

The use of Hungarian as a minority language in municipal offices in Southern Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

The present paper investigates the bilingualism of municipal offices of Hungarian dominant settlements in Southern Slovakia, focusing on communication in these offices in relation to the relevant legal regulations, specifically on the language of signage outside and inside the offices, the language choice of oral and written communication in administration, and the language of official means of communication. Throughout the paper, the author points out issues that make the practical application of legal regulations difficult, and comments on the basic conditions of the asserting minority language rights.

KEYWORDS

Slovak language laws, bilingualism in offices, Hungarian as a minority language, language use

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LEGAL REGULATION OF THE USE OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN SLOVAKIA

According to the 1995 Law on the state language, still in effect, the language of all official language use in Slovakia is Slovak. Staff in administrative institutions are required to use the state language in all oral and written communication with members of the public, who, in turn, are required to submit all written requests in Slovak as well. Signage posted by administrative institutions can only include text in a language other than the state language if it is the translation of the original Slovak text and if it is placed below the original (cf. [Zákon č., 270/1995. Z.z. Zákon Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky z 15. novembra 1995 o štátnom jazyku Slovenskej republiky](#)). After the law came into effect, Slovakia Hungarian political parties and movements, social and cultural institutions as well as international organizations, politicians and linguists protested widely against the law which severely limits the use of minority languages, as a result of which the Slovak government, which was carrying out accession negotiations with the EU at the time, and the Slovak parliament promised that a law regulating minority language use would be passed in the near future as well. The ruling political powers, however, did not follow up on their promise, and, thus, the issue of a law regulating minority language use was raised again only after a change of government in 1998. After meeting with heated debates and being modified several times in the preparation period, the law was finally passed on July 10, 1999, and came into effect on September 1 the same year.

Even though its name suggests that this law regulates the language rights of minorities, its Article 1 clearly limits these rights in official communication, allowing for the use of the minority languages in only some administrative offices of only those settlements where the proportion of minority population was at least 20% in the latest census. The most important details of the regulations are found in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 2, securing the right to use minority languages in writing in settlements that meet the above criteria. According to the regulations, clients of municipal offices who belong to a minority group can submit their petitions to administrative offices in the minority language, will receive a response in the minority language as well as the state language and, if specifically requested, will be given certain statements in the minority language (cf. [Zákon č., 184/1999 Z.z. Zákon Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky z 10. júla 1999 o používaní jazykov národnostných menšín](#)).

The law offers privileges primarily to the largest minority group of the country, the Hungarians, however, both linguistic studies carried out at municipal offices of Hungarian dominant settlements and biannual reports by the government testify to the fact that neither administrative organizations nor minority individuals use their rights of minority language use to the desired degree (cf. [Správa o stave používania jazykov národnostných menšín na území Slovenskej republiky za obdobie rokov, 2015–2016](#); [Správa o stave používania jazykov národnostných menšín na území Slovenskej republiky za obdobie rokov, 2017–2018](#); [Csiffári, 2010, 2012](#); [Gazdíkóvá, 2014](#); [Hájos, 2012](#); [Istók, 2012, 2014](#); [Kiss, 2015](#); [Misad, 1998, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2019](#); [Menyhárt, 2002](#); [Szabómihály, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c](#); [Takács, 2018a, 2018b](#)).

The present paper, partly based on my own research and partly drawing on undergraduate and master's theses supervised by me at the Department of Hungarian and written on the bilingualism of administrative offices, investigates how bilingualism is implemented in practice in municipal offices of settlements in Southern Slovakia. Empirical research for this paper was



done in the following settlements:¹ Dunajská Streda/Dunaszerdahely, Kostolné Kračany/Egyházkarcsa, Vydrany/Hodos, Kráľovičové Kračany/Királyfiakarcsa, Zlaté Klasy/Nagymagyar, Veľký Meder/Nagymegyér, Šamorín/Somorja, Jahodná/Pozsonyeperjes (District Dunajská Streda); Jelka/Jóka (District Galanta); Gemerská Panica/Gömörpanyit, Gemer/Sajógömör, Tornala/Tornalja (District Rimavská Sotoba).²

MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN THE STUDIED MUNICIPAL OFFICES

The linguistic investigations were carried out, in each case, with a focus on the regulations regarding the use of minority languages between members of the public and the administrative offices, specifically, in signage inside and outside the municipal offices, the language choice of oral and written communication in administration, and the language of official means of communication.

