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Засновник

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ЗМІСТ • CONTENT

МОВОЗНАВСТВО • LINGUISTICS

<i>Hires-László Kornélia, Máté Réka, Tóth-Orosz Enikő</i> Multilingual COVID-19 linguistic landscape in Berehove.....	5
<i>Гірей-Ласлов Корнелія, Матей Рейка, Товт-Орос Еніке</i> Багатомовний COVID-19 у мовному ландшафті Берегового	
<i>Глуховцева Катерина, Глуховцева Ірина</i> Функції лінгвістичних афоризмів (на матеріалі щоденникових записів та публіцистики Олеся Гончара).....	18
<i>Hlukhovtseva Kateryna, Hlukhovtseva Iryna</i> Functions of linguistic aphorisms (on the materials of Oles Honchar's notes and publicistics)	
<i>Дуденко Олена</i> Лексичний мікс у романі «Понаїхали» Артема Чапая.....	30
<i>Dudenko Olena</i> Lexical mix in Artem Chapai's novel «Ponaihalu»	
<i>Дяченко Наталія, Войналович Анна</i> Тролінг і його комунікативний потенціал.....	46
<i>Diachenko Nataliia, Voinalovych Anna</i> Trolling and its communicative potential	
<i>Зелінська Оксана, Тищенко Тетяна</i> Старослов'янізми в сучасних дискурсивних практиках.....	56
<i>Zelinska Oksana, Tyshchenko Tetiana</i> Old slavisms in modern discourse practices	
<i>Ковтюх Світлана</i> Нагальні потреби та перспективи функціонування державної української мови.....	67
<i>Kovtiukh Svitlana</i> Urgent problems and perspectives of the national Ukrainian language functioning	
<i>Комарова Зоя</i> Емотивний потенціал лексеми <i>серце</i> в художньому дискурсі Богдана Лепкого.....	78
<i>Komarova Zoia</i> The emotional potential of the lexeme <i>heart</i> in the artistic discourse of Bohdan Lepkyi	
<i>Лепетюха Анастасія</i> Синонімічні монопредикативні висловлення з головною лексемою-вигуком (на матеріалі французької художньої прози ХХ – початку ХХІ століть).....	87
<i>Lepetiukha Anastasiia</i> Synonymic monopredicative utterances with the interjectional head lexeme (based on French fiction of the 20 th – the 21 st centuries)	
<i>Прадід Юрій</i> Особливості семантики та граматичної організації фразеологічних одиниць із компонентом <i>земля</i>	95
<i>Pradid Yuriy</i> Peculiarities of semantics and grammatical organization of phraseological units with the <i>zemlia</i> component	

<i>Сегін Любомир</i> Мікротопоніми натурогенного походження села Великі Дідушичі Стрийського району Львівської області.....	106
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Sehin Liubomyr

Microtoponyms natural origin of the village of Velyki Didushychi (Stryi district, Lviv oblast)

Турчак Олена

Творчий потенціал метафори в циклі оповідань Григора Тютюнника «Степова казка» 117

Turchak Olena

Creative potential of metaphor in the cycle of stories by Hryhor Tiutiunyk «Steppe tale»

Чаїка Оксана

Translanguaging in multilingual classrooms: a case study analysis 127

Чайка Оксана

Інтермова як різновид перекладу в мультикультурному навчальному середовищі

ЛІТЕРАТУРОЗНАВСТВО • LITERARY STUDIES

Біляцька Валентина

Український роман у віршах на сучасному етапі: стан та перспективи розвитку 136

Biliatska Valentyna

The Ukrainian novel in verse at the present stage: state and prospects of development

Лопушан Тетяна, Шевчук Інна, Зарудняк Наталія

Особливості використання фольклорного мотиву про зваблення дівчини в прозі

Г. Квітки-Основ'яненка та новелістиці М. Хвильового 149

Lopushan Tetiana, Shevchuk Inna, Zarudniak Natalia

Peculiarities of the use of folkloric motif about seduction of the girl in the stories of H. Kvitka-

Osnovyanenko and in the novels of M. Hvylovyi

Циганок Оксана, Санівський Олександр

Образ матері в романі «Хліб і сіль» М. Стельмаха..... 159

Tsyhanok Oksana, Sanivskiy Oleksandr

The image of the mother in the novel «Bread and salt» by M. Stelmakh

Чордаш Василь, Кордонець Олександр

Досвід чужинності в прозі Єви Берніцкі 172

Csordás László, Kordonets Oleksandr

Experiences of strangeness in the prose of Éva Berniczky

Ямчук Павло

Діалог вічно живих (щоденникові записи Олександра Довженка і Євгена Сверстюка в контексті ХХ–ХХІ століть)..... 182

