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## Hungarian private linguistic landscape in South-West Slovakia<sup>101</sup>

*Petteri Laihonen*

### Abstract

In the field of Linguistic Landscape research little attention has been paid to the situations where a minoritized group gives the regional majority, such as South-West Slovakia where Hungarians form the majority. A clear majority of public signs, also in the region with a Hungarian majority, are only in Slovak, especially in the 'official', public sphere. In rural communities, signs posted by private citizens can be relatively frequent, too. In the truly non-commercial private sphere, minorities have autonomy in public language choice. I present the local practices and interpretations of the private linguistic landscape in two 'Hungarian' villages in South-West Slovakia in the light of photos, ethnographic observations and interview data. I conclude that the signs placed by private individuals follow tendencies in other domains and they are in flux. However, most importantly, they indicate best the local norms of signage and public language choice, as well as changes in local language ideologies.

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, I present the local practices and interpretations of private Linguistic Landscape in two 'Hungarian' villages in South-West Slovakia in the light of photos, ethnographic observations and interview data. My goal is to show the potential and significance of the private Linguistic Landscape to, among others, sociolinguistics, language policy and language shift. Through a theoretical model of language policy, macro level issues of international law will be connected to micro issues of single private signs on peoples' homes.

The study of Linguistic Landscape (LL), investigating visual language use, is an emerging field dealing with diverse geographical areas and various methodological issues. Even though recognizing the diverse origins of the field, most of the introductory works cite Bourhis & Laundry's (1997: 25) definition of LL:

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The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.

However, present studies follow a much broader spectrum of visual language use (for a recent summary, see Shohamy 2012), including the study of signs set up by private citizens as in our case. Furthermore, the term *Linguistic Landscape* is not the only term used to describe studies on visual language use, for instance Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) use *Semiotic Landscape* instead. Finally, other linguistic and everyday continuing associations of the term Linguistic Landscape range from general 'linguistic situation' (Gorter 2006: 1) to more technical ones such as mental dialect maps (e.g. Preston 1989).

In Shohamy's (2006) model of language policy, LL is seen among the mechanisms that link, interpret and transmit ideology into language practices. That is, the LL is a concrete device, similar to language education policies, through which the authorities form the ideological prestige of different languages and guide their hierarchy and choice in a given society. At the same time, not only dominant ideology can be transmitted through the LL. Resistance and transgressions to dominant ideologies by private individuals or activist groups are typically displayed in the LL as well (ibid. 123-125). This idea of LL as a transmitting device of ideologies to language practices is visualized below:

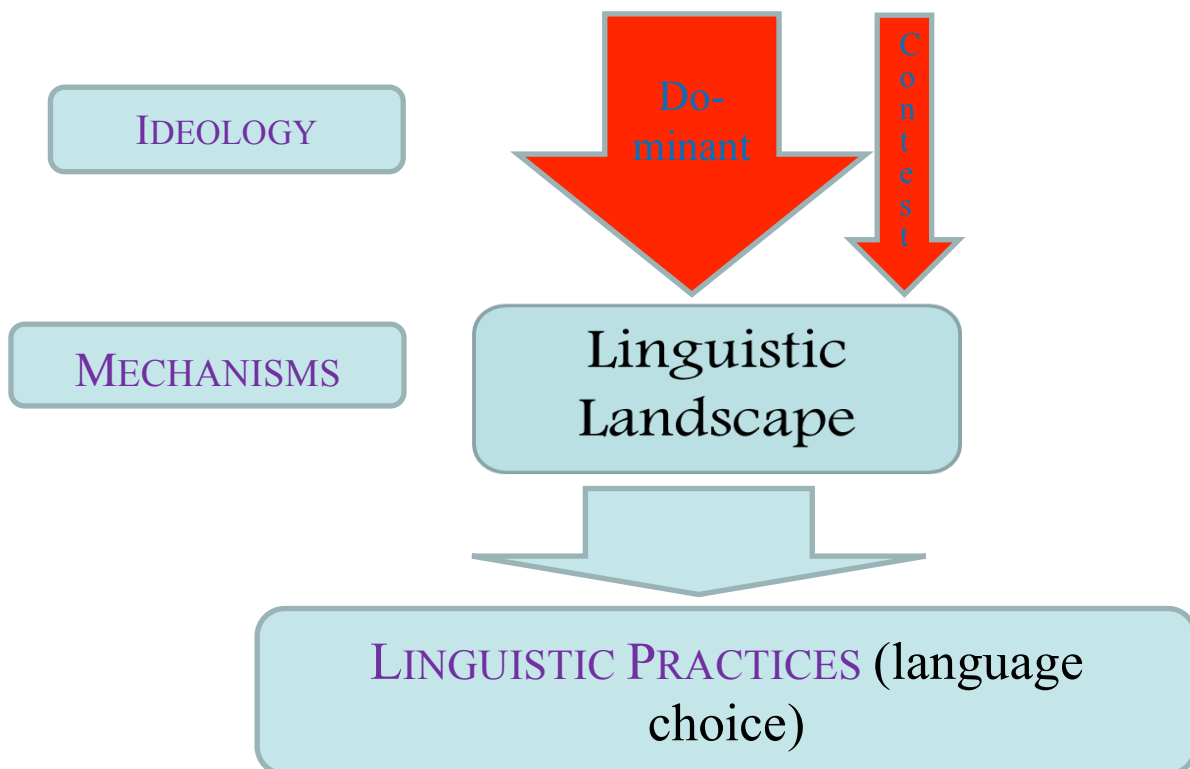
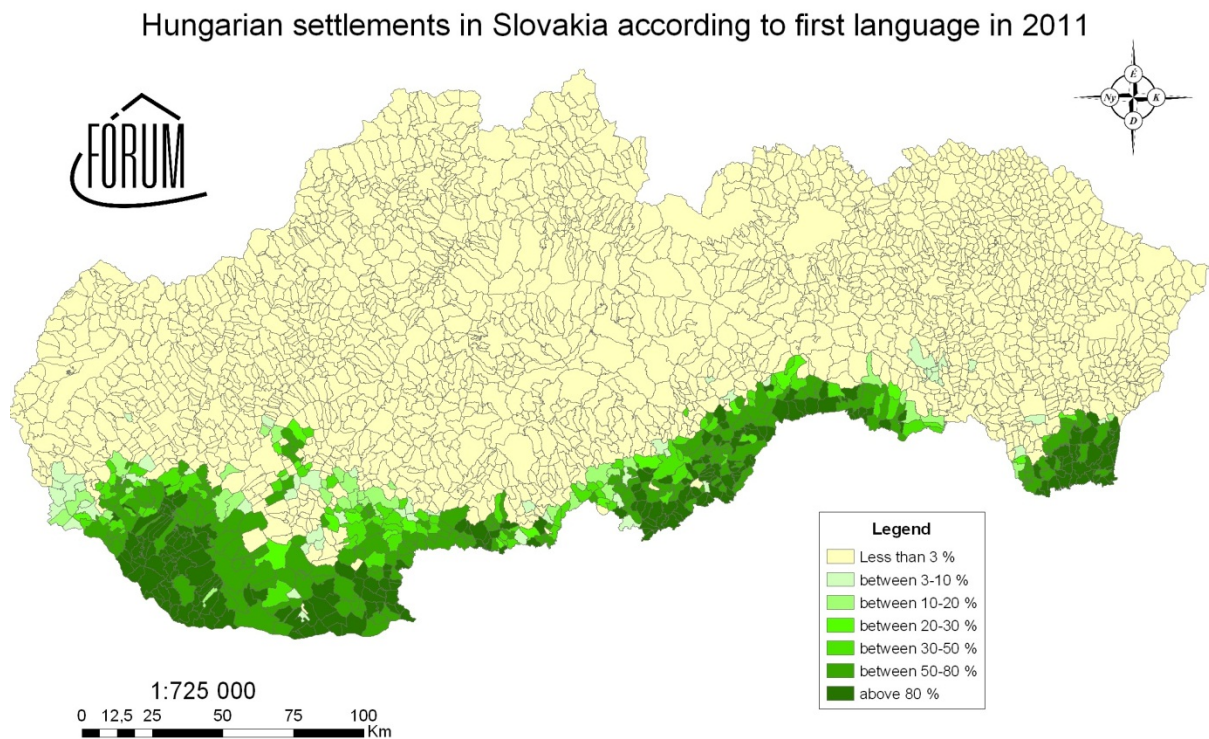


Diagram 1: LL as a mechanism of Language Policy (Shohamy 2006)

## 2. Historical, Geographical and Legal Background

So far, little attention has been paid to the LL where a minoritized group gives the regional majority. One such European region is South-West Slovakia where Hungarians are the majority (for details, see Lanstyák & Szabó Mihály 2005). As Sloboda (2009: 184) states, there is anxiety among the Slovaks “about the Hungarian inhabitants’ possible disloyalty to the young Slovak state and about the possibility of southern Slovakia’s secession.” In his view this makes the regions linguistic landscape fundamentally different from many other European bilingual areas. The regions inhabited by the Hungarians can be seen in the following map, produced by the Forum Institute:



© Örs Orosz – László Szeder, Fórum Minority Research Institute (Somorja-Šamorín, Slovakia), 2012

Source: [www.statistics.sk](http://www.statistics.sk)

Until 1920, the territory of Slovakia was part of the Hungarian Kingdom. In the peace treaty ending World War I, large rural areas with an overwhelming Hungarian majority were ceded to Czechoslovakia due to access to the Danube and railroads (see Kamuszella 2012: 661). In 1993 Slovakia gained independence (for the second time), which was interpreted as a Slovak national awakening (see e.g. Kamuszella 2012: 884-886). The current period, beginning with the 1990 transition from socialist system to democracy is best characterized as a post-multinational era. That is, the 1990's did not bring about a *post-national* period as in the western world (Heller 2011) – rather, as Brubaker (2011: 1786) has established, Slovakia,

together with the Baltic states, “appeared to be moving back to the nation-state, entering not a post-national but a post-multinational era.” The nationalist reign of Mečiar in Slovakia in the 1990’s resulted to numerous linguistic conflicts, including vandalism of Hungarian historical monuments (e.g. Kamuszella 2012: 887). A portion of Hungarians in Slovakia cling to rights they had been accustomed to in the socialist period, such as bilingual school certificates. Also the new municipality leaders began to use bilingual settlement names, and acts of vandalism by Slovak extremists against public signage have to some extent helped to mobilize the Hungarians in the cities (Schwegler 2008).

