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Author(s) / Autor(i): Katarína Chovancová
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AGE-BASED MARGINALIZATION IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ABOUT CRISIS

Katarína Chovancová*

ABSTRACT

The paper raises the issue of age-based marginalization reoccurring in political discourse produced by political elites in the time of the pandemic crisis. Discursive identity of the elderly population in a central European post-election spacetime is under focus, within a framework of theories of discourse in crisis. Lexicometric analysis of core media coverage of political discourse in Slovakia carried out upon the corpus of mainstream electronic press and a reading of its results is the objective of the empirical part of the study. The scope is to put forward a critical insight into short-term evolution of dominant vocabulary item series and into collocation patterns stressing the connotative features of prominent elements of discourse co-created by political and mediatic actors. The results show recurrent denomination practices with a strong tendency towards negative connotative load of dominant label words. Individual and group identities deserve to be further studied as socially undermined discursive constructs accessible through selected discrete elements.

Key words: discourse, discourse analysis, marginalization, lexicometry, media

Introduction

Contemporary pandemic crisis has brought many occasions in which we witnessed strengthening of tendencies towards marginalisation of different type. Among the most sensible cases of this kind there was putting aside of senior-aged citizens in an attempt to protect them from the risk of infection. The set of related practices led to a marked isolation of the elderly, to the limitation of their freedom of movement, to their social isolation as well as to a certain underestimation of their actions, capabilities and their decision-making.

The problem of marginalisation of the elderly population arose very soon after the breakout of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its specificity consisted in its rather ambivalent nature. The context of pandemic, which represented

* doc. PhDr. Katarína Chovancová, PhD. is an Associate Professor at the Department of Romance Studies, Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Tajovského 40, 974 01 Banská Bystrica, Slovak Republic, e-mail: katarina.chovancova@umb.sk.

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a crisis of a new kind, not faced for several decades in Europe, has seemingly offered all good reasons to justify the adoption of specific anti-pandemic measures aimed at protecting the health of the elderly, perceived as the most vulnerable age and social group. A stereotyped, discriminating character of these measures passed unnoticed at the beginning, then attracted interest and, progressively, became object of criticism.

The discourse of age-based marginalization has been, since the beginning, very much the matter of official political speech, emanating from top representatives of the state. It came from various actors of the political leadership, including the prime minister, members of government and members of parliament, local politicians but also, last but not least, from medical authorities, largely and unprecedentedly mediatized. It has taken some time until a larger variety of voices could be heard in the media, representing opposed viewpoints as well. These were the voices of civil society actors, human rights activists, backed up by some politicians. The number of politicians producing pro-senior-age discourse has been lower than the number of those who were behind the mainstream, often rather marginalising, speech. These alternative speakers, although perfectly conscious of the absolute necessity to protect the older-age citizens from the pandemic, preferred to point out at a possibly discriminating character of statements and measures, produced and adopted in relation to older people.

This paper deals with the rise of the older-age citizen protection theme in the Slovak online press in the selected period of 2020, corresponding to the breakout of the crisis. It will take into account not only the specific societal context of Slovakia, as a part of geographical and historical space of the Central and Eastern Europe, but also a country who had just gone through parliamentary elections that had led to establishing of a new government. The spread of COVID-19 in Slovakia was confirmed very shortly after the cabinet had been formed and thus marked its activity since the very beginning.

1. Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework of our reflexion relies on three different kinds of theoretical perspectives. First, it is the perspective offered by discourse analysis as a means to gain access to language emanating from political sources of power and further spread by institutional and individual actors, influencing mindsets and shaping convictions about social hierarchies. Second, our reasoning will use

theoretical input and operational toolkit provided by linguistics of the utterance (enunciation linguistics) allowing us to track key elements of the language constitutive of discursive polyphony. Third, we will necessarily need to take a look on mediatic discourse as a vehicle of discursive productions originating on the level of political stakeholders, be it locally, nationally or internationally. This triple disciplinary basis will provide us with necessary background and instruments to carry out the analytical task defined, focusing on marginalization both by discourse and within it. The theoretical basis will be presented progressively in the first chapter to be then materialised in the empirical study of mediatized political discourse.

1.1 Marginalisation practices as an object of discourse analysis

Reflecting on the most up-to-date state of the art in the field of social science and humanities (SSH), the research presented here aims at bringing along a complex and innovative perspective on *“those who are marginal”*. The pluralistic view that is about to be put forward strives to be essentially positive, based on the conviction of a high potential of marginality to reconfigure social practices and social norms. How can marginality be a strength of the society that is ours? How can the marginalized individual become a whistleblower of (negative) social behaviours of the society? How do manifestations of certain forms of marginality represent premises of the forthcoming social mutations? (cf. Pugnière-Saavedra and Fischer-Lokou, 2018, p. 6).

The SSH research has been focusing on marginality since 1980s when the researchers made new 'risky' social practices into subject matter for scientific field work in order to explain, justify and possibly legitimize them. It was the case in exploring the sociability of minorities, excluded or stigmatized groups, opening new spaces for research in difficult social zones marked by open or hidden social tensions or conflicts. Voices of the marginalized, outcast, abandoned, vulnerable, oppressed, excluded, unheard became gradually visible in the construction of the public discourse.

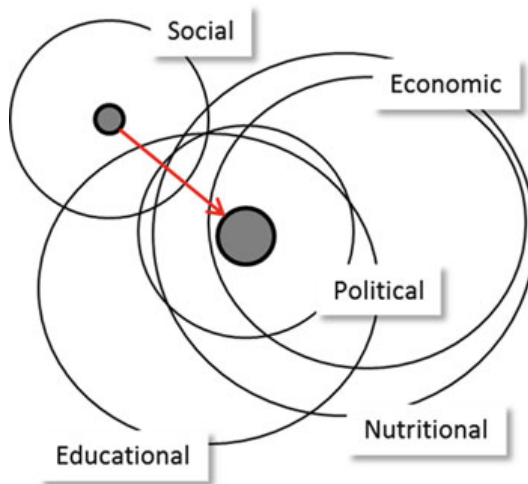
The research project explores the notion of marginality in relation to linguistic and social identities. It aims at reflecting on the state of the art (Park, 1928; Cullen and Pretes, 2000; Houtsonen and Antikainen, 2008; Gatzweiler and Baumüller, 2014 etc.) and at setting up an innovative perspective for developing research about the margins and marginality in the modern societies of the 21st century. The innovative view of marginality consists in combining the perspectives of social science and linguistics within a solid interdisciplinary research framework.

