

## TEXAS CZECH FOLK MUSIC AND ETHNIC IDENTITY<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Drawing on ethnolinguistic fieldwork in the historically Czech Moravian communities of Central Texas, this article explores an intersection between the Texas Czech folk music tradition and the 'idea' of language projected into and reflective of the shifting definitions and historically motivated perceptions of 'Czechness' and 'Moravianness' among the second-to-fourth generation descendants of immigrants from the Moravian region of 19<sup>th</sup> century Austro-Hungarian Empire (presently a part of the Czech Republic). The cross-fertilization of the ancestral musical tradition with Texas country and western music reflects the process of ethnic redefinition among the generations of Texas Czechs. Where considerable assimilation of the Texas Czech community has eroded once distinct ethnic boundaries, and where the Texas Czech linguistic variety has lost its ground in day-to-day interactions, cultural performances of Texas Czech polka bands help reenact symbolic boundaries of the Texas Czech community in the minds of performers and their audiences and create an environment conducive to heritage language use. Texas Czech folk music thus continues to function as an effective manifestation of the Texas Czech ethnic identity.

**Keywords:** dying languages, ethnic identity, folk music, language maintenance, performance, Texas Czechs

### 1. Historical background

#### 1.1. *The roots transplanted to Texas*

Major waves of immigration from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Austro-Hungarian Empire to both other parts of Europe and America were driven by economic, political and religious reasons. Czech Moravian peasants in the Czech lands (i.e., Bohemia, Moravia, and parts of Silesia) wished to escape severe economic oppression, pervasive Germanization, and a compulsory military service in the Austrian Army, and both Protestants and emerging Free-thinkers saw emigration as a solution to the long years of religious persecution in their homeland (Machann and Mendl 1983).

Most Czech Moravians coming to Texas settled in the area centrally located among Dallas, Houston, and Corpus Christi (cf. Map 1). The earliest Czech Moravian communities (from the mid-1850s) can be found in Fayette County, also known as "the cradle of Czech

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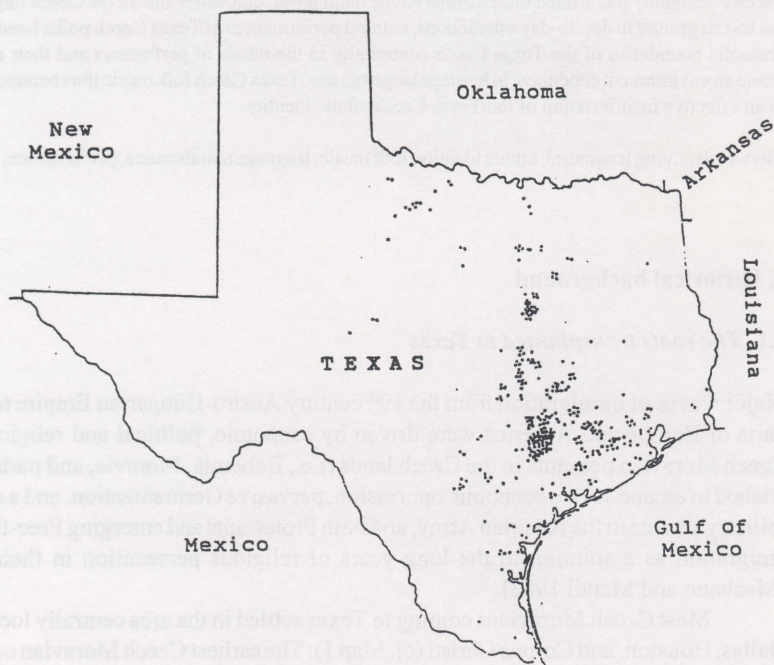
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immigration" to Texas (Svrcek 1974). Williamson and McLennan counties, where my focal communities are located, witnessed formation of the first Czech Moravian immigrant communities in the 1870s (Machann and Mendl 1983; Machann 1997; Gallup 1998).

Map 1

## Czech Moravian communities in Texas

(Distribution of Czech settlement in Texas in Janak 1991: 117)





The 1920s marked the end of significant organized Czech immigration to America, which then ceased completely by the end of World War II. The latest US Census for Texas (1990) indicates that a total of 191,754 Texans declared "Czech" or "Czechoslovakian" ancestry. (However, there were also an additional 2,120 Texans who claimed "Slavic" and 23,482 Texans who indicated "Austrian" descent. These numbers may also include ethnic Czechs.)<sup>2</sup> Irrespective of the Census data, Texas Czech organizations estimate their ethnic population in the state to number anywhere from 750,000 to one million, ranking the Czech language as the third "most popular spoken language" in the state.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2. *The Slav and other identities, then and now*

Being a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, many Slavic peoples in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lacked a concrete concept of national identity (Hannan 1985). Slavic, national and regional identities in the independent European nations formed after World War I have continued to evolve to the present day. The Slavs in 19<sup>th</sup> century Moravia used to claim Slav or Moravian identities, with some even objecting to being identified as Czech (Hannan 1996b: 176).<sup>4</sup> Even after the first Czechoslovak Republic was formed (1918), many inhabitants of the most remote regions in Northeastern Moravia continued to identify themselves as Moravians.

One key to our understanding of ethnolinguistic self-definitions given by the second-to-fourth generation Texas Czechs today therefore lies in the geographic origin of about 80% of the Czech immigration to Texas in the Lachian and Valachian regions of Northeastern Moravia (Janak 1985, 1991; cf. Map 2). Consequently, I find the designation "Texas Czech Moravians," which some Texans still proudly declare, to better reflect the sociohistorical development in the first immigrants' homeland (cf. also Eckert 1998; Hannan 1985, 1996a). At the same time, many Texans of this descent today prefer to identify themselves as "Texas Czechs," mainly because this self-designation allows them to trace their roots to the Moravian region of the Czech Republic. Using the term "Texas Czech" throughout this paper then, I acknowledge most of the community's preference for this ethnic definition.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1990 *Census of population: Social and economic characteristics, Texas*. Section 3 of 3. Table 17. Ancestry 1990: 142 & Table 18. Nativity, citizenship, year of entry, area of birth, and language spoken at home 1990: 143. Issued September 1993.

1990 *Census of populations and households, Texas*. Summary tape file 3.

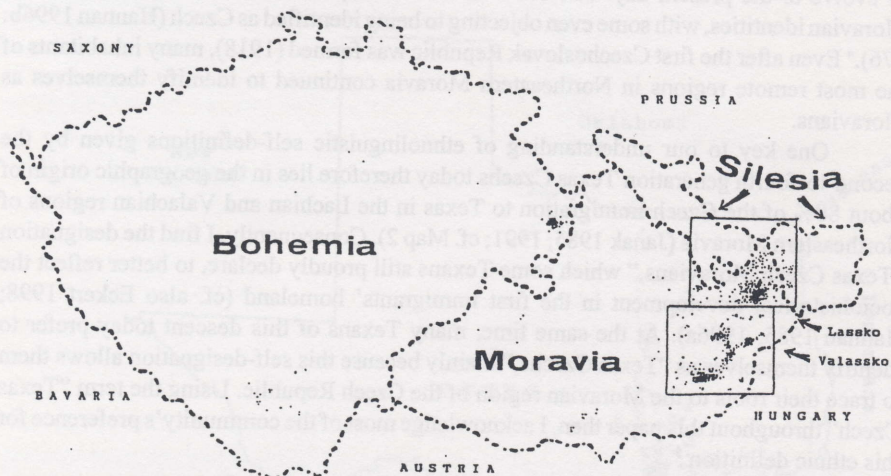
<sup>3</sup> The State of Texas House of Representatives. H.R. No. 83. Resolution adopted April 28, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> An example of such an appeal to the differences between Czech (i.e., Bohemian) and Moravian cultures from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes from the newspaper *Moravan* ('Moravian'), published in Olomouc, Moravia, in 1903: "We Moravians speak the Czech language, but then we do not have to be Czechs, let us stay rather Czech-Slavic Moravians" (Hýsek 1909 in Hannan 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Space does not allow me to expand on the complex issue of preferred ethnic self-identifications. The interested reader is referred to Chapter 6 in Dutkova (1998).

The origins of Czech immigration to Texas (Janak 1991: 114)]

Map 2 The origins of Czech immigration to Texas  
(Distribution of birthplaces of Czech immigrants to Texas in Janak 1991: 114)



DISTRIBUTION OF BIRTHPLACES OF CZECH IMMIGRANTS TO TEXAS (BASED ON 845 TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS IN 1985 STUDY):

**BY PROVINCE:**

born in Moravia: 83.3%  
born in Bohemia: 13.4%  
born in Silesia: 3.3%

**BY REGION:**

born in Lasko: 40.8%  
born in Valassko: 40.2%  
born in N. E. Bohemia: 9.9%  
born in S. Bohemia: 2.4%  
other birthplaces: 6.7%



## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. *Ethnic identity and language*

Despite the interest in the study of ethnic identity in the contemporary fields of anthropology and social science (e.g., Banks and Gay 1978; Barkan 1995a; Barkan 1995b; Bank 1996), a fairly small body of research has explored language and ethnicity among speakers of dying languages in US immigrant communities (e.g., Banks 1988; Dow ed., 1991; Haugen 1969; Fishman 1989, 1991a, 1991b; Fishman et al. eds., 1966; Peltz 1998: 173-204).<sup>6</sup> Language and ethnicity maintenance in Native American communities has been subjected to greater scrutiny (e.g., Fitzgerald 1974; Foster 1991; Harrod 1995; Kroskrity 1993). Insofar as language can be viewed as an essential part of speakers' identities (Brenzinger and Dimmendaal 1992), we need to fully understand how people think of themselves "in relation to one another and to their changing world," and how what they think is "encoded and mediated through language" (Kulick 1992: 9). Once a language comes to lose this exclusive position, whether used sparingly or not at all, we must consider it in its complex relationship with other expressions of ethnicity.

