

THE STATUS AND TERMINOLOGY OF THE HUNGARIAN LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LANGUAGE¹

Vengrų teisinės ir administracinės kalbos statusas bei terminija

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to provide an overview of the Hungarian legal and administrative language and terminology, including the language of academic publications, higher education and legislation, moreover, the article presents the outline of the planned Hungarian terminology strategy, the status and the state of the terminology of the Hungarian legal and administrative language.

The research method is a review and evaluation based on published articles and discussions within the framework of the project. We suggest that according to technical standards and terminology recommendations, terminology should be published in open terminology databases, because terminology databases are important tools for promoting national harmonization of terminology. Above all, it would be essential to link the legal and administrative terminology strategy to the general Hungarian terminology strategy. Since the language of

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science in Hungary is bilingual, Hungarian and English, we suggest preparing a terminology strategy covering both languages for law and administration faculties and universities, and to shift towards additive bilingualism.

KEYWORDS: language policy and planning, terminology strategy, Hungarian terminology strategy, legal and administrative language, clear communication.

ANOTACIJA

Šio straipsnio tikslas – apžvelgti vengrų teisinę ir administracinę kalbą bei terminologiją, išskaitant mokslinių publikacijų, aukštojo mokslo ir teisės aktų kalbą. Be to, straipsnyje pristatomi planuojamos vengrų terminologijos strategijos apmatai ir vengrų teisinės bei administracinių kalbos terminijos statusas ir būklė.

Tyrimo metodas – apžvalga ir vertinimas, grindžiami publikuotais straipsniais ir diskusijomis projekto kontekste. Remiantis techniniais standartais ir terminologinėmis rekomendacijomis, terminus siūloma skelbti atvirose terminų duomenų bazėse, nes šios bazės yra svarbus įrankis, skatinantis derinti terminą nacionaliniu mastu. Ypač svarbu susieti teisinės ir administracinių terminologijos strategiją su bendraja vengrų terminologijos strategija. Kadangi mokslo kalba Vengrijoje yra dvikalbė – vengrų ir anglų kalbos, siūloma parengti abi kalbas apimančią terminologijos strategiją teisės ir administravimo fakultetams bei universitetams ir pereiti prie papildomos dvikalbystės modelio.

ESMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: kalbos politika ir planavimas, terminologijos strategija, vengrų terminologijos strategija, teisinė ir administracinių kalba, aiški komunikacija.

INTRODUCTION

A two-year research project was conducted between 2022 and 2024 to examine and define the characteristics related to the status and corpus of legal and administrative language and terminology in Hungary (Rixer 2023). This article will first introduce terminology policy based on the relevant guidelines, as well as the background to the development of a Hungarian terminology strategy. Next, we present the purpose and methodology of the article. The section presenting the results discusses the status of Hungarian legal and administrative language, examining its use in higher education, research and legislation. In the next chapter, we will look at how plain language and better communication have been promoted, and then we will present the steps that have been taken to make legal and administrative terminology more accessible.

LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING, AND TERMINOLOGY POLICY

The term *language planning* was introduced by Haugen (1959). Later, Kloss (1969) distinguished between *status planning* and *corpus planning* as hyponyms of language planning. Status planning refers to the social and legal status of a language and its functions, whereas corpus planning is concerned with the formal changes in a language (lexis, spelling, etc.). Planning involves first of all an assessment of the communication problems that require corpus planning, the strategies to overcome these difficulties and the tasks that need to be solved at the national or international level. According to Tolcsvai Nagy (2005: 233), although the development of language planning itself came from several directions, its principles have always included both status and corpus planning. The different language planning trends have built on different historical traditions and methodologies, including the practice of traditional language cultivation (see Nekvapil 2008) and the codification

activities of the 19th century. Gazzola *et al.* point out that there are many different types of language policy and planning (LPP), and that the LPP is a process and a result at the same time. The policy cycle's stages are “(1) the emergence of a language issue, (2) agenda-setting, (3) policy formulation and adoption, (4) implementation, and (5) evaluation of what has been done, and the results obtained” (Gazzola *et al.* 2024: 4).