A special attention can be paid to marginality in societal crises, the crisis being defined as „akýkoľvek náhly, (ne)očakávaný závažný incident, resp. konflikt, ktorý narúša politický, spoločenský, kultúrny, ekonomický systém spoločnosti, mnohokrát s fatálnymi následkami, ktorým spoločnosť musí čeliť“ („any kind of sudden, (un)expected important incident or conflict disturbing political, social, cultural, economic system of the society, often with fatal consequences that are to be faced by the community“) (Genčiová, 2017, p. 61).

According to **Billson** (2005, p. 33), marginality has actually been applied in sociology in three different kinds of ways: a) as cultural marginality, referring to the dilemmas of cross-cultural identities and assimilation, b) as social role marginality, describing the tensions which occur when an individual is restricted from belonging to a positive reference group, c) as structural marginality, referring to political, social and economic powerlessness and disadvantage. **Bernt and Colini** (2013, p. 14) argue that it is especially the latter strand of research which has gained most attention in the last decades, and here concepts of power and oppression are regularly fused with more 'culturalist' ideas of 'outsidedness' to create a generally accepted contemporary definition of 'marginality' as the lack of power, participation and integration experienced by a group, or a territory.

Marginality is viewed as a systemic and evolutionary concept. It refers to „an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological or biophysical systems, preventing them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing (extreme) poverty“ (Gatzweiler and Baumüller, 2014, p. 30).

Fig. 1: Marginality in the context of a person or group by a specific position within multiple dimensions



Source: Gatzweiler and Baumüller, 2014, p. 31

According to **Gatzweiler** (2011) and **Gatzweiler and Baumüller** (2014), the marginality of a person or a group can be illustrated by their specific position within a multidimensional context and defined by the distance (expressed in terms of transaction and interdependence costs necessary for changing or maintaining position) from the desired centre. Grey circles refer to the condition (the well-being), larger circles represent different systemic (social, economic, political, nutritional, educational) dimensions of people's lives in which they are more or less marginalized.

Interdisciplinary view on marginality proposed here will focus on the intersections between authentic experience of individuals and/or groups. In this sense, specific importance and potential impacts of field-work based methodologies allowing to „révéler des modèles culturels intériorisés qui peuvent être appréhendés dans les productions verbales des informateurs“ („unveil interiorised cultural models apprehended through discursive productions of speakers“) (Schmitt, 2011, p. 85) are proven. The focus will also be on social institutions and authorities, centres of (symbolic) power, (inter)actions and processes. It studies how these factors (re)create, challenge and transform marginality and marginalization, trying to understand changes in status or role under effect of transitions of all kinds in order to re-think marginality and

marginalization. Let us take the example of family models transformations in Central Europe in the past few decades, progressively reducing the complexity of traditional polynuclear families (Schmitt, 2010, p. 125). Dynamic margin-centre relations will be under focus. The view from the margin, allowing for a wide and comprehensive vision, takes in more perspectives than are possible with a view from the centre only.

Within the complex subject matter of marginalization and social exclusion, the existence of linguistic and discursive marginality will attract a specific attention. For a large number of social groups (migrants and children of labour migrants, diaspora networks, re-emigrants, refugees, the homeless, the jobless, the accompanying persons, the elderly etc.) language represents a core component and instrument of their marginalized/hybrid/'outsider' identity. There is the need to understand these peripheral languages and discourses in order to engage the margins with the centre, embedding linguistic analysis in a socio-cognitive framework in the sense of Van Dijk (1984). An important reference can be made to the concept of "*counter-discourse*" (Foucault and Deleuze, 1977; Moussa and Scapp, 1996) and "*counter-hegemonic discourse*" (Hunt, 1990), as well as to the concept of "*plural diplomacy*" being "*scalable and dynamic*" (Rouet and Ušiak, 2019).

Interpretations and perceptions of the meaning of marginality differ among scientists. There is a shared sets of characteristics and determinants about marginality and marginal regions, still marginality continues to be an elusive concept and needs a clearer understanding.

1.2 Enunciation theory: the concept of polyphony

Reflecting on political discourse, the concept of discursive polyphony cannot be avoided. On the contrary, it needs to be understood properly and to be taken into account as one of its fundamental and definitory features. Out of several possible ways discursive polyphony is understood, we shall adopt the linguistic conception of Authier-Revuz (1995) who sees polyphony as a set of practices engaging more than one speaker, aimed at transforming the words of the Other and integrating them into one's own utterances in various ways. We might even want to go back to Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia, polyphony and dialogism (1981), seeing in polyphony, in this case, not only a diversity of sources of what is said but also a diversity of underlying ideologies.

The existence of representing (polyphonic) discourses is closely connected to communicative situations featuring mediators, in the broadest sense of the

term. They are intermediate enunciative instances, placed between the two speakers A and B in the communicative circuit. In such trinomic constellations, transmission of the Others' discourse is fundamental as it can modify, adapt or distort the original. From the generic point of view, representing discourses (marked as D), in relation to represented discourses (marked as d), have a set of basic features (Authier-Revuz and Lefebvre, 2015). Out of 9 features suggested by the authors, we shall take into consideration three, in the specific context of mediatized political discourse:

- D stands for d;
- d is anterior to D;
- D and d are not in one-to-one correspondence.

What these features tell us about the nature of mediated political discourse as representing discourse D is that it takes up and re-uses previous statements (discourses d) of political actors and institutions and integrates them, in a more or less transformed way, into a new discourse of its own. Thus, D contains transformed segments of d. The analytical focus of the empirical part of this paper will be on these represented segments. As far as different modes of representation are concerned, there can be a plurality of them, from basic ones such as direct speech and indirect speech to autonymical mentions and textual islets.

The specificity of the enunciative context within which discourses originate, are being reproduced and transformed at the same time, links to the very particular characteristics of the mass media as a mediating instance. The quality of mediatic re-adaptations and transformations of political discourse depends on the quality of the media itself and reflects the sociocultural and political context proper to the community as well. The ways in which political discourse is reworked when it is being mediatized, depends also on the personal educational background of media professionals and on traditions underlying modern journalism in its relations to the political power.

