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Linguistic landscapes of a minoritized regional majority: Language ideologies among Hungarians in South-West Slovakia

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1. Introduction

This article is an investigation of the linguistic situation in South-West Slovakia and its interpretation by local inhabitants through the notion of linguistic landscape (LL hereafter), here understood broadly as texts displayed in visual space.¹ This study has two broad aims. Firstly, the general distribution of the languages in the LL of two historically Hungarian villages is established. This distributional picture is compared to (inter)national and local conceptions about the visual use of different languages in South-West Slovakia. Secondly, using an ethnographic approach and making use of the data gathered during one month fieldwork, a set of individual signs and sign genres are analyzed from the viewpoint of their semiotic characteristics and the analyses focus on language ideologies of the producers and readers of such signs.

Discourses on the current LL in South-West Slovakia are characterized by the fact that this region encompasses large areas where Hungarians make up the majority of the population. Hungarians, typically living in the areas bordering Hungary, account for c. 10 per cent of Slovakia's population, and they form a historical minority whose identity is often constructed in opposition to the majority. As Sloboda (2009: 184) states, there is anxiety “about the Hungarian inhabitants' possible disloyalty to the young Slovak state and about the possibility of southern Slovakia's secession.” In his view, these perceived majority fears make this region's LL fundamentally different from many other European bilingual areas. The areas inhabited by Hungarian speakers can be seen in the following map.

Data for this study are collected from two villages in South-West Slovakia. The first, (Slovakian name: Reca, Hungarian: Réte) is located 25 kilometres east of Bratislava², and it is situated along the western border of the Hungarian majority settlements. The second village (H: Vásárút, S: Trhová Hradská) is located in the middle of a Hungarian majority region, 60 kilometres east of Bratislava. They represent two ends of a continuum, with Reca on the border

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² I use the place names in the language of the majority in the given settlement.

of a Hungarian majority region, where changes in the demographic and linguistic situations are rapid, and Vásárút in the Hungarian heartlands.

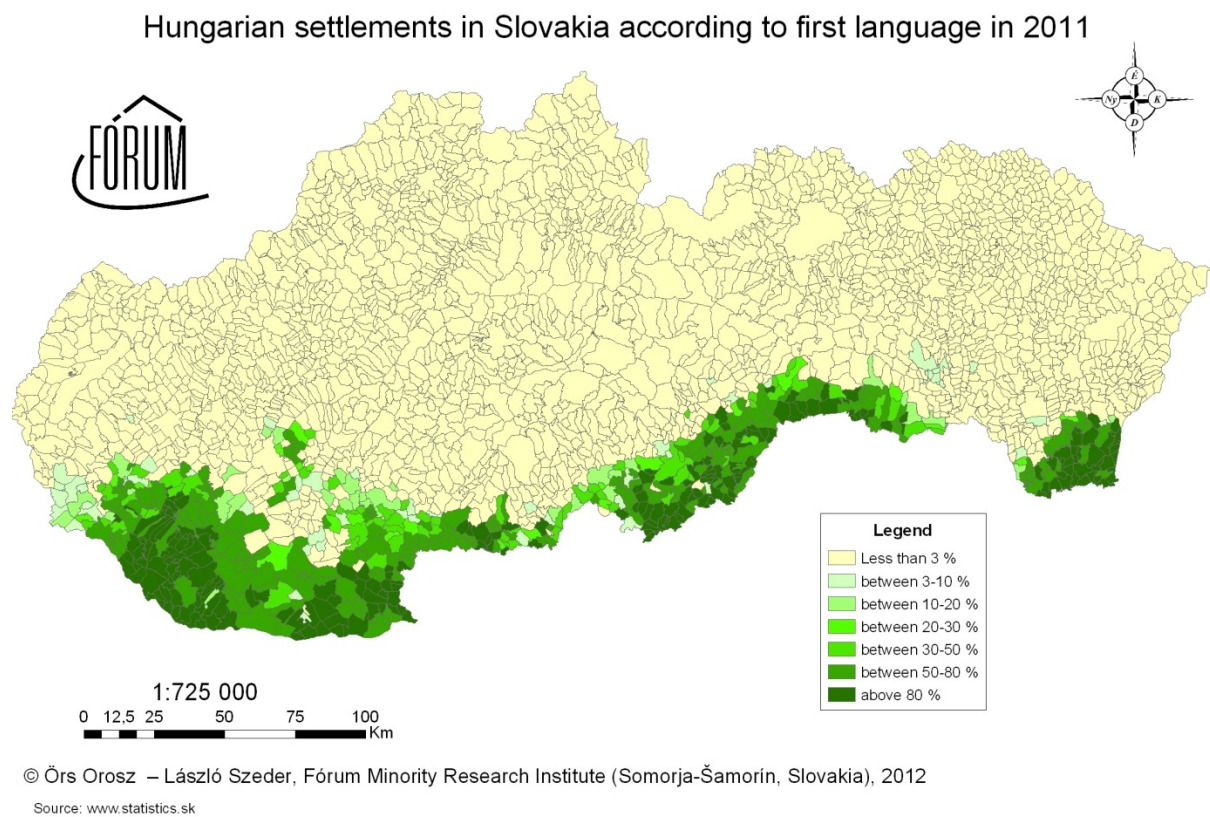


Figure 1. Hungarian settlements in Slovakia in 2011 (courtesy by Örs Orosz)