General language planning issues have been extended to LSP (language for special purposes) and terminology in the mother tongue. The *Guidelines for terminology policies*, by UNESCO (Infoterm 2005), separates *general language planning* from *specific language planning*. The guidelines on terminology policies affirm that language plays an important role in creating and sustaining a knowledge-based society and in bridging the digital divide. The digital divide co-occurs “with inequality of access to information and knowledge, which is in turn associated with inequality in linguistic access” (Infoterm 2005: V); and “Inadequate terminology is one key factor in the inequality of linguistic access, and it results in ‘functional illiteracy’ in the contexts of accessing information and using computers” (Infoterm 2005: V).

BACKGROUND – DEVELOPMENT OF A HUNGARIAN TERMINOLOGY STRATEGY

For decades, several international documents have highlighted the importance of terminology in multilingualism, in preserving cultural diversity and in universal access to information and knowledge. General principles for a terminology strategy were first published in international documents in the 2000s. Based on the UNESCO guidelines (Infoterm 2005), terminology policy is a set of formalized strategies for coordinating decisions and objectives, and/or the terminology of a particular social group (e.g. a particular linguistic community) or state.

“A national terminology policy is a public strategy formulated at the level of political decision making in a country or in a more or less autonomous language community <...> with the aim of developing or regulating emerging and existing terminologies for an array of purposes” (Infoterm 2005: 4).

Based on the relevant standard, terminology policy is a “set of principles and strategies used as a basis for developing and regulating terminology for a specific language(s) or domain(s)” (ISO 29383:2020).

For the development of a general Hungarian terminology strategy, as a starting point, the UNESCO guidelines (Infoterm 2005) and the ISO standard titled ISO 29383:2020 *Terminology Policies – Development and Implementation* has been used. The standard provides a general guide but, as it points out in its preface, in reality no two situations are exactly the same and each nation's or organization's terminology strategy is necessarily unique. At the national level, a terminology policy is usually in the form of a legal document or

information strategy, while in smaller organizations it is usually in the form of guidelines for workflow and the use of supporting technology, often without the word *terminology*.

Based on the UNESCO guidelines and different national practices, the preparation of a Hungarian national terminology strategy have been proposed in 2018. Representatives of scientific institutes and organizations from Hungary and abroad participated as invited speakers at the conference organized to lay the groundwork for this. Together, the conference organizers and speakers sought to cooperate and to establish a strategy and to agree on the principles that would lead to the creation of a Hungarian terminology strategy and its publication (Fóris, Bölcskei 2019b). The recommendations for the development of a Hungarian terminology strategy were formulated in this volume by the author-editors. They are:

- “Publishing a medium-term (4 to 10 years) strategic plan, a so-called ‘Green Paper’ which can open the debate, in order to prepare a document about the terminology strategy plans. Pursuant to Section 38 of Government Decree 38/2012. (III. 12.) on strategic government administration, the Green Paper *draws attention to the most important, unresolved questions of terminology as a policy area and initiates that the bodies concerned address the issues within the framework of the strategic control of the government*.
- Preparing a so-called *draft plan on terminology strategy*.
- Establishing an *advisory board on terminology strategy*.
- Based on the feedback from formulating and publishing the terminology strategy draft plan: finalizing a detailed *terminology strategy plan and programme*.
- Launching the *Hungarian National Terminology Portal*.
- Designing the *Hungarian National Terminology Database* and drawing up its cost plan, material and human resource prerequisites” (Fóris, Bölcskei 2019a: 18).

A few years after, following these recommendations, the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics² has already been the recipient of two grants in this area and has published a Green Paper (Prószéky *et al.* 2023; www.nytud.hu) containing strategic terminology studies of Hungarian terminologists. The Green Paper consists of four parts: 1. General issues of terminology strategy; 2. Specific issues of terminology strategy; 3. Standards and spelling; 4. Bibliography. In Part IV, at the end of the book, a selected bibliography on terminology strategy has been published, a collection of literature focusing on the general principles and methods of terminology strategy, organized around the following four themes: principles of terminology strategy; terminology database design; national public terminology databases and portals in Europe and major international terminology databases; publicly available language databases containing Hungarian terms –

² From 1 August 2025: ELTE Research Centre for Linguistics.

availability data, characteristics (Fóris *et al.* 2023; about the Hungarian linguistic corpora and databases, national and European projects, see the book summarizing the results achieved with the lead of Tamás Váradi (Dodé, Ludányi 2021)).

Although Gazzola *et al.* (2024: 1) locate “language policy and planning first and foremost as a responsibility of governments (at the national, regional, local, and potentially international level) and relevant bodies across all areas of public policy”, in Hungary, a comprehensive, explicit language policy prepared by the government does not exist yet. However, in our view, a public body such as the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (www.mta.hu) – in continuous cooperation with the relevant sectors, universities and terminology organizations³ – could be suitable to manage it.