Language choice in signage

Paragraph 5, Article 2 of the law on minority language use states that if the proportion of minority population at a settlement is at least 20%, according to the latest census data, its administrative institutions mark the name of the institution at the entrance to the building also in the minority language, whereas paragraph 4 requires that administrative offices of such settlements post important information (especially health related information or information that is aimed at protecting the population) in the minority language as well.

As the first step of the empirical research, I inspected the signage outside and inside municipal offices. Signage outside was typically written information with the name of the municipal institution and office hours found on the outside wall of its building. Signage inside included information boards, notices, and nameplates on or near office doors. When inspecting signage, I paid attention to whether there were any format or content related differences between the Slovak and Hungarian parts of text in bilingual signage.

Outside signage. All the municipal buildings investigated have signage outside of them in two languages indicating the name of the administrative office that operates inside. The Hungarian designation is found next to or below the Slovak one, with the arrangement clearly indicating the subordinated relationship of the minority language also sanctioned by the language law. It appears to be a widely used practice to omit the name of the settlement either from both the Slovak and Hungarian designation of the office or from the Hungarian designation. A likely reason for this is that the relevant law does not state that the name of the settlement has to be given in the minority language, however, regulation issued by the ministry of the interior states that the minority language designation of an administrative office is to be given in the state language (cf. Fazekas and Hunčík, 2005, pp. 52–53). It seems that the studied municipalities choose to omit the name of the settlement rather than give it in the state language only, e.g.: *OBECNÝ ÚRAD – KÖZSÉGI HIVATAL* “Village Office”, *MESTSKÝ ÚRAD – VÁROSI*

¹Throughout this paper, names of settlements are given in their official Slovak names first and traditional Hungarian names second, separated by slashes.

²I am grateful to Henrietta Takács, PhD student in linguistics, for her help in collecting the theses and summarizing their findings relevant for this paper.



HIVATAL “Town Office”, *RADNICA – VÁROSHÁZA* “Town Hall”; *OBECNÝ ÚRAD KRÁĽOVIČOVÉ KRAČANY – KÖZSÉGI HIVATAL* “Village Office” with the name office given in these examples in Slovak first and Hungarian second, with the name of the village in the last example given in Slovak but not in Hungarian.³ The majority language signage usually does not differ from minority language signage in font, font size, and coloring of letters, but in some cases the majority language designation is given in a separate plaque, in blue lettering against a white background, whereas the minority language designation is given in a smaller size plaque, in black lettering against a white background, *OBECNÝ ÚRAD KOSTOLNÉ KRAČANY* “Village Office, Kostolné Kračany” in Slovak, and below it *KÖZSÉGI HIVATAL* “Village Office” in Hungarian (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 24–28, 2012, pp. 45–46; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 21–23; Hájos, 2012, pp. 31–33; Istók, 2012, pp. 23–24, 2014, pp. 36–40, 52–52; Kiss, 2015, pp. 27–29; Laihonen, 2012, p. 37; Misad, 2014, pp. 244–245, 2016, pp. 59–60, 2019, pp. 25–26) (Figs. 1 and 2).