As is well known, the notion of LL started as a way to map language choices and to quantify visual characteristics of signs in public places, mainly in the commercial centers of cities. The results are considered comparable to language censuses and surveys, thus contributing to our understanding of the sociolinguistic context of a given community (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 67-68). LL has also been deemed significant since it “serves as the emblem of societies, communities and regions” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 8). In the case of multilingual sites, “circulating sociopolitical discourses about multilingualism are concretely observable in how languages are deployed visually in constituting the linguistic landscape” (Hult 2009: 91). As Hult (2009: 92-93) explains, through a view of “discourse as language-in-action”, discourses can be analyzed on the basis of the distribution and visual semiotics of signs. Hence qualitative studies of discourses of signage form the new trend in LL research (Coupland 2012). At the same time,

important investigations on the viewpoints of the readers/audiences (e.g. Garvin 2010) and producers (e.g. Malinowski 2009) of signs have emerged. Several studies now combine quantitative and qualitative analyses so that distributional results are combined with discourse analysis of visual semiotics including consumers' and/or producers' accounts of their significance in the local context (e.g. Marten 2010). In addition, villages and areas where the minority forms the regional majority have been investigated (Dal Negro 2009).

This study combines these approaches with the notion of language ideologies (cf. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010: 11) and investigates how the LL displays ideas of relationships between people, socio-political issues and language (e.g. Gal 2006a: 388). The structure is such that after the background sections, I will provide general distributional accounts of the LLs of the two villages to see what is typical for signage in general in the region today and to discuss possible differences between the villages. Next, I examine different categories in the LL, focusing on monolingual signs in contrast to bi- and multilingual signs. I will focus on emblematic and often contested signs that employ arrange of inscriptions (bilingual, Slovak, Hungarian, English, Italian, Latin and/or missing) which highlight ideologies about language and discourses surrounding them. I conclude with an analysis of local semiotic and discursive practices as well as norms and their transgressions from the viewpoint of the discourses of readers and producers of such signs.

2. Sociolinguistic overview of the two villages

Reca had an overwhelming majority of Hungarians when it was ceded from Hungary to Czechoslovakia in 1920. It was returned to Hungary in 1938 and restored back to Czechoslovakia in 1945. By the autumn of 1945 the Hungarian school was closed and Hungarians together with Germans were declared stateless people to be purged from the country. However, the allies did not approve the expulsion of the 600,000 Hungarians, and various measures were adopted by the Czechslovak state to weaken their position as much as possible (Vadkerty 1999). The population exchange with Hungary, forced through international pressure, removed c. 40 families (Cseplő 1995: 31, 47), they were replaced by Slovaks from Hungary. In my interviews and casual conversation with the ethnic Hungarians in the area, they described the deportations of Hungarians and the new ethnic and economic structure (see Vadkerty 1999) as a persisting trauma and a death blow to the Hungarian community in Reca.

The Hungarian school was reopened in 1949. However, from that time on the Hungarian school has lost a growing number of pupils to the Slovak school (Metzner 2000: 7-10). Today, for every 10-12 students entering school in Reca, only about two are placed in the Hungarian school, while the remaining are placed in the Slovak school, although some of these students are Hungarian L1 speakers. This practice suggests that Hungarian affiliation is rare among families and that the knowledge of Hungarian among the children is dwindling.

At the end of the 20th century, roughly two-thirds of the Reca inhabitants worked in Bratislava (Cseplő 1995:32), which carries an emblematic Slovak image for many of my informants. In the 2001 census, Reca counted a Slovak majority of 55 per cent among the 1,239 inhabitants for the first time in its history. After the transition towards capitalism in 1990, people have regained their lands which they have often sold to real estate developers. In 2011, the number of Hungarians has diminished to 37 per cent (portal.statistics.sk), and this development suggests that the village is gradually transforming into a suburb of Bratislava.

Language shift is taking place in Reca. Among the 80-year-olds, there were a few who told me that they can barely communicate in Slovak, and they reported troubles communicating with their grandchildren who seldom speak any Hungarian. The churches and cultural events are overwhelmingly Hungarian, as there are no Slovak cultural organizations and no Slovak churches; however, two congregations have some services in Slovak. In the two cemeteries, the newer the graves are, the more Slovak inscriptions they have. In the local pub, the middle-aged male generation was highly bilingual. According to my fieldwork notes, languages were constantly switched, and apparently no default language could be detected. According to my observations, it is a norm to greet most people in Slovak in Reca. A pro-Hungarian attitude is rare in the village, however, a handful of men make an effort to use only Hungarian inside the family and enroll their children in the Hungarian school. Those men are influencing their wives, many of whom attended Slovak schools and might still prefer to use Slovak with their bilingual friends and colleagues. In these families the use of Slovak is reduced to work and to the life outside the village. The family environment is kept as Hungarian as possible. However, during visits to these families, I experienced that the children are competent in Slovak as well.

As for Vášárút, there are hardly any historical remarks of other nationalities than Hungarians. It was ceded to Czechoslovakia in 1920, but unlike the Reca residents, the Hungarians in Vášárút escaped the population exchange program in 1945–1948. Vášárút has had

only Hungarian schools nearly throughout its history, however, Hungarian schools were banned altogether between 1945 and 1948, and Slovak teachers came to the village. Soon after the Hungarian school was reopened, the Slovak school was closed due to lack of enrolment (Presinszky 2002).

Vásárút still has an overwhelming majority of Hungarian first language speakers (92 per cent in the 2011 Census). In the village center, the conversations take place in Hungarian and to some degree also in the local Romani language. The local Roma, use their language amongst themselves and pass it on to their children. No written use of the local Romani language could be traced.

