities were eventually enumerated (PD 1991 / 1995, pp. 14, 352). The above-quoted definition of ethnicity stemming from the freedom to express oneself according to one's convictions implicitly implies that some people may not have any ethnic convictions and should therefore be free to leave the respective answer field blank. Therefore, with the 2001 census, the question on ethnicity became voluntary and in subsequent censuses a large proportion of the population did not fill it in, i.e. more than a quarter in the 2011 census and almost a third in 2021 (PD 2021 / 2024, p. 69). Since the 2011 census, the question on ethnicity also allows two possible answers, as is the case for mother tongue.

But why do Czech censuses ask about language and ethnicity? Hardly in order to strengthen the position of Czechs and the Czech language and thus justify the existence of the Czech state in the eyes of the international community, as was the case in interwar Czechoslovakia (cf. Kladiwa et al., 2016, p. 9). Today, the Czech state does not need data on language and ethnicity to strengthen the position of the majority, but rather, to ensure the rights of minorities, both linguistic and ethnic. Data therefore contribute to the fulfilment of the obligations arising from the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (hereinafter as Framework Convention, and Charter). In the 2021 census, the focus on minorities was also evident in the help instructions available online to census takers, which included the following explanation for the question on mother tongue:

'*Why are we collecting this data?*

Only the census provides information on the prevalence of minority languages. This data allows decisions to be made about promoting the use and preservation of different languages in a given locality. This may include, for example, the introduction of bilingual place names and signs or the provision of language education. This contributes to preserving cultural diversity and traditions and shaping national policy. The data are also used to assess commitments under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.'[12](our translation)

Czech linguistic policies dependent on census data

In addition to fulfilling international obligations to protect national and linguistic minorities, census data also serve to ensure the rights granted by Czech law. The basic law regulating the rights of national minorities is Law on the Rights of National/Ethnic Minorities and Amendment of Some Laws made on 10th July 2001 (No. 273/2001), the so-called Minority Act. It provides for general rights of the minority members with Czech citizenship, including linguistic rights, and a national apparatus for the protection of national minorities, i.e. the provisions of the Government Council for National Minorities, and regulates regional and municipal establishment (129 and 128/2000 Coll. respectively). The role of *Committees for National Minorities* (CNM) is essential for the development of language policy in the municipalities and regions.

CNM must be established compulsorily if an organization representing national minorities[13] requests it and at the same time 10% of the inhabitants of the municipality or 5% of the inhabitants of the region declared an ethnicity other than Czech in the last census

(128/2000 §117; 129/2000 §78). At least half of the members of the CNM must be members of ethnic minorities themselves.

Although only data on ethnicity are used for the legal establishment of these committees, the powers of the CNMs extend to linguistic policies. Only in a municipality with an existing CNM can – according to Czech law – be established a public school (i.e. having public funding by the municipality and/or the region) with teaching in a minority language (561/2001 §14) and the CNM is also one of the ways to enforce multilingual signs in a municipality (128/2000 §29). The other possibility of introducing multilingual signs is through the request of the association for national minorities, however, both of these possibilities must be accompanied by the condition that more than 10% of the population has claimed the 'ethnicity of the respective language' in the last two censuses (128/2000 §29).

The practical calculation works with the total number of inhabitants of the municipality (or region) and the percentage of ethnic minorities, which is made up of inhabitants of the municipality (or region) who declare themselves as belonging to one non-Czech ethnicity, to two ethnicities, neither of which is Czech, or to two ethnicities, one of which is non-Czech.

The road to minority politics is therefore long and thorny. The CNM is established on the basis of a relatively high percentage threshold, and serious policy steps such as multilingual signs or a school in a minority language even require more than 10% of the population of a *particular ethnicity* in *two consecutive censuses*.

From the examples of the establishment of minority schools or the enforcement of multilingual place signs, it is clear that the crucial problem with how the laws use census data on ethnicity and language is the unambiguous connection of the concept of ethnicity and the concept of language. The laws work with the notion of a minority language (128/2000 §29), but this prevents support for minority languages that do not clearly 'belong' to an ethnic community. Let us imagine a hypothetical municipality in the Czech Republic, in which the census enumerates 20% of the population as belonging to mother tongue X and 10% to mother tongue Y and the rest to Czech (i.e. the majority language), but the ethnicities are either not filled in or filled in as Czech (i.e. as the majority ethnic group). Such a municipality can then neither establish a public school with instruction in the minority language nor introduce multilingual signs, because these possibilities are not available for the linguistic minorities, but for the ethnic minorities.