The presence of polyphonical segments in mediatized political discourse (see also Profant, 2020 for the *"who speaks"* concern), inevitably implying pragmatic and semantic modifications of d-discourse by the author of D-discourse, is one of the expressions of linguistic subjectivity. Subjectivity, as an intrinsic property of any discourse, is discussed by Benveniste (1966) and has key importance in many linguistic approaches. We are specifically interested in the subjectivity that can be perceived in speakers' attitudes towards propositional content of their

utterances. From this point of view, subjectivity can be seen in the speaker's choices when there are multiple ways of expressing the same content. It leads us to search for elements that help speaker express his/her personal attitude towards the propositional content. We are convinced that any utterance bears some elements of subjectivity. This subjectivity is present in discourse participant's assessment, in the choice of information and in the way of its expression. When it comes to mediatized political discourse, voices coming from outside can be echoed in the journalist's own discourse.

1.3 Mediatized political discourse and

As pointed out by **Mazzoleni and Schultz** (1999, p. 258), media, commonly recognized for being a hugely influential, even unrestrainable communication force, are sometimes referred to as the „*fourth branch of government*“. In any empirical study of political discourse subject to mediatization, it is necessary to take into account the close interrelation between political discourse on one hand and the discourse of media on the other (Strömbäck and Esser speak about opposing concepts of „*media logic*“ and „*political logic*“, cf. 2014, p. 246).

Mediatization as a phenomenon is common to the political systems regardless of territory. For the development and the spread of the political discourse, the fact of being vectored by the media has become a condition *sine qua non*. It has to be stressed also that the mass media are far from being a passive vehicle for political content. In fact, as pointed out by theoreticians (Thompson, 1995), the media are complex and efficient organizations with their own *modus operandi* and their specific objectives. These scopes are not always in accordance with the needs of those who act as sources of political discourse:

„Because of the power of the media, political communicators are forced to respond to the media's rules, aims, production logics, and constraints (Altheide and Snow, 1979). One of the most significant results is that politicians who wish to address the public must negotiate with the media's preferred timing, formats, language, and even the content of the politicians' communication (Dayan and Katz, 1992). Some even hypothesize that legitimacy of the exercise of power increasingly might lie in the ability of rulers to communicate through the media (Cotteret, 1991)“ (Mazzoleni and Schultz, 1999, p. 249)

It proves useful to make a terminological and conceptual distinction between the terms mediatization and mediation. The former denotes a transformative

process carried out by the mass media, „a long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors has increased“ (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014, p. 244).

Being more neutral on the connotative level, the latter refers to „any acts of intervening, conveying, or reconciling between different actors, collectives, or institutions“ (Mazzoleni and Schultz 1999, p. 249-250). Parting from this fundamental distinction, it could eventually be claimed that mediatization is a specific realisation of mediated communication; the one implying a very specific institutional mediator of a great complexity, with its own vision, philosophy and power mechanisms.

„First, in their news reporting, mass media present only a highly selective sample of newsworthy events from a continuous stream of occurrences. Events are identified as 'newsworthy' when they satisfy certain rules, commonly understood as the criteria for determining 'news value'. Only part of the criteria of news value are intrinsic to the news events. Often the selection process is determined more strongly by journalistic worldviews and by media production routines. However chosen, the media's selective sample of events that are reported defines what appears to be the only reality for most citizens and often also for the political elite.“ (Mazzoleni and Schultz, 1999, p. 250)

Not only the media makes a choice of events to be mediatized and the ways how it will be done, it also selects voices to be heard in the sense of speakers (sources of enunciation), both institutional and individual, whose discourse will be directly or indirectly represented by the media. In this way, they build a public space of their own in which distances between the communication counterparts are being cancelled or minimized, sometimes the contrary. In the same way, through the processes related to agenda-setting, the mass media picks up and highlights some of up-to-date issues, making them visible and problematizing them so that they can become themes for the public debate (Mazzoleni and Schultz, 1999, p. 250-251). Also, the “media democracies” limit the final selection of political actors, making ground for some privileged forms and contents of political communication. It is often the one that „devalue political substance at the cost of conflictual, sensational, personalized and simplified messages“ (Thesen, 2014, p. 3).

According to Strömbäck and Esser (2014, p. 245), the media that matter most are news media, i.e., newspapers, radio, television and news magazines in either their traditional or digital formats providing organized journalism.

If we take for reference points the concepts of polity, policy and politics (as defined by Stromback and Esser, 2014, p. 247), we can easily define our primary area of interest in unveiling policies behind elements of political discourse transferred – and, potentially, transformed – by the media. Accessorily, and in part, our focus will also be on political agenda-setting.

The issue of mediatization is of a great interest to us, namely in the context of our previous research on mediated communication and in contrast to this research. We have claimed the fundamental difference between the mediated and the mediatized and we are inclined to associate mediatization to a mediation of a specific type, involving a mediating instance of a particular nature (mass media).

We should also be aware of the fact that the process of mediatization, though primarily focused on political discourse, has been dedicating a continuously growing amount of attention to culture and everyday life (Kaun and Fast, 2014, p. 6). In this new focus of mediatization, a close interconnection can be seen with the main research topic dealt with in the empirical part of the paper.

2. Data set description and methodology

The analysis presented in points 3 and 4 of this paper has been conducted upon SmeEPC2020 corpus. The abbreviation stands for Sme „Elderly in Pandemic Crisis“ in 2020: the corpus has been assembled by the author and, as far as its main features are concerned, tailored for the needs of the present research. The corpus consists in a set of press articles published in the Slovak national daily newspaper *Sme* during the first COVID-19 pandemic wave. The two-month period covered goes from mid-March to mid-May 2020. Explicit thematic focus of texts selected is centred on the situation of the elderly population in sanitary crisis in Slovakia.