The village is primarily agricultural, but jobs in agriculture have been reduced heavily since 2004 when Slovakia joined the European Union. Even though a large number of emerging small enterprises have replaced the lost jobs in agriculture, more and more people are seeking employment in Bratislava or other cities. The spoken language used in the workplaces in Vásárút is Hungarian and Slovak is used in written official documents.

Vásárút has a Hungarian school and kindergarten, and the nearest Slovak primary school is in the neighboring village which attracts children from the area (on proposals for bilingual education in Slovakia, see Langman 2002). According to a teacher in the Slovak school, only one-third of the children are L1 speakers of Slovak. During the last few years, this school received no children from Vásárút where putting children into the Hungarian kindergarten and the school is a norm. At the same time, it was felt that the Hungarian school did not provide the children with the much needed skills in Slovak, since vocational schools and higher education, often unavailable in Hungarian, require a strong knowledge of Slovak. The contemporary expansion of Hungarian higher education in Slovakia, and the chance to study in Hungary are gradually changing this picture. However, my local informants considered that official matters have to be carried out in Slovak. The teaching of Slovak in the Hungarian schools, even though it comprises a high number of hours, was felt to be too concentrated on grammar and literature. A general belief was that the village youth (a) lacked the linguistic competence needed to participate in the prestigious education available in Slovak, and (b) did not come into contact with the everyday registers of Slovak needed to communicate with their Slovak peers. A retired bilingual lady, who had spent most of her life among the Slovaks reported having as many

private pupils as she could handle, since so many parents wanted to ensure that their child learned Slovak.

Most adults use Slovak with contacts outside Vášárút; however, only few villagers have Slovak friends and they feel insecure in some domains of Slovak. Several informants believed that competence of Slovak has dwindled among the younger male generation since the abolishment of compulsory military service. High civil service positions are typically considered to be unavailable for the villagers due to lack of language skills. For instance, a successful local entrepreneur, who was campaigning for the Hungarian party in the parliamentary elections, stated that she had refused to be considered as a candidate at first, because she lacked the needed competence in Slovak. After the candidate list became public, other villagers were surprised of her nomination, since “she doesn’t speak Slovak well enough”.

To sum up, the local language practices and ideologies have developed differently in the villages due to the varying economic, educational, migration, and geographic processes. Reca is a bilingual village, with observable patterns of language shift to Slovak and with little resistance to the dominant language ideology. Vášárút is a monolingual Hungarian community, and the local ideologies support the use of Hungarian in local contexts. However, in non-local realms, the use of Slovak is a typical and generally accepted practice by the villagers. As will be shown later, these observations are reflected in the LLs of the villages, too. Among others, language shift is displayed in the LL of Reca and resistance to the hegemony of Slovak in the LL of Vášárút.

3. Linguistic landscapes and language politics in Slovakia

Slovakia has become famous for its disputes on language laws, which provide a macro level ideological context for analyzing local LL. According to Ondrejovič (2009: 26), the Slovak language is supported by the “status as the only official language of an independent and sovereign state”, and according to law it “takes precedence over other languages used in the territory of the Slovak Republic” (2009: 16). Since Slovakia’s independence in 1993, the language laws have served the purpose of creating a homogenous European nation state. The ideology of protecting the state language against the minority languages is a typical European

idea in the nation state building. For instance, the Venice Commission³ (2010: 10) recently stated that “the 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”. In this ideology, the Hungarian minority is viewed as a threat to the state language and thus state sovereignty. For instance, the need for tightening an amendment to the Law on the State Language was explained on the Slovak *Ministry of Education* homepages as follows:

Members of the Hungarian national minority [...] live largely in the southern areas of Slovakia. [...] *Citizens of the Slovak nationality living in areas of mixed nationality are often denied the right of access to information in the state language particularly in those municipalities where they live in a minority. Official announcements, notices on cultural and other events, notices and adverts in public spaces are in many cases provided only in the Hungarian language, in contravention also of the previously applicable law. Pushing the Slovak language out of public life in an area of mixed nationality in Slovakia often causes citizens of Slovak nationality material harm and hinders their full inclusion into the social and working life of their immediate environment [...] There is thus repeatedly discrimination of Slovak citizens in the territory of their own state.*

(*The Language...* 2009, emphasis in original)

Here, this argumentation claims that many signs in public spaces in Southern Slovakia are in Hungarian only. The way this passage combines the issues of language, state, territory, nationality, and citizenship is notable. It can be read as an example of the European ideology of “one language=one nation=one state=one territory” (Gal 2006a: 378). As Gal (2006b: 164) stresses, because this ideology is impossible to achieve, the emphasis is placed on exhibiting loyalty towards the state language. The Hungarian minority is explicitly constructed as violating this display of loyalty in public space, which has a direct consequence for the citizens of Slovakia, here read as those of Slovak descent.

The use of Slovak language in public or official domains is regulated by the Law on the State Language (1995, with several amendments later). The basic principle is that the state language should be used in all domains in the public space and in official written documents. Minority languages may be used in specified domains, places, spaces, media, and by some

³ The Venice Commission is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters (see www.venice.coe.int).

categories of speakers which have been codified in several national laws and international treaties ratified by Slovakia. The nationalist Slovak coalitions have pushed for the tightening of the language law through extending the notion of public occasions, stretching the scope of documents that cannot be bilingual (school certificates for Hungarian schools have been an emblematic case), and elevating the range and extent of fines for ignoring this legislation. Some international organizations have tried to push Slovakia to follow international treaties, such as the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. In the 2nd monitoring report the committee notably concludes that Slovakia has not fulfilled the recommended undertakings (see *Application...*, 2009). The coalitions of Slovak moderates and Hungarian parties usually achieve compromises stretching the allowances to use the minority language. The network of national laws and international treaties will not be discussed in detail here (for the latest developments, see *Third Report...*, 2012), since my goal is to give an overview of signage in the villages and its interpretations, not to report how the language laws are perceived by the inhabitants. As already shown by Langman and Lanstyák (2000) and also confirmed in my fieldwork, even though frequent reference to the language laws are made, the inhabitants, including municipality leaders or powerful entrepreneurs, have not typically read the laws. Nor do they follow the changes in the wordings of the law, but construct an overall impression of it based on media discourses which they follow selectively.