This may seem like a paradox, because not only a decisive part of language policy depends on ethnicity census data, but depends on it as *voluntarily* filled-in data. Should not, then, language policies be built on data that is based on an objective definition of language, i.e. a census notion of the mother tongue, rather than on one's own sense of belonging? – And, moreover, on data that would be population-wide, given the obligation of the language question?

The point is, however, that the question of establishing minority schools or multilingual place signs is also a question of the opinion and will of the population. From this perspective, the declarative and voluntary nature of the question on ethnicity can serve as a manifestation of the will to enforce ethnicity and linguistic policies. If multilingual signs and schools were determined by a *compulsory* language question, it could easily be the case that members of a linguistic minority would have no real interest in

such a policy. Instead, grounding these options in voluntariness implies that a member of a linguistic minority who voluntarily declares his or her ethnicity also has an interest in developing the rights of that minority, including the linguistic ones. It follows that the declaration of ethnicity in the census may be a *political act* pursuing personal goals, including, for example, the establishment of a school with a language of instruction other than Czech.

Declaratory questions as a prerequisite for persuasion

(A) Declaratory vs. factual questions

Censuses performed by self-completion of forms by census participants have the property, unlike censuses collected purely from administrative data, that the enumerated persons actively participate in them and are expected to cooperate to a high degree. The census thus becomes a huge social event that may affect the life of every inhabitant of the country. They may take a variety of strategic decisions in relation to the census: from disinterest, boycotting it, to using the census for their own interests.

Inhabitants are expected to be able to give their name or their birth number *correctly*. Note that this information is already in the administrative registers and in the documents of the participants (for example, on the identity card). Thus, when instructed to give, e.g. their birth number, the participant can look at their identity card and copy this number correctly. However, other data cannot be easily traced in this way and must be estimated[14] or *declared* by the participants. If the Czech census asks for the ethnicity, explaining that each person is to declare it according to their own convictions, it invites them to perform a specific speech act (Austin, 1962). We call the type of questions that ask for verifiable facts that are theoretically transferable to administrative registers *factual questions*. By contrast, we call the second type, jointly with the official documents of the Czech censuses (PD 2001 / 2005, Chapter 2; PD 2011 / 2013, p. 21), *declaratory questions*.

Clearly, in the census situation the inhabitants of the Czech Republic are not simply mechanical copyists of facts, they are also *creators of facts*. The declaratory questions, among which the Czech censuses officially include the only two voluntary questions in the census form, i.e. questions on ethnicity and religion (PD 2011 / 2013, p. 21), offer the census participants to declare their identity and co-create the statistical picture of the country. Thus, neither ethnicity nor religion are perceived as something permanent and immutable – instead, they depend on beliefs that can change over time by a simple act of will.[15]

(B) Question on mother tongue declaratory interpreted

Not only the filling-in of ethnicity and religion, but also the answer to the question on mother tongue can be understood as a declaration, even though the CSO does not admit it officially. An example is when a person has several mother tongues but does not fill in all of them.[16] In the following excerpt, the respondent PHK describes the case of her father who does not know what his mother tongue is, but still states Polish:

PHK: well I will tell you for example that my dad her mum mum spoke two languages to him she spoke Polish and German ye: and he was in the sense my father is tri – trilingual, he is German-Polish-Czech ye, I mean ye, I don't know, what his mother tongue actually is?
PHP: that's that's we´d have to call him
I: well: what do you think-
PHK: well he wouldn't answer (.) he doesn't know (.) I´ve already discussed it with him and he doesn't know (.) he wouldn't answer you
I: well a:nd when it is to be filled in – filled in the census
PHK: well then it´s Polish but, ((laughing)) but like like I don't know if it´s his mother tongue like that I don't know
I: so and then he puts Polish in the census, right?
PHK: yeah he´s putting Polish in there yeah, but I think he is not convinced that it´s Polish; that´s trilingual you know,[17]

PHK's father could have stated two languages, but he didn't. However, even if he had filled in any of the other two languages that 'his mother or those who raised him spoke to him', we could not say that he had stated anything *wrong*. Thus, filling in the Polish language can be seen as a declaration that goes hand in hand with the fact that the person in question considers himself to be ethnically Polish.