In 1998, Mečiar fell and Slovak moderates made some concessions to the Hungarian representatives, who have been included in two governments since then. A quick integration to Western alliances was followed by economic revival in the new millennium. However, the global recession around 2008 saw the return of the “Hungarian card” in Slovak politics. For the Hungarian population the most burning problem has been the infrastructural underdevelopment of the Hungarian region, now underlined by the swift development of Bratislava, the capital.



Figure 1: Senec (Szenc) Czechoslovakia (*Národná obroda* 1990 Sept. 1)<sup>102</sup>

This picture of a vandalized Hungarian war memorial was taken in the town of Senec (H: Szenc), which is located in the western border of Hungarian settlements. It shows that already in 1990 the idea of Slovak independence was conceptualized against the presence of Hungarian in the public space. The use of English and German may perhaps be explained as a token of the popular wish of those times to integrate into Western Europe.

<sup>102</sup> Thanks to István Neszméry for providing this photo.

In the Slovak constitution, the Slovak language has the “status as the only official language of an independent and sovereign state” (Ondrejovič 2009: 26). According to the law on state language (1996) it “takes precedence over other languages used in the territory of the Slovak Republic” (ibid. 16). So far, the European institutions – in which Slovakia has been eager to join – have taken actions in the interest of expanding and protecting language rights of the speakers of minority languages in Slovakia. However, during the last conflict in 2009 over the amendment of the Act on the State Language, the Venice Commission (2010) took a clear stand in favor of the monolingual Nation State. It is notable that the Venice Commission failed to even mention a legal model for putting the Hungarian language on an equal footing in the region where its speakers are in a numerical majority (for legal criticism of the Venice Commission’s opinion, see Pan & Pheil 2011). Instead, among others, the Commission legitimized the premise that “[t]he protection of the State language has a particular importance for a new State in which, as it is the case for the Slovak Republic, linguistic minorities represent a high percentage of the citizens of the population” (ibid. 10).

In general the Venice Commission gave a rare, vigorous and detailed justification of protecting and promoting the official language in Slovakia:

The protection and promotion of the official language of the state is a legitimate concern common to many European countries. It pursues several legitimate aims; it protects *in primis* public order... It guarantees the development of the identity of the State community... It avoids that citizens may suffer discrimination in the enjoyment of their fundamental rights in areas where the persons belonging to national minorities have a majority position. (Venice Commission 2010: 26).

In brief, the areas where the Hungarians form a majority are seen as a threat to the state language. This was made very explicit through a shared concern by the Slovak government and the Venice Commission that “in the southern areas of Slovakia [...] [o]fficial announcements, notices on cultural and other events, notices and adverts in public spaces are in many cases provided only in the Hungarian language.” (*The Language Act...* 2009). However, neither of the above-mentioned organs referred to any study or data to substantiate this. In the next chapter, I will briefly show that a clear majority of public signs in a municipality with a 92 % of Hungarian speaking population are in fact in Slovak only.

In brief, on the state level, a discourse of the primacy of protecting and promoting the official language for reasons of public order and the rights of the state community (understood as citizens of Slovak descent) is dominant in relation to Southern Slovakia where Hungarians present a high proportion of the population. In this discourse a Hungarian dominant linguistic landscape is presumed.

Finally, we can agree with the latest (2013) monitoring report of the experts of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* that

[t]here is a general tendency in the Slovak legislation to restrict the right to use minority languages to certain situations where specific statutory conditions are met. Even in these situations, the legislation often leaves it to the discretion of the authorities to what degree they want to implement the linguistic rights of minority language speakers. (*Report...* 2013: 10)

In other words, the Slovak language laws may be permissive in their letter towards the use of minority languages, however they clearly fail to “facilitate and/or encourage” the use of minority languages “in speech and writing, in public and private life”, as it is requested in the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, article 7, 1/d (see also *Report...*2013: 6).