4. Methodology and material

The Landry and Bourhis (1997) approach to LL, i.e. cataloguing language choice in signs, can be criticized for oversimplification on two grounds. Firstly, like census data, it presumes the existence of distinct homogenous languages. However, hybridity in signs and in names in particular is common in multilingual regions (Edelman 2009), and linguistic variation is also displayed in signs so that Hungarian inscriptions in Slovakia often differ from inscriptions in Hungary or Romania. Secondly and more importantly, quantitative methods often fall short in explicating the logic behind the LL. For instance, in the pioneering study by Landry and Bourhis, the LL was seen as a one-to-one indicator of linguistic vitality. However, as Jaworski and Thurlow (2010: 10-11) argue, the presence of a language in the LL “is not necessarily the best indicator of ethnolinguistic vitality of its speakers. Rather, the presence or absence of a language

on [...] signage in combination with the type (or genre) of signs, their contents and style, are indicative of [...] language ideologies.”

In the case of Southern Slovakia, we still lack a general distributional account of the LL and thus also an empirical understanding of this contested region. Such a description should enable us to see whether official signs in public places are often only in Hungarian, as claimed by the *Ministry of Education* or whether Slovak actually “takes precedence over other languages” (Ondrejovič 2009: 16). Such an examination will also take into account the presence and function of English and other languages in the LL.

In order to see beyond the numbers and to understand how the local inhabitants interpret the sociolinguistic situation they live in, I engage in the qualitative analysis of discourses of signage through the notion of language ideologies, broadly defined as “cultural, metapragmatic assumptions about the relationship between words, speakers, and worlds” (Gal 2006a: 388). In line with the discourse analytic LL research, my analysis focuses on conceptions of the relationships of the semiotic properties of the signs, agency, language choice and socio-political issues, drawn from the perspectives of the producers and readers of the signs. Unlike in the case of cities (see Malinowski 2009), the village context, at least in Slovakia, allows for a fairly easy approach to readers and producers of various signs.

In the analysis of the LL, I use a continuum reminiscent to the typical bottom-up/top-down, public/private dichotomies widely applied in quantitative linguistic landscape research (e.g. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). However, they have also been widely criticized lately (e.g. Kallen 2009). That is, as Gal (2005) has shown, such categories should not be seen as simple dichotomies but as language ideologies. That is, we should investigate what assumptions are included in the relationship of language use, social characteristics and the speaker (Gal 2005: 26). For instance, in the case of language laws, defining something as public or official is connected to state sovereignty and thus to the state language monopolies, but at the same time, this category is subject to constant political battles. As will be shown, signage of otherwise private businesses can target not only local co-inhabitants as their target audiences and primary readers but also governmental inspectors (cf. Kallen 2009: 273-274).

I carried out fieldwork in the two villages 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 villagers’ 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 and Szabó Mihály 2005: 54), I aimed to interview the villagers without a college degree or high economic status. In both villages, I interviewed around 15 Hungarians and their family members. In addition, I interviewed five middle-class individuals, viz. school teachers, municipal officials and entrepreneurs. My objective was to follow the villagers' life as closely as possible to acquire a sense of how they moved through the LL. I was lodged at a local family and I followed them to the nearby town where they run their errands about three times a week and where the youth attended high-school. Even though I was clearly a foreigner and an outsider in the villages, the two weeks' fieldwork period was enough to construct a closer picture of the life (family history, family relations, work, education, networks, socio-economic status, mobility, communication, and views on different language related issues) of these families. 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.⁴ Besides the photos and interviews, many informal conversations were documented in fieldwork notes and various materials were gathered. To save space, informants' accounts are abridged and translated to English by the author. To protect informant identities, only minimal information will be provided on them.

A general picture of the LL in the two villages will be presented first through statistics. In principle, I counted and documented all the signs in the public space. Signs inside institutions or houses, as well as inscriptions on gravestones were not considered public. However, for the qualitative analysis some of these signs are included. For the quantitative analysis, I decided that the same sign would be counted only once. A unit of quantitative analysis consisted of a text with a transparently coherent features, texts in texts, such as graffiti, were counted as autonomous texts. For the statistical analysis, the typical subjective elements and uncertainties remain. Hybrid inscriptions were at times approximated to some language, even though they

⁴ Contacts with Slovak intellectuals were established before and after the fieldwork. There were no Slovak administrators or local political leaders in the villages. I met the mayors of both villages, who were ethnic Hungarians similar to the administrators at the public offices. My attempts to visit the Slovak school and Kindergarten in Reca failed; however while in Vászárút, I succeeded in interviewing a teacher employed at a near-by Slovak school.

could be assigned to others as well. Nevertheless, general tendencies can be traced with the statistical analysis, and they are deepened through the qualitative analysis.

5. General distribution of languages in the linguistic landscapes

It is obvious that census data should be dealt with caution, particularly since they often exclude or misrepresent information on bilingualism or biculturalism. This may be because census collection often builds on the ideology of monolingualism (see Moore, Pietikäinen and Blommaert 2010). However, census data can still provide general information on affiliations, and can be considered relatively reliable in the case of Slovak and Hungarian.⁵ Table 1 shows the results for first languages from the 2011 Census.