It is often the case that the local municipality building also houses one or more other administrative offices besides the mayor’s office. The names of these offices are almost always placed by the front door, done in the same lettering in both the majority and minority language, e.g. *MATRÍČNÝ ÚRAD – ANYAKÖNYVI HIVATAL* “Registry office” [first in Slovak then in Hungarian]. In smaller settlements other institutions are also sometimes housed in the



Fig. 1. Outside signage, Dunajská Streda/Dunaszerdahely. (Photograph by Henrietta Takács)



Fig. 2. Outside signage, Gemerská Panica/Gömörpanyit. (Photograph by Béla Istók)

³The examples provided in the text are given in the form as they appeared in signage.



municipality building. On the signage indicating their names, it is often the case that the Hungarian designation is given first, and the Slovak one second, e.g. *KÖNYVTÁR – KNIŽNICA* “Library”, *NYUGDÍJAS KLUB – KLUB DÔCHODCOV* “Pensioners’ Club” (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 24–28, 2012, pp. 45–46; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 21–23; Hájos, 2012, pp. 31–33; Kiss, 2015, pp. 27–29; Misad, 2014, p. 245, 2016, p. 61, 2019, p. 27).

The signage indicating the office hours of municipal offices is linguistically very varied. Most is bilingual in both the main part and the names of the days, e.g. *Stránkové dni* Sl. “Days open” – *Ügyfélfogadás* or *Félfogadás* Hu. “Opening times”, *Stránkové hodiny* “Opening hours” – *Fogadási órák* or *Fogadóórak* Hu. “Opening hours”, and *Pondelok – Hétfő* “Monday” [Slovak and Hungarian], *Utorok – Kedd* “Tuesday” [Slovak and Hungarian], and *Streda – Szerda* “Wednesday” [Slovak and Hungarian] etc. Sometimes, only the main part is bilingual, and the names of days are only given in Slovak, e.g. *Stránkové dni – Ügyfélfogadás/Félfogadás* “Opening times” [Slovak and Hungarian], but *Pondelok* Sl. “Monday”, *Utorok* Sl. “Tuesday”, and *Streda* Sl. “Wednesday” etc. There are also examples of names of days given in full in Slovak, with the Hungarian equivalents after or below them in abbreviated form, e.g. *Pondelok* Sl. “Monday” – *Hé* from Hu. *hétfő* “Monday”, *Utorok* Sl. “Tuesday” – *Ke* from Hu. *kedd* “Tuesday”, *Streda* Sl. “Wednesday” – *Sze* from Hu. *szerda* “Wednesday” etc. In such signage, parts of text in different languages do not differ in font, font size, or coloring of letters. The Hungarian text is often placed under rather than next to the Slovak text (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 24–28, 2012, pp. 45–46; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 21–23; Hájos, 2012, pp. 31–33; Istók, 2012, pp. 23–24, 2014, pp. 36–40; Kiss, 2015, pp. 27–29; Misad, 1998, p. 48, 2014, pp. 245–246, 2019, p. 27).

Signage inside. Investigated signage placed inside municipality office buildings is similar in its designations of the various administrative units: it has been found to be always bilingual, with the majority language text always preceding the minority language text, e.g. *Odbor stavebný/ Stavebný odbor – Építésügyi főosztály/Építésügyi osztály/Építési szakosztály* “Building Department” [first in Slovak, then in Hungarian], *Odbor školstva/Školský odbor – Oktatásügyi főosztály/Oktatásügyi osztály/Oktatási osztály/Iskolaügyi osztály* “Education Department” [first in Slovak, then in Hungarian], *Evidencia obyvateľstva – Lakossági nyilvántartás* “Population Registration” [first in Slovak, then in Hungarian]. Differences are to be found in the placement and formatting of the various parts of the text: Hungarian equivalents are sometimes placed next to, other times below the Slovak text, with the two occasionally being of the same font and font size, other times the Hungarian text is smaller and/or of a different font (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 31–32, 2012, pp. 50–53; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 21–23; Hájos, 2012, pp. 31–33; Istók, 2012, pp. 23–24, 2014, pp. 36–40; Kiss, 2015, pp. 27–29; Misad, 1998, pp. 48–49, 2014, p. 246, 2019, p. 27).