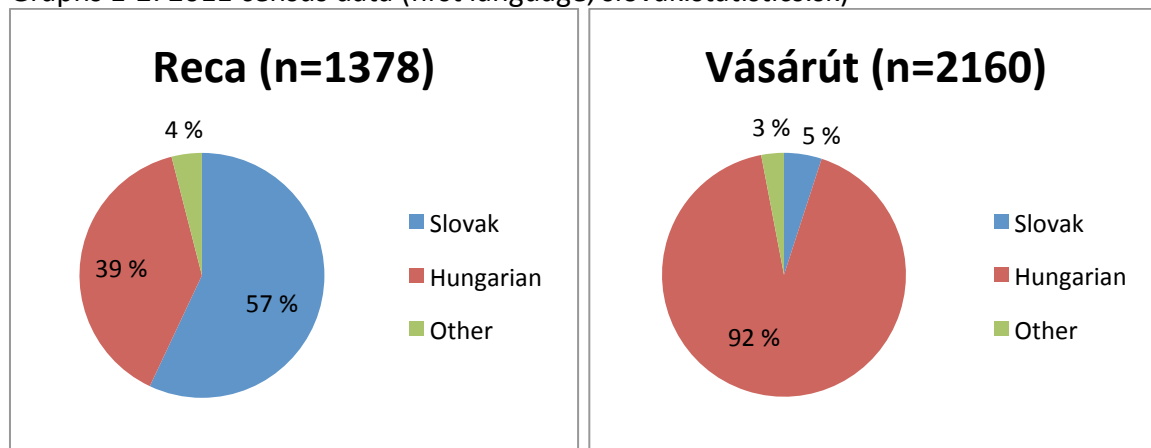
As Gorter et al. (2012) notice, investigating the LL may have an effect on the language policy of a region. In the case of Basque, a study on the LL made the policy makers realize that Spanish was much more dominant in the LL than they believed. As a consequence a new policy was drawn, which is now based on systematic establishment of bilingualism in all government signs and encouragement of the use of Basque in the private realm (*ibid.* 152, 159). As will be shown in the following chapters, similar measures would be needed in Southern Slovakia as well.

### 3. General Linguistic Landscape in Two ‘Hungarian’ Villages

First I will briefly describe the general LL in the investigated two villages in Southwest Slovakia, Reča (in Hungarian: Réte) and Vásárút (in Slovak: Trhová Hradská), where I carried out fieldwork during four weeks in November 2011. About one thousand pictures were taken and 40 interviews in Hungarian were carried out. The interviews were audio-recorded semi-open conversations at the local people’s homes. The planned themes for discussion were issues of language use and included ideas about the LL. Most of the informants were Hungarians, but in addition, a Slovak and a Roma informant (family) were interviewed in each village. Since Hungarians are typically poorer and less educated than the average citizens in Slovakia (Lanstyák & Szabó Mihály 2006: 54), I tried to interview mainly those villagers who did not have a college degree or high economic status. In both villages, I interviewed ca. 15 Hungarians and their family members. In addition, I interviewed ca. five middle-class individuals, viz. school teachers, municipal officials and entrepreneurs. The villagers in general sympathized with my interest in their lives and experiences and I received several spontaneous invitations to meet people. My knowledge of Hungarian was an important factor and somebody carrying out the same research in Slovak would probably get different results. Besides the photos and interviews, many informal conversations were documented in fieldwork notes and various materials were gathered.

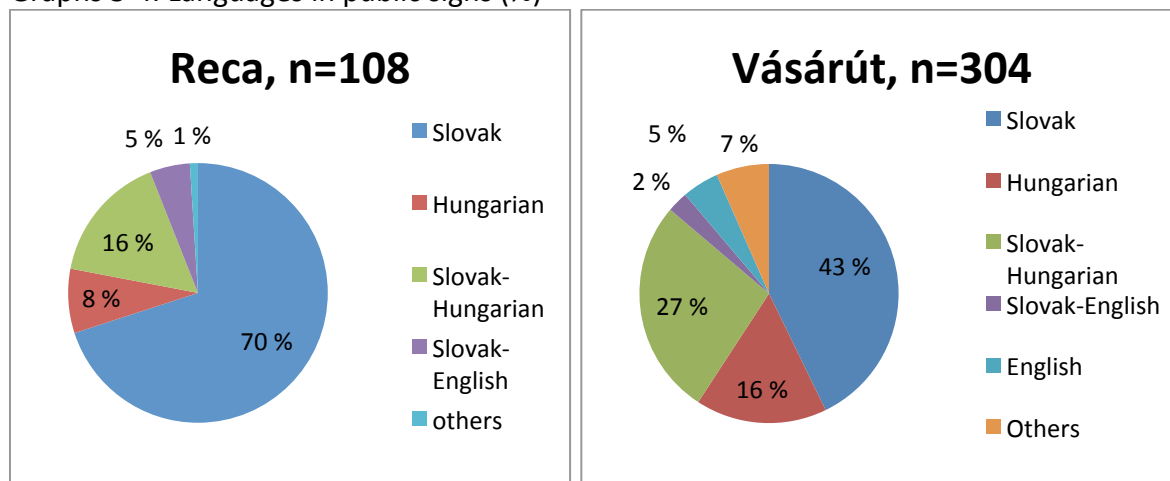
The distribution according to first language ('mother tongue') in the two villages was counted as follows in the 2011 census. Censuses should be taken with caution: for instance, they do not give information on bilingualism, which characterizes especially Reca.

