GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF BANSKÁ BYSTRICA DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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Abstract: The present study deals with the use of gender-inclusive language on hygiene notices that were placed on public facilities (shops, banks, churches, museums) on the Dolná Street and SNP Square in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) during the coronavirus pandemic. This phenomenon is examined in the context of the pandemic situation caused by the Coronavirus, as well as in the context of the current European gender policy and the application of gender-inclusive language in Slovakia. For the sake of comparison, attention is also paid to hygiene notices in Munich (Germany).
Keywords: linguistic landscape, hygiene notices, Coronavirus pandemic, gender inclusive language, Slovakia

1 Introduction

Linguistic landscape is a rapidly developing area of research in sociolinguistics; it deals with the written instances of a language found in the public space. It describes an everyday phenomenon and at the same time, a professional paradigm focused on investigating how written language is used in the public space. Linguistic landscapes take the form of a visualised language such as signs, posters, noticeboards, advertisements, etc. and can be considered typical for the 20th century. Over the years, they have been growing and become an inseparable part of the landscape transformed by humans, and in some cases, even a typical sign of the urban space. Although linguistic landscapes are not necessarily multilingual, research tends to focus specifically on those. They are perceived as phenomena typical for the postmodern urban spaces shared by several coexisting ethnolinguistic groups. The specific path of linguistic landscape formation is interpreted as a footprint and symbol of this coexistence. The term linguistic landscape has been coined by Landry and Bourhis who define it as follows: *"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"* (Landry and Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). Gorter describes linguistic landscape as the use of written language in a public space (Gorter, 2006, p. 2). Linguistic landscape refers to any written sign placed in the external or internal premises of a public institution, private shop or company in the given geographic location. Besides the official signs such as street signs, institution or shop signs, these include also notices placed on buildings and shops such as bans and orders regarding certain behaviour, actions taken in a specific space, advertising posters, private notices, and even forms of artistic expression such as graffiti on the walls of buildings or gutters.

According to multiple authors, the written signs fulfil two basic functions: informative and symbolic. The informative function helps define the borders of the linguistic groups and indicates what languages are used to communicate in the area- The symbolic function refers to the value of the language as perceived by its users in comparison with other languages (compare Cenoz and Gorter, 2009, p. 56). The written signs can also be categorised as official and unofficial. Official signs are regulated by the government and similar institutions while unofficial signs are posted by private entities and institutions (compare Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 27) have pointed out that in some cases, the linguistic profile of the governmental signs is more or less similar to that of the private ones, creating a consistent and coherent linguistic landscape. However, in some cases, the linguistic profile of the

private signs can be significantly different. Mainly private signs are often highly variable. Research studies have pointed out that linguistic signs are not used randomly in the public space. According to some authors, the public sphere is a very competitive environment (Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 44). The presence (or absence) of a language in a public space indicates the language policy and practice in the given country and place. On one hand, there are "top-down" aspects of the linguistic landscape, which result from the linguistic policy in the traditional sense. For instance, if the public places, streets, and buildings are marked in two or more languages, it reflects the political will to acknowledge and respect multilingualism in the area. However, the bottom-up components of the linguistic landscape also have a political dimension; using and preferring a specific language or its form reflect identity and will of individuals or civil society. As can be seen, linguistic landscape is closely connected with the language policy. The notices found in the public space also reflect the current events in society and speak about certain social and political phenomena. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected Slovakia just like other European countries. In terms of linguistic landscape research, this study aims to deal with the notices about the current hygiene measures related to the Coronavirus pandemic found on shops, banks, churches, museums, and other public establishments in the selected parts of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The focus will be on the way gender-balanced language is used to address the recipients. This phenomenon was investigated in the context of the pandemic situation caused by the Coronavirus and the related legal regulations specifying the compliance with the hygiene measures upon entrance into internal premises of facilities, as well as in the context of the current European gender policy and the application of gender-inclusive language in Slovakia. For the sake of comparison, we also pointed out the hygiene notices in Munich, Germany.

2 The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic measures in Slovakia

The world-wide COVID-19 (derived from "Coronavirus disease) pandemic has affected Slovakia as well. For the first time, this type of Coronavirus was reported in Wuhan, China in December 2019; it is officially known as SARS-CoV-2. The World Health Organisation announced a public health emergency on 30 January 2020, and on 11 March, the pandemic was confirmed. The number of people infected with this virus has been steadily increasing and has claimed many lives. The airborne virus spreads mostly through close physical contact: tiny droplets or aerosols are produced by the infected person when they breathe, cough, sneeze, or talk. It can also spread through contaminated surfaces. The most frequent symptoms include fever, cough, exhaustion, difficulty breathing, and loss of smell. The complications include pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome.

