



# Individual Linguistic Landscape in South–West Slovakia

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# Linguistic Landscape (LL) in South-West Slovakia



Senec (Szenc) Czechoslovakia 1990 (a courtesy by István Neszemény)

# Language in public space

- Public space is an area (and instrument) of regulation and control, of surveillance and power (Blommaert 2012: 48).
- The **protection and promotion of the official language of the state is a legitimate concern common to many European countries.** It pursues several legitimate aims; **it protects *in primis* public order...** It guarantees the development of the **identity of the State community...** It avoids that citizens may suffer discrimination in the enjoyment of their fundamental rights in **areas where the persons belonging to national minorities have a majority position.** (Venice Commission 2010: 26).

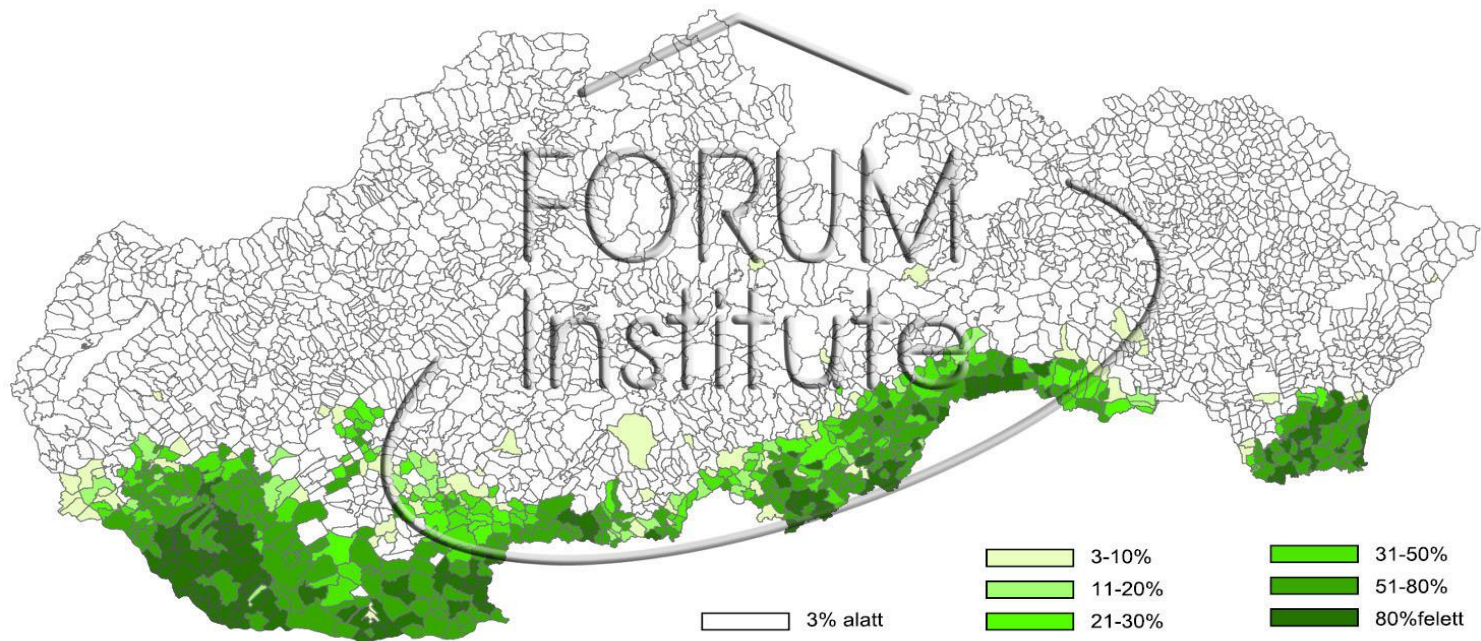
# A concern for Slovakia legitimized by the Venice Commission

- In the **southern areas of Slovakia...** Official announcements, notices on cultural and other events, notices and adverts in **public spaces** are in many cases provided only **in the Hungarian language.** (*The Language Act and minority rights in Slovakia, 2009, Venice Commission 2010: 42. fn. 36*).