Yamchuk Pavlo

Dialogue of the forever living (diary entries of Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Yevhen Sverstiuk in the context of the 20th – 21st centuries)

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ • REVIEW

Gazdag Vilmos, Churman-Pushkash Aniko

Beregszászi Anikó, Dudics Lakatos Katalin. Twenty-two. History of 22 years of Hungarian native language education in Transcarpathia (Termini, Törökbálint, Hungary, 2023. 172 p.) 203

Газдаг Вільмош, Чурман-Пушкаш Аніко

Берегсасі Аніко, Дудич-Лакатош Катерина. Двадцять два. 22 роки угорської рідномовної освіти та виховання на Закарпатті (Спілка Termini, Терекбалінт, Угорщина, 2023. 172 с.)

МОВОЗНАВСТВО • LINGUISTICS

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Kornélia Hires-László* , Réka Máté** , Enikő Tóth-Orosz*** 

MULTILINGUAL COVID-19 LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE
IN BEREHOVE

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought severe changes to people's lives and has influenced all aspects of our being. The most common attribute of these changes is that we had to comply with regulations that we had not experienced before, use words and phrases that might have been previously unknown to us. Our daily rhythm was radically transformed. The measures taken to stop the epidemic and the social effects of the pandemic have been examined in many forms. In our paper, we focus on a multilingual town in Transcarpathia, namely Berehove. The results of our longitudinal study, the trends that emerge from the data, can be projected not only on the city, but also on its agglomeration and other settlements that are inhabited by Hungarian speakers. In the linguistic landscape of Berehove, a multiethnic town in the westernmost part of Ukraine, a number of new signs have appeared after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are an excellent reflection of the multilingual nature in the region and the municipality. In our study, we present the geosemiotic characteristics of the signs, announcements on epidemiological restrictions and warnings published in public places in Berehove. We also investigate whether the advertisements, inscriptions and symbols were made on the official or private level (top-down / bottom-up). The photographic data was collected in the course of two years (2020–2021) and clearly shows the ever-changing multilingual landscape of the territory, and the alternations of different waves of the pandemic. International literature finds it important to advocate for the appearance of multiple languages as regards to the linguistic landscape of the virus, precisely because linguistic tolerance towards minorities in a hard times like the previous years of constant lockdowns, financial and health crises, is not only a language policy issue, but also related to health policy. Linguistic landscape, even in these times is not only a reflection of a territory's ethnolinguistic and ethno-demographical composition but is shaped issues of language policy, cultural legacies, language dynamics and attitudes.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, multilingual signs, Transcarpathia, COVID-19.

Гіреш-Ласлов Корнелія, Матей Рейка, Товт-Орос Еніке. Багатомовний COVID-19 у мовному ландшафті Берегового.

Пандемія Covid-19 серйозно змінила життя людей і вплинула на всі аспекти нашого буття. Найпоширенішим атрибутом цих змін є те, що ми повинні були дотримуватися правил, з якими раніше не стикалися, використовувати слова і фрази, які нам раніше були невідомі. Докорінно змінився щоденний ритм. Заходи, вжиті для подолання епідемії, і соціальні наслідки пандемії було досліджено в багатьох формах. У нашій статті йдеться про багатомовне закарпатське містечко Берегове. Результати лонгітюдного дослідження, тенденції, які впливають із даних, можна спроектувати не лише на місто, а й на його агломерацію та інші населені пункти, в яких проживає угорськомовне населення. У мовному ландшафті Берегового, багатоетнічного міста на крайньому заході України, після спалаху пандемії COVID-19 з'явилася низка нових вказівників, які чудово відображають багатомовність регіону та міста. У статті представлено геосеміотичні характеристики знаків, оголошень про епідеміологічні обмеження та попередження, розміщених у громадських місцях Берегового. Перевірено, чи були рекламні оголошення, написи та символи зроблені на офіційному чи приватному рівні (зверху вниз/знизу вгору). Фотографічні дані, зібрані впродовж двох років (2020–2021), чітко демонструють багатомовний ландшафт території, який

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постійно змінюється, і чергування різних хвиль пандемії. Міжнародна фахова література вважає важливим виступати за появу кількох мов у лінгвістичному ландшафті вірусу саме тому, що мовна толерантність до меншин у важкі часи, як, зокрема, у попередні роки, пов'язані з карантинном, фінансовою і медичною кризою, є не лише питанням мовної політики, але також пов'язана з політикою охорони здоров'я. З'ясовано, що мовний ландшафт навіть нині є не лише відображенням етнолінгвального та етнодемографічного складу території, але й сформований питаннями мовної політики, культурної спадщини, мовної динаміки та мовною аттітудою.