The answer to the question on mother tongue can also become a declaration when the mother tongue of the speakers is a transitional dialect, that is, there is no agreement under which named language such a variety belongs. In the Czech Republic, an example of such a dialect is the Těšín dialect, sometimes called *po naszymu* (literally: speaking 'our way'). As Nekvapil et al. (2009, p. 94) claim, '[the speakers] usually consider it a mixture of Polish, Czech and German, and occasionally also of other languages which were commonly used in the region.' Respondents from the Těšín area said in the interviews that Czechs and Poles often speak the same language in the region, i.e. *po naszymu*, but in the census situation they still fill in either Czech or Polish as their mother tongue, depending on which ethnicity they 'are.' Thus, one (Polish) respondent speaks of Poles in Těšín area and formulates a sentence that would be barely comprehensible without knowing that context:

PJ: well they have like, they have Polish as their mother tongue, but they don't speak Polish at home yeah,
I: mm
PJ: they speak like really *po naszymu*;

'Having Polish as mother tongue' in this passage means claiming Polish as mother tongue *publicly* (through censuses), even though in everyday communication a transitional dialect is spoken.

Persuasion practices before the 2021 Czech census

Multiple actors have an interest in inhabitants declaring their ethnicity and mother tongue in Czech censuses, and this interest – even in light of the declining number of people declaring their ethnicity – can lead to persuasion. Persuading someone to declare their ethnicity, religion or mother tongue is itself formally possible only if these identities are considered declaratory and thus not subject to possible control by the census organizers – this is an inherent assumption of the *possibility* of public persuasion leading to actions that the census organizers approve as permissible.[18]

In the course of our research, we have revealed *three levels of actors* who are interested in getting as many people as possible to fill in their ethnicity and mother tongue, and who therefore engage in persuasive practices:

(a) The *Czech state* has an interest in people stating their ethnicity and language in the census because it needs to fulfil its international obligations under the Charter and the Framework Convention.
(b) *Organizations representing minorities* have an interest in maintaining or strengthening their position through a significant number of the population officially belonging to the minority whose interests they represent.
(c) *Individuals* who, for whatever reason, are interested in having more people claiming a particular ethnicity or language. These reasons include that the persuading person is aware of the political implications of claiming a minority ethnicity under Czech law.

(A) Persuasion by the state

It was not difficult to find out *if* and *how* the persuasion to fill in ethnicity and mother tongue took place on the first two levels, as both the state and the organizations representing ethnic minorities use mass means of communication with the public.

The CSO distributed brochures through the Government Council for National Minorities that were prepared for organizations representing ethnic minorities and leaflets aimed at members of those minorities. These documents focused on ethnicity data and sought particularly to ensure the minorities' organizations and members that it is safe to provide ethnicity data. The brochure for organizations representing ethnic minorities also explains why it is politically important to state ethnicity: it provides a layman's explanation of the laws based on ethnicity data, first of all the facts about CNMs and their rights.

The goal of persuasion by the state is not to encourage people to fill in a *particular* ethnicity, but to ensure that they fill in any ethnicity at all. This goal is motivated by two reasons: (1) in previous censuses there was a high non-response rate hindering the statistical completeness of the results, and (2) it is imperative for the state to fulfil the obligations on the protection of national minorities under the Charter and the Framework Convention. The second reason seems to be more serious in terms of the form of persuasion, since both kinds of the mentioned persuasion documents were aimed at persuading minority members to declare their ethnicity. Note that the subject of the state's persuasion is therefore members of ethnic minorities, not the Czech ethnic majority.

(B) Persuasion by minority organizations

Organizations representing national minorities have prepared campaigns significantly richer than the state ahead of the 2021 census. As given above, we will focus on the German and Polish minority campaigns.

German minority campaign

The state of the German minority in the Czech Republic is still strongly influenced by the consequences of Second World War, that is, by a forced evacuation of most Germans from the former Czechoslovakia. Historians estimate that more than two million

Germans had to leave the country during 1945–1947; only 200 000–300 000 were allowed to stay. This was followed by a period in which it was socially disadvantageous or even dangerous to express one's German identity, including speaking German. In such conditions, the German minority was gradually being assimilated into the Czech majority. The pre-census campaign therefore turns to history, uses the slogan 'admit your roots' (*přiznej kořeny)* and often features old family photographs in campaign materials in attempt to evoke a sense of belonging to the ethnicity in people with (forgotten) German ancestry. Referring to his personal persuasion techniques, the chairman of the *Assembly of German Associations in the Czech Republic* addressed the notion of ethnicity as a cultural heritage from ancestors:

> DN: I have persuaded a lot of people I have just said, hey ((quoting himself)) do you have any German grandma? well everyone has of course yeah, I say well you see then you have there some genes as well ri:ght, some and do you think it´s right? it is. do you like the German language? I do; my grandma spoke it; and I say you see:, then admit your roots.