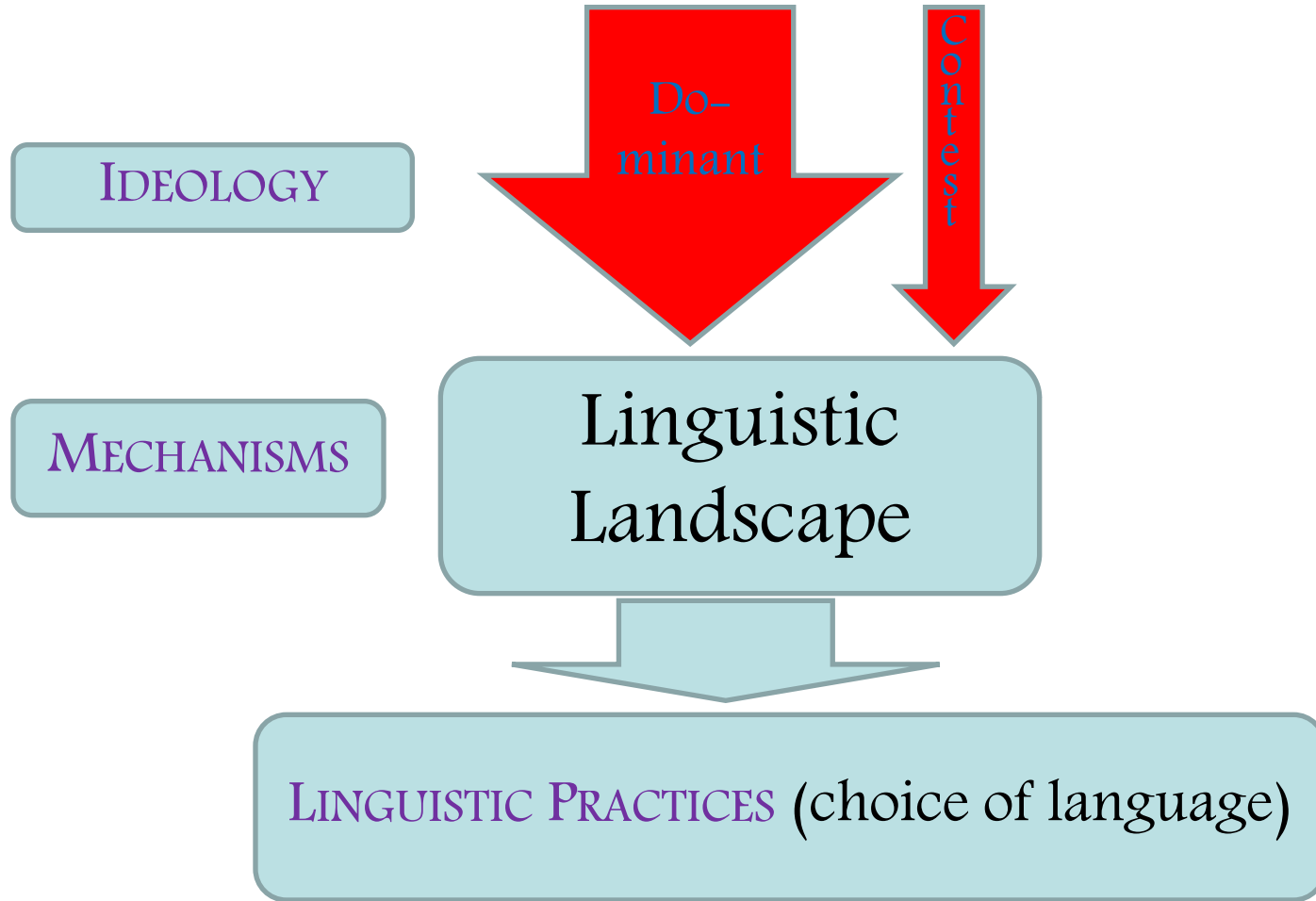


# Hungarians in Slovakia (nationality 2011)

A magyar nemzetiségű lakosság aránya Szlovákia településein 2011-ben

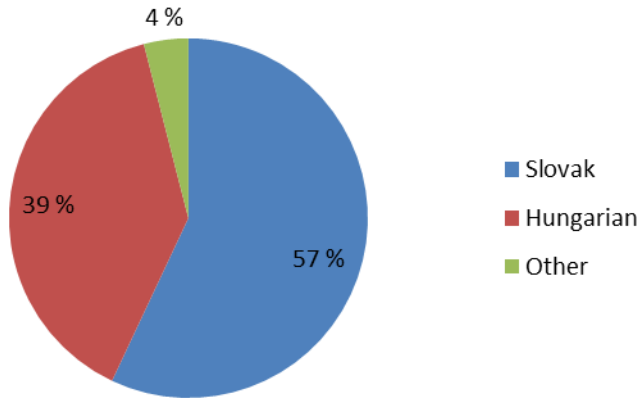


# LL as a mechanism of Language Policy (Shohamy 2006)

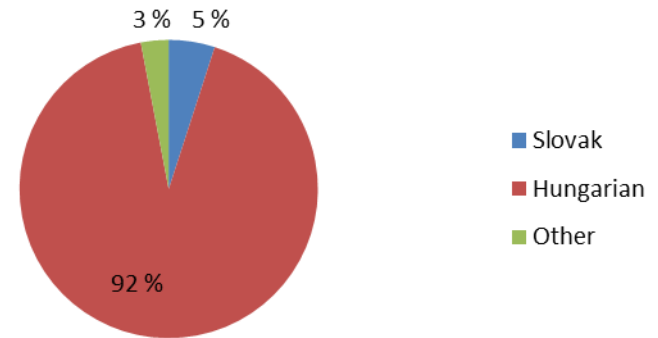


# Distribution of languages in the census and the LL (2011). Two villages in South-West Slovakia

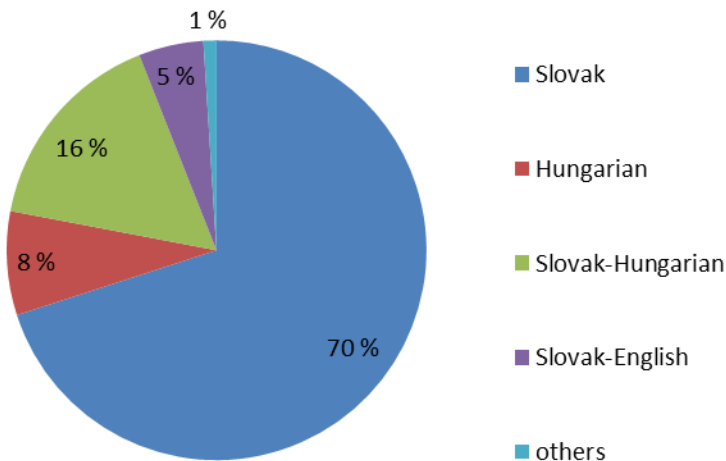
**Reca (n=1378)**



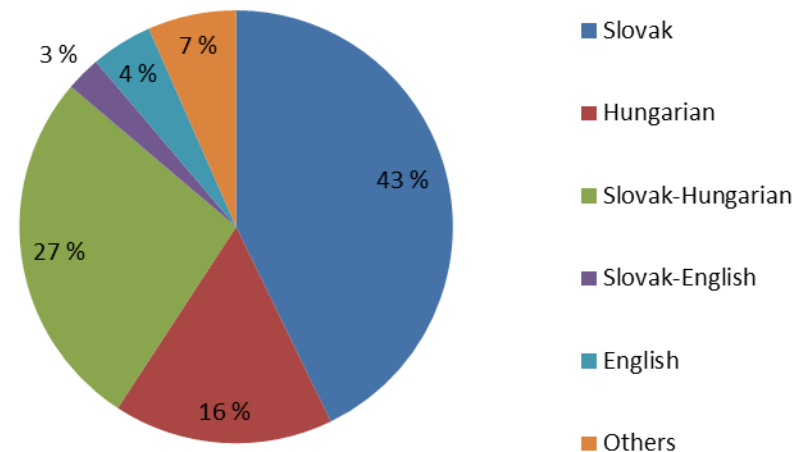
**Vásárút (n=2160)**



**Reca, n=108**



**Vásárút, n=304**



# Distribution of languages in different categories of public signs

|                            | <b>Reca</b>               | <b>Vásárút</b>                                    |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| <b>International</b>       | --                        | Slovak  |