Ключові слова: мовний ландшафт, багатомовні вивіски, Закарпаття, COVID-19.

Introduction. The Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to demanding and unified, global health action, brought changes for mankind in many other areas. The most important thing is that we had to/must comply with regulations that we had not experienced before, the words and phrases that were used only occasionally became ordinary – the daily routine of every person was transformed. The measures taken to stop the epidemic and the social effects of the pandemic have been examined in many forms, including the use of language [Zhang & Li ed. 2020; Asifa et al. 2021] and linguistic landscape analyses [Jia Lou et al. eds. 2022] were also published related to the topic. In most of these papers, they reflect on the style of the announcements, the evaluation of the content of the information, the monolingual and multilingual nature of the inscriptions, and compare the inscriptions read in different cities and regions. In the use of language, the study of words and phenomena related to Covid-19 in any form has grown into a separate research area [Covid19 language hub URL2]. In our study, we focus on the linguistic landscape of the multilingual Transcarpathia, what laws regulated the coronavirus restrictions in Ukraine, and how they were reflected on in the official and private sectors. We pay special attention to the functions of the visual display of different languages and compare Covid-19 related multilingual visible signs consisting of posters, notes, billboards in streets, market places, banks, restaurants, cafes and shops, universities and other material digitally recorded in 2020–2021. The research question is *how official language policy and language planning, on the one hand, and popular attitudes, on the other, shape the Covid-19 linguistic landscape in the time of a global pandemic.*

Multilingualism has been present in the region for the last centuries, and this tradition was still valid in the Soviet era in connection with the use of minority languages [Csernicskó 2016; 2019]. As a result of a series of historical events in the region, the ethnic groups living in Transcarpathia respected each other's culture, religion and use of language, and conflicts only arose if rights to language use were forcefully taken away [Hires-László 2020]. These general characteristics apply to the multilingualism of the multiethnic Transcarpathia and its linguistic landscape [Csernicskó 2019; Karmacs 2018a, 2018b; Laihonen & Csernicskó 2019; Hires-László 2019; Erőss & Kovály 2018]. In the linguistic landscape analyses on various topics, the conclusions all prove that the multilingual signs visible and readable in the area also appear in the languages of its minorities. The Hungarian-language signs in Transcarpathia have a tradition dating back to many decades, centuries. Signs in the official and private spheres are present in almost equal proportions in settlements where the ethnic minority forms a relative majority. In addition to the Hungarian minority, we can also read Romanian and German subtitles in the settlements inhabited by Romanians and Germans. In this paper, we examined the signage that was published in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in multilingual Transcarpathia.

The spread of Covid-19: the change in the pandemic. Precautions against the virus have been constantly evolving and countries have responded in different ways, but a similar pattern is emerging, only at different times. With the constant change, the

signs have also evolved, so we also need to see how long ago the precautions were introduced and accordingly, in which period were the photos taken (Table 1). That is why the exact date of the photos becomes important too.

Table 1

Waves of Covid-19 spread and changes in key quarantine measures in most European countries (including Ukraine)