The target group of the German minority campaign was people who have German ancestors among their relatives but still consider themselves Czech. Therefore, the campaign placed great emphasis on the possibility of stating the dual ethnicity and presented this possibility as progress towards a tolerant multi-ethnic society. Thus the campaign's central material, the youtube video 'Census 2021: #admityourroots', was introduced by the caption saying that it is a campaign 'to promote an open approach to ethnicity issues (not only) in the 2021 census.'[19] The video itself does not end with an appeal to state the German ethnicity, but two ethnicities, the other ethnicity being the Czech ethnicity:

> On March 26 [i.e. the decisive moment] you can list two ethnicities, so don't miss it and #admityourroots, because it's #2021

These words are followed by a shot of the paper census form filled out by a person listing two ethnicities: Czech and German, that is ČESKÁ and NĚMECKÁ (see Figure 2).

Polish minority campaign

At first glance, the campaign led by the *Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic* differed from the campaign of the German minority in that it produced much more content: videos, leaflets or banners. The campaign was strongly focused on one region, that is, Těšín Silesia, and while the main language of the German minority campaign was Czech, the Polish campaign was mostly Polish-led, using only Czech subtitles, and worked with the symbolic function of the dialect *po naszymu*. The title of the campaign was also multilingual: *Wpisuję polská*, the first word being Polish (meaning 'fill in'), the second one Czech (meaning 'Polish'). However, the Czech word 'polská' here may be motivated merely by an organizational fact of the 2021 census, namely that the paper census forms were printed only in Czech and could also be filled out exclusively in Czech (PD 2021 / 2024, p. 19).

A significant difference between the campaigns of the Polish and German minorities was that the Polish minority members were persuaded to state only one ethnicity, that is, Polish. Some leaflets and videos even explicitly discouraged people from stating the second ethnicity.[20]

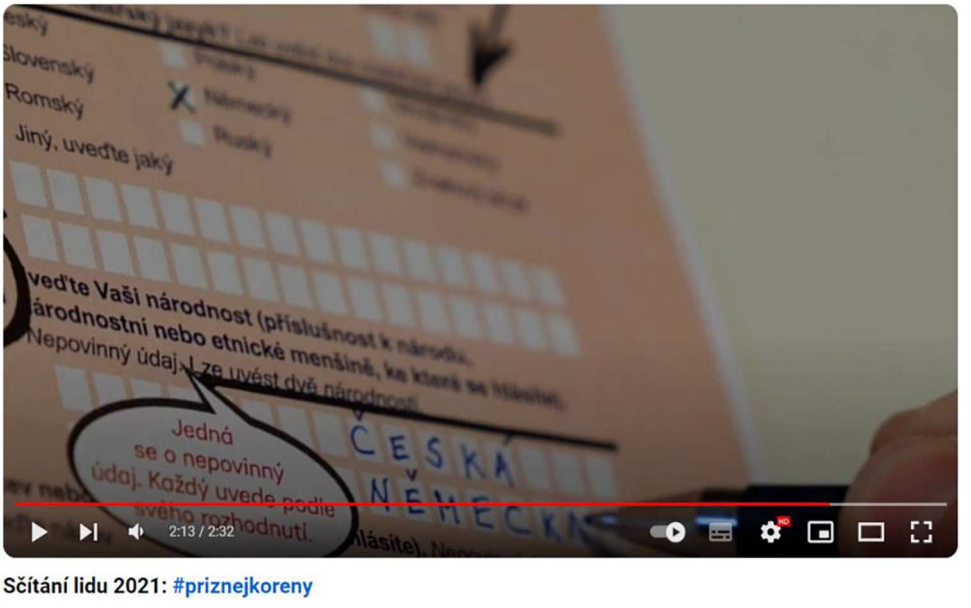

Figure 2. Declaration of a dual ethnicity in the promotional video of the Assembly of German Associations (Census 2021).

What is the point of such persuasion? After all, even a dual ethnicity (one of which is a minority ethnicity) 'counts' as a minority ethnicity, and therefore cannot threaten the formation of the CNM or other political options. A plausible clarification is that stating only the minority ethnicity is taken as a strategy to promote greater visibility of the Polish minority in the area. Moreover, an underlying fear of misinterpretation of the census data may be at issue here. This is demonstrated by one of the promotional videos featuring the President of the *Congress of Poles* himself.[21] He first tries to persuade the census participants not to list regional ethnicities ('Silesian, Goral and Zaolzian'), as these would not appear in the census results as Polish ethnicity, but would fall in the 'other ethnicity' category; and then, in the same breath, he discourages people to state dual ethnicity, especially Polish-Czech, for the same reason (sic!).