| <b>State</b>               | Slovak                    | Slovak  |
| <b>Commerce</b>            | Slovak                    | Slovak, Slovak-Hungarian,<br>(Hungarian, English) |
| <b>Municipality</b>        | Slovak-Hungarian (Slovak) | Slovak-Hungarian (Slovak,<br>Hungarian)           |
| <b>Church</b>              | Hungarian (Latin)         | Hungarian (Latin)                                 |
| <b>Civil organizations</b> | Hungarian (Slovak)        | Hungarian   |
| <b>Private individuals</b> | Slovak                    | Hungarian, Slovak                                 |



# Typical Slovak only sign types: communication, transportation...



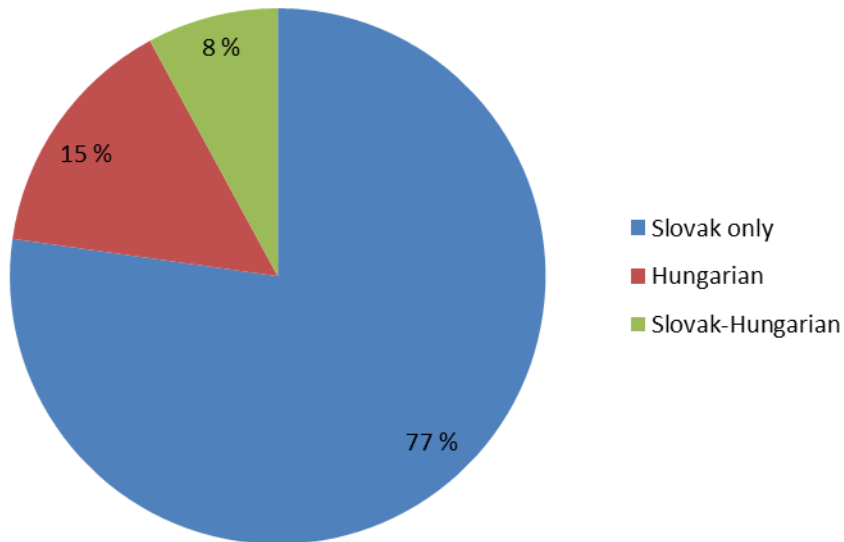
# A Slovak only EU sign on the Hungarian school window in Vásárút