Authorities around the world have responded by implementing travel restrictions, traffic closures, safety inspections at workplaces, and in many countries, in a certain period of time, closing operations and introducing the recommended hygiene measures in the publicly available spaces. The pandemic has also caused global social and economic disruption including the biggest global recession since the Great Depression. It resulted in postponing and cancelling many sports, religious, political, and cultural events; education institutions have been partly or completely closed, and many switched to online teaching. The EU and its member states have adopted various measures to mitigate the social and economic impact of COVID-19 and support the recovery between 2020 and 2022. At the time of this linguistic landscape research in January 2022, general hygiene measures were in force for all operations, shops, and services in Slovakia, according to which the number of customers at the given time could not exceed the concentration of one person per $15m^2$ in the sales area designed for customers (however, it did not apply to children younger than 14 years accompanied by an

adult). The business owners were obliged to frequently ventilate the premises and regularly disinfect the touched surfaces, doorknobs, trolleys and baskets, devices, tools, etc. using virucidal disinfectants. Grocery shops, public catering facilities including fast food stands and other street sellers of food and drinks had to ensure regular cleaning and disinfection in terms of their daily sanitation regime pursuant to the correct hygiene practice. In Slovakia all business owners were obliged to: allow only persons with covered mouth and nose (face mask, respirator without an exhalation valve, scarf) into the premises. Upon entrance, all persons were obliged to apply hand disinfection or use the disposable gloves provided and keep their distance from other customers in the line. Pursuant to the regulations, the business owners were obliged to post notices on the necessity to comply with the aforementioned hygiene measures in visible places at all entrances into the premises. These notices will be investigated in this study.

3 Gender policy and the use of gender-inclusive language in international contexts

Although gender policy is quite young in comparison to other public policies, its roots can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries when the activities focused on battling discrimination and promoting women's rights started. The Second Wave Feminism in the second half of the 20th century played a major role in the establishment of gender policy. During this time, the main philosophy of gender policy was formulated, which applies currently. The point of gender policy is to ensure that biological differences are not used to create social differences (Pietruchová and Magurová, 2011, p. 10). Since its establishment, the EU has been striving to enhance the social dimension of Europe and reach equality between men and women. However, the complete system aiming to formulate and enforce non-discrimination rules in science, politics, employment, law, education, family life, language, etc. was only established at the end of the 20th century. As for the EU legislative framework, it draws from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948, the basic international document, which specifies that no one must be discriminated based on their sex, race, skin colour, language, religion, political views, national or social origin, or affiliation to a national minority, or property. The policy of gender equality has been promoted by numerous international agreements, conventions, and action platforms. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) specifies equality as the central aspect and one of the main goals to be achieved by the EU. This treaty also defines *gender mainstreaming* as the EU strategy to achieve gender equality in all areas of public and private life. Upon accession to the EU, all member states have undertaken to apply the principle in their policies. *Gender mainstreaming* is a horizontal approach, i.e. a cross-cutting policy implemented by all ministries. However, gender equality, i.e. equality of men and women, can only be achieved if this goal is shared by all areas of politics, including the language policy, i.e. a policy of gender equality in language. The policy of gender equality has also been promoted by a number of documents adopted at the *Fifth Conference on Women (Beijing +5)* in 2000 in New York and *Beijing +15 – UN Platform for Action for Gender Equality* at which further measures and initiatives were adopted to enforce the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.

Along with the development of gender policy and women's rights, the gender-balanced/inclusive language and its use evolved. This gradual process has not been easy. Before the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) was formulated, a lengthy discussion took place until finally, the gender-balanced language was used. Recommendation R(84) 17 on the equality of women and men in media of 1984 includes a provision addressing the research of non-sexist language use. In 1990, the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation No. R (90) 4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the elimination of sexism from language. The Committee of Ministers recommended that all member states support using language promoting the principle of gender equality and adopt the measures aimed to achieve the following goals: support non-sexist language as much as possible to respect women's

presence, positions, and tasks in society as they are respected in men; harmonise the terminology used in legal texts, public administration, and education with the principle of gender equality; promote using gender-balanced language in media. Since 1990, the use of gender-balanced language in official and everyday communication in the EU member states significantly progressed and further recommendations followed, e.g. Recommendation *Rec (2003) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making* of 2003 and *Recommendation CM/Rec (2007) 17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms* of November 2007. Pursuant to the recommendation of 2007, the member states should follow the guidelines requiring the use of gender-balanced language in the official documents, specifically in legal texts, official communication, education, and media. The Council of Europe member states were also supposed to adopt administrative measures ensuring that the official language would reflect the fact that men and women had equal power (see Terkanič, 2014 in Cviková et al., 2014). However, the Council of Europe does not limit itself to these recommendations. It has also adopted guidelines addressing the specific use of gender-balanced language. They have been published in two official languages of the Council, English and French, with a recommendation to adapt them in other languages. In all its documents, the Council of Europe has also committed to refrain from using sexist language and it has been striving to fulfil this commitment since. The European Parliament first called for gender equality in language in the Resolution *of 13 March 2003* on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament. In 2008, the European Parliament published *Gender-neutral language in the European Parliament*, a booklet on the use of gender-neutral and non sexist language in parliamentary texts. The brochure, translated into all official EU languages, contains a set of guidelines to ensure that as far as possible gender-neutral language is the norm rather than the exception in parliamentary documents. These guidelines were intended as an "invitation" to administrative staff to apply these guidelines in all parliamentary documents and written communications. In July 2018, the European Parliament published the handbook *Gender neutrality in the language used in the European Parliament*, which contains guidelines for Members and officials on the use of gender-neutral language in institutional communication and the regulatory process. In 2018, the Council of Europe Secretary General's office published guidelines entitled *Inclusive Communication in the GSC* in all official languages of the EU, including Slovak. These guidelines are language-specific since these languages differ in terms of grammar, syntax, and style. However, all of them promote inclusion and diversity through language and visual tools in the Council of Europe. The guidelines include tips for neutral communication in relation to men and women, person with disabilities, and other groups, however, legal regulations are not included. The Slovak version provides examples from the Slovak language practice relevant not only for the Council of Europe Secretary General's office, but in everyday communication as well – it can help Slovak speakers avoid the inadvertent use of discriminatory language (compare Štefaňáková, 2020, p. 86).