There is a lot of variability in the name us of administrative staff in offices. In name plates placed on or next to the doors of offices, names of staff are usually given in a unified way, in what is usually referred to as the “Indo-European order”, even when the staff member’s name is officially registered as a Hungarian name, e.g. *Karol Csiba, Klára Kisová, Miroslav Póthe, Alžbeta Szabóová, László Mezei, Piroska Horváth* etc. The municipal offices of some settlements give names registered in their Slovak form following the Indo-European order, and the names registered in their Hungarian form following the Hungarian order, e.g. *Ladislav Balódi, Katarína Kázmérová*, but *Czucz Etelka, Hodosi Erika, Szabó Mária* etc. Name plates almost always indicate the position filled by the person whose name appears on it, and in such cases the position is indicated in two languages, typically listing the Slovak designation first, e.g.



matrikárka – anyakönyvvezető “registrar” [in Slovak first, and in Hungarian second], *vedúci hospodárskej správy – gazdasági részleg vezetője* “head of economy section” [in Slovak first, and in Hungarian second], *vedúca obcej knižnice – knižničárka* “librarian” [in Slovak first, and in Hungarian second], *vedúca odboru – szaksztály vezetője* “head of department” [in Slovak first, and in Hungarian second] etc. Rarely but it does occur that the minority language designation is listed first, *polgármester – starosta obce* “mayor” [in Hungarian first, and in Slovak second], *referens – referentka* “clerk” [in Hungarian first, and in Slovak second], *könyvelő – účtovníčka* “bookkeeper” [in Hungarian first, and in Slovak second] (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 31–32, 2012, pp. 50–53; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 21–23; Hájos, 2012, pp. 31–33; Istók, 2012, pp. 23–24, 2014, pp. 36–40; Kiss, 2015, pp. 27–29; Misad, 1998, p. 49, 2014, p. 246, 2019, p. 28) (Figs. 3 and 4).

Language choice in oral communication in municipal offices

Paragraph 1 of Article 2 of the law on minority language use states that, if people belonging to a minority group constitute 20% or more of the population of a settlement, the minority language can be used in official communication at the settlement. At the same time, Paragraph 1 of Article 7 of the same law requires administrative institutions and their staff to obligatorily use the state language in official communication, and the minority language can be used only as defined by this law and other laws, even though the administrative staff are not required to know the minority language according to regulations.

In this study, the focus has been primarily on language choice in oral communication between the staff of municipal offices and clients, and secondarily between members of staff.

Language choice in the communication between municipal staff and clients. In the offices under investigation, the language chosen for communication between office staff and clients is



Fig. 3. Nameplate, Dunajská Streda/Dunaszerdahely. (Photograph by Henrietta Takács)








FINANČNÉ ODDELENIE PÉNZÜGYI OSZTÁLY	
REFERÁT MIESTNYCH DANÍ A POPLATKOV HELYI ADÓK ÉS ILLETÉKEK ALOSZTÁLYA	
ZASADACIA MIESTNOSŤ ŪLÉSTEREM	
PRIMÁTOR MESTA POLGÁRMESTER	
ODDEL. ŠKOLSTVA - ISKOLAÜGYI OSZTÁLY OBCENÝ ŠKOLSKÝ ÚRAD - KÖZSÉGI TANÜGYI OSZTÁLY	

Fig. 4. Information board, Dunajská Streda/Dunaszerdahely. (Photograph by Henrietta Takács)

the client's mother tongue or chosen language. In smaller settlements, municipal staff typically know everyone in the population by name, and, thus, they also know whose mother tongue is what language. When they meet a client they do not know, they typically greet them both in Slovak and Hungarian, and take the language of the response as their cue as to which language to continue in. Municipal staff follow the same strategy in larger settlements as well. No client speaking only Hungarian was ever assigned to a staff member who did not speak Hungarian at any municipal office during the entire fieldwork of the present study.