March – June 2020 <i>total lockdown I.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violation of the lockdown rules resulted in severe fines • mandatory mask wear in enclosed spaces and even on open streets • only places selling food and most important household items could be open for a limited period of time • those returning from abroad were quarantined for 14 days – by checking the police or an application specially developed for this purpose • travel has been restricted to the maximum • events and education took place online
June – August 2020 <i>opening up I.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mandatory mask wear is still valid when visiting certain enclosed spaces • entry conditions for destination countries are different • negative rapid tests are a prerequisite in more and more areas (personal presence, travel) • in the economic sphere, everyone could start their own business by complying with the restrictions
September – December 2020 <i>partial lockdown I.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measures are to be tightened to prevent further spread of the virus • travelling is restricted again – more restrictions are introduced • mask wear is strictly controlled
January – May 2021 <i>total lockdown II.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vaccination campaigns start (vaccination of the most vulnerable: elderly, chronically ill) • a visit to the most important places affecting the masses is linked to an immunity certificate • several business units close again – entrepreneurs contact their customers in alternative ways (expanding online availability and ordering, etc.)
May – August 2021 <i>opening up II.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • another wave in the vaccination campaign (target population is the adults) • a certificate of immunity is a precondition for visiting workplaces and certain places
September 2021 <i>partial lockdown II.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vaccination card is a condition for certain jobs – redundancies
January 2022 <i>total lockdown III.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are no longer such severe restrictions as in the case of the previous full closure • mass events and education are paused or carried out online due to high number of cases
February 2022 opening up III. <i>(Russian-Ukrainian war)</i>	The introduction of the state of emergency superseded all previous decrees/measures, although some of the previous restrictions are still valid.

Source: edited by the authors

In Ukraine, the law on preventing the spread of Covid-19 was adapted on 17 March 2020 and has been amended several times since, according to how trends in the spread of the virus have changed [URL1].

Those who come from the settlements that are mainly inhabited by Hungarian speakers, are accustomed to and consider the Hungarian-language signs to be completely natural. In the signs belonging to each scene of language use, it is characteristic of almost the whole settlement that Hungarian appears primarily in addition to the Ukrainian language, and English or Russian are rarely used. In addition to the permanent Ukrainian-Hungarian subtitles, with the spread of COVID-19 within the linguistic landscape, we can find monolingual and bilingual signs on temporary restrictions and up-to-date information. These signs primarily draw attention to mandatory mask wearing. Wearing a protective mask, as in other countries where restrictions have been introduced to stop coronavirus, is required by the aforementioned law in Ukraine. If we take the example of shops and other commercial premises, the most important provision of the law, that we would like to emphasize, is that both the customer who enters the business premises and the store manager are responsible for complying with the restriction, otherwise they can both expect a heavy fine. This is regulated by the law, the last amendment of which (September 21, 2021) included e. g. mandatory mask wearing in public transport, which means an expected fine of 170–250 UAH (6–9 USD) on local buses and 17–34 thousand UAH on long-distance buses, for not keeping the rules (630–1 259 USD).

On the other hand, as the opening hours of the shops have been restricted on several occasions, customers were also informed about alternative shopping options. During the first full lockdown, store owners faced an unprecedented situation and tried to connect with their customers in several ways: the most widespread solution in Berehove was that in addition to the captions that could also be read on the street front, the telephone numbers of the store managers appeared in the form of temporary signs (see the beauty salon in Picture 1).



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive
Picture 1. Inscriptions in Ukrainian and Hungarian in a beauty salon
 (Berehove, 14.02.2022)

A common feature in Transcarpathia is that we can read completely different opening hours on the Ukrainian subtitles than on the Hungarian ones. As the westernmost region of Ukraine, Transcarpathia falls into a different time zone due to its geographical location, and accordingly the local time differs by a full hour from the time in Kyiv. The captions in Ukrainian mainly show Kyiv time, while those in Hungarian show the local time [for more information, see Csernicskó &

Fedinec 2019]. We can also see a typical example of this phenomenon in Picture 1, which is not a unique one in Berehove and other Hungarian settlements in Transcarpathia. The permanent signage announces the order of opening hours, while the temporary sign in Ukrainian-Hungarian informs the clients about the restrictions, and the contact information can be read in one language, through which they can contact the beauty salon even during the strictest lock down.



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 2. Total lockdown II. and the monolingual and bilingual inscription of the alternative purchase option in Berehove (15.01.2021)

Not far from the beauty salon, a stationery store that also acts as a printing press publishes all important information on the door to the busiest side of the road (Picture 2, on the left). Although these premises could not be opened, they operated a printing department that could be accessed from a less busy street. This information is published on two separate pages in Ukrainian and Hungarian. The hobby shop not far from the stationery (Picture 2, on the right) warns customers to wear a mask with Ukrainian-Hungarian bilingual signs at the doorstep, and also tells them about the information published during the full lockdown, that is still valid: «Don't be bored, you can call or write to us. You can still order». Both images are in the same style, only captions are used, no symbols, icons or pictograms are placed to illustrate the message. Signage of this kind is most common in Berehove where other creative, simple pictorial patterns are not used as often, in addition to the message. The use of colourful pages is unique, laconic, black and white signs are the most typical (see Picture 3). In the photo on the left we can read the alternative shopping options, on the right the most important points of the regulations (1.5 meters distance, only one customer can stay in the 20 sqm store, etc.).