From a variety of perspectives, linguistic research has confirmed that besides communication and description of reality, language is also used to shape it. In the EU, UN, Council of Europe and in developed countries, the importance of using inclusive and non-discriminatory language, which does not exclude women, is rarely diminished. Many countries around the world as well as international organisations follow political and legal standards that promote, specify, and use gender-balanced language (compare Štefaňáková, 2020). In Slovakia, this discussion has started with considerable caution and even today, it still remains misunderstood in certain circles. Since this study investigates this phenomenon in the context of linguistic landscape and compares the Slovak and German legislations, the following part will focus on the gender equality legislative frameworks and the use of gender-balanced language in these two countries.

4 Gender policy and gender-inclusive language in Slovakia

In the area of gender equality and non-discrimination, Slovakia as an EU member state is bound by several international documents implemented into the legislation as well as practice. The most important include: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its amendments and appendices, International Labour Organisation's Convention, European Social Charter, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and other. Although the legislation on the equality of men and women and other genders has been available on the international level for some time, in Slovakia, the interest in the legislation regarding gender-balanced language could only be observed in the recent decades.

In the Slovak Republic, the issue of gender equality has been addressed by the special legislation. Mainly the *Anti-Discrimination Act* is of importance, which explicitly states the causes of discrimination in Article 2. The Act defines the principle of equal treatment for men and women in the specified areas. It transposes the legal acts of the EU and applies this principle to social security, health care, provision of goods and services, education, employment relationships and other legal relationships. The *Anti-Discrimination Act* distinguishes several types of discrimination based on sexist language, but does not explicitly state the requirement for using gender-balanced language. However, Terkanič has pointed out that using sexist language can be considered discrimination based on the circumstances. He defines sexist language as a form of discriminatory language, which employs exclusion, trivialisation, or derogation (usually) of women. It takes a variety of forms including making women invisible in the language (by using the masculine grammatical gender to refer to e.g. politicians), asymmetrical labelling (e.g. a woman prime minister), or stereotypical labelling (nurse – female, doctor – male). Terkanič analysed the Anti-Discrimination Act to study discrimination through language from different perspectives. In terms of the Act, mainly extreme instances of ignoring the gender-balanced language are considered discriminatory; these take the form of verbal (and non-verbal) sexual harassment "whose intention or consequence is or can be violation of a person's dignity, and which creates threatening, degrading, dishonouring, hostile, or abusive environment" (Section 2a, Par. 5 of the Act – compare Terkanič in Cviková et al., 2014, p. 36). As for the Slovak legislative framework, there are no laws as of today that would explicitly restrict sexist language or require the use of gender-balanced/non-sexist language in the given areas. On the other hand, German-speaking countries have this kind of legislation as well as recommendations, strategies, and specific language for addressing persons in a gender-balanced way. In Slovakia, only partial non-governmental initiatives to reveal and prevent discrimination through language can be observed so far. The interest in gender-balanced/gender-inclusive language in Slovakia reflects in a variety of ethical codes, internal company rules, private legal contracts, agreements, and other documents, however, the wider public is not aware of these. An example of the increasing interest in gender-balanced language in Slovakia can be seen in the activity of the Advertising Standards Council (ASC), the authority for ethical self-regulation in advertising. In 2014, the ASC General Assembly adopted several changes to its Code of Ethics based on which its Arbitration Commission evaluates the complaints about advertisements. In terms of gender-balanced language, the initiatives aim mainly to eliminate sexist language in the public sphere. One of the most important awareness raising initiatives in Slovakia is the publication of *Analýza významu a možností používania rodovo vyváženého jazyka/Analysing the Importance and Possibilities of Using Gender-Balanced Language* (Cviková et al., 2014). The publication has been created under the Sociolinguistic Research