Graphs 1-2: 2011 census data (first language, slovak.statistics.sk)



A general picture of the LLs from the viewpoint of language choice in the public space can be formed on the basis of the following graphs:

Graphs 3-4. Languages in public signs (%)



The difference between the villages' ethnic composition is clearly reflected in their linguistic landscapes. Reca, a community undergoing language shift, has a dwindling presence of Hungarian in public signs. In general, the proportions of languages in LL do not match with the linguistic affiliations of the population, rather they display power relations. For Reca the census shows 39 % of inhabitants with Hungarian as their mother tongue, however, only 24 % of signs include Hungarian, whereas Slovak speakers form 57 % of inhabitants but 70 % of signs are in Slovak only. In the case of Vásárút it is even more obvious that the numbers



reflect the different statuses of the languages. For instance, in Vášárút only 5 % of the inhabitants report Slovak as their mother tongue, but 42.8 % of the signs are in Slovak only. Conversely, 92 % of the inhabitants are Hungarian first language speakers, however, 55.3 % of the signs do not contain any Hungarian elements. Monolingualism in general is frequent, bilingualism characterizes only one-third of the signs even in Vášárút. Autonomous (monolingual) use of Hungarian appears in 8 % of signs in Reča and 16 % of signs in Vášárút. However, in both villages, Hungarian is most often used in bilingual texts, typically after Slovak.

To achieve a general understanding of the LL in the villages, we can split the LL to different categories, based on the accounts I have gathered on the field. That is, informants more or less agree on different sets of signs and their typical linguistic and social implications. Next, other categories than private are briefly examined.

Table 1: distribution of languages in different categories of public signs, according to frequency, rare cases in brackets.

Category	Reča-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vášárút
International	--	Slovak
State	Slovak	Slovak
Commerce	Slovak	Slovak, Slovak-Hungarian, (Hungarian, English)
Municipality	Slovak-Hungarian (Slovak)	Slovak-Hungarian (Slovak, Hungarian)
Church	Hungarian (Latin)	Hungarian (Latin)
Civil organizations	Hungarian (Slovak)	Hungarian
Private individuals	Slovak	Hungarian, Slovak

The investigated 'Hungarian' villages have a Slovak dominant LL with nests of bilingual, Hungarian and other signage. International (e.g. EU) and governmental signs are exclusively in Slovak. Typically signs pointing to non-local phenomena, such as mobility, transportation, communication, state or international relations are obligatorily only in Slovak, too. Some examples are provided next:



Slovak only signs. Figure 2<sup>103</sup>: EU-sign; figure 3: road sign; figure 4: post; figure 5: railway stop.

The Slovak only EU-related sign for the Hungarian medium school in Vásárút (see figure 2) is striking, since it was among the very few monolingual signs around this institution. The community leaders told me that they had received explicit orders “from the ministry” about what kind of EU-related signs should be placed and where. During the fieldwork I did not see any EU signs that would have included minority languages (in the border zone there were some Slovak-English bilingual EU signs).

In line with road signs (see figure 3), everything connected to transportation or communication is in Slovak only. In addition, Hungarian place names are very infrequently used outside their own settlements, and official maps never display them. It is noteworthy that even the maps in Hungarian schoolbooks produced in Slovakia had no Hungarian place names. Apart from road signs (as seen in figure 3), also all other traffic signs on bus stops or in train stations are displayed only in Slovak. The informants did not consider the bilingual road signs important for them. A typical account is illustrated in the following quote: “Well, for understanding the signs there is no problem, everybody knows the Slovak place names here, but perhaps we could feel a bit better if there were bilingual signs.”

<sup>103</sup> The photos have been taken by the author and should not be used without his approval.

The national post is one of the emblematic symbols of the European nation states. Accordingly, due to internal regulation, the use of Hungarian signage is prohibited in the offices and mailboxes of the Slovak Post (see figure 4). According to a local post official, if over 50 per cent of the staff is Hungarian, they are allowed to use Hungarian in spoken communication. My experience from the post office was that both Hungarian and Slovak were used in spoken interaction in Reča, but I witnessed only Hungarian use in Vášárút.

The reluctance of the railroad administration to allow the use of minority place names aside Slovak ones (see figure 5) has been debated lately. There has been some cat and mouse play between Hungarian activists and transportation officials in the territory of railroad signs and road signs, too (see Orosz 2012). However, so far no concessions have been made and partisan bilingual signs have been removed promptly. In sum, the official and non-local signage has remained strictly only in Slovak and it shows how the official language can be forced upon minority speakers even in a region where they form the majority.

The municipalities in turn cherish Slovak-Hungarian bilingualism. Where the Hungarians present an overwhelming majority, there Hungarian appears in commercial signs, too. Nevertheless, also there Slovak is the default language and Hungarian is used only as a second language in bilingual signs. As a statistically insignificant exception to the rule, minority associations produce signs in Hungarian for their programs, and the churches have signage in Hungarian.

The Hungarians in Slovakia have been accustomed to use Slovak in all official written communication and in some official spoken communication. At the same time, it should be noticed that Hungarian literacy is widespread among Hungarians in Slovakia due to the relatively complete Hungarian medium education network; in this respect, Hungarians in Slovakia differ from typical Western European non-autonomous minorities. The infrequent signage in Hungarian in commerce and the absence of Hungarian signs in transportation or other non-local contexts have gone largely unnoticed until lately (for a late development of Hungarian bilingual activism, see Orosz 2012). As it was usually explained in interviews, people got used to these visual practices and (lack of) language rights in the Socialist period. New rights, such as the right to drop the Slovak female suffix *-ová* from female surnames (since 1994, see Misad 2012), have barely been practised (it is now a 'natural' norm among the Hungarians in Slovakia to attach *-ová* to females' surnames).