A notable contribution to the study of social identity has been made by Tajfel (1974, 1981, 1982). According to Tajfel (1974: 69), social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the values and emotional significance to that membership." Tajfel's theory of social identity became a cornerstone of the social psychological theory of ethnolinguistic identity (e.g., Giles ed., 1977; Giles, Bourhis and Taylor 1977; Giles and Johnson 1981, 1987). The study of language and social identity in general, and of language and ethnic identity in particular, has been further approached from the sociolinguistic perspective (see for example, the interactional sociolinguistic approach of Gumperz 1982; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982; Hymes 1972, 1974; Heller 1987; Heller ed., 1988), the sociology of language (cf. Fishman above), and ecology of language (Haarmann 1986).

The present study draws on the notion of ethnic boundaries that define and are defined by an ethnic group (Barth 1969; Bank 1996; Haarmann 1986; Isajiw 1974). With Barth (1969: 13) I view language as one of the diacritical markers of ethnicity that "may or may not be relevant to behavior." With Haarmann (1986: 261) I prefer to *relativize* the ethnolinguistic connection, viewing language *in* ethnicity as a variable rather than a central "criterion for the shaping of ethnic identity." Haarmann emphasizes that language is a variable parameter (and one of many) in the molding of ethnic identity, and that is why "the relation between language and ethnicity has to be specified as 'language *in* ethnicity,' and not simply as a diffuse interrelation of the kind, 'language and ethnicity'" (Ibid.: 261; italics in original). Conceptualizing the role of language in ethnicity as such leads us to accept, for example, that "the relevance of language in ecological relations

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the study of language and ethnic identity, see Gudykunst and Schmidt (1988).



depends on the role it is assigned by ethnic groups in interethnic relations" (Ibid.: 258).<sup>7</sup>

Inspirational from Fishman's research is his identification of modified ethnic identities in immigrant ethnic groups that have become 'de-ethnicized.' Fishman's (1985: 71) view that authentic ethnicity means "continuity of being, of doing, and of knowing" affords a useful distinction between "ethnic doing" and "ethnic knowing." His and other studies (e.g., more recently, Papademetre 1994 on Greek Australians; Šabec 1995 on Slovene Americans), demonstrate that ethnicity in some form of expression outlives the language, that is, the "knowing" in an immigrant ethnic community typically outlives the "doing." Šabec (1995: 148), for example, concludes that language shift among Slovene Americans in Cleveland has outpaced the progressing change in the community members' ethnic self-definitions, and that "the language is not considered to be the most important factor in preserving ethnic heritage for even one generation."

I also find inspiration in the few studies on Texas Czechs that devote some space to ethnolinguistic issues (e.g., Eckert 1998; Hanak 1979; Hewitt 1978; Machann 1976; Machann and Mendl 1983), and in Hannan's approach to the study of Texas Czech communities (1985, 1992a, 1996a) which considers the social, historical, and political factors involved in the process of ethnolinguistic redefinition of Texas Czechs till the present day. Hewitt (1979: 47-8), for example, when explaining the general dissolution of "ethnic enclosure" of Czech communities in Texas, asserts that at least through the 1900s, the "essentials of cultural heritage" (i.e., "religious beliefs, ethical values, musical tastes, recreation patterns, literature, historical language, and a sense of a common past") were preserved. Further, Machann and Mendl (1983) identify some traits, morals and values that prevailed through the late 1930s despite the already then-advanced assimilation of Texas Czechs, and Hanak (1979: 173) speaks of "identity with difference" still distinguishing Texas Czechs from other Americans in the late 1970s, because they "would melt away enough of their ethnic ego to stay in the melting pot but generally, not so much as to become nondescript, anonymous sediment."

## 2.2. *Texas Czech variety*

The fact that the majority of Czech immigrants to Texas came from Northeastern Moravia also explains why, unlike other American Czech linguistic varieties, Texas Czech is deeply rooted in Moravian (presently viewed as the Moravian dialects of the Czech language), specifically in the Lachian dialect of the Silesian subgroup, the Valachian dialect of the East Moravian subgroup, and the Hanak dialect of the Central Moravian

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<sup>7</sup>Haarmann does not simply assert the importance of "*relativism* of language in ethnicity"; he attempts to clarify it (Ibid.: 257; italics in original). Importantly, he argues that "the avoidance of a priori weighting or trying to fix the role of language as a *predetermined criterion* in ethnicity is not a weakness in sociolinguistic reasoning, but rather a guideline for the sophistication of theoretical concepts (Ibid.: 262; emphasis added).

The need to tease apart the notions of language and ethnicity and the insights we gain by doing so are demonstrated in a recent volume on endangered languages edited by Grenoble and Whaley (1998).



subgroup. My definition of Texas Czech as a reduced,<sup>8</sup> immigrant variety of Moravian Czech thus reflects this dialectal basis of Texas Czech, the considerable mixing and leveling of regional dialects over time and across generations, and the outgrowth of the contact between Czech Moravian and English. Having undergone the process of "relenguification" (Fishman 1985: 66), Texas Czech today survives as a "varying factor in ethnicity," relevant to some and irrelevant to other ethnic memberships, rather than being its stable feature (Haarmann 1986: 261-2).

### 2.3. *Ethnic identity, community boundaries, and language use*

The process of ethnic redefinition (Fishman 1985, 1991a; Haarmann 1986; Hannan 1996a for Texas Czechs) in the Texas Czech community reflects a complex interaction of the notions of 'Czechness' / 'Moravianness,' 'Americanness' and 'Texanness' among the Texans of Czech Moravian descent, their pride in their ancestors' determination to succeed despite immense hardships, fostered by both the factual and semi-idealized stories of immigration, their childhood memories, as well as their nostalgia for the 'old days' on the one hand, and a satisfaction with having 'the best of both worlds' on the other. Not surprisingly, identity of ethnic Czechs in Texas no longer pertains "to the same culture that was initially associated with that identity" (Fishman 1991a: 26). Rather, the unique Texas Czech culture of the 1990s draws on community members' "ethnic knowing" (Fishman 1985: 5) of what it means to be a Texan with the Czech Moravian ethnic background.

The boundaries of the Texas Czech community today are highly permeable. Defining the concept of ethnic boundary, Barth (1969: 13-14) argues that "to the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for the purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups." However, his assignment of "an imperative status" to ethnic identity strips this concept of the necessary "situationality" (Okamura 1981 in Bank 1996), as "one's sense of one's own ethnicity waxes and wanes...depending on the current social situation one is engaged in" (Banks 1988: 17). Haarmann (1986: 39) views the notion of ethnic boundary as "deeply dependent on the attitudes and activities of ethnic groups, which may serve to weaken or strengthen them," and Cohen (1985: 118) concludes that

whether or not its structural boundaries remain intact, the reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture. People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a reference to their identity.

All these perspectives emphasize fluidity and context-boundedness of ethnicity, suggesting that when considering the boundaries of a far-gone immigrant community such as that of Texas Czechs, one should amend Barth's concept of ethnic boundary to include the view that "it is not so much the group which endures as the *idea* of the group" (Bank 1996: 12; emphasis in original).

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<sup>8</sup> According to Polinsky (1994: 257): "The language that undergoes attrition is called *reduced* as opposed to a *full* language [here, European Czech], i.e., a language characterized by full conventional knowledge" (italics in original; see also Polinsky 1995).



Likewise, it is the 'idea' of the heritage language, rather than the actual use of Texas Czech, that continues to play a role in the Texas Czech identity. I demonstrate elsewhere (Dutkova 1998; 1999ab) that while the speaker's identity and identity of her interlocutors are the most important factors affecting language choice (cf. Dorian 1981; Gal 1979), the use of this variety in Texas Czech communities is limited to a few specific *functional* contexts (such as joking and teasing, greetings, and 'weather talk'), and only certain *social* contexts (referring to both physical settings and occasions, particularly polka dances, ethnic festivals, and the so-called 'Czech weddings') encourage it. One does not have to speak the language to feel Czech or Moravian, although *any* use of Texas Czech is emblematic of the ethnic group membership and manifests the ingroup solidarity. Thus, the remaining contexts of language use meaningfully complement the community's reality as "expressed and embellished symbolically" (Cohen 1985: 98) through various outward manifestations of ethnicity, cultural performances of Texas Czech polka bands being one of them.