project performed by the Institute for Gender Equality along with a manual of gender-sensitive language. The author collective challenged the neutrality of the *generic masculine* and proposed two approaches to establishing the gender balance in the language: *gender specification* and *gender neutralisation*. *Gender specification* means explicit use of the gender; strict gender differentiation is observed and *generic masculine* is replaced by both grammatical genders, either in the form of a double reference, e.g. *zamestnanci a zamestnankyne* (meaning male and female clients or employees), or gender doublets divided by a slash (female gender is marked by the grammatical morpheme) *zamestnanci/zamestnankyne, zamestnanci/-kyne*. The second alternative is *gender neutralisation*, which replaces generic masculine; in Slovak, the strategy is characterised by avoiding the use of language means, which require the expression of the grammatical gender. Instead of using masculine, a group, abstract, or general reference can be used. Since Slovak is a fusional language, the possibilities of neutralisation are limited (Cviková, 2014, p. 5). However, the following examples can be specified (m. – masculine, f. – feminine, n. – neutral expression, a. – abstract, g. – group): *učiteľský zbor (g. teaching staff)* or *vyučujúci (g. teaching staff)* instead of *učitelia* (m. *teachers*); *vedenie* (a. *management*) instead of *riaditeľ* (m. *director*), *zdravotnícky personál (g. health workers)* instead of *lekári a sestričky* (m. *doctors* and f. *nurses*); *poslanectvo* (n./g. *members of the parliament*) instead of m. *poslanci*; *senátorstvo* (n./g. *senators*) instead of m. senátori. (Košková – Satoła-Staśkowiaková, 2017). In Slovak (in terms of gender-balanced language), there are also words that have grammatical gender, but are not considered marked in terms of natural gender. E.g. *človek/ľudia* and *osoba/osoby* (sg. and pl. of *man* meaning a human and *person*) are masculine, and *starostlivosť o maloleté osoby (maloletý* = m. *minors* are replaced by *maloleté osoby* = n. *minor persons* in the phrase *care for minors*) or *aj títo ľudia majú právo na rovnaké zaobchádzanie (these people have the right for equal treatment too)*, etc. Generic masculine references can also be replaced by an adjective, e.g. *Hlavné body ministerského zasadnutia v Tallinne (Main points of the ministerial meeting in Tallinn* (instead of *zasadnutie ministrov = meeting of* m. *ministers;* see Inclusive Communication in the GSC, guidelines published by the Council of Europe Secretary General's office, 2018*)*. A further initiative to raise awareness of the phenomenon is a manual entitled *Ako používať rodovo vyvážený jazyk. Možnosti, otázky, príklady/How to Use Gender-Balanced-Lanuguage. Possibilities, Questions, Examples* (Cviková et al., 2014*)*. Besides general discourse about gender issues, it also provides examples and inspiration on how gender-balanced Slovak language can be used in the public sphere. In the chapter entitled "Would a man sign a contract referring to him as if he was a female employee?", the authors have pointed out that many female job seekers are confronted with discriminatory work contracts which refer to them as if they were males. Referring to the contractual parties as if they were exclusively male fails to provide gender neutrality, therefore even a contract can be discriminatory. The authors claim that contract templates also play a role in the gender imbalance in the area of business and civil legal relationships.

The presented analysis indicates that although using gender-inclusive language in Slovakia has not been explicitly specified by any law, the public is becoming aware of inclusive language thanks to a variety of initiatives and publications. It can be observed mainly in the written form in the public spheres and journalism as has been confirmed by research focused on gender-balanced language in the journalistic texts. The corpus analysis was performed on the Slovak National Corpus (see Štefaňáková, 2020). The question addressed by this study can be formulated as follows: What is the linguistic practice in addressing persons, i.e. using gender-inclusive language, in public notices in today's linguistic landscape? Specifically, the public notices posted in the Banská Bystrica city centre informing people about the obligation to respect the hygiene measures upon entering premises of certain facilities will be analysed. The analysed situation is specific since it has been caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. The business owners had

to post these notices based on the regulations issued by the Slovak Government.

5 Gender-inclusive language and its use in the notices regarding the Coronavirus pandemic-related hygiene measures in Banská Bystrica

In accordance with the goal of this study, the notices about the Coronavirus pandemic-related hygiene measures posted on shops, banks, churches, museums and other public facilities on the Dolná Street and Námestie SNP Square in Banská Bystrica in January 2022 will be analysed. The primary intention was to reveal whether the verbal or non-verbal notices prevail. In the case of verbal notices about hygiene instructions, the style of addressing the recipients will be investigated, i.e. whether generic masculine, gender-inclusive, or neutral addressing prevail. This phenomenon is researched in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic situation in Slovakia, current regulations specifying the hygiene measures upon entering internal premises of the facilities, and the current possibilities of using gender-balanced language in the Slovak linguistic environment. Due to the limited space, some hygiene notices will be selected to demonstrate the phenomenon. The hygiene notices on Dolná Street and Námestie SNP Square in Banská Bystrica were photographed at the beginning of January 2022. In accordance with the governmental regulations at the time, the notices had to be posted at all entrances to the facilities obliged to comply with the measures. The most important hygiene measures included the following: only persons with a covered upper respiratory tract were allowed to enter the premises, hand disinfection or disposable gloves had to be used, the number of persons was limited, and persons in the premises had to keep distance from each other.