According to Rošteková and Rouet (2011, p. 25), *„slovenský trh s denníkmi je poznačený neustálym poklesom nákladu. [...] Napriek uvedenému faktu dennikový trh na Slovensku v poslednom období považujeme za relatívne stabilný.“* („the Slovak press market has been marked by a continuous decrease of circulation in print since 2008 and before. Despite this fact, the constellation of main daily news publishing houses remains more or less stable“). The Slovak

newspaper *Sme* ranges among the most influential national dailies in Slovakia, together with *Denník N*, *Pravda* and *Hospodárske noviny*. The choice of the source media has been motivated by the impact of *Sme* on the national level and on its estimated circulation (print and digital combined), as well as on the left bias of the paper which may let expect a critical distance from the middle to right-wing cabinet having emerged from Slovak parliamentary elections in February 2020. Another reason behind the choice of the media was the previous research already conducted upon *Sme2011* corpus (Zázrivcová et al., 2016) and, contrastively, upon *LeMonde0.3*. At this stage, the bulk of parallel corpora covered a one-year period of daily editions of the Slovak daily and of the French one.

In *SmeEPC2020* corpus, the overall amount of 60 press texts ranged in the *Sme* section devoted to home politics (labelled *Domov*) has been gathered, with a total length of 171 849 characters. The selection contains mostly articles in a standard format, a few interviews and several minute-by-minute information feeds, following slightly different structural schemes. Identification of thematic features leads to the following list of recurrent topics: a) preventive measures taken by the Slovak government in the midst of the 1st wave of the sanitary crisis aimed at the target group of the elderly; b) infection and mortality statistics in general and within the target group; c) response to measures adopted with a particular focus on critical views and opposed standpoints.

The corpus has undergone a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis making use of the *Sketch Engine* analytical tool with main foci on frequencies of discursive items, collocations and concordance patterns available for core lexical units. The choice of methodology reflects analytical needs and research objectives. A corpus-based lexical analysis has been completed by an analytical insight into enunciative practices based on identification of sources of enunciation (speakers), subjectiveness (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002) and the polyphonic practices (Authier-Revuz, 1995; Authier-Revuz and Lefebvre, 2015).

The Sketch Engine is a freeware enabling creation and treatment of text corpora. It has been widely used for various purpose of SSH research. Its availability and its user-friendly character are seen here as a substantial advantage, namely when it comes to corpora of a rather restrictive length, assembled for narrowly defined research scopes. Unlike No Sketch Engine used by Slovak National Corpus, it has a lower level of institutionalised use and offers possibilities of free queries for diversified research tasks.

3. Data analysis

3.1 Frequency analysis

At the first stage, *SmeEPC2020* has been checked for word frequencies (with a specific interest paid to nouns, verbs and adjectives), with the objective to identify possible thematic word clusters and to observe a variety of denominative and evaluative practices associated with the target group. Noun frequencies show a clear prevalence of the following lemmas: *zariadenie* (facility, 195 occurrences), *senior* (senior-aged person, 188), *človek* (person, 174), *opatrenie* (measure, 135), *služba* (service, 108), *domov* (home, 106), *klient* (client, 91). The table below shows a complete list of lemmas with $f > 50$.

Table 1: Noun frequencies $f > 50$ in *SmeEPC2020*.

N°	Lemma	f	N°	Lemma	f
1	zariadenie (facility)	195	13	ochorenie (illness)	68
2	senior (senior-aged person)	188	14	vláda (government)	67
3	človek (man)	174	15	pripad (case)	65
4	opatrenie (measure)	135	16	rok (year)	64
5	služba (service)	108	17	zdravotníctvo (healthcare)	61
6	domov (home)	106	18	koronavírus (coronavirus)	57
7	klient (client)	91	19	čas (time)	56
8	zamestnanec (employee)	88	20	osoba (person)	53
9	bratislava (bratislava)	88	21	testovanie (testing)	52
10	karanténa (quarantine)	72	22	COVID-19 (COVID-19)	51
11	slovensko (slovakia)	69	23	pezinok (pezinok)	51
12	situácia (situation)	69	24	minister (minister)	50

The leading position of *zariadenie* (facility) is of a particular interest as it unveils the tendency to reflect on the elderly from the point of view of the institutional place they occupy and, secondly, from the perspective of care they receive. The qualification of receivers is the one that best describes the status of the target group. As receivers, the elderly are definitely expected to express unconditioned acceptance, understanding and thankfulness in relation to measures adopted by policymakers. If they do so their attitudes are rewarded with a positive media feedback

In the perspective of denomination of the target group, the range of lemmas contains items such as: *senior* (senior, senior-aged person), *človek* (man, person,

individual), *klient* (client), *pacient* (patient), *dôchodca* (pensionary, retiree). Collocations of these lemmas are studied in 3.2.

The corpus SmeEKP2020 contains 737 verbal lemmas (see the selection in Table 2 below), with a wide variety of syntactic and semantic statuses.

Table 2: Verb frequencies $f > 13$ in SmeEPC2020.

N°	Lemma	f	N°	Lemma	f	N°	Lemma	f
1	byť (be)	790	13	zabezpečiť (ensure)	23	25	pomôcť (help)	17
2	mať (have)	244	14	dodať (provide)	23	26	zomrieť (die)	17
3	môcť (can)	112	15	prísť (come)	22	27	myslieť (think)	15
4	ísť (go)	61	16	priať (receive)	20	28	chybať (lack)	15
5	musieť (have to)	55	17	dodržiavať (keep)	20	29	žiť (live)	15
6	informovať (inform)	48	18	potvrdiť (confirm)	19	30	ukázať (show)	15
7	povedať (tell)	47	19	tvrdiť (claim)	19	31	cítiť (feel)	15
8	chcieť (want)	43	20	platiť (pay)	19	32	začať (start)	14
9	uviesť (state)	33	21	chodiť (go)	18	33	pribudnúť (rise)	14
10	vedieť (know)	30	22	potrebovať (need)	18	34	pripraviť (prepare)	14
11	hovoríť (say)	25	23	dostať (get)	18	35	čakať (wait)	14
12	dať (give)	24	24	odporúčať (recommend)	18	36	obmedziť (limit)	14

Verb frequencies query shows presence of the following semantic classes of verb lemmas:

- a) auxiliaries *byť* (to be) and *mať* (to have) as items with highest frequencies;
- b) modals *môcť* (can), *musieť* (have to), *chcieť* (want) with significant frequencies that can be explained by the thematization of measures taken, as well as with discursive re-defining of rights and duties of the target group members;
- c) verba dicendi *informovať* (to inform), *povedať* (to tell), *uviesť* (to state/to make a statement), *hovoríť* (to say), *potvrdiť* (to confirm), *tvrdiť* (to claim);

- d) verbs of giving and receiving *dať* (to give), *zabezpečiť* (to ensure), *dodať* (to provide with), *priať* (to receive), *potrebovať* (need), *dostať* (to get), *pomôcť* (to help).