### 3. Aims of the study

The goal of my ethnolinguistic fieldwork in rural Czech Moravian communities of Central Texas was to examine the role of an obsolescent language in the immigrant community and in the shifting definitions of its members' ethnic identity. One of the most salient outward expressions of Texas Czech ethnic identity is Texas Czech folk music. In what follows, I explore symbolic meanings of this art form and identify the link between the cultural performances of Texas Czech bands and heritage language maintenance.

#### 3.1. Method

The method central to my fieldwork was participant observation. In the course of seven months I participated in numerous social events (such as ethnic festivals, polka dances, church picnics, community fund raisers, 'Czech' weddings, meetings of Texas Czech organizations, and school reunions), conducted sociolinguistic interviews, complemented by structured language tasks, and collected additional data through questionnaires on language use and attitudes. In my present work, I draw on a subsample of 39 interviews from my focal communities (see 3.2. below), 37 attitudinal questionnaires, and fieldnotes.

The major advantage of participant observation lies in its potential to yield good samples of natural language (Milroy 1987: 78).<sup>9</sup> Apart from a number of ethical issues of which a researcher must be cognizant, one technical difficulty worth mention here is that audio-taping in the midst of crowded public events may jeopardize the quality of data. In

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<sup>9</sup> All researchers interested in collecting natural speech data through interviews and participant observation face what Labov (1972: 209) termed the *Observer's Paradox*: "[T]he aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation." To at least partially compensate for its consequences, I rely on four sources of data (i.e., observed language use, interviews, fieldnotes, and attitudinal questionnaires).



my study, audio-taping during dance socials, church picnics, and ethnic festivals with performances of Texas Czech bands proved quite difficult, yet such events were prone to provide the most interesting language data (more on this point below).

The majority of insider views expressed in this article come from semi-structured interviews which cannot provide equally spontaneous language data. However, Texas Czech speakers rarely choose to use their Czech in spontaneous encounters, even if they are relatively proficient in it. Thus considering a very limited use of Texas Czech that one encounters in natural settings, my interviews yielded invaluable speech data. As for the informants' autobiographies and views around which our talk was centered, the degree to which I managed to offset the unavoidable bias depended on whether we were able to establish good rapport and whether we talked in a context that the informant perceived as natural.

As Hill and Hill (1986: 73) note in their insightful discussion on the value and drawbacks of sociolinguistic interviews,

the best site for collection of material on ways of speaking is in contexts which are defined by speakers themselves, in which the fieldworker is a participant observer, not an outsider who has imposed a foreign context for talk.

Most of my interviews took place in an informant's home, and most of them were constructed as semi-formal visits, sometimes including more conversation over a meal. I interviewed individuals, couples, and groups. The couple and group interviews were most successful in reducing the event's formality. In addition to the context, the researcher must consider "how respondents constructed our identities and that of the interviewer" (Ibid.: 75). Having established several closer relationships with community members, I benefited from my enriched identity as not only a researcher but also as "a friend of a friend" (Milroy 1987: 66) interested in the life of the community. Here I found that my Czech Moravian background and rural upbringing also affected people's perceptions of my place in the community. Likewise, the image of a 'young girl who is running around' (to learn as much as she can), created by the community members, seemed to work to my advantage as I typically enjoyed a cordial welcome and hospitality. Finally, having matching sources of data to guide my analysis of ethnographic information that my informants offered has helped illuminate their ideologies about who they think they are and what language they think they speak.

### **3.2. Focal communities**

Most of my fieldwork took place in the Texas towns of Granger (Williamson County; population 1,190) and West (McLennan County; population 2,515). Granger is geographically more isolated than West, which is situated right off Highway 35. While many West businesses (such as the Olde Czech Bakery, the Czech American Restaurant, or the Czech Gift Shoppe) have successfully drawn on the uniqueness of ethnic composition of the town, once prosperous businesses of Granger have lost the economic battle against Walmart, K-Mart, and HEB in the nearby town of Taylor. In addition, the controversial construction of Granger Lake (completed in 1977) displaced many farming families and, as I was told on many occasions, contributed to the economic downfall of the



town. As Mrs. Arnold<sup>10</sup> from Granger put it:

- (1) ...*tady není žádné zaměstnání, ty obchody zavírají, nemohou na tom vydělat*.  
 '...there're no jobs here, the stores are closing down, they can't make a profit'  
*A nemáme tady {grocery stores}, a musíme jezdit' do Taylor...*  
 'and we have no grocery stores here, and [so] we have to go to Taylor...' <sup>11</sup>

Mrs. Borek of West, on the other hand, voices the common view that the beginning of the Czech ethnic festival in 1976 helped revive the town's commercial spirit: "...It was after the success of the Westfest when it all started, before the town was going down hill...[People] had jobs in Waco and there were very few little stores that had kept up."

Yet, even though West has been designated by the State Legislature as the "Czech Heritage Capital of Texas," I expected to find more speakers of the Texas Czech variety in Granger. This hypothesis rested in the reasoning that the town's relative geographic isolation should have helped delay the dissolution of its "ethnic enclosure" (the term of Hewitt 1978). (The speakers from Granger indeed displayed higher levels of proficiency in Texas Czech; cf. Dutkova 1998.)

### 3.3. Focal informants

My 39 focal informants are second-to-fourth generation Texans of Czech Moravian descent. Most of them have been life-long residents of the Granger and West area. With the exception of three informants who were the first to be born in the US, all speak of great-grandparents or grandparents who settled in Texas in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix A lists false surnames (without diacritical markers that for some of them change the quality of vowels and consonants in European Czech) of all informants whose views are quoted in this paper, along with their year of birth and the home community. Any overlap with the real surnames of many other people whom I met, spoke with, or interviewed is purely coincidental. (In European Czech, female surnames are distinguished from male surnames by the ending *-ová*; e.g. *Arnoldová*.)

<sup>11</sup> *Note on Transcription:* Softening of the Czech consonants /c, d, n, r, s, t, z/ and the vowel /e/ is marked by a *háček* above the letter (e.g., /č, ř, š, ž.../; /ě/ = [ie]), and vowel length is marked by a *čárka* above the letter (e.g., /á/ = [a:]). The Czech vowel /i/ is represented orthographically as either a 'soft' [i] or a 'hard' [y]. (The effect of this distinction on pronunciation is guided by specific grammatical rules the discussion of which is not taken up in this paper.) Excerpts from interviews are transcribed using regular Czech orthography except for three adjustments: (1) the /ů/ orthographic distinction is rendered as /ú/ regardless of the linguistic environment; (2) voicing of unvoiced consonants affected by the following voiced consonant in speech is transcribed as such for (a) [k] < [g] (e.g., *gde, negdy* for Standard Czech [StCz] *kde, někdy* 'where, sometimes'); (b) [s] < [z] (as in *zme* for StCz *jíme* 'we are'); and (3) devoicing of voiced consonants affected by the following unvoiced consonants is transcribed as such for (a) [z] > [s] as in *spívát* for StCz *zpívat* 'to sing'), and (b) [v] > [f] (as in *Morafci* for *Moravci* 'Moravians'). These adjustments have been made to better reflect the Moravian dialectal basis of Texas Czech. *Symbols for transcription:* ( ) = my question and translation within the excerpt; - = pause; -- = word group or clause truncated (-- and restart); [ ] = my word insertion/explanation; ... = omitted segment; @@@ = laughter; ( ( ) ) = literal translation of word/phrase; \* = ungrammatical feature in both Common (Spoken) Czech and Moravian dialects; { } = morphological integration (i.e., an English stem + a Czech inflection). 'My translation of excerpts is closed in single quotation marks.' Case inflections noted here include GEN (genitive), DAT (dative), ACC (accusative), and VOC (vocative); INF = infinitive; PL = plural.



My informant grouping reflects the fact that the definite decline of intergenerational transmission and use of Czech in Texas Czech communities began after World War II.<sup>12</sup> The sample is then composed of two groups: 27 focal informants (13 males and 14 females) who were born before 1945 (pre-1945 group), and 12 informants (7 males and 5 females) born after 1945 (post-1945 group). Twenty-two of them (17 from the pre-1945 group and 5 from the post-1945 group) married other ethnic Czechs. Ten informants born before 1945, and 6 informants born after 1945 married Anglo-Americans or other-ethnic Americans; one informant is single. This ratio reflects the increased rate of intermarriage for the post-World War II generation. As for education, 15 informants graduated from high school, and 10 finished anywhere from 6 to 11 grades. Dropping out of high school used to be common especially before World War II, when farming required full-time involvement of all family members. Six informants earned college degrees and another 6 have taken classes in community or four-year colleges. Occupation-wise, this informant sample is composed of homemakers, farmers, health care workers, bank employees, tradesmen and the self-employed, factory and postal workers, an engineer and a physician.

The views I quote in this paper were given by 24 Texas Czechs, with 16 from the sample of 39 focal informants (described above) and 8 outside the sample.<sup>13</sup> The questionnaire data come from 37 focal informants who have returned their questionnaires.