The research of pandemic hygiene notices showed that the business owners complied with the governmental regulations. At entrances to all internal premises of facilities on Dolná Street and Námestie SNP Square in Banská Bystrica, the notices about the obligation to comply with the hygiene instructions were posted. We photographed and analyzed a total of 45 pandemic hygiene notices, which were located at 28 facilities in SNP Square and Dolna Street in Banská Bystrica. The analysis of their visual form showed that the facilities often used verbal expressions (17 hygiene notices), and most frequently, the text was combined with non-verbal elements, i.e. pictures ((28 hygiene notices). Exclusively non-verbal notices are rarely seen in the Banská Bystrica linguistic landscape. The way in which the recipients were addressed was analysed in the verbal notices to reveal how often gender-balanced language (and references) were used. The analysis drew from the current EU policy including the requirement to use gender-balanced language mainly in the public sphere in all EU member states. As it was already explained, there is no law explicitly requiring the use of gender-balanced language. However, in the area of gender equality and non-discrimination, Slovakia is bound by multiple international conventions, which should be implemented into the legislation as well as practice. In the recent years, awareness has been raised by initiatives and publications about the fact that gender-balanced language exists. The authors of the aforementioned publications offer two ways to approach the issue: *gender specification* using doublets to explicitly name men and women, or doublets using a slash (e.g. *student* – m. *študent* and f. *študentka*, pl. m. *študenti* and pl. f. *študentky*, f. *študentka*/m. *študent*, m. *študent*/f. *-ka*, m. pl. *študenti*/f. pl. *-tky*). Another approach is *gender neutralisation* which does the opposite, i.e. removes the gender completely. The excessive use of *generic masculine* is criticised as a feature shared by other Slavic languages as well. In Slovak, masculine is the referential, substitute gender in singular as well as plural nouns, and as a formal neutral marker. It is used to refer to a pair consisting of a man and a woman, or a group of persons regardless of the women's presence in it. However, feminist and gender linguistic research have challenged the neutrality of generic masculine, which resulted in the creation of various approaches and strategies replacing it in different world languages. This study focuses on the way in which the current gender-balanced

language policy is transferred into the linguistic practice in Slovakia. As the material, the notices about the pandemic hygiene measures will be used. The analysis of notices showed that generic masculine clearly prevails in addressing the recipients that was used on 39 hygiene notices as can be seen in the following examples:

... *"V súvislosti s nariadením vlády SR o koronavíruse žiadame zákazníkov o dodržiavanie hygienických opatrení." .../"In relation to the Regulation of Government of the SR regarding the Coronavirus, we require the* m. *customers to comply with the hygiene measures.";* ... *"Počet zákazníkov v prevádzke v jednom okamihu nesmie prekročiť koncentráciu jeden zákazník na 10m²z predajnej plochy prevádzky."/"The number of* m. *customers in the premises in a single moment must not exceed the concentration of one* m. *customer per 10m² in the sales area."* (Fig. 1: Záložňa Breva – Bazár pawnshop and second hand store, Dolná St. 51, Banská Bystrica)

... *"Vážení zákazníci, dovoľujeme si vás poprosiť o dodržiavanie zásad ÚVZSR vzhľadom ku šíreniu sa koronavírusu Covid 19..."/"Dear* m. *customers, we would like to kindly ask you to comply with the rules specified by the Public Health Authority of the SR due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus..."* (Fig. 2: Záložňa Inbox s.r.o. pawnshop – Dolná St. 29, Banská Bystrica)... *"Pri vstupe do kultúrnej inštitúcie je návštevník povinný použiť dezinfekciu na ruky. ..."/"Upon entering the cultural institution, the* m. *visitor is obliged to apply hand disinfection. ..."* (Fig. 3: Central Slovakia Cultural Centre, Dolná St. 35, Banská Bystrica)

... *"V kníhkupectve môže nakupovať maximálne 9 zákazníkov. ..."* „*Zákazník má povinnosť nosiť rúško."/"A maximum of 9* m. *customers can be shopping in the bookshop. ..."* *"The* m. *customer is obliged to wear a face mask."* (Fig. 4: Knihy za groš bookshop, Dolná St. 55, Banská Bystrica)

... *"Milí klienti, pred vstupom do Wüstenrot centra počkajte prosím na vyzvanie. Z dôvodu zamedzenia väčšieho počtu zákazníkov bude vstup na pracovisko regulovaný. ...";* ...*"Milí klienti, vstup do Wüstenrot centra bez použitia rúška, prípadne šálu či šatky alebo inej vhodnej alternatívy sa zakazuje! Odporúčame používať aj rukavice." /"Dear* m. *clients, before entering the Wüstenrot centre, please, wait for being called. To prevent a larger number of* m. *clients in the premises, the entry will be regulated. ..." ; ...*"Dear* m. *clients, the entry to the Wüstenrot centre without a face mask, shawl, scarf of other suitable alternative is banned! We also recommend using gloves."* (Fig 5: Wüstenrot stavebná sporiteľňa insurance company, a.s., Dolná St. 26, Banská Bystrica)