Modal verbs represented express a range of modalities, from 'possibility' to 'obligation/necessity'. Interestingly enough, in several cases, obligation is evoked to be then denied:

(1) *Majú seniori ísť k lekárovi, ak majú uňho dohodnutý termín? Nie, ak to nie je nevyhnutné, a to platí aj vtedy, ak ide o lekárov špecialistov.* [Do the elderly people have to consult their MD if they have not taken an appointment with? No if it is not inevitable. That counts also for health specialists.]

(2) *Kedy môžu seniori nakupovať? Pre seniorov sú na nákupy v potravinách vyhradené hodiny medzi deviatou až dvanástou predpoludním.* [When can the elderly do their shopping? Shopping hours reserved for older people go from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.]

The example (1) shows the modal verb *mať* (have to) used to question the obligation of the older people to consult their doctor in case they feel symptoms that could be those of COVID-19. However, this obligation is cancelled immediately, restricting it to hardly defined 'inevitable' cases. Similarly, in the example (2), the modal verb *môcť* (can) seemingly evokes a possibility which is then associated to a restrictive measure (limitation of shopping hours for the target group members).

Verbal semantic classes c) and d) stated above contain full verbs. It should be stressed that verba dicendi are a naturally well-represented category in the given text type and genre as confirmed by the analysis of Sme2011 (Zázrivcová et al., 2016). In this analysis, for instance, *povedať* and *tvrdiť* appeared among the 15 most frequent full verbs. In this sense, SmeEPK2020 is not outstanding. On the contrary, verbs of give and take may be seen as highly emblematic in relation to the specific thematic nature of the corpus.

The third frequency list shows adjectival lemmas (see Table 3). These items are capable of carrying a highest degree of subjectivity.

Table 3: Adjective frequencies $f > 14$ in SmeEPC2020.

N°	Lemma	f	N°	Lemma	f	N°	Lemma	f
1	sociálny (social)	33	11	bratislavský (of bratislava)	31	21	spoločný (common)	18
2	nový (new)	59	12	veľký (big)	30	22	hygienický (hygienic)	17
3	verejný (public)	57	13	možný (possible)	28	23	mimoriadny (extraordinary)	17
4	ďalší (another)	48	14	hlavný (main)	26	24	cely (whole)	17
5	krízový (crisis)	44	15	ochranný (protective)	26	25	blízky (close)	17
6	starý (old)	37	16	zdravotný (health)	24	26	potrebný (necessary)	16
7	slovenský (slovak)	36	17	prísny (severe)	22	27	aktuálny (up-to-date)	16
8	štátny (state)	34	18	osobný (personal)	21	28	katolícky (catholic)	16
9	iný (other)	33	19	negatívny (negative)	20	29	ohrozený (endangered)	15
10	pozitívny (positive)	31	20	zdravotnícky (sanitary)	18	30	pľúcny (pulmonary)	15

When it comes to frequencies, the lemma *sociálny* (social) is the absolute leader. It appears in two types of contexts. First, to make reference to social homes for the elderly (DSS). Second, in some other contexts, it can mean subsidiary/solidary. Apart from *sociálny*, adjectives divide into lexical units with positive connotations (*nový* – new, *osobný* – personal, *spoločný* – common, *veľký* – big, *možný* – possible etc.), some neutral ones (*verejný* – public, *ďalší* – another, *krízový* – crisis, *slovenský* – Slovak, *iný* – other, *bratislavský* – of Bratislava, *hlavný* – main, *zdravotný* – health etc.) and, finally, items with negative connotations. Very interestingly, in this last group, there are many lexemes that might be fallaciously considered as positive. It is the specificity of the topic that makes them acquire negative connotations. This is the case of *positive* which, in reality, means *infected*.

3.2 Collocations

Taking a closer look at the discursive functioning of selected nouns in minimal contexts, we are able to identify dominant collocation patterns (N stands for noun,

V for verb). Thus, *senior* is most often modified by *opýtaný*, *pracujúci* or *slovenský*, *klient* is mostly modified by *testovaný* (tested), *vyšetrený* (examined) or *zomrelý* (deceased) and *dôchodca* is modified by *pracujúci* (wage-earning). Modification makes ground for expression of subjectivity, modifier often being an affective or evaluative lexical unit.

Further, *senior* tends to appear in some significant N3s and in N2 patterns. These are three-term and two-term collocations such as

- **N/V + pre + seniorov:** *zariadenie pre seniorov* (facility for the elderly), *domov pre seniorov* (home for the elderly), *nákupy* (shopping), *strava* (food), *variť* (to cook), *vyčleniť* (to assign), *čas* (time), *rúško* (mask), *odporúčanie* (recommendation), *omša* (mass), *cestovanie* (travelling) + *pre seniorov*;
- **N + seniorov:** *ochrana* (protection), *percento* (percentage), *domov* (home), *testovanie* (testing), *väčšina* (majority), *názor* (opinion), *charakteristika* (characteristics), *ošetrovatelstvo* (taking care) + *seniorov* (of seniors);
- **V+ senior / senior + V:** *potrebovať* (need), *môcť* (may), *mať* (have to), *dostať* (to get), *chváliť* (to praise), *zvládnuť/zvládať* (to manage), *tráviť* (to spend time), *umierať* (to die), *nakupovať* (to shop), *ísť* (to go), *cítiť* (to feel), *(ne)obťažovať* (not to annoy), *prežívať* (to live through).

Coordinative collocations are of specific interest as they unveil associations made by speakers between groups and the tendency to define a place for one target group among others. Thus, links are drawn between *seniorov a ľudí bez domova* (the elderly and the homeless), *seniorov a bezdomovcov* (the elderly and the displaced), *pendlerov a seniorov* (the commuters and the elderly), *seniorov a obetí* (the elderly and the victims), *chorych a seniorov* (the sick and the elderly), *deťoch a senioroch* (children and the elderly), *personálom a seniormi* (the staff and the elderly).