#### 4. Ethnic identity and Texas Czech folk music

##### 4.1. Historical perspective

Owing to the first Texas Czech settlers' origins in the Lachian and Valachian regions of Moravia, that is closer to the Slovakian border, their transplanted folk culture had "more in common with Slovakia and other parts of the Carpathians than with Bohemia and western Moravia" (Hannan 1996a: 10). Some elements of this folk culture proved more practical and more desirable in Texas than others. For example, the elaborate costume from the Beskydy mountainous area did not survive in the Texas environment, while *cimbál* (dulcimer), a popular string instrument (Ibid.: 11), was used by the early musical groups, the best known of which is the *Bača* Family Band of Fayetteville.

The *Bača* Family Band was organized by Frank *Bača* of Fayetteville in 1892. Frank's father came to Texas from Bordovice, Moravia in 1860 and settled near Fayetteville in the area that he named Bordovice to remind him of his native village. Frank *Bača*'s was a truly family band involving all of his thirteen children. The *Bačas* established themselves as a brass band, playing in the tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bohemian bands,

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<sup>12</sup> The mid-1940s spelled the end of once widespread intergenerational transmission of American Czech (e.g., Eckert 1988, 1998; Henzl 1975; Hannan p. c.). Kučera (1989), for example, notes that American Czechs born in the 1950s grew up "*v prostředí zcela americkém*" ('in an entirely American environment') with only some Czech still being spoken in the homes.

<sup>13</sup> That is, some of them I interviewed, others I only met in passing. In both cases I draw on my fieldnotes. Based on the available data, these eight informants include a retired high school teacher, a retired farmer, a homemaker, a former shop co-owner and a community service worker.



although they added the dulcimer,<sup>14</sup> which was typical for Moravian folk music groups.

In the late 1930s, *Bača's* Band evolved into three bands, one of them being Ray *Bača's* New Deal Band. Ray's son, Gil Baca (today with anglicized spelling), has kept the tradition alive, first with his Houston-based band, and since he retired, with his Fayetteville Band. Just like his father, Gil Baca plays the dulcimer and other instruments. The liner notes on his band's recent audiotape highlight his success as an "ethnic musician" (*Bača's Musical History*; G. Baca, p. c., December 1, 1997; *Gil Baca*, audiotape).

Undoubtedly, folk music has been the most popular expression of the Czech Moravian identity in Texas. Hannan (1996a: 11) emphasizes that Texas Czech folk music is the product of the descendants of the first immigrants rather than an expression of the first settlers' musical tradition, which, in fact

did not reflect the traditions of eastern Moravia, however, where the traditional folk music is performed on stringed instruments. Until recent decades the Moravian folk music in Moravia was viewed as backward and primitive in comparison with that of cosmopolitan Prague.

In the 1920s, live band performances in the dance halls were joined by polka shows aired on many local radio stations. This kind of "ethnic programming" (Machann and Mendl 1983: 155) has retained its popularity mainly, but not exclusively, among Texas Czechs over the age of fifty. In the 1920s and 1930s, Texas Czechs could pride themselves in having about one hundred ethnic bands in the state (Ibid.: 157). Some forty years later, Machann and Mendl (1983: 154) comment that it is "uncommon for [their] informant to remember a single *pohádka* (fairy tale) but common to perfectly recall, and be willing to sing...dozens of songs." While I have found that not very many people remember all the lyrics and are willing to sing a Czech song when asked, they are often able to sing along with a band and do so spontaneously.

#### 4.2. The role of folk music in Texas Czech ethnolinguistic identity today

In the dying language communities, living ethnically finds a surrogate in occasional celebrations of ethnicity. While such symbolic expressions of identity are a welcome addition to, rather than the essence of, daily life, they may continue to play a role in heritage language maintenance. For example, as Šabec (1995: 114) reports, "ethnic events show a dramatic rise in the use of the Slovene language" among Slovene Americans in Cleveland.

Assessing the stage of language loss among Native people of Southeast Alaska (namely Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian), Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998: 67-8) note that while "the language effort has never matched the popularity of singing and dancing," there has been "the dramatic increase in Indian pride as manifested in the many community

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<sup>14</sup> Hannan (1996a: 12) notes that while "the craft of making and playing dulcimer was introduced to Texas from Moravia," the dulcimer became a part of brass bands playing polkas and waltzes in the style of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century orchestras from Bohemia.

Ray *Bača* played a dulcimer built by the Kreneks, another family of musicians and dulcimer builders. Ray Kreněk of Sealy still plays one today (the performance at *Matička Kultura* 'Mother Culture' organized by the Folklife Resources in Austin, Texas, August 17, 1997).



dance groups that have blossomed in the last few years." They reason that "[s]inging and dancing are easier, more fun, more tangible, and less threatening than language learning." Such performances serve as "obvious outward manifestations of 'the culture' that transcend language skills other than learning the songs," and therefore, are more appealing to the learners (Ibid.: 68). These 'performances of heritage,' however, can be viewed not only as "a more convenient 'badge of ethnicity'" (Ibid.); importantly, they help maintain the *presence* of heritage language in the community. Indeed, being one of the creative and often commercialized outward manifestation of 'Czechness,' Texas Czech folk music today functions as a key, spontaneous factor in language preservation. It is this point that I explore in some detail in this section.

#### 4.2.1. *Texas Czech folk songs as a cultural performance*

As conceptualized by Hymes (1975) and Bauman (1977, 1986, 1992), verbal performance is

a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skills, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential context (Bauman 1986: 3).

Folk songs constitute a 'way of speaking' (cf. also Hymes 1974) just as oral narratives or poems do; therefore, their performance, "like all communication, is situated, enacted, and rendered meaningful within the socially defined situational contexts" (Bauman 1977: 45). A folk song, then, is "not just a text with a tune" precisely because its meaning is contextually bound, being communicated in the act of performing (Titon 1992: 168).

Further, the presentation of Texas Czech polka bands as part of ethnic events and at dances constitutes "cultural performances," that is, "scheduled events, restricted in setting, clearly bounded, and widely public" (Bauman 1977: 28). And while such performances are organized with the main objective of entertaining (Ibid.), they also provide a meaningful context for ethnic Czechs in the audience to initiate and participate in brief exchanges in their heritage language. Moreover, the sound of Czech lyrics surrounding the youngest members of this audience helps raise awareness of, and in some an enthusiastic endorsement for, having Czech Moravian ethnic background and language. Such performances then become "the occasion and event that fosters through social interaction and participation the collective consciousness and affirmation of group identity or ethnicity" (Béhague 1992: 177). Overall, the community members themselves appear to view these performances as discrete 'encapsulations of culture' (Singer in Bauman 1992: 47), occasionally put on display for *both* outsiders and insiders to enjoy.

Among communicative means keying performances of Texas Czech polka bands the use of the heritage language occupies the most prominent place; it is not a "special usage" (Bauman 1977: 17) of the audience's primary language (here English), but rather a call from the past reminding those who care of who they are. This use of ancestral language goes hand in hand with an "appeal to tradition" (Ibid.: 21). While the bands have their own idea of how a song should be performed (involving primarily changes in its instrumentation), and while they strive for creativity in order to sound different from others, most of them take as a point of reference Texas Czech adaptations of original Czech folk



songs, or authentically *Texas* Czech compositions.<sup>15</sup> To these points of reference they want to remain faithful.

As for typical settings and events, Texas Czech bands have traditionally performed in *SPJST*<sup>16</sup> dance halls, community centers, or out in the open, for dances, 'Czech weddings,' church picnics, and ethnic festivals. Band members usually wear a white shirt and a vest with embroidered hems. The motifs decorating the vest are rather simple and tend to differ from one band to another. An embroidered vest is an essential part of a Texas Czech costume, sometimes worn by itself to symbolize one's membership in the Texas Czech community when the event attended calls for it. Some costumes are authentically Texas Czech, others approximate regional *kroje* (costumes) from the ancestral land.<sup>17</sup> More or less 'Tex-Czech modified' costumes (referred to as such by Mrs. Karas from West, among others) are also worn by dancing and singing groups.