The differing strategies of the Polish and German minorities are due to the differing degree of awareness of ethnic difference among members of the Polish and German minorities. While the representatives of the Polish minority can build on a relatively high degree of this awareness and can channel it in various ways in the campaign, the representatives of the German minority have yet to gradually develop an awareness of ethnic difference. Historically, this difference can be explained by the continuity of the national consciousness of the Polish minority in the Těšín area and the uprooting and stigmatization of the German minority after the Second World War in the former Czechoslovakia.

Both the German and Polish campaigns include footage of a person writing their ethnicity on the census form. A comparison of these two shots is indicative of the persuasion goal of both campaigns: while in the German campaign the person writes out two ethnicities (the first being Czech), in the Polish campaign he writes out only the Polish ethnicity, that is, POLSKÁ: (see Figure 3)

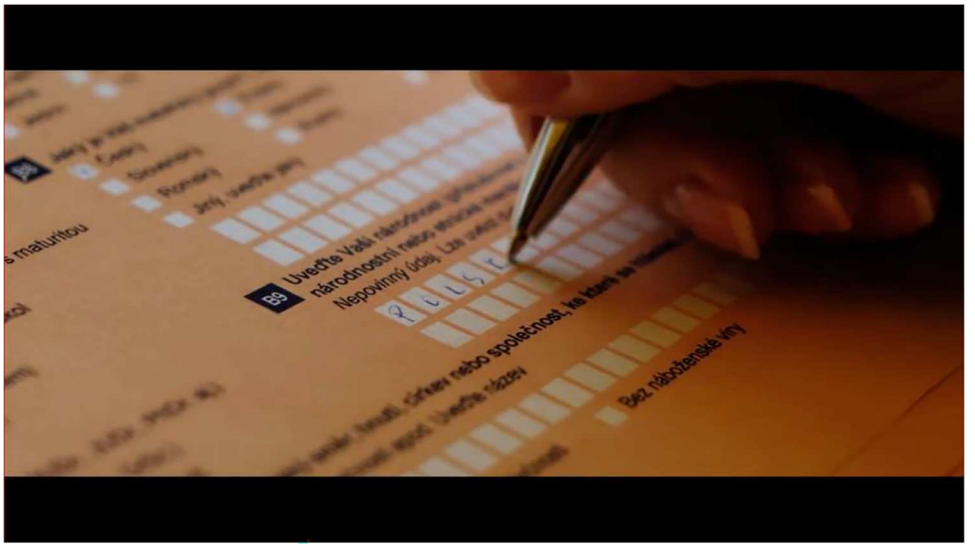

Figure 3. Declaration of a single ethnicity in the campaign video of the Congress of Poles (Census 2021).

(C) Persuasion by individuals

Whether persuasion took place even at the grassroots level, i.e. among individuals, remains unclear from the content disseminated in the media. But how to obtain data on this kind of persuasion? Should the researcher contact random members of ethnic and linguistic minorities? But how to proceed, given that belonging to an ethnic and linguistic minority is a private matter? Moreover, why should these minority members care about whether people with the same ethnicity or the same mother tongue claim these identities?

Those who are even existentially affected by the census results are members of minority committees as only certain results secure the existence of the CNMs (see above Section Czech linguistic policies dependent on census data). It is therefore to be expected that they have not only an institutional interest in the census results, that is, continuation of their organization, but a purely personal interest as well.

Note also that members of the CNMs are the middle link in the chain of persuasion: they communicate with minority associations and the Government Council for National Minorities, but they also know the members of ethnic minorities in their municipality/region in person. They are therefore part of the *organised* language, communication and sociocultural management, but they also have access to *simple* management, taking place in local everyday interactions. Thus the following observations are based on the interviews conducted overwhelmingly with them (for more details see Section A note on theory and method).

Persuasion among individuals can be divided into two types based on the data collected: family strategies and contact campaigns.

As given above, the basic unit of Czech censuses is not the individual, but the household. One member of the household can fill in the data for the remaining members, in the

case of underage household members this option is mandatory. In all households, but especially those that are ethnically and linguistically mixed, there may be different strategies to list the ethnicity of children for political purposes. In the following excerpt, respondent PN, who is Polish but has children with his Czech wife, is depicting how he persuaded his wife to fill in the children's Polish ethnicity – despite dual identity of the children:

PN: ((imitating himself speaking to his wife)) look, if we write out the Czech (.) we aren't gonna hurt or help anyone (.) but of course but we have this agreement basically that the children will basically determine the identity themselves,
I: hm
PN: but until now we had to, kids were too small so we were filling it out for them, my wife in the end agreed to it, yes, okay, put the Polish

Several respondents had conducted a contact campaign outside their family and circle of close friends. In the following excerpt, the respondent PHP is claiming that without the contact campaign, they would probably not have been able to get the ten percent of the minority ratio in the municipality needed to legally establish the CNM:

PHP: well but: I think that if there was no direct personal campaign in our municipality
PHK: hm
PHP: if we hadn't gone almost directly to every single family
I: hm
PHP: and hadn't explained to them, shown what it is about ye: that there were no ten percent
I: hm

Thus, it appears that pre-census persuasive practices can be crucial for the subsequent development of minority politics in some places.