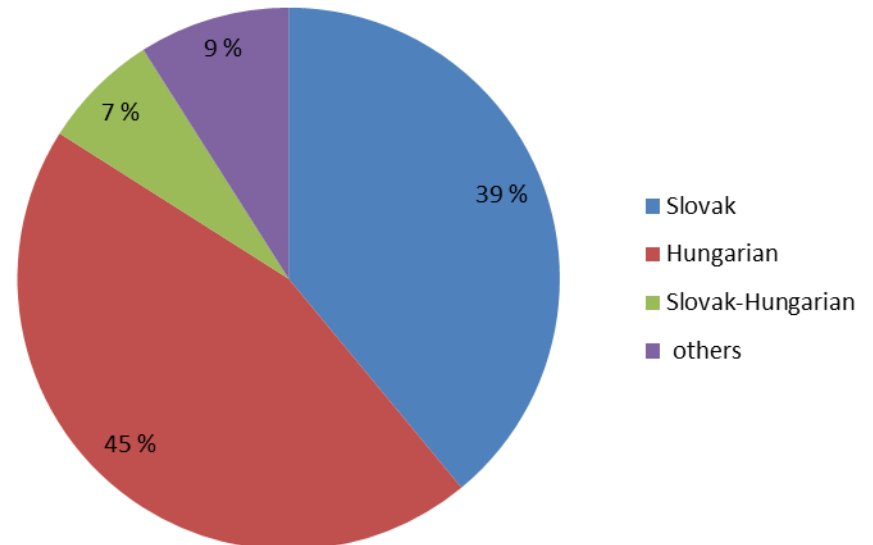
fond  
(Slovak)  
alap  
(Hungarian)  
fund  
(English)

# Language choice in signs by private individuals

Reca, n=13



Vásárút, n=44



# Beware of the dog!



Reca: Commodities in Slovak only. An older bilingual Slovak–Hungarian sign (pre 1990), considered as exemplary by the villagers

# Vásárút, commodities from Hungary



# Vásárút, other solutions to resistance



But...



# The Post: Slovak only commodity and resistance in Vásárút



# Graffiti: global (Reca) and local (Vásárút)





# A "private" War Memorial, Recca Catholic cemetery



# Individual LL: Conclusions

- In the private sphere, minorities have some autonomy in public language choice, not restricted by laws.
- It is the best reflection of bottom-up resistance to – or acceptance of – a dominant ideology.
- Informants in Reca often voiced the norm of using bilingual signs, however their real-life practices did not reflect this. The informants in Vásárút stated that they “do not want any trouble”, but that they prefer Hungarian signage. Since, “here everybody speaks Hungarian”.

# Conclusions for Reca

- The dominant ideologies have a great impact on this community. In Reca first language speakers of Hungarian prefer Slovak in the public texts they produce, purchase and choose to put into display. This indicates that the LL has become a mechanism **escalating** the observable **language shift** in the village.
- The individual LL shows both trajectories of the **past** (Hungarian was used, too) and **future** (Hungarian is not used in new private signs)

# Conclusions for Vásárút

- ❏ The choice of language in private signs displays that **Hungarian** is the **language of the community**.
- ❏ Private signage displays **resistance** to dominant ideology.
- ❏ However, the **dominant ideologies pop up** also in private signage. First, the trade of signs in Slovakia is based on monolingual Slovak signs. Second, the genre of signs connected to post reflect the ideology that the post is an emblem of the Slovak State.
- ❏ In these cases, **resistance** is displayed through signs purchased in Hungary and through self-made signs.

## Conclusions for the International Community

- According to the data on the LL, **Hungarian signs are not a threat to the official language.** The scarce visual use of Hungarian is dwindling in many categories; thus it is **urgent to facilitate and encourage the use Hungarian language**, “in public and private life”. (*European Charter...*)
- As a minimum requirement for an area where the minority presents a (historical) majority, international bodies should focus on supporting **systematic establishment of bilingualism in all government signs and encouragement of the use of the minority language in the private realm.** The Venice Commission opinion should not be taken as a precedence.

# References

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