Similarly, collocative potential of lexical units synonymous to *senior* can be observed. For the word *klient*, the same structural types of collocations have been searched for to compare collocation sets to those featuring *senior*. *Klient* takes ante-posed modifiers such as *testovaný* (tested), *vyšetrený* (examined), *zomrelý* (deceased), *nový* (new), *pozitívny* (positive) and gets modified also by postposed attributes such as *klienti zariadení/domov/seniorcentra* (clients in care homes). In the position of the subject, *klient* links with *zomrieť* (to die), *porušovať* (to breach/to infringe), *(ne)pociťovať* ((not to) sense), *stretávať* (to meet), *musieť*

(have to), *mať (určený)* (to get something assigned), *dostávať* (to get). The genitive case of the word *klient* appears in collocations such as *testovanie klientov* (testing clients), *pohyb klientov* (movement of clients), then *účasť* (participation), *vyšetrenie* (examination), *vychádzka* (walk), *aktivita* (activity), *väčšina* (majority), *počet* (number), *prípád* (case). Coordinations include *zamestnancov a klientov* (staff and clients), *klientov a pracovníkov* (clients and staff members/workers), *klientov a personálu* (clients and personnel). In the position of the object, verbs such as *presúvať* (to dislocate), *nachádzať* (to find), *otestovať* (to test), *evidovať* (to register) collocate with *klient* in the accusative case; *vysvetľovať* (to explain) in the dative case.

The semantics of the synonymic series *senior/klient/človek(ludia)/pacient/dôchodca* is defined by four main axes: a/ health condition, b/ work activity, c/ habitat and mobility, d/ age.

Table 4: Modifiers available for synonymic series related to *senior*.

senior (senior-aged person)	klient (client)	človek (man)	pacient (patient)	dôchodca (pensionary)
opýtaný (quizee), pracujúci (working), slovenský (slovak)	testovaný (tested), vyšetrený (examined), zomrelý (deceased), samotný (individual), nový (new), pozitívny (positive)	mladý (young), starý (old), testovaný (tested), infikovaný (infected), ostatný (other), pracujúci (working), dochádzajúci (commuting), zastavovaný (controlled), zamestnaný (employed), osamelý (lonely), postihnutý (handicapped), staručký (very old)	onkologický (oncological), detský (child), zomierajúci (dying), hospitalizovaný (in hospital), ležiaci (bed bound), nakazený (infected), daný (given), ďalší (another), pozitívny (positive), dospelý (adult)	pracujúci (working), starobný (old age), ležiaci (bed bound)

The denomination *človek* occurs predominantly in plural (*ľudia*). *Ľudia* is modified by a dozen of adjectives. Some of them are of determinative nature (*testovaný* – tested, *infikovaný* – infected, *ostatný* – other, remaining, *pracujúci* – working, wage-earning, *dochádzajúci* – commuting, *zastavovaný* – checked/stopped, *zamestnaný* – employed), 5 others expressing a qualitative assessment with a higher level of subjectivity (*mladý* – young, *starý* – old, *osamelý* – lonely, *postihnutý* – handicapped, *staručký* – very old). In the subject position, apart from the link verb *byť* (to be), *ľudia* form predicative bounds with modal verbs (*musieť* – have to, *(ne)mať* – (not) to have), verbs of state or transition (*prestávať* – to cease, *sedieť* – to sit, *zomierať* – to die, *uspieť* – to succeed, *žiť* – to live) motion verbs (*opúšťať* – to quit/to leave, *pohybovať* – to move) verbs of speech (*pýtať* – to ask, *uvádzať* – to state). Action verbs other than those expressing motion are rather rare (*pozrieť* – to look, *uprednostniť* – to give priority to something, *stretávať* – to meet). In the position of the object, *ľudia* are targeted by actions expressed by verbs such as *dotknúť* (to be concerned with something), *testovať* (to test), *opatrovať* (to care about somebody), *dať* (to give), *považovať* (to consider), *chýbať* (to miss), *mať* (to have), *vyzvať* (to ask/to invite), *oddeliť* (to separate), *chrániť* (to protect), *lákať* (to attract), *obsluhovať* (to serve), *monitorovať* (to monitor), *skontrolovať* (to check), *kontrolovať* (to control), *povedať* (to tell). Semantically, these verbs imply an object under control, receiving care or being separated from somebody or something. Collocations with the form *ľudí* (genitive case of *ľudia*, in the position of a substantive complement) include *počet* (number), *tretina* (one third), *mobilita* (mobility), *pohyb* (movement), *skupina* (group), *zodpovednosť* (responsibility), *vychádzanie* (going out), *psychika* (mental state). *Ľudia* sometimes coordinates with the homeless (*seniorov a ľudí bez domova*).

The nominal label *pacient* is of a slightly more specific nature. It takes mostly neutral modifiers without evaluative or affective semes (*onkologický* – oncological, *detský* – child, *zomierajúci* – dying, *hospitalizovaný* – in hospital, *ležiaci* – bed bound, *nakazený* – infected, *daný* – given, *d'alší* – another, *pozitívny* – positive, *dospelý* – adult) referring to age, illness or order. *Pacient* can *podľahnúť* (to succumb), *nachádzať sa* (to be located) or simply *byť* (to be). On the contrary, *pacient* is being *seť* (*nastavovať*), helped (*pomôcť*), assessed (*posúdiť*) or visited (*navštevovať*) by others. The genitive case of *pacient* appears in the collocations such as *sprevádzanie* (caregiving), *liečba* (remedy), *úmrtie* (death), *vek* (age) or *stav* (state). We find the only relevant coordination which puts together *príbuzných s pacientmi* (relatives and patients).