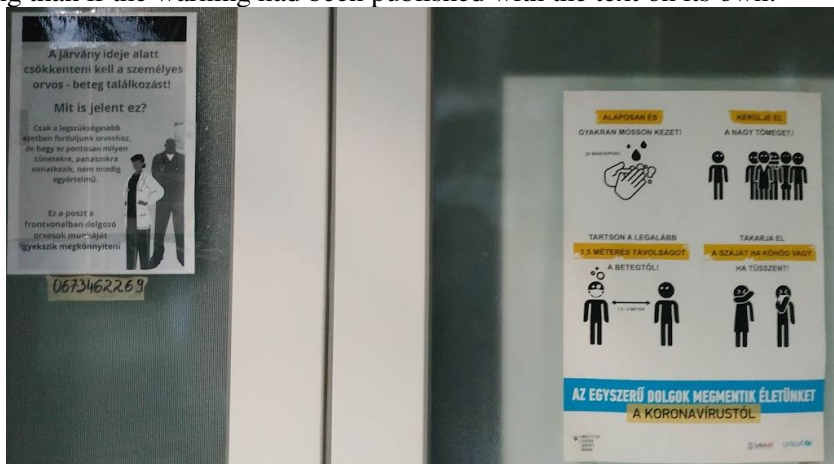


Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 3. Information on shopping and karate rules in Ukrainian in the total lockdown II. at the door of a jewelry store (15.01.2021)

The information poster designed by the state bodies can be read in Hungarian at the entrance door of the family doctor's office, which is part of the state health care

(Picture 4). The entire signage of the Berehove hospital can also be read in Ukrainian, but the Hungarian version seems more interesting, where the 4 most important items are illustrated: 1. *wash your hands thoroughly and often*; 2. *avoid large crowds*; 3. *keep a distance of at least 1.5 meters from the patient*; 4. *cover your mouth if you cough or sneeze*. The captions are also supplemented with pictograms. The underlined text is highlighted in yellow, and the following text is highlighted in blue at the bottom of the page: *Simple things save our lives from the coronavirus*. The use of blue-yellow color is perhaps not accidental, as these are the colors of the state flag. On the other side of the door, patients are warned in black and white to reduce their face-to-face meeting with doctors and healthcare professionals and to ask for help and consultation over the phone. The text here is also illustrated with a small image, which is much more eye-catching than if the warning had been published with the text on its own.



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 4. At the door of the family doctor's office of the Berehove hospital (28.01.2022)

For a long period of time in the area of Berehove one could read the names of the institutions in two languages [Hires-László 2015] in all areas of the town. This trend has been increasingly reversed by the law on the protection of the state language, which makes it mandatory only in the state language. Nevertheless, in the area of the local hospital we can still find inscriptions in Ukrainian-Hungarian. Many of the locals are less familiar with the state language to such an extent that they would not be able to interpret a more complicated message. Also, as been previously mentioned, in Berehove, multilingual signage is a tradition, that is the reason why even the simplest warning signs are published in Hungarian in addition to the state language. The ban on visiting the various departments of the hospital can be read in black and white, but the text calling for mandatory mask wearing has already been written in blue-red or only in pure red.



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive
 Picture 5. COVID inscriptions of the Berehove hospital in Hungarian and Ukrainian-Hungarian (22.06.2021)



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive
 Picture 6. Posters distributed by the Ministry of Health of Ukraine