... *"Vážení návštevníci ÚĽUV-u, dovoľujeme si vás požiadať, aby ste sa nezúčastňovali našich podujatí a vzdelávacích aktivít, ak: ste sa vrátili z oblasti ohrozených nákazou koronavírusu v priebehu posledných 14 dní, vykazujete príznaky ochorenia. ..."/"Dear ÚĽUV* m. *visitors, we would like to kindly ask you not to attend our events and educational activities if: you returned from an area with risk of the Coronavirus infection during the last 14 days, you show symptoms. ..."* (Fig. 6: ÚĽUV – Centre For Folk Art Production, Dolná St. 14, Banská Bystrica)

... „*Vážení klienti, prosíme o dodržiavanie nasledovných preventívnych opatrení proti šíreniu koronavírusu:/"Dear* m. *clients, we would like to ask you to comply with the following measures aimed to limit the spread of the Coronavirus: 1. Vstup do pobočky je povolený len s prekrytím nosa a úst./The entry into the premises is allowed only with your nose and mouth covered. 2. V pobočke sa môžu vyskytovať najviac štyria klienti súčasne./A maximum of four* m. *clients can be present at the same time. Ak sa v pobočke nachádzajú práve štyria klienti, počkajte prosím pred vstupom do pobočky, pracovník banky vás o chvíľu vyzve na vstup./If there are currently four* m. *clients in the premises, please wait before you enter the premises, the* m. *bank employee will shortly ask you to enter. 3. Klient je pred vstupom do pobočky povinný dezinfikovať si ruky./The* m. *client is obliged to disinfect his hands before he enters the premises.*

Zároveň je potrebné dodržiavať bezpečný odstup počas komunikácie s pracovníkom banky. /At the same time, it is also necessary to keep a safe distance while you are communicating with the m. *bank employee. 4. Pracovník pobočky môže odmietnuť vstup klienta do priestorov banky, ak klient prejavuje známky choroby./A* m. *bank worker can also deny the* m.*client the entry into the premises of the bank, if the* m. *client shows symptoms of a disease."* (Fig. 7: OTP Banka, Námestie SNP Square 15, Banská Bystrica)

... "Počet účastníkov na verejnom slávení sv. omše je obmedzený na 5 osôb. Prosíme Vás, aby ste toto nariadenie brali do úvahy a zároveň ho rešpektovali. Po naplnení tohto limitu nebudú ďalšie osoby do katedrály vpustené."/"The number of the m. *attendees at the public celebration of the Holy Mass has been limited to 5 persons. Please, take this regulation into consideration and respect it. After the limit has been reached, no more people will be allowed into the Cathedral."*
(Fig. 8: St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Námestie SNP Square 27, Banská Bystrica)

... „Milí návštevníci, vstup do múzea je možný len s ochranným rúškom, resp. iným prekrytím horných dýchacích ciest (šatkou, šálom ...)"/"Dear m. *visitors, the Museum can only be entered with a face mask or otherwise covered upper respiratory tract (shawl, scarf...)"* (Fig. 9: Central Slovakian Museum, Námestie SNP Square 4, Banská Bystrica)

... "Vážení zákazníci, žiadame vás o dodržiavanie opatrení Úradu verejného zdravotníctva, zodpovedným prístupom chráňme seba aj nás. ... Maximálny počet zákazníkov: 2"/"Dear m. *customers, we ask you to comply with the measures of the Public Health Authority. Let us be responsible and protect ourselves as well as the others. ... Maximum number of* m. *customers: 2"* (Fig. 10: Slovenka outlet, Dolná St. 30, Banská Bystrica)

The provided examples of notices about hygiene measures as well as many other notices posted at the entrances into the internal premises of facilities in the Banská Bystrica city centre confirm that generic masculine is preferred when addressing persons in public spaces. Another specific example of generic masculine is the notice posted by the Elegancetravel agency, which informs about the closure of their premises due to the Coronavirus pandemic and home office until further notice. Jana Kiššová, a woman, is specified as the m. *"responsible representative"* in the notice, which implies that even if the person referred to is obviously a woman, masculine is still preferred in the linguistic practice (compare Fig. 11: Cestovná kancelária Elegance Travel, Dolná ul. 43, Banská Bystrica).

Usually, the notices took the text form and pictures were merely used to complement them. For instance, the notice posted by the *Gastro Walter restaurant* at Dolná St. 1 did not address their customers directly, instead, they used a picture of a man with a face mask and the text *"Nosme všetci rúško!" ("Let us all wear face masks!")* Next to it, there was a notice showing pictures with the following appeals: *"Zákaz vstupu bez rúška!"/"No entry without face mask!" "Používaj respiračnú ochranu: rúško, masku, polomasku, respirátor, šatku ... !"/"Use respiratory protection: face mask, mask, half mask, respirator, scarf...!"*; *"Vstupujte len s ochrannými rukavicami alebo si dezinfikujte ruky!"/"Enter only with protective gloves or disinfect your hands!" "Dodržujte minimálny odstup 2 m! Držte sa pokynov personálu!"/"Keep at least 2m distance! Follow the staff's instructions!"* (Fig. 12: Gastro Walter restaurant, Dolná St. 1, Banská Bystrica).