Members of the public contacting the municipal office by phone are typically greeted by staff in two languages, either with greeting expressions (Slovak *Prosím!* followed by Hungarian *Tessék!*) or with place designations like *Samospráva – Önkormányzati hivatal* “Municipal office!” [first in Slovak, then in Hungarian] or *Mestský úrad/Obecný úrad – Önkormányzati hivatal/Városháza/Községháza* “Town Hall/Municipal office” [first in Slovak, then in Hungarian], and then choice of language is decided by the caller. Rarely, it happens that the staff member answering the call responds only in Slovak, e.g. *Mestský úrad Tornal’a Sl.* “Municipal office, Tornal’a”. According to self-report, the subjects of the present study⁴ respond first in Slovak, then in Hungarian even in settlements where the local majority are Hungarians, considering this order to be the one they should adhere to due to the fact that regulations regarding to the language of official communication prescribe the primacy of the Slovak language, and because they live and work in Slovakia, where the majority language is Slovak (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 22–23, 2012, pp. 56–58; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 27–28; Istók, 2012, p. 25; Kiss, 2015, pp. 29–30; Misad, 1998, pp. 49–50, 2019, pp. 29–30; Menyhárt, 2002, pp. 37–38; Takács, 2018a, pp. 136–137, 2018b, pp. 9–10, 2019, pp. 103–104).

⁴That is, municipal staff who assisted the researcher during the investigation.



Language choice in the communication among municipal staff. An overwhelming majority (92.7%) of the staff of the municipal offices studied professed to be native speakers of Hungarian, but those whose native language is Slovak were also bilingual without exception, who said that carrying out communication with clients in Hungarian did not constitute any problems for them. Staff members typically use both Hungarian and Slovak in communication with each other, choosing the language depending on the situation: when speaking about personal matters, native speakers of Slovak typically accommodate to the numerically dominant Hungarian speakers, asking for clarifications if they do not understand something. In cases like this, the conversation sometimes continues in Slovak, or, in a case of receptive bilingualism, sometimes all involved carry on in their own native language. Staff members communicative about official matters in both the majority and minority languages among each other, but because many minority language native speaker staff members are not familiar with administrative terminology in Hungarian, they also often choose Slovak to discuss official matters. It is also sometimes the case that staff members who are native speakers of Hungarian but who completed their primary and secondary education in schools using Slovak as the language of instruction communicate about work matters in Slovak among each other (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 29–30, 2012, pp. 56–58; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, pp. 27–28; Istók, 2012, p. 25; Kiss, 2015, pp. 29–30; Misad, 1998, pp. 49–50, 2019, pp. 30–31; Menyhárt, 2002, pp. 37–38; Takács, 2018a, pp. 136–137, 2019, pp. 104–106).

Language choice in the meetings of city councils. Paragraph 1 of Article 3 of the law states that a local municipal body can hold its meetings in the minority language if all participants agree to do this.

In the municipalities studied the members of the city council hold their meetings typically in Hungarian, although sometimes mayors open meetings in both languages or in Slovak even when there is nobody present who speak or understand only Slovak. When an official who speaks only Slovak is present at a city council meeting, the meeting is conducted in Slovak. When open city council meetings are attended by both Hungarian and Slovak members of the local population, they are greeted in both languages, the agenda of the meeting is read out by the mayor or other member of the local government also in both, and official reports are also given in both, etc. Members of the population can address their questions or comments to the officials present in their own native language, and the officials respond in the same language. Occasionally, when an official does not speak the minority language, they request for the question or comment and the response to be translated into the majority language, and in such cases the responding member of the city council repeats both the question and the response in Slovak (cf. Csiffári, 2010, p. 30, p. 58, 2012, p. 58; Istók, 2012, p. 25; Misad, 2019, p. 31; Takács, 2019, pp. 106–108).

Language choice in the written communication of municipal offices

Paragraph 3 of Article 2 of the law on minority language use states that, in settlements where members of the minority constitute 20% or more of the local population, members of the minority group can submit their petitions addressed to the local municipal office in the minority language, which is required to respond to such petitions in both the state language and the minority language.