#### 4.2.2. From Czech to Texas Czech 'variety' bands

Machann (1988: 109) observes as "most striking" in the development of Texas Czech folk music "the adoption of elements from American 'country' ('country and western') music," and reasons that this might be happening because "country music is the closest thing in

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<sup>15</sup> As for the lyrics, Titon (1992: 169) observes that the media together with the efforts to preserve folk songs (hence written notation taking the place of oral transmission) tend to effect reduction in their variability from one version of a song to another. While Texas Czech folk songs have not escaped this trend, some variations in lyrics within one song performed by different Texas Czech bands can be still recorded. For example, in the song *From Tabor to us* (*Od Tábora až k nám*), the line *má drahá Mařenko* ('my dear Mary') as sung by Kovanda's Czech Band becomes *má drahá panenka* (literally, 'my dear doll') when performed by Vrazel's Polka Band. (The song, in the Kovanda Czech Band's version, is reproduced in Appendix B.) There are also differences between the Czech and Texas Czech versions of one song (for example, the *Wild goose waltz* / *Husička divoká* in which European Czechs sing *nemohla doletět, spadla do potoka* / 'she couldn't land, she fell into the stream,' and where Texas Czechs – apparently unanimously – have *vypila vodičku z našeho potoka* / 'she drank water from our stream'). Finally, at times one encounters somewhat puzzling lines as in the song *She was sitting by the fountain* (*U studánky seděla*), where the European Czech version has *U studánky seděla, do vodičky hleděla, spatřila malou rybičku jak polykala vodičku* ('She was sitting by the fountain and was looking in the water, she spotted small fish swallowing [drinking] water'), while a Texas Czech band I have heard play the song many times sings, ...*spatřila malú rybičku, aby se bála vodičku* ('...she spotted small fish so that she [the fish] was afraid of the water') with incorrect case inflection (*vodičku*-ACC instead of *vodičky*-GEN). (Note that the rhyme in *rybičku / vodičku* is preserved though at the expense of the grammatical case ending, and that the purpose clause *aby se bála vodičku* fails to meaningfully modify the main clause beginning with *spatřila* 'spotted'.)

<sup>16</sup> *Slovenská podporující jednota státu Texas* (Slavonic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas), or *SPJST*, with its weekly *Věstník* ('Herald') published in English, is a flourishing organization combining fraternalism with issuance of insurance policies. *SPJST* was established in 1897 and its lodges used to be the center of cultural life in Czech Moravian communities across Texas. While many lodges have remained quite active to the present day, vitality of their cultural life has been fading out.

<sup>17</sup> Authentic *kroje* from the Czech Republic have been a highly priced – and praised – commodity among Texans of Czech Moravian descent, many of whom purchased one while visiting the Czech Republic. A talented seamstress in West caters to American (mainly Texas) Czech customers who are interested in a slightly or significantly modified version of an authentic regional *kroj*.



America to a living tradition of Anglo, rural, folk music, and the Texas Czechs are a predominantly rural-oriented people, even today." Most Texas Czech bands today utilize elements of country music style and instrumentation in their polkas and waltzes, and adopt full-fledged country songs into the repertoire. In fact, Machann (1988: 109) cites data obtained as early as 1977 indicating that already at that time about 50% of the Texas Czech bands' repertoire from live performances and about 25% of the songs recorded on their albums fit the genre of country western.

In contrast to Kovanda's Czech Band, which is unique today because it plays an "[a]uthentic Czech polka and waltz music," other Texas Czech bands promote themselves as offering a variety of styles for all types of audiences; for example, Vrazel's (in the original spelling *Vrážel*) Polka Band, one of the most popular Czech bands in Texas, is advertised as performing "*polka, waltz and country music since 1953*."<sup>18</sup> This trend is apparent from promotional slogans of other major bands – from those that continue to foreground authenticity of their Czech music ("*innovative Czech folk music*" combined with 'country' and 'modern' of the Dancehall Polka Boys), through those that seem to present both styles on equal footing (the Lee Roy Matocha orchestra with its "*old time and modern music for all occasions*"), to the bands that appear to highlight the 'country' aspect of their repertoire (the Granger Polka Boys, a "*five-piece variety band featuring old-time country, polka and waltzes*"), and finally those that market themselves using a vague and perhaps commercially the most appealing label of all (the El Campo Melody Boys, "*the most versatile band in Texas ... honoring everyone's heritage*") (*Věstník* Jan. 28, 1998: 11; emphasis added).<sup>19</sup>

It is possible that the slogan of El Campo Melody Boys, "honoring everyone's heritage," expresses what most Texas Czech bands are striving for. At the same time, as long as they keep the Czech-sung polkas and waltzes in their repertoires, at least some of their music will retain its appeal as an important symbol of ethnicity. Should they resort to English translations, however, this special characteristic distinguishing Texas Czech from other polka bands in Texas would be lost, and with it, the bands' unique role in the maintenance of Texas Czech ethnolinguistic identity (cf. Mr. David's words in excerpt 2 below). This may soon become a pressing issue for Texas Czech activists as well as music lovers concerned with the preservation of Texas Czech folk music as we know it today.

- (2) *Mladi už zapominají na českou muziku ... if we don't do something about it,*  
*'the young have been already forgetting Czech music...if we don't do something about it,'*  
*ja myslím že mosíme českou muziku spívat englicky, aby to mladi mohli byt' part of it,*

<sup>18</sup> The composition of the Kovanda brass style band, i.e., two bugles (or bugle horns, in Czech *křídlovka*), two clarinets, two trombones, a baritone, a euphonium, a tuba, and drums, is a reflection of the original Czech brass band music transplanted to Texas. (The band's organizer, Vlastimil Kovanda of the former Czechoslovakia, established the band in 1984 and returned to his home country a few years later.) The arrangement of the five-member Vrazel's Band, on the other hand, with its two saxophones, two electric guitars, drums, and two accordions, represents the Texas Czech style significantly influenced by Texas country and western music.

<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Texas Chapter of Polka Lovers Club of America (P. L. C. of A.), the biggest chapter in the US having 1,000 members in 1995 (Gallup 1998), and the Texas Czech Polka Music Association, with its Houston-based monthly *Texas Czech Polka News*, both play an important role in the promotion of Texas Czech folk music today.



'I think that we have to sing Czech music in English, so that the young people could [can] be a part of it,'

*a Polaci už to dělají...ja to nemam rad, ale...*

'and the Polish have been already doing it...I don't like it, but...'

(Mr. David, a musician from Ennis)

Trying to appeal to all age groups, some bands choose to emphasize their music's adaptability to the modern age, depicting it as something 'cool' and empowering (for example, the print on a tee-shirt promoting Vrazel's Polka Band reads, "Vrazel's Polka and Power"). None of them, however, seem to have fulfilled the expectations of young audiences as successfully as a Denton-based band, Brave Combo, which plays a variety of styles including Czech, German, Polish, and Mexican polkas. Their "nuclear polka" incorporates everything that young audiences might look for - no enhancement strategies necessary. Mr. Eden from West describes the band as "a cross between Čech ('Czech') dancing and American, they sort of mix the two together, they're hippie style, long hair, but they play fast-pace Czech music, polka and waltzes, and kids love it..." He thinks that at least twenty percent of younger people come to the annual Westfest only because of Brave Combo: "They bring the Czech music to the younger kids and they're accepting it." His statement assumes what generally tends to be the case: That Texas teenagers of Czech descent lack interest in Texas Czech folk music. His wife then continued, "I'll turn the music on [radio polka show] and they [her children] laugh," to which Mr. Eden added, "we love it, and I get upset when they do that, but I guess they don't understand..."

The question that often surfaced in interviews was whether Texas Czech bands, naturally interested in gaining more popularity and satisfactory earnings, must compromise their repertoire to appeal to the widest possible audience. "In Texas you have to play country," says Mr. Frinta, a farmer and musician himself. However, Mr. Gustav from West believes that this compromise might be hurting the popularity of some bands that play high quality polkas and waltzes but whose country and western does not live up to the same standards. He moderates "The American Czech Hour," the radio program at KHRB Hillsboro, which is one of the many Texas Czech polka shows aired across the state of Texas. Interestingly, in Mr. Gustav's experience the Texas Czech audience prefers Texas Czech music so strongly that the selection of the bands from the Czech Republic must be limited to "maybe three songs a week." He says,

- (3) I don't really think [the bands] have to - [compromise], they just do it to bring a little more variety to what they play, and I personally think that's a mistake. If you play Czech music, you should play Czech music and stay away from country western...I think that a lot of the bands that try to mix it up don't have near the following...I'm not sure if there're any Czech bands in Texas that play authentic music, I think that the music they play has been adapted to - I think the correct term is "Texas Czech music," I've never heard a band from Czechoslovakia that sounded anything like bands here.

The "American Czech Hour" polka show has yet another hard worker behind the scenes, Mrs. Hrda, who says that she wants the selection of music to include at least some bands from the Czech Republic, "so that people don't forget how it sounds." She is also concerned with the quality of pronunciation of Czech lyrics, making sure that only the



recordings in which singers “pronounce the Czech or Moravian correctly”<sup>20</sup> are included.

Some examples to illustrate Mrs. Hrda’s concern follow. First, I reproduce a few lines from the Wild olive waltz as transcribed by one Texas Czech musician (excerpt 4). Here, only two misspellings (underlined) would be clearly detectable in the actual performance of the song. Incorrect lengthening of vowels serves as an example of haphazard placement of diacritical markers which is very common in (today rather scarce) examples of Texas Czech writing. Breaking words into syllables (e.g., *ne vím* instead of *nevím* ‘I don’t know’) may simply reflect the rhythm of the song.