In general, Hungarians in Slovakia often avoid activism for the use of Hungarian, since, also amongst local Hungarians (cf. Sloboda 2009), language activism is easily connected to the revisionist claims still alive amongst extremist circles in Hungary. Furthermore, local Hungarians voiced the idea in interviews that the Hungarian region should fight for longed-for investments and economic development rather than provoke with language rights claims. During the fieldwork, even the most 'extremist' Hungarian organizations and persons in Slovakia seemed to fight for bilingualism for the Hungarian majority region, not for the

autonomous use of Hungarian. Finally, among the Hungarians Slovak language laws have often been interpreted as more restrictive than they in fact are (see Langman & Lanstyák 2001).

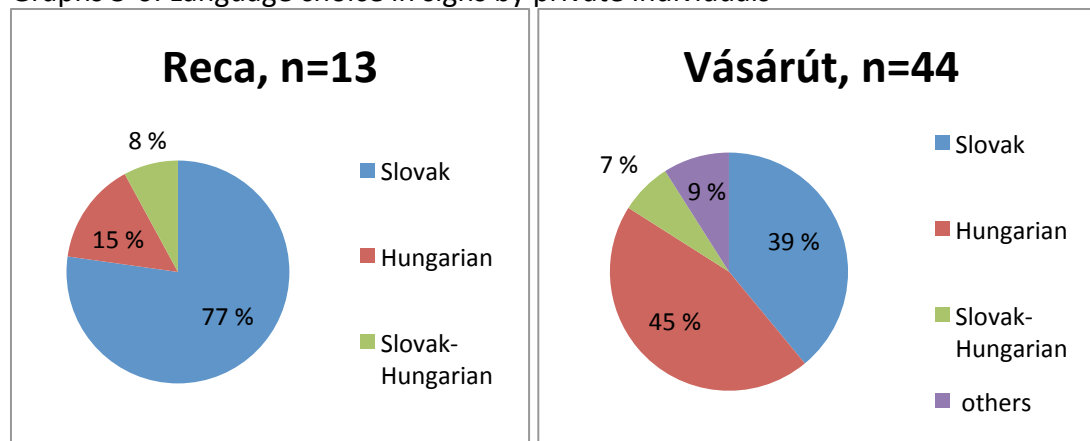
From the background of the Hungarian minority being accustomed to and content with the sight of Slovak monolingual official and commercial signage, I will next explore how local Hungarians practice visual literacy in their private life for the purpose of understanding how such signs reflect language policy and perhaps indicate future language policy and change in ideologies.

#### 4. Private Linguistic Landscape in the Two Villages

Previous studies on linguistic landscape focus on public signage by state, municipal and commercial sector. However, in the typical rural communities inhabited by the Hungarians, private or individual sign use is widespread, too. In the private sphere, excluding highly regulated “private enterprise”, minorities have autonomy in public language choice. Even though the Slovak law regulates language use in all public space, private persons cannot be punished (for a recent detailed summary of Slovak language laws, see *Third Report...2012*). Next, I will focus on the local practices and interpretations of individual linguistic landscape in two ‘Hungarian’ villages (Reca and Vásárút) in South-West Slovakia.

Public signs placed by private individuals make 13.8 % of all signs in the LL of the villages. Their distribution according to language choice is displayed in the next graphs:

Graphs 5-6: Language choice in signs by private individuals



In comparison to the general picture, there is a tendency towards monolingual signs in the private sphere. Beyond the lack of bilingualism, the choice of language for private persons is similar to that of the commercial sector. In Reca (which is undergoing language shift, with a dwindling 39 % of Hungarian speakers) most signs are only in Slovak, whereas in Vásárút

(which has an overwhelming majority of Hungarian speakers, 92 %), private signs in Hungarian give a slight majority. Next I will analyze the different genres of signs inside the private category to show grassroots ideologies and language practices which explain the use of different languages in these villages and then demonstrate how they contest the dominant ideology of a Slovak only public sphere.

#### 4.1 Beware of dog!

The most frequent genre of private signs consists of the “beware of dog” plates. The trade of such signs has met a significant demand in the villages, now participating in global consumerism. In Reca, Hungarians have purchased them in nearby shopping centers, where they are available only in Slovak.



Figures 6-7: commodity ‘beware of dog’ signs in Reca

The examples in figures 6-7 above are typical of new signs sold in the global supermarkets. Beyond a warning, they also have a humorous remark (‘I guard here!’, ‘The housewife is even worse’), as in figure 7 above. These signs can be seen to display the dog owner’s identity as an easy-going person through the humorous remarks. According to the informants, such signs have become popular in the last two decades, and they are available in shopping centers at a nearby town (Senec/Szenc). Bilingual signs or signs in Hungarian are not available in the new international supermarket chains in Slovakia.