Finally, *dôchodca* (a retired person, a pensionary) associates with adjectival modifiers *pracujúci* (working, wage-earning), *starobný* (old-age) and *ležiaci* (bed bound, in the sense of incapable of movement). *Dôchodca* becomes subject of a rather interesting series of verbs including *dať* (si povedať), *nájsť* (to find), *ochorieť* (to fall sick), *môcť* (predtým mohol) (to be able to), *pracovať* (to work), *využívať* (to make use of something). Some of these are used in very specific contexts. It is namely the case of *dať* (to give) and *môcť* (to be able to):

(3) Každý dôchodca predtým **mohol** vychádzať von, kedy chcel. Samozrejme, tí, ktorí môžu chodiť. Opatrenia na ľudí v zariadeniach doliehajú silnejšie, ako keď je niekto doma v karanténe. Vie, že po štrnástich dňoch bude môcť vyjsť von. My to nevieme. [Before, each pensionary **had been able to** go out when they wanted. Of course, those who were capable of walking. Measure impacts the people in retirement homes more than those who undergo isolation in their own homes. The latter know they would be able to go out again in fourteen days. We do not know that.]

(4) Z ministerstva dopravy prišla informácia, že tisíce dôchodcov využíva denne bezplatnú vlakovú dopravu, povedal premiér Igor Matovič. Preto na zasadnutí krízového štábu prišiel návrh, aby seniori nad 62 rokov o túto možnosť cestovať bezplatne prišli. „ Ak si niektorí dôchodcovia **nedajú povedať**, musíme možno aj takéto opatrenia prijať, „ povedal premiér Matovič. [The Ministry of Defence informed that thousands of pensionaries take the trains free of charge daily, said the prime minister Igor Matovič. That is why the permanent crisis headquarters proposed to cancel the possibility of free travel for the senior-aged people over 62. „If some pensionaries **do not let us explain this** to them, we may have to adopt this kind of measures as well, „ the prime minister Matovič stated.]

Dôchodca is being asked to do something (*vyzývať*), contacted (*kontaktovať*) and he/she is not annoyed by adopted measures (*neobťažovať*). The genitive plural form *dôchodcov* links to *domov* (home), *jednota* (union), *zdravie* (health), *príbuzný* (relative), *percento* (percentage), *opatrenie* (measure) and *väčšina* (majority). Like in other analysed nominal units, *dôchodca* frequently appears in the prepositional clause *pre + dôchodcov*. In these cases, it relates to *problém* (problem), *hodina* (hour), *nakupovanie* (shopping), *angličtina* (English), *link* (link), *vlak/vlakom* (train/by train).

3.3 Polyphonic segments

Identification of polyphonic segments of discourse (D discourse) is based on three kinds of information available in the text. These are a/ indications of enunciators responsible of original mediatized utterances (d); b/ *verba dicendi* appearing in introductory segments accompanying D-discourse; c/ D-discourse segments themselves, making use of various kinds of transformations of original d-segments. The following examples show various configurations of representing discourse in the corpus. Enunciators of d-segments are marked in bold, *verba dicendi* (verbs of speech) are in italics:

(5) **Komisárka pre osoby so zdravotným postihnutím Zuzana Stavrovská** a predstavitelia neziskových organizácií *odporúčajú*...

[**The commissar for persons with a physical handicap Zuzana Stavrovská** and representatives of non-profit organisations *recommend*...]

(6) Odbor prevencie kriminality kancelárie ministra vnútra SR pripravil leták obsahujúci krátke rady a odporúčania. *.../ Agentúru SITA o tom informovala Michaela Paulenová z tlačového odboru rezortu vnútra.*

[Department of Prevention of Crimes at the Head Office of Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic prepared a flyer containing short advice and recommendations. *.../ The SITA Agency had been informed about it by Michaela Paulenová from the press department of the Ministry of Interior.*]

(7) Za potrebné *považuje prezidentka* pokročiť v ochrane seniorov. „Ide najmä o testovanie každého nového prijímateľa sociálnych služieb, ktorý ide do zariadenia alebo sa doň vracia z nemocnice,“ uviedla.

[**The president** *considers* necessary to improve protection of the elderly people. „Each new beneficiary of social services should be tested when entering the retirement home or returning back there from hospital,“ she said.]

(8) */Prezidentka/ Upozornila* tiež na obeť domáceho násilia, „ktorých počet všade na svete počas karantény stúpa“.

[*She /the president/ also reminded* of victims of home violence „whose number raised everywhere in the world during the confinement“.]

(9) Podpredseda parlamentu Peter Pellegrini (Smer) *si myslí*, že by stačilo k ľuďom úprimne prehovoriť a nie je nutné prijímať prísne opatrenia, ak je situácia predvídateľná.

[The deputy chair of parliament Peter Pellegrini (Smer) *thinks* that it would be enough to speak openly to people and not to adopt strict measure if the situation is predictable.]

(10) Štát pravdaže nemá kapacity, aby boli hliadky na každom mieste.
[The state does not have enough capacities to put patrols everywhere.]

(11) Ide o prvý prípad tzv. komunitného šírenia koronavírusu.
[It is the first case of *the so-called* community-based spread of the coronavirus.]

The examples show polyphonic segments of different kinds. Distinctions can be observed in the degree of certainty and precision reached in the process of identification of original speakers (authors of d discourse). Proper names prevail in the corpus, as shown in the examples (6) and (9), often accompanied by appositive structures expressing titles, functions, positions or degrees. Polyphony is signalled by the presence of verbs of speech which act as direct hints towards transforming of d-segments. Transformations vary, too, from more or less complete utterances in direct speech placed in quotation marks (examples 7 and 8); through syntactically united indirect speech (example 9) to resuming speech with expressions of subjective attitudes (example 10). In some cases, more general descriptions of original enunciators can be seen. That is true for the example (10) where we learn about what the state authorities admitted about the lack of patrols with no further precisions; in the example (11), the only hint of polyphony is offered in the „tzv.“ (takzvaný – the so-called) particle with no exact definition of the original speaker.

The choice of examples above gives a slight qualitative insight into discursive polyphony in the corpus. We are specifically interested in voices represented. Contrary to expectations, in SME journal, a large space is given to speakers representing non-governmental institutions. This covers a very wide range of authorities, organisations and interest groups, including medical authorities, civil society actors and the target group members themselves.

Discussion

The analysis conducted in this paper is based on insights into some fundamental discursive features of the corpus: key vocabulary, collocation schemes and polyphonic segments. Exemplification uses concordance outputs.