- (4) \**Olívo*, \**olívo*, \**olívo zelená* [should be *olivo* ‘olive-VOC’]

‘Olive, olive, green olive’

\**řekní mně* \**olívo*, *co můj milý* \**dělát* [should be *řekni* ‘tell me’, *dělá* ‘is doing’ instead of INF \**dělát* / *dělat* ‘to do’]

‘tell me olive what my love is doing’

*Já \*tý to \*ne-povím, já to sama \*ne vím* [should be *tě* ‘you-DAT’, *nepovím* ‘I will not tell’, *nevím* ‘I do not know’]

‘I won’t tell you, I don’t know it myself’

*Já jsem strom zelený, já \*mlúvit \*ne-umím* [should be *mluvit* ‘to speak’, *neumím* ‘I don’t know how’]

‘I am [just] a green tree, I don’t know how to [cannot] speak’

In another example (from the Wild goose waltz), one band’s singer mistakenly pronounces the word *zvysoka* in the line *Husička divoká letěla zvysoka* (‘the wild goose was flying up high’) as *vyšoká* (‘tall’), thus obscuring the line’s meaning. In the next line, *vodičku* becomes *vodyčku* (‘water-ACC’). Texas Czech speakers are able to detect ‘foreignness’ of such pronunciation, because in Czech the /y/ hardens while the /i/ softens the consonant /d/ preceding it (cf. note 10). Finally, the difficulty that singers in the mid-50s and younger tend to have in common is mispronunciation of the fricative trill /ř/ which is unique to European Czech (resulting in an approximation [rzh]). Belonging to the post-World War II generation, they usually heard Czech spoken as they were growing up but were not encouraged to learn to speak it.<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Hrda is likely to be even more selective about the bands that perform Czech folk music but whose members are not of Czech descent. Another informant, Mrs. Ivanik from Granger, says of such cases,

<sup>20</sup> Many of my informants referred to their ancestral language interchangeably as “Czech” or “Moravian” (and to the community’s present-day variety as “Texas Czech” describing it as “broken,” “half and half,” “mixed,” “slang,” “brogue,” and the like), further problematizing the concept of Texas Czech / Moravian ethnolinguistic identity.

<sup>21</sup> Apart from pronunciation, some of them do not fully understand the meaning of the lyrics they perform. As I observed, the Czech-English dictionary then comes in handy for those who want to present an English summary of the lyrics to non-speakers in the audience.

- (5) You can always tell when they don't know how to speak Čech ('Czech'),  
*němajú ty hačky na tym a tož* -  
 'they don't have those *hačeks* [a softening diacritical mark] above it so - '  
 but - they do well, *ty lidi co rádi \*tančit* - *tak to dycky bude...*  
 'but - they do well, those people who like to dance -- so it [the dances] always will be [will last]...'

An interesting question is why the musicians who would feel more comfortable singing in English still prefer Czech instead. That they do not choose English suggests that the sound of Czech lyrics sung to a Texas Czech tune retains a special meaning for those who attend polka dances and almost daily turn on the radio to listen to their favorite polka show. At the same time, the task of singing without comprehension is not too difficult, if the singers “don’t have those *hačky* above it,” that is, if they are not too particular about the placement of diacritical marks and the pronunciation of lengthened vowels or softened consonants of European Czech. While more fluent Texas Czech speakers can easily tell when the singers “don’t know how to speak *Čech*,” the young non-speakers, who cannot, are exposed to the sound of (somewhat distorted) Czech, and the reminder of their ethnic belonging still pertains. Overall, incorrect pronunciation never raises a serious concern among the audience.

My questionnaire data indicate that most informants in both age groups (i.e., born both before and after 1945) enjoy listening to polka music broadcast from the radio stations in Cameron, Hillsboro, Taylor, and Temple (Table 1). Specifically, the data show that 21 (80.7%) informants in the pre-1945 group and 9 (81.9%) in the post-1945 group listen to their favorite polka shows with more or less regularity.

Table 1  
Listening to Czech folk music on radio stations (N = 37)  
(Cameron, Hillsboro, Taylor & Temple, Texas)

Statement: "I listen to the Czech radio broadcast"							
Group (N)	A	O	S	R	N	N/A	Yes
Ratio	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
OG (N = 26)	<b>3.8</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>26.9</b>	15.4	0	3.8
YG (N = 11)	<b>9.1</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>27.3</b>	18.2	0	0

**Legend:**  
A (Always)/ O (Often)/ S (Sometimes)/ R (Rarely)/ N (Never)/ N/A (Non-Applicable)/ Yes (Affirmative response with no further specification)



Also, most of them say that they can sing along with a Czech band. For example, Mr. Jaros from Granger told me, "*spívám česky trošičku* ('I sing Czech a little'), what I know and some of that Czech we sing in church..." My observations confirm this and similar modest self-assessments by others. Mr. Janak from West says on this topic:

- (6) *A tudyg jag maju ty tance tak řebas ta jedna {orquestra} z Ennis,*  
 'and when they have those dances here so - like one band from Ennis,'  
*tag jak oni přijedú většinu dycky v nedělu odpoledňa se tancuje,*  
 'when they come, usually ((always)) on a Sunday afternoon there is a dance,'  
*a jag je to tak polovicu v tom tak každý měl trochu piva, tag začnú spívat česky*  
 'and when it's about half way through [and] everybody had some beer, then they start singing in Czech...'

That this music genuinely touches the hearts of those born in the 1940s and the 1950s is evident in the words of Mr. Kotrba who says:

- (7) *Jag negdy ve \*práce neco nejde dobře, a ja sa negdy napálím...*  
 'sometimes when something goes wrong at work and I get mad,'  
*ja dycky rad poslucham česky muziky protože to je -*  
 'I always like to listen to the Czech music because it is -'  
*uděla to dycky dobře ve srce, ja vim gde ... moje přijmeno - odkad přišlo*  
 'it makes you feel good in [your] heart, I know where ... my last name - where it came from'

In addition to the radio shows and polka dances, an occasional performance of a Czech choir at a designated mass, a wedding or a funeral, and the singing during the so-called "polka mass" (or, "Czech mass"),<sup>22</sup> traditionally featured in the program of ethnic festivals, also tend to invoke such a heartfelt sense of ethnic belonging in both performers and their audiences. Thus the pride expressed by Mrs. Ludvik, who directs the Senior Czech Choir in Granger, for having kept her promise to one of Granger's Czech priests to 'never stop singing in Czech' ("*nepřestanu spívat česky*"), may stem from her realization that what she does is helping preserve one ethnic tradition; through her role as a performer, she may have "found a sense of ethnic identity for [herself]" (Cohen 1985: 55).

Music by itself is not the only channel of communication between the performers and their audiences. There are, for example, several band leaders who prepare and moderate their radio polka shows. Once on the stage, the spoken word - when introducing the next number (in English or in both Czech and English), or inserting a joke or a comment - both smoothes transition from one song to another and helps performers maintain contact with their audience. They do not expect their audience's undivided attention though; while couples dance, friends and acquaintances talk, eat and drink. If a respected, well-known band (such as the Vrazels) is playing, their steadfast fans sometimes cluster around the stage and joyfully sing along, now and then rewarding the band with shouts of approval. Because popular bands typically have a steady following, friends and acquaintances tend to outnumber strangers, which only accentuates the relaxed atmosphere and informality of the event. When the break comes, one can see musicians interacting with the audience

<sup>22</sup> One main characteristic of the polka mass is that all church songs (some of them of Czech origin) are being sung to the familiar polka or waltz tunes. Texas Czech folk singing groups are usually invited to furnish the music.



members off the stage. Generally, one or two-day ethnic festivals generate more excitement than dances (typically lasting only a few hours).<sup>23</sup>

One exchange that I wish to present here (in 8) was recorded during a Granger Polka Boys' performance at the Kolache Festival in Caldwell (Burlleson County).<sup>24</sup>

- (8) M: A little cowboy – a little *kravský ogar*  
 A1: He must be talking about me! @@@  
 A2: Maybe he is one of them too! @@@

The exchange was initiated by the band leader's (Mr. Milan; M) introduction of the next (country) song. In response to his "A little cowboy - little *kravský ogar*" (literally translating 'cowboy' into one of the Northeastern Moravian dialects), one member of the audience (A1) replied laughingly, "He must be talking about me!" to which another man (A2) added, "Maybe he is one of them too!" His remark, however, was already muffled by the laughter that the first man's joke had earned and by the first tunes of the number "A little cowboy." One might think that the latter comment was at least mildly offensive, but such joking, more frequent among males than females, is fairly common among Texas Czechs. It is also one of the few remaining functional contexts that tend to produce Texas Czech speech.<sup>25</sup>

When a musician is the one telling a joke, he has to consider the composition of the audience. For example, some elderly people take offense at 'Bohemian' jokes. Traveling Texas with his polka band, Mr. Milan has learned which locations in Texas are still zones too sensitive for his 'Bohemian' or 'Aggie' jokes. He says, "*enem lešči nenisu moc blisko Huston ja řeknu 'dva Bohimini Aggies'*" ('only if I'm not too close to Houston I say two Bohemian Aggies'), when naming the actors in a joke he is about to tell. He now knows that it is safer to be more selective when his band is playing in the Houston area, where his jokes about Bohemians once met with disapproval of some older people who, as a result, saw Mr. Milan as being contemptuous of Czech heritage.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> While both festivals and dances combine "participation and performance in a public context," the level of involvement of performers, organizers and audience is appreciably higher during ethnic festivals where "what is spoken, acted, or displayed in festival – public or private – anticipates a response... This active mode, then, makes demands on participants, requiring their attention. And this concentration of attention heightens consciousness, creating an intersection of individual performance and social reflexivity" (Stoeltje 1992: 263).