PHP further stated that he used to go door-to-door in his village of about 1,500 inhabitants with leaflets of the official campaign of the Polish minority organization (*Congress of Poles*). During the interview he referred to the census as a political event several times, for example when giving 'lack of interest in public affairs' as the main reason why people do not declare their ethnicity and language.

Mother tongue unworthy of persuasion

Interestingly, we have not found any mention of explicit persuasion to fill out the mother tongue at any of the three levels of persuasion analysed in this article. There may be several reasons for this: the first is that the question on mother tongue is formally obligatory, there should therefore be no possibility of someone not completing it.[22] The second reason is that the question seems clearer and easier to answer because mother tongue, with its reference to childhood, appears to be immutable, as PN claims in the following excerpt:

PN: hm hm hm ((thoughtfully)) eh: (…) ((breath)) mother tongue or ethnicity, (.) you change that ethnicity basically yeah, (.) the mother tongue will remain (.) still the same it will be one.

The third reason for the absence of persuasion to specify mother tongue – and most important one for language policy research – is that no direct legal measures follow from this question. If political influence is perceived as the main goal behind persuasion

practices around censuses, then persuasion concerning mother tongue does not make sense: you can't establish the CNM or enforce minority (ethnic or language) policies with a certain proportion of mother tongue speakers indicated by the censuses. Clearly, the question on mother tongue is taken as factual by the persuading actors, i.e. politicians and representatives of national minorities, though it has a certain declaratory potential (see Section Declaratory questions as a prerequisite for persuasion).

Discussion

Confusion of 'ethnic' and 'linguistic' minority by legislators and policy makers

We do not want to argue that it is wrong that, given a certain proportion of national minorities in a municipality, there should be an obligation to create a body with the aim of protecting and promoting minority objectives: however, censuses should serve as an orientation base for minority policy-making rather than as a (very strict) benchmark, moreover, as a base that takes into account not only the number of people claiming minority ethnicity, but also minority languages.

It is not difficult to find communities whose linguistic identity is different from their ethnic identity: for example, the inhabitants of pre-war Hlučín region who considered themselves German, although their mother tongue was Czech (Kladiwa et al., 2016, p. 20), or some inhabitants of Těšín area who speak a dialect more similar to Polish and yet consider themselves Czech.

The current state of affairs discriminates against such communities or forces them to adopt a clear interpretation of the relationship between language and ethnicity. If someone is a native speaker of Polish and considers themselves Czech, they could be through censuses *de facto* deprived of the opportunity to be educated in their own language.

The current Czech laws thus confuse the concepts of language and ethnicity, interpreting them as one being an index of the other. The Czech state defends itself claiming that the transfer of language rights to members of national minorities does not cause a problem in practice (První periodická zpráva, 2008, p. 8). However, two objections can be posed here:

(1) The fact that no problem is visible does not mean that there is none: the problem may lie in the census data, generally considered objective, thus not problematized by anybody. However, what if people with a complicated ethnic identity and a minority language are forced to fill out a voluntary question about ethnicity just because they want to maintain the status of their language? The problem would then be not only in the reliability of the census data, but also in the coercion of linguistic legal norms forcing citizens to define themselves ethnically.
(2) Such a conception petrifies the relationship between language and ethnicity and hinders the development of a more complex notion of linguistic and ethnic identity.

The idea of a clear link between language and ethnicity remains not only in the laws, but is present also in the personal strategies of the census participants and in consciousness of the policy makers. Thus, in the report of the Government Council for National

Minorities reflecting on the 2021 census results, we can read that 'differences between ethnicities also exist in how many of their members also declare knowledge of the language. The highest proportion of those who do not speak *the language of their minority* was among the Belarusian and Ruthenian ethnicities.' (our emphasis)[23] The Belarusian linguistic and ethnic minority may serve to demonstrate the ambiguity of this connection. Belarus has two official languages – Russian and Belarusian – and the bulk of ethnic Belarusians now speak only Russian. Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that these people 'do not speak the language of their minority', if they don't speak Belarussian but Russian, since in this case the language of the Belarusian minority is also Russian.