A single bilingual sign from the socialist period is on display in Reca.



Figure 8: a bilingual Slovak-Hungarian ‘beware of dog’ sign in Reca

In the interviews, inhabitants of Reca claimed to prefer bilingual private signage, “so that everybody would understand them”, as many informants put it. However, this ideology was not transmitted to real life practices of private signage. The only bilingual sign in Reca in this genre of ‘beware of the dog’, shown in Figure 8, was an old sign – it was also the only sign including Hungarian. It will be most likely the last of its kind, which indicates the fading out of Hungarian and bilingual signs in this genre. Pietikäinen et al. (2011) investigated formerly destabilized Finno-Ugric minority communities in Northern Scandinavia that are now supported by a dominant ideology of minority language revitalization. However, in the seven villages now claiming minority language in other arenas, all the private signs they found were in the state language.

The visual semiotics of this sign – the lack of an image of a dog etc. – categorizes it as outdated, similar to the socialist bilingual inscriptions awaiting removal in Reca (e.g. ‘with culture for peace’ at a cultural center). When I asked the villagers about this sign they were puzzled by its placement. “But he is not a very Hungarian person”, they reacted. In other words, the sign was out of place, since such a display of a Hungarian identity would perhaps be seen as a nationalist activity, given the norm in Reca to use Slovak for private signs. In sum, use of Slovak only in private signage has been normalized in this formerly Hungarian majority village, where 39 % of residents still claim Hungarian as their mother tongue. In Vásárút, Hungarians have found solutions to use the language of the community by purchasing the signs in Hungary or patching up signs of their own. These can be seen as innovative forms of resistance:



Figures 9-10: 'beware of dog' signs in Hungarian (Vásárút), commodities from Hungary

In the Hungarian-dominant Vásárút, we find only two expressions in Slovak in this genre; either 'I guard here!' or the more standard 'beware of the dog' explicit warnings. Hult (2009: 98-99) finds that language choice in commercial signs is often influenced by whether the passage is used to communicate information on what is being sold or whether it is used for symbolic meanings, such as the notion of foreignness. In a similar vein, in the case of 'beware of the dog' signs in Vásárút, where bilingual signs are absent, only Hungarian is used for inscriptions that carry a humorous narrative or expression. The humorous expressions in turn can be seen to serve the purpose of mitigating the face-threatening warnings. In the case of Vásárút addressees in all such cases are Hungarian speakers. Put the other way round, in Hungarian dominant Vásárút, Slovak is used only to communicate information but not to display interpersonal relationships. Manufactured 'beware of the dog' signs are available only in Slovak (or English) in Slovakia, those in Hungarian have been bought in from Hungary. The villages are a one or two hours ride from Győr and Komárom in the Hungarian side of the Danube and Budapest is also a popular shopping destination for the villagers. However, inhabitants of Reca do not buy such signs in Hungary.

A further innovation in this category in Vásárút was to patch up self-made signs:



Figure 11: self-made Hungarian 'dog bites' sign in Vásárút

For language choice, self-made signs such as this offer more freedom of choice, since they are not constrained by the supply of signs available in the given language. Also in the case of commercial signs, self-made inscriptions such as daily offers are most likely to be in Hungarian in the villages with an overwhelming Hungarian majority. However, in some cases language insecurity by Hungarians was observable. For instance, in a single case, Slovak was used in a hand-made plate.



Figure 12: 'beware of dog' in Slovak, Vásárut

It can be speculated that the use of a Slovak-language sign in a more or less monolingual Hungarian village community is due to the dominant ideology of compulsory use of Slovak in public communication, or perhaps to insecurity in the written use of Hungarian. A local colleague, István Lanstyák explained that Hungarians in bilingual settlements in Slovakia rarely write anything in Hungarian since they might feel insecure in writing Hungarian and hence stick to Slovak for written inscriptions, even in the private sphere.

#### 4.2 Mailboxes

Private individuals routinely display their identity in the public in the form of having a mailbox. At the same time, the national post is one of the emblematic symbols of the European nation states. Accordingly, the use of Hungarian inscriptions is prohibited in the offices and mailboxes of the Slovak Post.





Figures 13-14: mailboxes in Slovak

Figure 14 shows how private signs are typically monolingual: next to a Hungarian ‘beware of the dog’ sign, there is a Slovak mailbox. It also indicates that it is more difficult to resist the use of Slovak for mailboxes than ‘beware of dog’ signs. Mailboxes such as displayed in figure 13 are available at the local post office. In Hungary similar mailboxes are not used. However, resistance to dominant ideology in the form of autonomous use of Hungarian appears in Vásárút also in this category. Vásárútians have found innovative means to contest the idea that anything connected to the post should be in Slovak, namely e.g. in the form of putting together hand-made newspaper mailboxes (see figure 15).