<sup>24</sup> The Czech word *koláče*-PL (a round-shape type of pastry typically with cottage cheese, prune, or pear filling) has been adjusted to the English spelling as 'kolache-PL' or fully integrated into English as 'kolaches-PL'. *Koláče* baking competitions are traditionally a part of every Texas Czech festival. This particular event takes place in the "Kolache Capital of Texas" (The 71<sup>st</sup> Legislature of the State of Texas).

<sup>25</sup> Tsitsipis (1989: 121) reports that in Arvanitika, a dying Albanian variety, "competence in performing genres such as jokes is frequently singled out as the most significant aspect of a good speaker's ability, not features of grammar or other structural domains."

<sup>26</sup> The word "Bohemian" has strong negative connotations, particularly for those born before 1945, as they often remember being made fun of as *Bohunks*, *Bohanks*, *Bohimini*, or Bohemians by (mainly) Anglo-Americans and German Americans in the past. Most Texas Czechs equate the word "Bohemian" with a "Gypsy" (which is one of its dictionary meanings), whom they stereotype as a person of loose morals, jobless



Summing up, if “the interactions between performers and audiences reflect various meanings assigned to the performance event and process,” as Béhague (1992: 172) has it, the meanings that Texas Czechs find in and contribute to the band performances derive from their assertion of ethnic bonding and solidarity with all *našinci* (‘the ones of our kind’) who participate in the event.

The bands perform not only in the dance halls and during ethnic festivals, where folk dancing and music indeed “set the pace of most activities and key the emotions of the participants” (Stoeltje 1992: 265), but also at the so-called Czech weddings, known for long guest lists, lots of beer and Texas Czech style food, and, importantly, a dance with a live band. (I was told that in Ennis, Texas, “you just have to have a Czech wedding.”) Just like any use of Texas Czech, whether a single word reference to ‘beer’ as *pivo*, or a greeting exchange between two elderly couples at the dance while waiting for another song to begin, Texas Czech music is a manifestation of ethnic group membership and ingroup solidarity. Importantly, my data suggest that the band performances at dances, weddings, and ethnic festivals create a social space conducive to the use of Texas Czech, exposing also younger generations in the audience to the sound of Czech lyrics in folk songs, thus helping to shape and strengthen the ‘idea’ of having a heritage language, of being a Texas Czech / Moravian. As Mr. Nalevka from West put it, “let’s not forget the music, even though my children and the majority of people around here do not know what songs - what the words are that this band is playing, they’re singing Czech, that’s important to them, that’s a Czech custom, it’s a Czech tradition, and they grew up with it” (cf. Mr. Jaros, Mr. Janak, and excerpt 6 above).

The three exchanges reproduced in (9-11) are given to illustrate the types of interaction that one can overhear during such ethnic socials. In excerpt (9), two men in their 50s (identified only as A and B) greet each other in passing, walking down the street filled with booths selling Texas Czech food and various kinds of merchandise. It is the first day of the Kolache Festival in Caldwell. The sound of music is ubiquitous, coming from at least four different stages with at least four different bands and/or singing groups performing at the same time. Even though the exchange is initiated in English, the addressee responds in Texas Czech.

- (9) A: How are you doing, man?  
B: ah - *pomály* / ‘slowly’ [it’s slow, but it’s going]

In the next example (excerpt 10), we move to the Fraternal Auditorium in West where a dance is being held to help celebrate the Jodie Mikula Band’s anniversary. Here, both speakers are in their 60s, and both are from Ennis. Joseph (*Jozef*; J) initiates the exchange with his friend Mary (*Mařenka*; M) by teasing her (*Mařenko, ty si stracena?* / ‘Mary, are you lost?’) and then opens a topic to which Mary replies laughing, teasing him back about his excessive partying. The point of reference is another dance that Joseph attended the night before.

- (10) J: *Mařenko, ty si stracena? Ja su Jozef, ale ne svaty dneska*  
‘Mary, are you lost? I’m Joseph but not the saint one today’  
  
A: *Oh dneska ne, dneska si svaty, fčera’s nebyl, ja sem to slyšela @@@*

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and homeless, hence a complete opposite of a hard working Czech or Moravian.



'Oh today you're not, today you're the saint one, yesterday you weren't, I've heard it'

J: *Ja sem přijel dom o pulnoci!*  
'I came home around midnight!'

Finally, during the same event (as in 10 above) I was fortunate to record a conversation in which Mr. Ondra (O) and Mr. Prnka (P) exchanged information about their age and then continued to talk about their past and present experiences with the Czech language. Excerpt (11) includes this part of their conversation.

- (11) Mr. P: *Jak si stary?* / 'how old are you?'  
Mr. O: *budu mět devědašedesát* / 'I'll be sixty nine'  
Mr. P: *ja mam sedumašedesát* / 'I am sixty seven'  
Mr. O: *tož ty seš o dva roky mladši* / 'so you are two years younger'  
Mr. P: *ty si ten staříček, ja su ten mladý @@@*  
'you're the old man and I'm the young one' [joking]  
Mr. O: I wish I would have learned Spanish up here, it'd be useful now -  
Mr. P: *ja sem mluvil mexicky jag zme byli na farmě ve Grendži*... I almost lost my Čech ('Czech'), too  
'I spoke Mexican [sic] when we ((were)) lived on a farm in Granger...'  
Mr. O: *ja mam kamarada tady na kusek od nas na Penelopě*  
'I have a friend here just a bit away from us in Penelope a \*ona taky pravi že nemože --  
'and she also says that she can't --'  
*jag chodila do školy ona mluvila dobře česky aji rodiče...* [continues in Czech]  
'when she went to school she spoke Czech well and so did her parents...'  
Mr. P: *jag my mluvíme doma, tag my trochu morafsky a trochu englicky,*  
'when we talk at home, so we speak a little Moravian and a little English,'  
*je\_ \* mišane, tož nemluvíme šeko česky ...*  
'it's mixed, so we don't talk in Czech all the time' ...

In addition to the Texas Czech bands and singing groups, there are many folk dance groups in Texas. Where the Texas Czech polka bands seek a middle course by adding diversity to their repertoire, Texas Czech dance groups make similar decisions that affect both the choice of music to accompany their dance performances and their choreography. Mrs. Karas, the leader of the Czech Folk Dancers of West, which is perhaps the most popular dance group across Czech Texas, commented on this issue:

- (12) I would say it's [choreography] very much Čech ('Czech') type style, we have watched the tapes of dancers from the Čech Republic, and we'd pick up steps from them, and I feel like the steps that we do in comparison with dances we've seen are very comparable... I don't think that the music has any influence on steps, the music may sound Tex Čech, but the steps we are doing are still the European style with the lifts and polka steps...."

Later in our conversation she remarked about one of the dances that her group was practicing: "it gives us a chance to express how we feel being Czech and being Texan... we do it as a tribute to our ancestors coming to Texas."

Just like the choir director who proudly continues to sing in Czech, the Czech Folk Dancers of West have found a way to assert and express their ethnic identity through performance. They *choose* to schedule all their family time around weekly practices and frequent appearances at ethnic socials, and these performances have earned them distinction



among other dance groups around the state. While the performer roles may not dominate their other social identities (Bauman 1977: 29), they are firmly a part of their lives – through them they foreground who they are ethnically. Similarly, many musicians love what they do no matter how little profit, compared to the time invested, they make. They also enjoy being appreciated and publicized by their audiences and relevant media. Representing them here is Mr. Milan who says, “*enomže ja strašně mam rád tu muziku*” (‘but I just really love this music’) – the trouble is worth it. He sees himself as a musician first.

Contemporary Texas Czech folk music has been shaped through the process of cultural assimilation. The perseverance of the Czech polka and waltz tunes, on the other hand, demonstrates their remarkable resistance to assimilation (Machann 1988: 110). Importantly, however, the assimilation process during which the polka bands have continued to draw on American country music finds its counterpart in the adjustment to the modern age in general, because the interest in traditional polkas and waltzes has been dwindling in the Czech Republic, the ancestral homeland of Texas Czech, as well. Interestingly, Mr. Vasek of Granger observes, “...and of course when we were in *Praha* (Prague), we noticed how Americanized they are over there, we even couldn’t find the *Čech* (‘Czech’) tapes!”, viewing this generational change solely as the result of Western influence. On another occasion, I was asked, “Where does one find Czech music in the Czech Republic?” This inquirer must have drawn on her experience in the Czech Republic as well (Panel on Texas Czech music at *Matička Kultura*, August 17, 1997).

#### 4.2.3. *The future of Texas Czech folk music*

Texas Czech folk music is one of the few ‘things Czech’ in the ethnocultural heritage that many community members believe to have a potential to outlive the ancestral language. In addition to this general outlook on the issue, some realize that the music’s longevity will depend on the interest of the younger generations, as Mr. Rudolf in excerpt (13) points out, and others highlight the role of preservationists in Texas Czech organizations. The latter view is represented in the words of Mrs. Sladek (S) and Mr. Trnka (T) in excerpt (14).