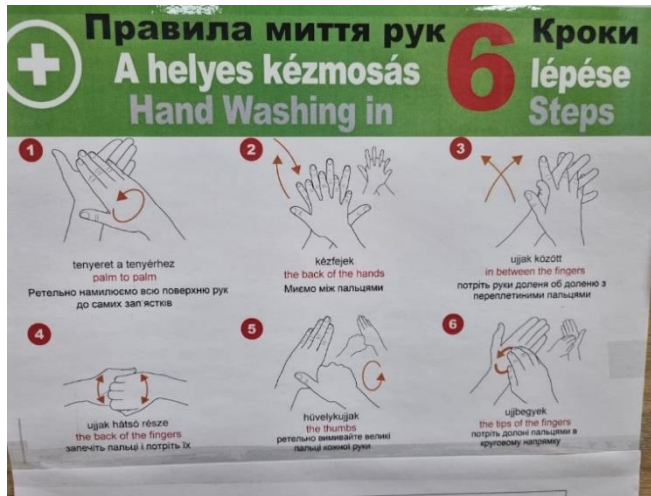
In figure 5, we can still see it in the background, but in figure 6, we can take a closer look at the yellow-based informative poster made by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health in order to curb the coronavirus. These posters can be found in almost all official locations, which clearly communicate with interesting pictograms, what actions to take in order to prevent the spread of the illness. The creation and distribution of such spectacular posters was advocated by international organizations – the visual designs were created by the organizations themselves, and the inscriptions were always translated into the language of the given country. The posters shown in Figure 6 can be found anywhere in educational institutions, in areas related to health care, in cases related to the use of the official language, but primarily in Ukrainian. The Ministry of Health also had the Hungarian language versions of the posters prepared, but these can rarely be found in the settlements inhabited by the Hungarian majority in Ukraine and Transcarpathia (Picture 4. and 8.). The multilingual versions of the posters were thus prepared centrally, but for some reason their distribution was not carried out completely. The question remains whether there was a mistake in the distribution of leaflets and posters made in the languages of the minorities, or whether they were apparently made in the languages of the minorities living in the country, but the distribution was not seen as essential. It seems that international conventions on minority languages were dealt with, but the publication was less productive.



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive
 Picture 7. Precautionary statements in Hungarian developed by the Ministry of Health

In Transcarpathia, multilingual signs have a history and we can find many cases in previously published studies where we can see interesting, creative solutions for their multilingualization. Picture 8 is also a trilingual (Ukrainian-Hungarian-English) poster made in order to curb the spread of COVID-19, on which the traditional Transcarpathian multilingualism prevails – the three languages are separated by different colors, and the essence of the message is illustrated with clear drawings. A multilingual poster is just as informative as a monolingual one but it can reach a broader audience. In many cases, multilingualism also has a symbolic significance,

which shows who the message is addressed to, respecting the language use of the other nation.



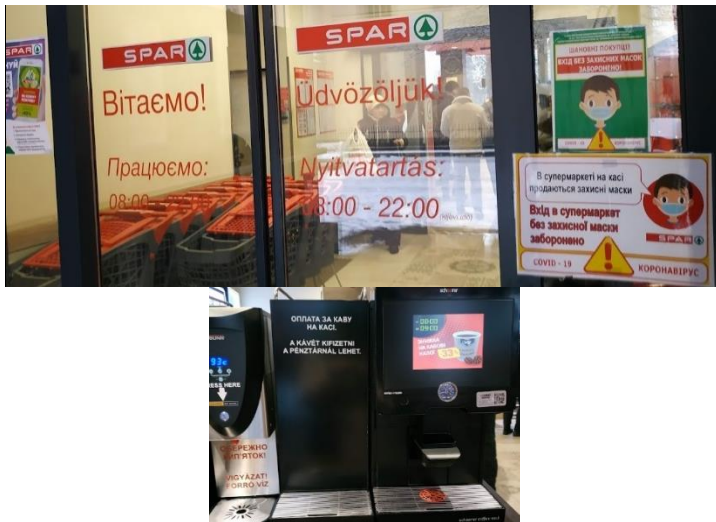
Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 8. Poster in Ukrainian-Hungarian-English warning of correct hand washing at the Hungarian College in Berehove (23.01.2022)

Societal multilingualism in Covid signage. Linguistic landscape analyses are often used to analyze the changes in social processes, through which we can get a glimpse into different phenomena in society. Thus, the study of the language use of signs also provides room for a sociological analysis to a certain degree, and in examining signage on quarantine measures in COVID-19 itself; we can also observe the most visible changes that appear.

In the center of Berehove, as part of a shopping center, SPAR operates as a popular business. The Dutch megastore, which was founded in 1932, has grown into a large chain, operating in 52 countries. The name «spar» means pine in Dutch¹, and it has become the supermarket's symbol worldwide. The use of colours is mostly unanimous: most of the captions are written in red, green and white, in the light of the symbolism of the business. However, warning signs contain other colours as well, mostly yellows, to draw more attention. In the photo on the right (Picture 9), in addition to Ukrainian, customers and users of the self-service coffee machine are also informed in Hungarian that they can pay at the checkout, but quarantine measures at the entrance and at the checkout lines can only be read in Ukrainian. In general, the characteristics of the shop's signage are that the signs that are permanently present and cannot be easily replaced are bilingual, while those that are temporarily published are monolingual. The virus itself is mostly referred to as COVID-19 on the warning posters, although we can see an addition to the acronym with the full name of the virus: coronavirus. The customers are warned with a speech bubble: we can buy a mask at the checkout. The store also uses a cartoon-like character to draw further attention to the message of the signs.