Table 1. First languages in the 2011 census data (portal.statistics.sk)

First language	Reca – Réte	Trhová Hradská – Vásárút
Hungarian	39 %	92 %
Slovak	57 %	5 %
Other	4%	3 %
Total number of inhabitants	1378	2160

A quantitative overview of the linguistic landscapes based on language choice in the public space is provided in Table 2. The difference between the ethnic compositions is clearly reflected in their linguistic landscapes. Moreover, as the percentage of Slovak only signs exceeds that of the percentage of Slovak first language speakers in each case, we can surmise that the LLs display power relations. From previous studies, the presence of Hungarians and the percentages of Hungarian signs in the LLs resemble the situation of Palestinians in Israel (see Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). However, Arabic is still relatively much more visible in Israel than Hungarian is in Slovakia.

⁵ I.e. the data are reliable at least in comparison with the Roma in the villages. In the interviews with the Roma, the census categories seemed irrelevant; their numbers in the censuses are often contested.

Table 2. Use of languages in public signs (rounded to zero decimals)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	70 % (76)	43 % (130)
Slovak-Hungarian	16 % (17)	27 % (82)
Hungarian	8 % (9)	16 % (50)
Slovak-English	5 % (5)	3 % (8)
English	-	5 % (14)
Others	1 % (1)	7 % (20)
Total	100 % (108)	101 % (304)
Slovak included	91 % (98)	74 % (224)
Hungarian included	24 % (26)	45 % (136)

Reca, the community undergoing language shift, has an unequal presence of Hungarian in public signs relative to the population. The census data in Table 1 show that 39 per cent have Hungarian as their first language, while only 24 per cent of the signs include Hungarian. In contrast, Slovak first language speakers comprise 57 per cent of inhabitants but 70 per cent of signs are in Slovak only. In the case of Vásárút it is even more obvious that the numbers indicate different statuses of the languages. The census data indicate that Vásárút has 5 per cent Slovak first language speakers and 43 per cent of the signs are in Slovak only. In contrast, while 92 per cent of the inhabitants are Hungarian first language speakers, and only 45 per cent of the signs contain Hungarian elements. Monolingualism in general is frequent in the LL, but bilingualism characterizes only one-third of the signs even in Vásárút.

To examine the relationship between reported L1s and the choices on signs in the LL in more depth, I will next examine language choice across various categories of signs. I have categorized signs primarily on the basis of (a) the space in which they occur, (b) the agency displayed through it (who might have posted/ordered it), and (c) on their contents and forms. I provide a quantitative summary followed with a qualitative analysis that focuses on local language ideologies. The signs have been grouped into seven categories ranging from top (international signs) to bottom (private signs). This order indicates a continuum from Slovak to bilingual and to Hungarian signs.

As for signs with an international dimension, Table 3 shows that Reca has hardly any international signs. The three Slovak signs in Vásárút are EU billboards and advertisements indicating **EU** funded projects. This ‘Slovak only policy’ in the EU-related signs (see figure 2) is striking, since for other types of signs all these institutions had bilingual inscriptions, or in the case of the school in Vásárút, there were more monolingual Hungarian than Slovak signs in its inner spaces. The community leaders told me that they had received explicit orders “from the ministry” on what kind of EU-related signs should be placed and where, and not following these rules would be a risk during the inspections.⁶ A consequence of the signs for the Hungarian language use is that the expressions in these signs are spread in Slovak. As one (well-educated) informant stated, she does not think there is a Hungarian expression for *fond* (‘fund’, see figure 2), although there is Hungarian *alap*.

Table 3. Signs with an international dimension (1.2 % of all signs)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	-	3
Slovak-English	1	-
Slovak-Hungarian	-	1



Figure 2. EU sign in Vásárút (Slovak only)

⁶ Inspections, which also pay attention to language issues, were frequently referred to at schools, by entrepreneurs and by local council employees. My interviewees mentioned that inspectors come from the ministries in Bratislava or from the regional governmental offices in near-by towns. Further investigation into the issue of inspections was out of the scope of this study.

The bulk of the category understood as *official* by the local people consist of signs produced and controlled by state offices, ministries or (formerly) state-owned companies (Table 4).

Table 4. State signs (14 % of all signs)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	16	40
Slovak-English	1	1

There are no differences between the villages in this category. The signs in this category are road signs, and the names of neighboring villages and cities are displayed in Slovak only (see figure 3). 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 would be bilingual signs.” However, there exists a grass-root civil campaign towards bilingualism which has gained some attention in the villages, and the quick removal of the bilingual road sign in the nearby Dunaszerdahely in 2011 was cited as an example of the hostility of the Slovak officials towards the Hungarian language. A local Slovak couple did not see the case this way, and they thought that road signs and maps should be in the official language of the state only, since monolingualism, according to them, was the international norm.

In line with road signs, everything connected to transportation or communication is in Slovak only, thus implying that all contacts outside the village should be monolingual in Slovak. 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 in Slovak only.

The post office has signs invariably in Slovak only, and the Slovak Post represents monolingualism in its visual image. Signs in Hungarian are forbidden in its company language policy (although there are occasional signs in English). 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 Reca, but I witnessed only Hungarian use in Vásárút. Some

Hungarian newspapers and bilingual postcards are sold in the post office in Reca, but in Vásárút, however, the post has greeting cards in Slovak, and thus villagers buy them at a private newsstand which only sells Hungarian cards.