The analysis of the notices about current hygiene measures against the Coronavirus pandemic showed that gender-inclusive language was not used in the Banská Bystrica linguistic landscape. All clients, customers, visitors, attendees, and employees, etc. were addressed using generic masculine. Not in a single case was a doublet with conjunction (e.g. *účastníci a účastníčky*/m. and f. *attendees*) or gender specification with a slash (účastníci/účastníčky, klienti/tky) used, i.e. strategies

recommended in Slovak to address persons in a gender-balanced way. In some cases, neutral forms were used (6 hygiene notices), e.g. person(s) and exceptionally, the notices were formulated as orders and did not explicitly address the recipients, e.g. "Let us all wear face masks!" *Generic masculine* is a part of the language system deeply rooted not only in the language codes, but also in the society's and individuals' minds. It reflects in the way the hygiene notices were formulated: their creators automatically used generic masculine to address the recipients or refer to them. The social consciousness has just started learning to use gender-inclusive language in Slovakia and the process is going to take some time. It can be stated that using generic masculine in the public notices about hygiene measures reflects the current linguistic practice in Slovakia. The initiatives and recommendations on using gender-balanced language forms have not penetrated society yet. (compare Tab. 1: The analysis of the hygiene notices on the Dolná Street and SNP Square in Banská Bystrica).

Tab. 1: The analysis of the hygiene notices on the Dolná Street and SNP Square in Banská Bystrica

Hygiene notices on Dolná Street and SNP Square	45
Hygiene notices with verbal expression	17
Hygiene notices with verbal expression and non-verbal elements (pictures)	28
Non-verbal hygiene notices	0
Hygiene notices using a generic masculine	39
Hygiene notices using a neutral forms	6
Hygiene notices using gender-inclusive language forms	0

Since the APVV-18-0115 *Language in the City – Documenting the Multimodal Semiosphere of Linguistic Landscapes in Slovakia and in a Comparative Perspective* project focuses on the comparative aspect of linguistic landscape research, we also investigated the hygiene notices in number of public facilities located in Munich, Germany. As the Coronavirus pandemic limited travelling, and more complete documentation of the pandemic notices in specific streets or places in Munich was impossible, this research should not be considered as fully comprehensive. For the sake of comparison, only some of the hygiene notices will be selected. They were photographed by one of the members of the research team in Munich at the beginning of January 2022, i. e. roughly at the same time when the samples were collected in Banská Bystrica. Our intention was to identify whether verbal or non-verbal forms prevailed. In the case of verbal notices, the approach to addressing or referring to persons was analysed to find out whether generic masculine prevailed as in Slovakia, or gender-inclusive and neutral forms were preferred. The specificities of the German language system were taken into consideration, specifically, the existing strategies for replacing generic masculine with other ways of addressing women and men. At the time of research, the pandemic hygiene measures in Germany were the same as in Slovakia. The notices were placed visibly at all entrances to internal and external premises of facilities in Munich. The analysis showed that non-verbal hygiene notices prevailed in Munich. Often, the posters and notices about hygiene measures combined non-verbal (pictures) and verbal (text) instructions. In Munich, notices without pictures were exceptional. The analysis drew from the current language situation and policy in Germany in the area of using gender-inclusive language. Germany already has the relevant legislation specifying the use of gender-balanced language in some areas, mainly public administration. The ministries, courts, and other institutions requested guidelines for using gender-balanced German. They offer a number of approaches and strategies linguistically expressing gender equality and the ways in which to replace generic masculine as previously explained. These guidelines recommend mainly these strategies in German: *referring to both sexes using full expressions in a doublet through a conjunction, splitting: doublets with slash, splitting: doublets with brackets, Binnen-I/Capital I in front of the ending.* In the recent years, specific forms were also added to address the whole spectrum of sexes: *„Gender-Gap"* (gender underscore character – Student_innen)

and *Gender-Sternchen „*"* (gender star – Student*innen), and „*X –Form*" *(Dix Studierx).*

Based on the analysis of the notices about hygiene measures, it can be stated that Munich posters and notices preferred order-like and brief formulations without addressing the recipients directly. The instructions were usually accompanied by pictures visualising the respective measure or recommendation. The German posters and notices included the following examples: ... *"Beim Einkauf gilt: Maske auf!" Bitte halten Sie Abstand und Hygieneregeln ein! Vielen Dank!"* (Fig. 13: Munich); ... „*Maskenpflicht im Fussgängerbereich!"* (Fig.14: Munich); ... „*Für unser aller Gesundheit: Hier nur mit Maske! Vielen Dank!";* ... „*Bitte haben Sie einen Augenblick Geduld. Wir holen Sie gleich ab. Laut Coronavirusverordnung darf gleichzeitig nur 1 Kunde je 20qm im Shop sein!";* ... „*Bitte beachten sie allgemeine Präventionsmaßnahmen. Vielen Dank für Ihre Unterstützung! Bitte mind. 1,5m abstand halten! Zu anderen Kunden - zum Verkaufspersonal. Bitte beachten Sie die Maskenpflicht. Bitte nutzen Sie nach Möglichkeit kontaktlose Zahlungsoptionen (per EC-/Kreditkarte)."*