In studying the written communication of municipal offices, I investigated the communication of offices with the local population, other offices in their jurisdiction, as well as the language of the forms used by the municipality.





2018. április 22-én tartotta ünnepi ülését a városi képviselő-testület

Díjátadó ünnepség a meghatottság jegyében



22. apríla 2018 sa uskutočnilo slávnostné zasadnutie mestského zastupiteľstva

Mesto ocenilo najlepších

Fig. 5. Municipal webpage, Šamorín/Somorja. (Photograph by Henrietta Takács)

Language choice in the written communication between municipal offices and their clients. Members of the Hungarian minority tend to submit monolingual Slovak petitions to the local governments investigated.⁵ According to the staff of self-government offices, minority clients usually believe that petitions written in the majority language enjoy priority in processing, so even clients whose Slovak proficiency is not very high prefer to ask somebody (a staff member, a family member, a neighbor or a friend) to help write their petitions in Slovak rather than write it in Hungarian.

The municipal offices under investigation respond to clients' petitions that are written in Hungarian typically in both Slovak and Hungarian. The Slovak language response usually enjoys primacy over the Hungarian one, but some offices provide the Slovak language text below the Hungarian one. Rarely, it does happen that a petition in Hungarian receives a solely Hungarian language response from the municipal office. The administrative staff included in the study believe that a bilingual response to a monolingual Hungarian petition is justified, partly because if the client is not satisfied with the action taken by the municipal office and decides to appeal to a higher self-government authority, the local self-government can defend the adequacy of the

⁵The results of the study show that the number of Hungarian petitions increased by 8.7% in towns and only by 1.9% in villages since the law on minority language use came into effect (cf. Takács, 2019, pp. 110–111).



action with the Slovak language response, and partly because, in case of disagreement over interpretation, the state language text is regarded as legally authoritative.

According to the subjects, other written documents, which are not regarded as official (such as notices and invitations sent to members of the public etc.), are written in the language decided on by the mayor or the city council. Texts of this sort investigated as part of the present study were typically bilingual, and rarely monolingual in Hungarian (cf. Misad, 2019, pp. 31–32; Takács, 2018a, pp. 138–139, 2019, pp. 109–110).

Language choice in the written communication between municipal offices. Municipal offices use different strategies of language choice in their communications with institutions within vs. outside their jurisdiction. To institutions of the former type – e.g. preschools and primary schools using Hungarian as a language of instruction – they send bilingual letters in all cases, in accordance with the law, in which the state language text is found first, whereas they correspond typically in Hungarian with local minority cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations. According to the subjects, this is so because the correspondence between the local self-government and institutions within its jurisdiction is open to other higher authorities (such as, for instance, relevant ministries or county self-governments), whereas correspondence between them and Slovakia Hungarian cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations concerns only the corresponding parties (cf. Misad, 2019, p. 32, Takács, 2019, p. 111).

The language(s) of forms. Paragraph 6 of Article 2 of the law states that a local self-government office is to offer any forms used by them in the minority language at the request of a member of the public.

Despite these regulations, many municipal offices do not provide bilingual forms for minority clients, and most municipal staff are not familiar with sample bilingual Slovak–Hungarian texts that were prepared by the Gramma Language Office for municipal offices of Hungarian dominant settlements in Slovakia, and they do not use the bilingual sample petitions either which are electronically available for free at the website onkormanyzas.sk.⁶ Most office staff that were asked as part of the data collection for the present paper were of the opinion that it is unnecessary to prepare or use bilingual forms since Hungarian native speaker clients understand Slovak forms, or if they do not (which practically does not happen), staff members assist clients in filling out state language forms (cf. Csiffári, 2010, pp. 30–31, 2012, pp. 57–58; Gazdíkóvá, 2014, p. 28; Istók, 2012, p. 26; Kiss, 2015, pp. 30–38; Misad, 2019, pp. 32–33; Takács, 2018a, pp. 139–143, 2019, pp. 111–113).