Figure 15: ‘newspaper’ in Hungarian, Vásárút

### 4.3 Graffiti

Graffiti is typically not following the dominant norms and ideologies for signs. Furthermore, unlike the earlier genres, graffiti are not commodities which would follow the trends of global trade either. All this being said, the code choice for graffiti is rather unsurprising for both villages: Slovak and English for Reca and Hungarian and English for Vásárút. Still, graffiti is the only type of private sign that is not visible at all in Slovak in Vásárút. In Reca, graffiti is part of the global graffiti culture, whereas in Vásárút it is of local character. The different graffiti genres indicate that the youth culture in Reca is of global character, whereas Vásárút has a more local, Hungarian youth community.



Figure 16-17: Graffiti in Reca and Vásárút

In Reca, graffiti is part of the global hip-hop culture (cf. Pennycook 2009). The peripheral but mobile placement and form of graffiti in Reca is typical, it indicates a global, transportable subculture, which is not aimed to carry a message understandable for outsiders to the subculture (Pennycook 2009: 302). In comparison, the graffiti in Vásárút is of local character. In Vásárút the location of the graffiti is also central: on the map of the village at main square of the settlement. It includes typical, generally understandable, insults in Hungarian (*faszopó* [sic!] 'dick sucker' and *buzi* 'faggot') and English (*fuck*). The different graffiti genres seem to indicate that the youth culture in Reca is of global character, whereas Vásárút has a more local, Hungarian youth community. That is, in Vásárút the Hungarian youth communicates in Hungarian with each other in the form of visual language. This is in line with my fieldwork observations, in Vásárút I noticed only youth groups that communicated in Hungarian, whereas in Reca I met no such groups, rather Slovak was used among the youth.

#### 4.4 A war memorial

The autonomous Hungarian public signs placed by private individuals in Reca include a war memorial plate in the cemetery.



Figure 18: war memorial in Hungarian, Reca

It must appear peculiar that a private grave includes a war memorial to “the Heroes of Réte” (*Réte hősi halott honvédei*), all local Hungarians killed in the World Wars (1914-1918, 1942-1945). The name of the donor of the memorial plate is displayed on the right corner, together with the words *Drága véreim emlékére* (‘For the memory of my precious blood [relation]s’). According to the language laws, the plate could not be autonomously in Hungarian had it been produced by an official entity or a registered civil organization. As a demonstration of this, in the same cemetery there is a bilingual memorial plaque placed by the municipality for those buried elsewhere. That is, also in this case, the dominant ideology, displayed in language laws and official signage, is being contested in the private sphere, which is here stretched to include what might be also characterized as community signs.

## 5. Discussion

The dominant local discourse around the language choice for private signage, voiced in my interviews, is that the private visual language use should follow the predominant private spoken language use in the village. In Vásárút private signage should thus be predominantly Hungarian, whereas in Reca it should be Slovak dominant but bilingual. In the interviews, Hungarian informants in Reca often displayed the explicit norm of using bilingual signs, however their real-life practices did not reflect this preference. The informants in Vásárút stated that they “do not want any trouble”, but that they prefer Hungarian signage in the

private sphere. Since “here everybody speaks Hungarian”, they do not see any reason to produce signs in Slovak.

The discourse of producing private signage as a deliberate political act, aiming at a greater visibility of the Hungarian language, was voiced only in one casual conversation. What is more, producing monolingual private signs in Hungarian with a symbolic intent was viewed negatively by most of the informants in both fieldwork sites. Finally, issues of personal identity may be at stake in the cases where Hungarian has been used against all the odds, that is, when a sign with Hungarian texts has to be handmade or purchased in Hungary. In the LL of Vásárút, mass produced humorous remarks or hand written frivolous insults are put into public display only in Hungarian. Furthermore, there seems to be a notable unwillingness to use Slovak signs among some Vásárútians and they can even go to excesses in turning them into Hungarian. At the same time, there is no discourse of a Hungarian community operating *en masse* in producing and placing private signs in either of the sites.

The dominant ideologies reflected on the other branches of LL have a great impact on the language community undergoing language shift. In Reca private individuals who speak Hungarian as their first language prefer Slovak in the public texts they produce, purchase and choose to put into display. This indicates that the LL has become a mechanism escalating the observable language shift in the village. The few examples of Hungarian use point to the past.

The choice of language in private signs in Vásárút indicates that Hungarian is the language of everyday use in the settlement. The general LL displays dominant norms and ideologies which are contested in the private signage. However, the dominant ideologies pop up also in private signage. Two general transmitting mechanisms were described: First, the trade of signs in Slovakia is based on monolingual Slovak signs. Second, the genre of signs connected to the national postal system reflect the ideology that the postal system is an emblem of the state. In these cases, resistance is displayed through signs purchased in Hungary as well as through self-made signs. This ideology of resistance is not present in local discourses, rather it can be derived from the local practices of visual language use.

According to the data on “official” signs and the general LL, Hungarian signs are not threatening the official language in any observable way. Rather, the already scarce visual use of Hungarian is dwindling in many categories, which points to the urgency of facilitating and encouraging the use of Hungarian language. For Reca it might be too late, since the dominant ideology of a non-Hungarian public space has already been internalized by the Hungarian speakers. In other words, in the informants’ opinion the use of Hungarian by private individuals in public is a nationalist provocation which should be avoided in order to maintain the positive aspects of the Hungarian identity.

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