An important subcategory consists of a range of warning signs and notices. Local Hungarians often commented that such signs should be in Slovak, since they are official, however, in fact, according to the law (see *Third Report...*2012: 54-55), signs on the threat to life and health should be bilingual in minority settlements.



Figure 3. A road sign in Slovak only in Vásárút

In the realm of municipalities bilingualism is dominant in both villages. It is noteworthy that the transition in 1990 resulted in some autonomy in the municipalities, but it also resulted in the so-called sign wars (Kontra 1996) when the municipalities with over 20 per cent minority share received the right to have bilingual place signs. Even though some people mentioned that the Hungarian signs have been demolished a few times by Slovak nationalist youngsters, most people considered that bilingualism in municipality signage has been well established and generally accepted. Bilingual signs placed by the municipality have the Slovak version in the dominant position, i.e. placed before or above the Hungarian text.

Table 5. Signs placed by the municipality (16.7 % of all signs)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	6	9
Slovak-Hungarian	14	26
Hungarian	-	5
Others	-	9

Spoken communication in the municipalities differs between Reca and Vásárút. Hungarian is the default language in Vásárút, whereas in Reca the newly elected mayor stated that “9 out of 10 want to use Slovak when they come to the office, so what can you do?” In the interviews the municipal leaders in both villages emphasized that they support bilingualism. However, they lacked the resources for producing materials in two languages: “I just don’t have the time to translate everything”. Both leaders considered other issues as higher priority than using Hungarian in signs (cf. Mrva and Szilvássy 2011: 56-57).

What are the monolingual signs placed by the municipality then? In Reca these include texts on the trash cans for instance, and a sign on the Slovak kindergarten (Figure 4). It is noticeable that the signs for Hungarian schools or kindergartens always include a Slovak explanation that the school uses Hungarian as the medium of instruction. That is, they present the marked case against the unmarked ones of monolingually labeled Slovak institutions.



Figure 4. Slovak Kindergarten in Reca (left) and a Hungarian school in Vásárút (right)

In Vásárút, the coat of arms on the mayor’s car bears only the Slovak name of the village. In mayor’s own words this is because “I didn’t order the Hungarian name because I move around a lot, I go often to Bratislava, too. I don’t want any trouble.” In the inner spaces of the two municipality halls both monolingual and bilingual coats of arms were on display in different places. A bilingual version was used on the trash cans in Vásárút. The homepage of Vásárút (www.vasarut.sk), which has Hungarian as its default language, displays the coat of arms with the Slovak name of the village. It was, however, changed to Hungarian in December 2011, possibly as a consequence of my field work: I asked for the rationale of using the Slovak place

name on a Hungarian homepage, and the answer was: “Well, we didn’t even notice it, the homepage design was ordered from a programmer who did it for several villages around here. Perhaps we should mend that in the next update.”

The Hungarian signs in the municipal institutions in Vásárút included *feltámadunk* “we will be resurrected” above the gate of the municipal cemetery, the timetable on the school door, and an advertisement for a cultural event. In general, the cultural life in both villages is conducted predominantly in Hungarian. However, in Reca, the Slovak school and kindergarten contribute with Slovak cultural programs at different festivities in the village.

Commercial signs are central to the general LL of the villages. They make up about half of the signs and show considerable differences between the two locations.

Table 6. Commercial signs (48.7 % of all signs)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	43	58
Slovak-Hungarian	1	52
Hungarian	1	17
Slovak-English	2	7
English	-	11
Italian	-	4
Others	-	4
Total	47	153

The commercial signs in Reca were almost solely in Slovak. The informants recalled that there were bilingual signs at the grocery store, but that they were removed during the last rejuvenation of the village. The local entrepreneurs did not consider it important to use Hungarian in writing. What is more, a Hungarian owner of a repair shop stated that he would never place bilingual signs or signs in Hungarian at his business, because “we have reached that level that all Hungarians understand Slovak texts, we do not bother ourselves with such issues, business is all that counts.”

The commercial signs in Vásárút show more diversity. Yet it is striking that a slight majority of these signs are in Slovak only. What makes a Hungarian shopkeeper in an

overwhelmingly Hungarian village write things only in Slovak? Business owners often stated that inspectors requested signs in Slovak. One account was that “I had no sign, and the inspectors were coming, so I asked Niki⁷ to make me signs quickly, no matter how they look. Next time I will make them bilingual”. The shopkeeper, further reported receiving remarks that he was setting a bad example by not using Hungarian on his signs.

The high number of bilingual commercial signs distinguishes Vásárút from Reka. In Vásárút, there seems to be a constant shifting between Slovak only and bilingual signs. According to the informants, certain firms that use bilingual signage now had Slovak monolingual signs in the past; others have turned from bilingual advertising to monolingual Slovak ones. There was also the widely-cited example of how remarks on monolingual signage have made an entrepreneur produce bilingual texts. Among the business owners, it was considered that the law requested signs in Slovak. However, the local norm was to display information in Hungarian, too.

In the bilingual signs the Slovak text is typically placed before (to the left) or above the Hungarian and occasionally also in larger font. In Scollon and Scollon’s (2003: 119-120) terms, Slovak then is the preferred code and Hungarian the peripheral. In the commercial bilingual signs in Vásárút, however, the Hungarian text can appear as the preferred element in the sign. This is the case for 19 per cent (10/52) of Slovak-Hungarian bilingual signs. For instance, in figure 5, the phrase for *opening hours* is in Hungarian above and before the Slovak. This can be seen as contesting the dominant ideology of putting the Slovak in the preferred position in bilingual signs, often referred to by the informants as a general principle of the language laws. However, according to the language laws “no sequence of texts is determined” (*Third Report...2012: 54*) for commercial signs in minority settlements.