¹ <https://spar-international.com/aboutus/history/>



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 9. SPAR. Bilingual (Ukrainian-Hungarian) inscriptions and monolingual quarantine rules at the entrance

If one visits different spots of the town, the symbolism of the signs can differ. The message, the wording, the use of illustrations can range from a kind request or reminder to a strict prohibition. There are places where the captions and the illustrations used are rather repetitive. The little man on the left, shown from a profile with smiley eyes in the picture below (Picture 10), is the rarest. The most often used types pictograms are the ones in the middle (a man or woman shown from the side angle, wearing a mask, no emotion can be seen). We can also rarely meet a mask appearing alone, as can be seen in the picture on the right side. As in all other aforementioned cases, bilingual subtitles are common – either they are made in bilingual right away, or they are supplemented with a completely different kind of sign (mostly handmade or hand-written in this case). The nicest wording is when we are not commanded but asked to wear a protective mask, although, the latter appears less frequently. Both Hungarian and Ukrainian orthography requires the use of a comma before the word «*please*», but this is often omitted in these cases. In some cases it can be observed, that the message of the signs in the state language slightly differ from the one written in Hungarian. The left picture says in Ukrainian: «*Entering without a mask is forbidden!*». The wording in the Hungarian text delivers a kinder message: «*Please wear a protective mask!*». We can also find examples for the opposite. In the picture on the right, one can read in Ukrainian: «*Put your mask on, my friend*». However, the Hungarian (hand-written) version simply commands us to wear a mask. These can refer to several factors: the native language of the owners or managers (it is easier to formulate a polite request in the language they are more fluent in), or shops and other units simply copy each other's wording or even signage as a whole, not paying attention to meaning behind the captions.



Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 10. Linguistic landscape warning of mandatory mask wearing in Berehove (15.02.2022)

In the cases presented above, entrepreneurs attempted to please the customers by not only instructing them but also illustrating the message. This no longer applies to the following examples. Although the signs of the shops and stores in the pictures are bilingual and all other captions are colorful, eye-catching, the ones that refer to Covid-19 restrictions appear only in a black and white caption (printed or handwritten) (Picture 11).



June 2021

January 2021

Source: Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center photo archive

Picture 11. Monolingual Ukrainian subtitles next to multilingual (Ukrainian-Hungarian) subtitles in Berehove

Conclusions. With a longitudinal analysis, we presented the linguistic landscape of Covid-19 in Berehove, Transcarpathia. In the course of the study, we could see how the population, the official and service sector adapted to the introduced restrictions. We have experienced different waves of the spread of the epidemic in the last 2 years, and these were mainly along colder and warmer seasons – most of the photos are mainly from the winter periods. Our analysis was based on the qualitative method, in which we separately evaluated ordinary and less typical inscriptions and signs, and we were able to see what tendencies prevail in the official (top-down) and private (bottom-up) spheres. In the private sector, we have seen multilingualism not only in local businesses, but also in a store belonging to a larger shopping chain. But the precautions to suppress the spread of Covid-19 are only in Ukrainian even at this store. The posters produced by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health can be found in almost every settlement of the region, but the Hungarian language version of them is not common. We highlighted the rare cases where the multilingual versions are clearly visible, which fit much better into the linguistic landscape traditionally used by the Transcarpathian Hungarian community. In a quantitative analysis of the signs referring to the danger of viruses among Hungarians in southern Slovakia, the authors came to the conclusion that in most places where Hungarians live, it is considered important that information is written in Hungarian in addition to the state language [Istók & Lőrincz 2022]. International literature also considers it important to advocate for the multilingualization of the linguistic landscape of the virus, precisely because linguistic tolerance towards minorities in a crisis situation is not only a language policy issue, but also a case of health policy [Hopkyns & Van den Hoven 2021; Insyrah & Sudarwati 2021]. In our view, linguistic landscape, even in pandemic times is not only a reflection of a city's ethnolinguistic and ethno-demographical composition but is shaped by previous and present language policy, cultural legacies, language dynamics and attitudes.

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