The analysis showed that the styles used for addressing the public in the Slovak notices (e.g. dear customers, visitors, clients, etc.) were rarely used in Munich, instead they were formulated as orders (e.g. *Bitte Abstand halten!/Please, keep your distance!*) The instructions rarely addressed the recipients explicitly. The following hygiene notice which used the generic masculine form of addressing persons was rather an exception: m. ... „*Liebe Wochenmarktbesucher, bitte halten Sie mind. 1,5 m Abstand zu anderen Personen. Wenn dies nicht möglich ist, tragen Sie bitte Mund-Nasen-Bedeckung. Für Personen, die in Kontakt zu einer mit dem Coronavirus infizierten Person stehen, wenn seit dem letzten Kontakt nicht 14 Tage vergangen sind, oder die typischen Symptome einer Infektion mit dem Coronavirus (namentlich Geruchs- oder Geschmackstörungen, Fieber, Husten sowie Halsschmerzen) aufweisen, gilt ein generelles Zutrittsverbot. Herzlichen Dank für Ihr Verständnis!/Dear marketplace m. visitors, please keep the distance of at least 1.5 m from other persons. If it is not possible, please protect your mouth and nose with a mask. Persons who were in contact with a person infected with the Coronavirus fewer than 14 days before, or those who show symptoms of the Coronavirus infection (specifically loss of smell and taste, fever, cough, or sore throat) are banned from entering. Thank you very much for understanding."*

The research showed that none of the notices and posters about the hygiene measures in Munich used gender- language. None of the gender-balanced forms recommended by the numerous guidelines for using gender-balanced German was used besides neutral "person(s)". Therefore, it can be stated that the German business owners and creators of the hygiene notices in Munich consciously combined the non-verbal instructions (pictures) with texts formulated as orders to avoid explicitly addressing the recipients or referring to them. Their goal was probably to visualise the hygiene instructions and formulate them in a gender-neutral way. The use of generic masculine in some exceptions where the recipients were directly addressed seem to result from the fact that generic masculine is deeply rooted in the society's mind, similarly as in Slovakia.

6 Conclusion

The goal of the study was to identify how the notices about the current hygiene measures related to the Coronavirus pandemic posted on public facilities in the selected parts of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia were formulated. During the pandemic, these notices became a part of the linguistic landscape, which is closely interconnected with the language policy. The analysis focused on the gender- inclusive language in the public space – a current linguistic and political phenomenon. The phenomenon was observed in the contexts of the pandemic regulations and hygiene measures upon entering the facilities, and the current European gender and gender-balanced language policies in the Slovak Republic.

The notices with the current hygiene measures in the Banská Bystrica linguistic landscape showed that so far, public notices in the Slovak Republic did not use gender- inclusive language. As could be seen, generic masculine was used to address persons or refer to them (sg. and pl. **m.** client, customer, visitor, attendee, employee, etc.). Except for the neutral "person(s)", no gender-balanced form was ever used to explicitly address men and women, i.e. a doublet with conjunction (e.g. účastníci a účastníčky/m. and f. attendees) or gender specification with a slash (účastníci/účastníčky, klienti/tky), although these forms are recommended for use in the public sphere. Exceptionally, the notices were formulated as orders or appeals without addressing anyone in particular, e.g. "Let us all wear face masks!" However, the inclination to use generic masculine in public notices about hygiene measures in the linguistic landscape of Banská Bystrica seems to draw from the deeply rooted and persisting social and individual consciousness, in which the substitute masculine is ingrained. Despite the efforts to enforce the use of gender-inclusive language based in the current European gender policy, generic masculine is still widely preferred. The research orientation of notices about hygiene measures in Munich did not confirm that explicit gender-balanced forms were used in the public space either. The preference for generic masculine in public notices can also be interpreted as a bottom-up phenomenon in the linguistic landscape; this preference results from individual will and deeply rooted society-wide consciousness alike.

Figure 1: Záložňa Breva – Bazár pawnshop and second hand store, Dolná St. 51, Banská Bystrica

Figure 2: Záložňa Inbox s.r.o. pawnshop – Dolná St. 29, Banská Bystrica

Figure 3: Central Slovakia Cultural Centre, Dolná St. 35, Banská Bystrica

Figure 4: Knihy za groš bookshop, Dolná St. 55, Banská Bystrica

Figure 5: Wüstenrot stavebná sporiteľňa insurance company, a.s., Dolná St. 26, Banská Bystrica

Figure 6: ÚĽUV – Centre For Folk Art Production, Dolná St. 14, Banská Bystrica

Figure 7: OTP Banka, Námestie SNP Square 15, Banská Bystrica

Figure 8: St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Námestie SNP Square 27, Banská Bystrica

Figure 9: Central Slovakian Museum, Námestie SNP Square 4, Banská Bystrica

Figure 10: Slovenka outlet, Dolná St. 30, Banská Bystrica

Figure 11: Cestovná kancelária Elegance Travel, Dolná ul. 43, Banská Bystrica

Figure 12: Gastro Walter restaurant, Dolná St. 1, Banská Bystrica

Figure 13: Munich   Figure 14: Munich

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