The remaining recommendations, such as the establishment of a national terminology database and portal, were implemented within the framework of the Hungarian national terminology strategy, which aimed to create the Hungarian National Terminology Database and a terminology portal (Fóris 2024a; publications on this topic from the previous year have been compiled into a book: Fóris 2025).

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This article aims to provide an overview of Hungarian legal and administrative language and terminology, including that used in academic publications, higher education and legislation. This overview is based on the results of a two-year research project conducted between 2022 and 2024.

The research uses a case study methodology to provide an in-depth content analysis of the subject within its real-world context. The review and summary of results involve presenting a comprehensive overview of the data collected from multiple sources, analysing it to identify key themes and patterns, and synthesising these findings into a detailed description. The analysis is based on published articles and discussions within the project framework, as well as literature on legal and administrative language and terminology, and academic and professional websites and monographs (synthesis and analysis of previous research).

STATUS OF THE HUNGARIAN LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LANGUAGE

The Legal and Administrative Language in Higher Education

While it is widely acknowledged that law and language are intertwined (e.g., Karpen, Xanthaki 2017; Tiersma, Solan 2021; Biel, Kockaert 2023; Engberg 2023; Drinóczi *et al.* 2025), with law being implementable through language, it is noteworthy that Hungarian

³ Such as the Council of Hungarian Terminology, MaTT, www.matt.hu.

universities rarely offer courses dedicated to legal language or communication. The following section will examine several characteristics of law education.

Hungarian is the language of instruction at the eight law faculties and at the Ludovika University of Public Service in the Hungarian higher education. On the one hand, the topic of language and law started to be discussed in higher education, books about law and literature were published, courses have been introduced in Hungarian in all law faculties (Rixer 2012): for example at the Faculty of Law of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (ELTE) there has been a ‘Law and Literature’ course since 2017 and at the Faculty of Law of the Károli Gáspár University (KRE) since 2019 (see Fekete 2018). The Faculty of Law of ELTE has also been hosting a podcast titled ‘Law and Literature’ on the university radio for several years. The number of moot court competitions for students is increasing (Rixer 2024) both in Hungarian and English, and these competitions have quickly become popular among students.

On the other hand, only four of the eight Hungarian law faculties offer rhetoric or legal communication courses integrated into the curriculum. For example, ‘Legal reasoning and communication’ is a compulsory course at the Faculty of Law of the University of Miskolc; likewise, ‘Legal Reasoning and Legal Rhetoric’ is a compulsory course at the Faculty of Law of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, and ‘Legal Communication’ at the Faculty of Law of the University of Pécs. There is no specific course on linguistics or terminology in law schools, although linguistic analysis is one of the basic skills for legal work. One of the essential elements of the relationship between law and language (beyond the fact that all legal instruments are expressed in language) is that the first step in the interpretation of legislation and individual decisions is always the so-called grammatical interpretation that means analysing the words, expressions, concepts and phrases in legislation and individual decisions based on grammatical rules and semantics, and comparing them with the historical facts of the given case to be evaluated. The question arises whether, if linguistic analysis and legal terminology is such a central part of the legal profession, it is not justified to teach legal and administrative LSP or legal terminology as a separate subject at university level legal education. We do not see any examples of this in Hungary: the relevant knowledge is traditionally ‘dispersed’ between the various subjects (Introduction to law, Legal history, Legal communication, Legislative theory, and dogmatic knowledge of the various branches of law) (e.g. Drinóczi, Novák 2015). However, clear and accessible communication is considered by several authors as an ethical requirement and is incorporated into the curriculum of ethics courses in legal education (Tóth 2017; Németh 2022).