⁷ The names are pseudonyms.



Figure 5. Hungarian as the preferred code in Vásárút

The name of the owner is displayed in many commercial signs. At times, Hungarian names (and the Hungarian order of last name followed with the first name) are used. However, most female owners have kept the Slovak *-ová* suffix (female names without it were allowed in 1994, see Lanstyák and Szabómihály 2005: 58). A Hungarian cultural activist stated that she would have dropped the suffix if she had not been a business owner. According to her, she did not want to take the risk of being subjected to too many inspections for this kind of display of Hungarian-ness. Business names are most often international expressions in some Indo-European orthography (e.g. *Ferrofruct*, *Judi Bar*), Slovak names are used rarely (e.g. *Jednota*). There were two cases of Hungarian business name use in bilingual signs in Vásárút. In the first one, the Hungarian orthography is used (*Korona* ‘Crown’ for a pub), in the other the name has been translated to Slovak: *Patkó – Potkova* [sic!] (‘horseshoe’ for a restaurant).

What are the 17 commercial signs in Hungarian in Vásárút? Some of them are *ad hoc* signs which inform of the meals of the day on a chalkboard in a local inn (*pénteken őzpörkölt*, English: Friday: Venison paprika stew). Permanent signs are posted by individuals selling something or offering services. In these rare cases, all the names are in Hungarian as opposed to the place names which are always in Slovak.

The use of languages other than Slovak and Hungarian in the commercial sector seems to be modest when compared with the wider European context (see e.g. Edelman 2009, Hult 2009). There are two kinds of bilingual signs, a typical translation and the other one a hybrid sign. There are two Slovak-English hybrid signs in Reča. One of them is a *Horse Show*, where the program is in English and in Slovak. In Vásárút, the use of English is apparent in names (e.g.

AD-SHOP) and in product advertising (e.g. *wenice® KIDS FASHION*). Slovak-English bilingual signs include the monitor of a money teller, which has “please insert your card” in Slovak and English.

The use of Italian names takes place in a local café (figure 6). The owner explained that the Caffè del Moro sign had come together with all kinds of other supplementary products, such as sugar and glasses. Sugar packages had texts in Italian and German. The café in general had Slovak-Hungarian bilingual signs. The use of English and Italian names or internationalisms for shops and cafés in the Hungarian majority region of Slovakia is explained by Lanstyák and Szabó Mihály (2009: 67) as a strategy to avoid translating the names to either Slovak or Hungarian. In small rural villages such as Vásárút, customers are primarily Hungarians, so using a Slovak name would be a marked choice, and a monolingual Hungarian name could likewise be considered as taking an overtly pro-Hungarian standpoint which is often deemed as provocative and avoided by the entrepreneurs. Thus, the use of English or Italian is a way to escape this problem. In Reca the names of companies are mostly in Slovak. That is, Slovak names are the unmarked choice. Here the internationalisms can be seen as barely attracting more attention by displaying a West-European orientation (as one informant in Reca put it “there was a time when western products were all we longed for”).



Figure 6. Dolce Vita and Caffè del Moro in Vásárút

A linguistic characteristic of Hungarian in Slovakia is the adoption of product names from Slovak. Lanstyák and Szabó Mihály (2005: 68, 71) define transparent loan words as “imported” borrowings. Such expressions as *horcsica* for mustard (Standard Hungarian *mustár*),

párki for sausage (SH: *virslí*) and *zsuvi* for chewing gum (SH: *rágó*) are widely used in the villages. They were first introduced in Slovak in the villages (Lanstyák 2000: 155) and the way that they have become a permanent part of the local variety of Hungarian is further explained by the fact that they are still mostly sold in packages that do not contain Hungarian inscriptions. However in the local café, *žuvačka* (*zsuvi* ‘chewing gum’) was translated to *rágógumi* which is very rare. It is noteworthy that in figure 7, Hungarian is above the Slovak, which was the only case in the café. In brief, the display of the Standard Hungarian *rágógumi* alongside the emblematic *žuvačka* is definitely a marked event.



Figure 7. ‘Chewing gum’ in Vásárút with Hungarian above and Slovak below

To sum up, commercial signs are most often in Slovak only, especially in Reča, whereas a considerable number of commercial inscriptions in Vásárút are bilingual and in special cases monolingual Hungarian. It seems to be important to use Hungarian but at the same to avoid overt displays of Hungarian-ness in the latter. To some extent, this complex ideology can be seen behind the preference of naming bars, cafes and shops in English and in Italian.

As for religious signs, religious life was conducted primarily in Hungarian in both the locations. Reča has a Reformed and a Catholic Church where the services in Slovak are held every second Saturday, but otherwise they are in Hungarian. The Reformed Church has services in Hungarian only, however an Evangelical congregation uses the premises every second week for a service in Slovak. In Vásárút, there is only a Catholic Church, which holds its services in Hungarian.