This confusion between the concepts of ethnic and linguistic minority or ethnicity and language is not really new. In interwar Czechoslovakia, ethnicity was determined in the censuses by asking about the mother tongue (Kladiwa et al., 2016, p. 18). What is new is that since the 1991 census, mother tongue and ethnicity are asked separately in the censuses, but only the data on ethnicity is used to shape minority policy, including language policy.

Objective data gathering or elections?

The manifest function of the census is to record the facts, based on which the state can then make political decisions. However, we have shown that the latent function of fact-making and (minority) policy-making may lead many people to see the census *primarily* as a political act. Dominique Arel, referring to Brix (1982), describes the pre-census situation in the Czech lands during Austro-Hungarian rule as follows:

> 'Census preparation acquired the features of an election campaign, where each "vote" was bitterly fought by the contestants, a development completely at odds with the belief in a "scientifically objective" census.' (Arel, 2001, p. 110).

Minority persuasion campaigns also try to win votes, sometimes even explicitly using electoral rhetoric. For example, in a pre-census video aimed at persuading people to declare their Polish ethnicity, the President of the Congress of Poles has formulated a sentence that could be cut out of an election campaign: 'Thus, it is a shame to waste your vote, especially because every vote is important to us.'[24] Can we therefore think of the census as an event more akin to an election than to demographic research?

Apart from the pre-census persuasion and the political impact of the results, other aspects of the census speak for the appropriateness of this comparison. Like election results, census results are influenced by a country's 'electoral system', which may favour certain ethnicities or languages over others. Thus, the results and their political impact depend to a large extent, for example, on the language question asked, i.e. whether the question is about mother tongue, main language, the vernacular (*Umgangssprache)* or the ability to speak a particular language (Duchêne et al., 2018; Humbert, 2022). As in the case of elections, the vote itself can in some cases be 'skewed' – as when someone who lists a dialect as their mother tongue is counted under the parent language in the results, although identification with the dialect may have been central to the census participant. This comparison is countered by the fact that while elections are considered a political event by the majority of the population (including those

who do not vote), the current Czech census is perceived as such only by a narrower group of people, namely politically engaged members of ethnic minorities. In any case, the very possibility and meaningfulness of the comparison of the census and elections problematize the majority view of the census as objective data gathering.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we have demonstrated that and how persuasion to declare a minority ethnicity took place before the 2021 Czech census. The fact that persuasion occurs is due both to the design of Czech censuses, which take the form of self-completion and in which the question on ethnicity is explicitly declarative, and to Czech Minority Act, which derives many minority rights, including linguistic rights, from the census data.

We have introduced the distinction between factual and declaratory questions in the census design and demonstrated that the possibility to persuade someone to fill in a particular ethnicity, religion or mother tongue is formally viable only if the required information is considered an answer to a 'declaratory' question.

One of the reasons why the persuasion campaigns focused on 'ethnicity' rather than on 'mother tongue' was that the question on 'mother tongue' was perceived as factual. The other reason was that, as stipulated by Czech Minority Act, no direct legal measures follow from the census results based on the mother tongue question – for Czech language policy in the locality, it is the results based on the ethnicity question that matter.

Abbreviations

PD – *Pramenné dílo* [Statistical results. Source work].

Notes

1. The population may be, for example, all the inhabitants of a given state or territory, but also a selection of the part of the population worthy of enumeration, e.g., all men capable of fighting, or all men owning property (de Vries, 2005, p. 1104).
2. During the 1991 Czechoslovak census, the question on religion was again included as compulsory. However, due to negative reactions of the population, its non-completion was tolerated (PD 2011 / 2013, p. 20).
3. Many countries do not collect data on ethnicity because of fears that the data will be used against ethnic minorities (in Sweden, this prohibition on the collection of sensitive data is anchored in the Swedish Personal Data Act).
4. Thus, data on ethnicity can be based on both a direct question ('what is your ethnicity') and an indirect question, as was the case, for example, in the 1930 Czechoslovak census, where census participants (with the exception of Jews and Roma) were required to indicate their ethnicity (*národnost*) according to their mother tongue (PD 2011 / 2013, p. 27).
5. Compare the dispute between German and Czech statisticians before the first Czechoslovak census (1921) about how the concept of ethnicity (*národnost*) should be understood (Kladiwa et al., 2016, pp. 16–19).
6. For more on the institution of the Committee for National Minorities and its function, see Section 3. *Czech linguistic policies dependent on census data*
7. The Romani minority waged a very complex campaign too, and it is therefore to be expected that persuasion has also taken place on the individual level. See Romea. *Přihlaste se k romské národnosti: Romské organizace spustily kampaň ke sčítání, ve které "vystupuje" i prezident*