Legislative knowledge is usually taught in law faculties in Hungary as part of the basic legal courses (e.g. Introduction to Law, Constitutional Law), but this is only one of many topics in these courses, and the linguistic context is also very limited. Recognizing this, most institutions offer courses in *Legislative Studies* (*Jogalkotástan*, e.g. Faculty of Law of KRE) or *Legislative Theory* (*Törvényhozástan*, e.g. Faculty of Law of the University of

Pécs) as compulsory or optional subjects, where the linguistic issues and contexts are also more widely covered. More in-depth courses are available in the form of Postgraduate Training Programs for law degree holders (*szakjogász szakirányú továbbképzés*): the Faculty of Law of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University offers further training in *Public Service Regulation and Codification* in Hungarian (*közszolgálati szabályozási és kodifikációs szakjogász szakirányú továbbképzés*), and in 2024, the Széchenyi István University of Győr launched a *Postgraduate Training Program in Law and Governance* in English. Among the accredited Postgraduate Training Programs, there used to be a specialized *Legislative Drafting Training for Local Level* in Hungarian (*helyi jogszabály-szerkesztő szakjogász szakirányú továbbképzés*), which has not been offered for some time.

In higher education in the field of public administration (Ludovika University of Public Service, Faculty of Public Governance), legislative issues are emphasized in a compulsory core subject (*Szabályozás és kodifikáció*, in English: *Regulation and Codification*), but even within this, the language section is of minor importance.

Overall, it can be said that teaching Hungarian legal and administrative language is not a priority in the training of lawyers and public administrators in Hungary. Of course, the situation of the Hungarian legal and administrative language is also significantly influenced by the fact that, partly due to ERASMUS cooperations, Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarships, and partly due to the implicit language strategy of the government and universities, the number of courses offered in English (and less frequently in German and French) is growing at law and administration faculties; the number of English-language postgraduate training programs and the number of English-language doctoral courses have also increased significantly in the last decade. Nine Hungarian universities have doctoral schools of law, and one university has a doctoral school of public administration (www.doktori.hu), and officially Hungarian is the language of instruction in most of them, however, doctoral students are generally expected to be able to publish in English, and there is the possibility (and practice) to write theses in English and attend classes in English. (One of these Universities is the Andrassy Gyula University, where the language of instruction is German.) Therefore, in addition to Hungarian, English has also become important in academic writing and legislation. It is also becoming the language of instruction in many Hungarian universities, as English Medium Instruction (EMI).

The Legal and Administrative Language in Research and Publications

There have been significant changes in academic research recently, affecting the status and use of legal language. A decade ago, it was easy to make a list of studies and monographs written by Hungarian authors in foreign languages in certain areas of law and on certain topics (Rixer 2013). By today, publishing in English and international research collaborations have become common. Several handbooks have been published in English, one of them is about Hungarian public administration reform from 2010 under the Magyary

Zoltán Public Administration Development Program (Patyi, Rixer 2014). In the case of publications written in a foreign language, even basic terms and concepts (e.g. the use of the term *közigazgatási eljárásjogi ügyfél*, ‘party to an administrative authority procedure’) require a special explanation.

English language publications can play a major role in the more consistent use of English in the Hungarian academic sphere, and the description of the terminology and conceptual system of the Hungarian legal and administrative language in English. Rixer (2013: 7) already noted a decade ago that English has taken over the role of the former Latin, German and Russian languages in becoming a mediating language in Hungary, not only in understanding neighbouring people, but also in a wide range of sciences and academic disciplines, including law and public administration (although it is still not exclusive, of course). He also pointed out that in the case of English-language publications, terminological and conceptual consistency is often lacking; and a Hungarian and English dictionary of public law and administration would be necessary. He drew attention to the need for the development of the Hungarian administrative law doctrine, because a coherent, clear and transparent use of administrative (legal) terminology is a prerequisite for greater involvement in the international governance literature (Rixer 2013: 21–22). Contemporary discourse has highlighted the necessity of a legal terminology database, which replaces the need for a dictionary.

Today, considering the recommendations of the terminology strategy, and in line with the opinion of Drinóczi and Novák (2015), we conclude that there is a need for terminological and conceptual harmonization of the administrative law, first of all to build a terminology database and to publish the Hungarian terms, concepts and the conceptual network of administrative law with English equivalents. Terminology databases are important tools for promoting national harmonization of terminology and for the rapid and consistent publication of newly adopted terms.

Nowadays, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian universities consider publishing in English to be the most important, and among the various academic career requirements, publications and citations in English are of greater value than those in Hungarian. The question is: what impact this change will have on the use of Hungarian legal and administrative language, despite the professional advantages and international benefits that result from it? At present, it seems that at academic level, legal and administrative language use has already become bilingual: Hungarian and English, but the question is whether the language of legislature and of administration and governance has already reached Hungarian and English bilingualism?