Language choice in municipal communication

The language choice of local municipal offices in their means of communication is regulated by Articles 3 and 5 of the law on the state language (cf. The use of the state language in official communication; The use of the state language in means of mass communication, and at cultural and public events). Regulations prescribe the use of the state language in every relevant domain

⁶The website of Pro Civis Polgári Társulás makes available 173 bilingual Slovak–Hungarian text samples at present which can assist staff of administrative offices and Hungarian native speaker clients in their minority language communication in the offices if they want to exercise their right to do so.



and allow for the use of minority languages only very rarely, in line with special regulations of laws.

Language choice in municipal webpages. All studied municipal offices have websites, 71% of which are bilingual in Slovak and Hungarian, or trilingual in Slovak, Hungarian, and English, with the rest being monolingual in Slovak. Minority language versions of websites, however, typically follow majority language versions only in their structure: identical content in the two versions was found in a single case only. Some of the studied Hungarian language websites contain only basic information: the name and history of the settlement, the name and organization of the municipal office, and information on office hours. Detailed Hungarian language information (e.g. regarding decisions concerning the population, minutes of city council meetings in the minority language etc.) was found only in about one-fifth of the municipal offices (cf. [Neszméri, n.d.](#); [Misad, 2019](#), p. 33; [Takács, 2018a](#), p. 143).

Language choice in municipal newspapers. About 90% of the studied municipalities publishes a newspaper, newsletters, or other media publication. These typically monthly publications are, without exception, bilingual, containing articles written primarily in Hungarian. Only two studied publications contained an equal number of articles in Hungarian and in Slovak. According to staff informally interviewed for this paper, articles are typically written in Hungarian and then translated into Slovak by the author, the editor, or, rarely, by a staff member whose Slovak proficiency is high. Advertisements published in these publications appear in the language requested by the advertiser (cf. [Istók, 2012](#), p. 27, [Misad, 2019](#), p. 34) (Fig. 5).

Language choice in municipal television. Of the studied municipal offices, two operate television stations. Both broadcast Hungarian and Slovak language news and advertisements, with the video materials being the same in the majority vs. minority language programs. In their use of Hungarian in programming, municipal offices follow Article 5 of the law on the state language in providing state language subtitling (cf. [Istók, 2012](#), p. 28, [Misad, 2019](#), p. 35).

Language choice in public address systems. Municipal offices of small settlements still use public address systems as a means of providing information to the population. Announcements are typically made in such systems in both languages, with the primacy of Slovak: only one studied municipal office was headed by a mayor who requests that announcements be made in Hungarian first, in view of its speakers constituting a majority locally. Information and announcements read out through the public address system are typically written in Hungarian and then translated into Slovak by a staff member tasked with this. It happens only rarely that announcements are written on the basis of the state language sample texts available on the internet and then translated into Hungarian. The content of the majority vs. minority language texts is usually the same (cf. [Gazdíkóvá, 2014](#), p. 30; [Istók, 2012](#), p. 27; [Misad, 2019](#), p. 35).

CONCLUSION

The present paper has investigated the bilingualism of municipal offices of Hungarian dominant settlements in Southern Slovakia, focusing on the language choice of signage, oral and written communication between staff and clients, and of the means of communication used by the



municipal offices. The results show that bilingualism is most dominant in the oral communication between staff and clients and in outside signage and is most limited in written communication between staff and clients. The fact that the bilingualism of the studied municipal offices reflects only partly the proportion of minority population in the settlement is due most likely to two main reasons. The first one is that inadequate information is provided for minority language native speaker clients: they do not receive clear information on how and to what extent they can use their mother tongue in official communication with the administrative offices. And second, there is a lack of preparedness for minority language in this domain, since, due to the several decade long Slovak monolingualism of official communications, neither municipal staff, nor minority clients are familiar with administrative terminology, official style, and the linguistic characteristics of text types of official communication in Hungarian.

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