Table 7. Signs connected to the church(es) and religion (2.9 % of all signs)

Language	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Hungarian	4	6
Latin	1	1

The church is an important autonomous institution where a non-vernacular version of the Hungarian language is used in the villages. However, the churches do not have many signs in public places, rather signs are confined to inner spaces. The public religious signs typically consist of statues of the saints. The texts are in Hungarian or Latin. In Vásárút, a statue with the year 1756 has a text in Latin, but a woodcarving next to the Reca Catholic Church from 2006 has the text *Stephanus Rex*. According to the local informants, the name of the first Hungarian King (H: *I. Szent István*, 1000-1038) was carved in Latin as a precaution, to avoid conflict. As shown in Figure 8, one finds a statue of Saint Wendelin with no text in Vásárút. According to several informants it was left blank intentionally, since “this madness [of compulsory Slovak inscriptions] will not last forever, and we have eternity to wait”. The churches thus represent the only public sites which present a Hungarian LL. In church exteriors, Latin is used for avoiding trouble or inscriptions are “postponed”.



Figure 8. Saint Wendelin in Vásárút, with no text

Table 8. Public signs placed by civic organizations (1.5 per cent of all signs)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	1	-
Slovak-Hungarian	1	-
Hungarian	2	2

Among civic organizations, the cultural association for Hungarians in Slovakia, Csemadok, is active in both villages and arranges symbolically significant events and displays signs in which Hungarian is often used. It has erected a *kopjafa*, a wooden monument with the word *rendületlenül* carved on it in Reca. *Rendületlenül* ('steadfastly') is the emblematic word of the second Hungarian national anthem (*Szózat*). In Vásárút, Csemadok, together with other Hungarian organizations and the municipality, has erected a statue of Lajos Kossuth, a mid-19th century freedom fighter and the father of Hungarian democracy (figure 9). This monolingual statue was presented as a major achievement by the community leaders, since it was “done in the worst Mečiar years” (1994).



Figure 9. A statue of Lajos Kossuth in Vásárút (Hungarian only)

Signs posted by private individuals mainly consist of self-made posters and advertisements or writings/graffiti. There are also stickers that have been manufactured industrially, but which have been stuck or nailed to visible places of peoples' homes. The most typical public signs placed by private persons could be found both in self-made and

manufactured versions. There are few bilingual signs placed by private persons. One reason for their scarcity is that manufactured bilingual signs are not available.

Table 9. Public signs placed by private individuals (13.8 % of all signs)

Language(s)	Reca-Réte	Trhová Hradská-Vásárút
Slovak	10	17
Slovak-Hungarian	1	3
Hungarian	2	20
Others	-	4

Among the private signs in Reka, mostly in Slovak, there is a poster for a lost dog, a graffiti and a *beware-of-dog* sign, which is only available in Slovak, in four different manufactured forms. In addition, there are mailboxes with *Pošta* above and *Noviny* (English: newspaper) below. These mailboxes are sold at the post office which has them only in Slovak. The two Hungarian public signs placed by private individuals include *Réte* painted on a trash can and a private Hungarian war memorial (1914–1918, 1941–1945) in the cemetery. It was judged to be a private because it was erected by a private person.

The numbers in Table 9 show a mild dominance of Hungarian in Vásárút. However, several of the Hungarian sign types appear only once, whereas for instance the most frequent Slovak signs can be found on nearly every street. Furthermore, some Hungarian signs are self-made, such as the one in figure 10. There is also a case of transforming a Slovak product into Hungarian: the owner of a Hungarian mailbox stated that “I first erased the *Noviny* and then scratched off the caron from *š*, turning it to Hungarian *posta*.” This is an example of some of the resistance that exists to the monolingual norms of Slovakia.



Figure 10. "Newspapers" in Hungarian in Vásárút

6. Conclusions

This article has illustrated that the numerical majority of Hungarians in the South-Western parts of Slovakia is barely displayed in the LL. These results may be compared with the results in Del Negro's (2009) observations of German speakers in the autonomous South-Tirol or on the Palestinians in Israel (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). The majority fears that signs would be provided only in Hungarian in public space proved highly overrated. For my Hungarian informants, the main objective was to "avoid problems" and not to "provoke" with a markedly pro-Hungarian stand by insisting on Hungarian inscriptions. Even for activists, linguistic rights in education were considered more important than signs, and according to local ideologies, the LL is not the primary indicator of ethnolinguistic vitality, rather it is the Hungarian education.

My paper combined the quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative and descriptive lines of LL investigation are meeting their limits (see e.g. Blommaert 2013: 2-3). However, together with qualitative analysis and the ethnographic approach, they were valuable in this study since the Hungarian region in Southern Slovakia presents a highly disputed case of which languages are on display. Further, and most importantly, it has been the target of varying claims whether it contains a high number of minority language signs. That is, following Blommaert (2013: 2-3), the quantitative account is a good first step to see what languages are present in the LL and to what extent. This first step should be followed by an interpretive analysis of the "stories about the cultural, historical, political and social backgrounds of a certain space" (2013: 41). Undoubtedly, such analyses should form the majority of LL studies on Southern Slovakia in the future.

The quantitative analysis has illuminated a Slovak dominant LL with nests of bilingual, Hungarian and other signage in Hungarian villages in South-West Slovakia. The notion of language ideologies enabled a qualitative study of the ideas that are circulated among the local inhabitants, explaining the construction and development of the LL. The dominant ideology reflected in the language laws is that Slovak, as the only official language, should take precedence over other languages in the LL, and that the use of a minority language in public space is a potential offence to state sovereignty. Resistance to this ideology is present but rare among the informants. The local Hungarians connected the use of Hungarian inscriptions at times to a display of Hungarian nationalism, which was to be avoided. This ideology, together with memories of collective punishment, explains why speakers of Hungarian display an ambivalent view to Hungarian signage in South-West Slovakia. Finally, language ideologies explain why Hungarian villagers in Slovakia, at times representing an overwhelming local majority, do not demand or produce bilingual or Hungarian signs even to the extent that the language laws would allow.

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