- (13) ...*pokad’ nekeri ti mladi se budú učít’ a budú hrát, budem mněť českú muziku dost’ dlúho..*  
 ‘as long as some young people learn [to play] and play [it], we’ll have Czech music for a long time...’
- (14) Mrs. S: We are trying to keep it alive –  
 Mr. T: - oh, having that - the CHST [Czech Heritage Society of Texas] being formed and trying to keep everything going, and we’re seeing more polka waltz dances now than we ever did before, it’s picking up...

In excerpt (14), the collective ‘we’ in fact stands for ‘they,’ namely “the Czech Heritage Society of Texas.” Mrs. Sladek’s ‘we’ comes from the couple’s desire “to keep everything going,” while Mr. Trnka’s ‘they’ reflects the reality, i.e. the actual referent whose role is to fulfill this goal. This ambiguous use of referents seems to derive from the tension between one’s emotional stand (the desire to preserve this piece of tradition) and one’s pragmatic assessment of the actual situation. This competition is even more salient in the



community members' views on language maintenance (cf. Dorian 1982), suggesting that their language loyalty is unlikely to transcend to the level of personal participation in the attempts to save it. Such ideologies, or people's beliefs about what is and what should be, stem from their understanding of the state of their traditional music - and heritage language - in Texas today.

I have also encountered views highlighting the role of Texas Czech folk music in language preservation efforts (in the words of Mrs. Udaril from West, "*moje děti co se naučili, naučili se z muziky*"/'what my children have learned, they've learned from music'), as well as the opposite belief, even amongst the most devoted fans of Texas Czech bands, that neither language nor the music will survive beyond the current, at best the next, generation of Texas Czechs. Mr. and Mrs. Vasek (V) of Granger represent this latter view (excerpt 15).

- (15) Mr. V: *Ne moc dluho - naše děti, a jejich kamarádi co sou Češi, a nebo co byli rození Češi, 'not [for] very long - our kids, and their friends who are Czech, or who were born Czech,'<sup>27</sup>*  
*u žádný nemluvi česky, a nekery co ešee mluvi to je jich velice málo,*  
*'nobody speaks Czech anymore, and those who still speak [it], so there're very few of them,'*  
*a tady není potřeba aby mluvili česky, tady je potřeba mluvit mexicky než česky,*  
*'and there's no need to speak Czech here, they need to speak Mexican [rather] than Czech here,'*  
 [sic]  
*a neminju'it' do Československa, možná enom na nějakou dobu -*  
*'and they don't intend to go to Czechoslovakia, maybe only for a while -'*  
*ale ja pochybuju že za padesat roku bych tu slyšel hodně česky -*  
*'but I doubt that in fifty years I would hear much Czech here -'*

*(a muzika?) muzika též --*  
*'(and music?) music as well --'*

Mrs. V: *ja nevím, vyhyne, protože aji v Elgin jak chodíme, oni povídají less and less polka dances...*

*'I don't know, it'll die because even in Elgin [a dance hall] where we go, they say less and less polka dances...' [sic]*

Mr. V: ...the younger generation does not care for it --

Mrs.V: our two kids [living] right here, they still love to polka and waltz, but there's not that many young couples that will dance at polka dances

This couple's argument is clear: Young people do not seek polka dances, and therefore, these informants' generation is most likely the last one to encourage the bands to perform traditional polka and waltz (*valčík*) tunes. Moreover, the couple's experience from the Czech Republic, where, just like in Texas, this type of music has a clearly defined audience of people over the age of fifty, reinforces their view that the chances for its survival are rather small.

<sup>27</sup> The assertion that 'their friends who are Czechs, or who are ((were)) born Czechs, nobody speaks Czech any more' makes a puzzling distinction, given that neither the former nor the latter are said to speak/use the language. While Mr. Vasek might have simply phrased the same ethnic designation in a different form (i.e., 'are' and 'are born'), one could also speculate that he was referring to some outward expression of 'Czechness' in those who *are* Czechs as opposed to those who *are born* Czechs.



## 5. Conclusion

While in the late 1980s one could still argue that "[n]ext to the Czech language, music has always been the single most important cohesive force in Texas-Czech culture" (Machann 1988: 107), today it is Texas Czech folk music, more so than Texas Czech variety, that continues to express the redefined 'Czechness' of Texas Czechs.

I have argued that Czech lyrics in Texas Czech folk songs significantly contribute to the ethnolinguistic maintenance, as they remind young Texans of Czech descent of their ethnic identity and expose them to the 'idea' of having a heritage language. When Texas Czech speakers and semi-speakers hear a familiar song, they recall at least some of the lyrics and spontaneously sing along. When young people in their teens and twenties attend ethnic festivals (as they do in West mainly to enjoy what Mr. Eden defines as "a cross between *Čech* dancing and American" in the "nuclear polka" of Brave Combo), they inevitably hear songs sung in Czech while walking around to see what else the festival grounds have to offer. Some stay a while to watch a polka band playing on the stage; others even join the couples on the dance floor. While it is unlikely that they would ever consider going to a Friday night's polka dance in the West Fraternity Hall, they do not seem to mind trying out this 'old-fashioned' dancing here, on the festival grounds. Perhaps it feels more legitimate, and joining the festive crowds somewhat safer, than purposely attending an event where a Texas Czech band entertains the over-the-age-of-fifty audience that such performances typically attract. It is encouraging for many older and middle-age community members to see that young people attend ethnic celebrations. Some of them hope that with time these experiences will lead their offspring to appreciate Texas Czech music and perhaps even to learn their heritage language.

To conclude, Texas Czechs form a community to which Fishman's (1985: 5, 11) notions of the "participatory" nature of postmodern ethnicity and the predominance of "ethnic knowing" over "ethnic doing" clearly apply. Along with Czech / Moravian identity, Texas Czech folk music has undergone a process of redefinition. It has become one of the "badges of ethnicity" that one can easily put on and take off (Dauenhauer et al. 1998: 68-9), and one of the overt "diacritical features that people look for to show identity" (Barth 1969: 14) when the occasion calls for it. Using these symbolic markers, current generations of Texas Czechs continue to appreciate and display their ethnicity. As for the language, it is not so much the actual use of Texas Czech as the *idea* of the heritage language perpetuated by the lyrics of Czech folk songs that - owing much to the Texas Czech polka bands - endures in Texas.

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## Appendix A

### Informants (N = 24)

8 females and 10 males born before 1945 (N=18)  
2 females and 4 males born after 1945 (N=6)

In the alphabetical order:

<u>Informant</u>	<u>Year of Birth</u>	<u>Community</u>
1. Mrs. Arnold	1913	Granger
2. Mrs. Borek	1924	West*
3. Mr. David	1930s	Ennis*
4. Mr. Eden	1951	West
5. Mrs. Eden	1956	West*
6. Mr. Frinta	1931	Granger*
7. Mr. Gustav	1951	West
8. Mrs. Hrda	1928	West*
9. Mrs. Ivanik	1925	Granger
10. Mr. Jaros	1953	Granger
11. Mr. Janak	1917	West
12. Mrs. Karas	1950	West
13. Mr. Kotrba	1943	West/Temple
14. Mrs. Ludvik	1932	Granger*
15. Mr. Milan	1946	Granger
16. Mr. Nalevka	1924	West
17. Mr. Ondra	1928	West*
18. Mr. Prnka	1930s	Granger/Kileen*
19. Mr. Rudolf	1942	Granger
20. Mrs. Sladek	1941	West
21. Mr. Trnka	1938	West
22. Mrs. Udaril	1938	West
23. Mr. Vasek	1926	Granger
24. Mrs. Vasek	1935	Granger

Note: (\*) indicates that the informant falls outside the sample of 39 (cf. note 12 above). Apart from 24 informants listed in this Appendix, the interlocutors speaking in excerpts (8-9) are identified as A1 and A2, and A and B respectively, and those in excerpt (10) by their real first names (as used in the exchange).

## Appendix B

### From Tabor to us

*Od Tábora až k nám* (polka)



(1)

[*: Od Tábora až k nám / cestička jako mlat :*]

'From Tabor to us / the path is very nice [to walk on]'

[*: Po ní jsem chodíval svou milou vodíval každý den častokrát :*]

'I would walk it with my love many times every day'

(2)

[*: Chodíval chodíval / klepal na okénko :*]

'I would walk I would walk [it] / knock on the [her] window'

[*: Spíš a nebo nespíš, nebo mě neslyšíš, má drahá Mařenko :*]

'Are you asleep or are you not asleep, or do you not hear me, my dear Mary?'

(3)

[*: Já nespím já nespím / já tě dobře slyším :*]

'I am not asleep I am not asleep / I hear you well'

[*: Jenomže já tobě, potěšení moje, otevřít nesmím :*]

'But I must not open the door for you, my darling'

(Kovanda's Czech Band)