Zeman. Online: https://romea.cz/cz/domaci/prihlaste-se-k-romske-narodnostiromske-organizace-spustily-kampan-ke-scitani-ve-ktere-vystupuje-i-prezident-zeman

8. That is, those that were carried out since the 1989 social change, i.e., the 1991 Czechoslovak census and the 2001, 2011 and 2021 Czech censuses.
9. However, in 2001 statisticians also processed the responses of respondents with two mother tongues. (*Národnostní složení obyvatelstva*, 2003, Table 14).
10. The concept of ethnicity/nationality varies greatly from culture to culture, as do the terms used for it. The Czech concept of *národnost* is formally closer to Anglo-Saxon *ethnicity*, although compared to Anglo-Saxon *ethnicity, národnost* is anchored in policy-making situations. Etymologically, it is linked to the word *národ*, i.e., nation. This is why, for example, documents of the Council of Europe translate legal terms concerning *národnostní menšiny* in the Czech Republic as 'national minorities'. However, we have chosen the term 'ethnicity' for the sake of greater comprehensibility for the English reader. Note that the English version of the census form has also used the word 'ethnicity'. For more on the different concepts of ethnicity/nationality, see, for example, Arel (2001, p. 92ff.) and Zhou (2015, p. 206).
11. In the 1950–1980 censuses, which took place during the socialist era, the question on language was absent (except in the 1970 census) and ethnicity was already asked in the form of declaration. Ethnicity was defined as 'belonging to the nation with whose cultural and working community the person enumerated is intrinsically linked'. (PD 2011 / 2013, p. 16).
12. Original Czech instruction: „Proč tento údaj zjišťujeme?

    Jedině sčítání informuje o výskytu menšinových jazyků. Tato data umožňují rozhodovat o podpoře používání a zachování různých jazyků v dané lokalitě. Může se jednat například o zavedení dvojjazyčných místních názvů a nápisů či nabídku jazykového vzdělávání. To přispívá k zachování kulturní rozmanitosti a tradic a formování národnostní politiky státu. Data jsou také využívána pro hodnocení závazků vyplývajících z Evropské charty regionálních či menšinových jazyků.'
13. E.g., the *Congress of Poles in the Czech* Republic or the *Assembly of German Associations in the Czech Republic*.
14. For example, a hypothetical census participant who uses different means of transport to get to work may estimate which means of transport they use most often when asked 'which means of transport do you usually use to get to work or school'.
15. That is, without the need for official administrative intervention, which is necessary, for example, in the case of an official name change.
16. Either because the maximum number of to-be-filled-in languages in the Czech censuses is two, or because they do not want to claim some of them for whatever reason.
17. Translated from Czech. All excerpts from the interviews given in this article have been translated by the present authors. Transcription conventions are based on the conventions used in conversation analysis.
18. One can also imagine persuasion that would lead to impermissible, or even illegal, behaviour. For example, if people were persuaded to give a false address of residence.
19. Landesversammlung der deutschen Vereine in der Tschechischen Republik e. V. 1. 3. 2021. Sčítání lidu 2021: #priznejkoreny. In Youtube. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUW6c9k3WKY&ab_channel=%C4%8Cesk%C3%BDstatistick%C3%BD%C3%BA%C5%99ad
20. See e.g., Ulotka do pobrania [Online]. *Kongres Polaków w Republice Czeskiej*. https://www.polonica.cz/SpisLudnosci2021/ and https://www.polonica.cz/Files/File/ulotka.pdf
21. Głos – Gazeta Polaków w Republice Czeskiej. Prezes Kongresu Polaków w RC Mariusz Wałach – Wpisuję polská In: Youtube. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqi5L7daluM&t=3s&ab_channel=G%C5%82osGazetaPolak%C3%B3wwRepubliceCzeskiej
22. This does happen, but to a much lesser extent than in the case of ethnicity: the non-response rate was "only" 7.2% in the case of mother tongue in the 2021 Census (PD 2021 / 2024, p. 71).
23. Report of the Meeting of the Government Council for National Minorities, 18. 10.2022 [Zápis z jednání Rady z 18. října 2022], p. 6. Online: https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rnm/aktuality/Zapis-z-jednani-Rady-vlady-pro-narodnostni-mensiny-18-10-2022.pdf

24. Głos – Gazeta Polaków w Republice Czeskiej. Prezes Kongresu Polaków w RC Mariusz Wałach – Wpisuję polská
In Youtube. Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqi5L7daluM&ab_channel=G%C5%82os-GazetaPolak%C3%B3wwRepubliceCzeskiej

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