Vocabulary analysis focused on unveiling denomination practices related to the target group of the older-aged citizens in relation to the pandemic crisis. A series of five different denominations (label words) was identified, four of them being connoted, carrying an age-based reference (*senior*) or a reference based on the concept of transactional hierarchy (*klient*, *pacient*, *dôchodca*). In this perspective, even the word *senior*, widely used in general to describe the target group of people over a certain age limit (varying, in general, from 60 years of age onwards) means more than just a person of an elder age. Connotative level of the signification of the word *senior* relates to the seme „sen(i-)“, which may, just like in the words *senilný* (senile), *senilita* (senility) evoke the threat of progressive decrease in flexibility of physical and/or mental capacities and the loss of strength to face transactional societal needs, leading to the loss of autonomous decision-making.

In analysed discursive contexts, *klient* is used restrictively to refer to elderly people in retirement homes. In this perspective, it loses a great part of its possibly positive connotative values which it would normally have carried, for instance, in thematic contexts of business or commerce. *Klient* no longer means here the person who is free to express its needs and who would be able to claim, sometimes with insistence, the service that fulfills these needs. In the corpus, *klient* rather refers to persons obliged to rely on recognition of their needs by those who provide em with thservice and care. This recognition may be more or less successful. In the latter case, *klient* becomes a receiver of what is being offered to him/her. The idea of service in the field of social care, as a specific kind of transaction, repeats in the sanitary context where the label word *pacient* appears most often. As the etymology of this word indicates, discourse analysis proves that *pacient* can be understood as a person low in the hierarchy of power, a health care receiver with limited possibilities to exercise a real influence on his/her situation. In the new pandemic context, this kind of connotation becomes even more important, as discourse about sanitary measures, the respect of which is not just recommended but strictly demanded and the lack of respect of which is subject to penalties, gains importance. Connotative load of *dôchodca* is related to economic powerlessness or precarity due to the lack of wage-earning activities. Going even further, *dôchodca* is sometimes seen as a person with irrational behaviour, not willing to understand and respect protective measures, although in reality, the conduct of many retirees was different, entirely opposed to this stereotyped vision.

Taking an overall, summarizing view of denomination practices related to the target group, it can be said that only the very general word *človek/ludia* remains un-connoted. Naturally, its use is reserved to generic contexts in which any potential age-based or hierarchy-based reference remains implicit.

Apart from inquiring about the choice of denominations used to label the target group members, we have taken a closer look into collocative potential of items the denomination series included. We have studied selected collocation patterns: nominal modifiers, predicative clauses in which label nouns (*človek/ludia*, *senior*, *klient*, *pacient*, *dôchodca*) appeared either in the subject position or in the object position and, finally, noun coordinations. The results confirm our findings from the first research stage, dedicated to denotative and connotative aspects of denomination practices. The analysis of the collocative potential clearly shows that the discursive identity of the target group is based, in a large number of analysed contexts, on the idea of receiving. The target group members, elder people, are very often viewed as those who are supposed to accept what has been prepared, designed and decided for them. They should be willing to receive and respect with little or no consultation, without voicing their views and with no critical response nor contestation. Discursive identities of this kind arise from prevalent choice of vocabularies used when speaking about the target group, these vocabularies consisting of modifiers (adjectives), predicative verbs and nouns entering the coordination patterns. A majority of modifiers that accompany 5 analysed label words belongs to the category of adjectives with an evaluative or affective lexical charge. This can be proved by the fact the most of these modifiers are concerned with the grammatical category of gradation, i.e., they measure a quality attributed to the label. The specimen of predicative verbs consists predominantly in static or process verbs for which the subject is not an active agent but an entity in experiencing a certain state or concerned by an ongoing process. This speaks in favour of the idea of passivity as a fundamental feature of the discursive identity of the target group.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, any possible specimen of authentic mediatized political discourse represents a vast material basis for interdisciplinary research within the branch of social science and humanities. A combination of research perspectives like the one adopted in this paper, involving, on one hand, discourse analysis

related to societal issues and sciences of language proves to have its advantages and bring impact in terms of new, valuable pieces of knowledge.

Discourse is a territory where reflections of social, political and cultural phenomena in interaction show. When analysed, it brings a lot of useful information about the attitudes and actions of the society and sometimes lets unveil inconsistencies and stereotyped thinking where all seems, at first sight, politically correct. Indeed, this is true of the mediatized political discourse in pandemic crisis related to COVID-19, in the context of a post-election situation in a Central European country with a new government who had just come into being. In a situational context of this kind, it is not surprising to find a mixture of complex discursive topoi.

The corpus of press texts picked up during a two-month period covering the first wave of the pandemic in one of the most renowned and considerably influential Slovak dailies SME was chosen in order to obtain a general view of how (and by whom) the core discourse about the target group of the elderly citizens was formulated and how it was transformed by the media. The corpus-based work showed a set of negatively connoted commonplace ideas that should be revisited by critical thinkers, active citizens and also by the political elites of tomorrow. These attitudes include, namely, some hierarchical views of the target group, being secluded in marginal places defined, primarily, by lack of means and powers. We are convinced that this marginalising vision, promoted by speakers representing official institutional political discourse, even though they were forced to face the crisis rapidly, with no warning and no real experience, should not be the excuse for not being able to be aware of the potential inadequacies of their discourse.

In this sense, we believe it would be useful to pursue the research enlarging the scale of speakers and resources. It is certain that pieces of mediatized discourse that circulate in the media platforms of another kind, such as, for example, web discussion fora, social media, blogging and instant messaging platforms, including those that are closely interconnected to the official journalism discursive outcomes, would bring a very rich, varied and more balanced views on the question. This conviction is to be tested in the forthcoming research tasks and stages. An attempt to enlarge the research perspective will also involve an activation of comparative-contrastive interlingual and intercultural study. It might show culturally-biased differences between distinct communities of media users with different historical backgrounds.

Finally, we very much insist on the fact that marginalisation issues are explicitly or implicitly present to a large extent in the discursive productions of contemporary political speakers. We are persuaded that the awareness of the real “politically incorrect” should be raised both at the side of producers of this kind of discourse and those who receive the mediated information. Scientific research is here to build platforms for empowering citizens to improve their critical thinking skills and to exercise a pressure on the political elites, demanding a politically correct discursive practices to be recognized, adopted and respected at all moments.

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