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences has acknowledged the situation as well. Since its foundation in 1825, one of its key missions has been promoting the use of the Hungarian language. In 2023 the Academy launched a public online discussion forum about Hungarian as a language of science. The main conclusions of the discussion forum have been published on the Academy’s website: the Academy continues to consider the Hungarian language and

Hungarian LSP's as a matter of national strategic importance; supports the bilingual use of Hungarian and English in science, i.e. scientific bilingualism; prefers supporting the Hungarian language primarily in the form of digital support; and it also argues for the importance of English in sciences (MTAMN). However, some Hungarian linguists argue that the Academy actually does little to support the use of Hungarian as a scientific and academic language (Ferenc 2018; Kontra 2025). In other words, the shift towards bilingualism seems to favour subtractive bilingualism rather than additive bilingualism, while the latter would be more appropriate (see Lambert 1981; Phillipson 2003; Kontra 2025).

The Legal and Administrative Language in Legislation

The changing circumstances intensify, and even make inevitable, the enforcement of the requirement of norm clarity in the Hungarian legal and administrative language, i.e. the demand to satisfy the need for normative and specific legal acts to be as comprehensible, simple and transparent as possible.

The growing demands and expectations in this respect are perhaps linked to the fact that the lack of clarity of legal norms has become not only a source of inconvenience but also a slowing factor and a threat to modern market economies and participatory mass democracies. The real accessibility of legal texts is a (pre)condition for exercising many fundamental rights, and the accessibility of legal sources is also a constitutional mandate, but there is no consensus on how to prescribe/regulate, measure, and enforce accessibility, thereby improving access to texts.

Decree 61/2009. (XII. 14.) of the Minister of Justice and Law Enforcement on the Drafting of Legislation in Hungary states that draft legislation must be worded in accordance with the rules of the Hungarian language, in a clear, comprehensible and consistent manner (Section 2). In her research, Judit Tóth shows that the requirement of clarity is formulated as an expectation in a total of 270 sources of law in the Hungarian legal system, but its content – what this means – is completely lacking in the legal texts examined (Tóth 2023: 157). It is also important to note that the newer and newer waves of deregulation (in Hungary, on average every 4–5 years) do not usually contain explicit linguistic objectives.

There have been several unsuccessful government programs aiming at the simplification, standardization and upgrading of the Hungarian legal and administrative language in the last decade:

- The language sub-program of the Magyary Zoltán Public Administration Development Program was one of them, where they tried to simplify the language of regulations (specifically 11 Government Decrees), but they were not successful, because the internal complexity of the legal system makes it very difficult to intervene in language at an isolated point of the legal system (Nagy 2014).

- In another attempt, linguists, so-called ‘language guards’ (*nyelvőrök*), were employed in ministries [first at the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice (KIM) in 2012] to give their linguistic opinions on drafts, but this program was also quickly stopped because it slowed down the legislative process.

Moreover, since the 2010s, the Hungarian legal and administrative vocabulary has started to be “replenished” with words that had previously been removed from legal terminology. The phenomenon is not entirely new in the history of the Hungarian legal language either, as the first language innovators (dictionary editors, linguists, experts) in the 19th century often resorted to the old language, the vernacular – along with other patterns and sources – in the development of the legal terminology. This is now widely considered to be an anachronism: the mere reintroduction of certain old terms that sound strange to the Hungarian ear into the legal and administrative language – as an isolated attempt, in the absence of a general strategy – may not be suitable either for the renewal of vocabulary or for serving other indirect goals. Here are some specific examples (legal explanations are given in footnotes):

- A legal institution that has always existed is given back its old name, the name that used to designate an essentially identical (similar) institution: for example, *vármegye*⁴ instead of *megye* (‘county’), and *főispán*⁵ instead of *kormánymegbízott* (‘Government Commissioner’). In these cases, there is only a change of name, the underlying institution did not change.
- A legal institution that previously existed, then ceased to function, and is now returning to the legal system, but whose content or place in the legal system is partly different from the old legal institution of the same name: for example, *sommás eljárás*⁶ (‘summary procedure’).
- A legal institution that existed before, then ceased to function, and now re-entered the legal system with roughly the same content: e.g. *kártalanító*

⁴ See Article F) (2) of the Fundamental Law of Hungary – Amended by Article 4 of the Eleventh Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary.

⁵ The *főispán* (‘lord lieutenant’, in official English translation “Capital and County Government Commissioner”) was the King’s representative in the counties between 1526 and 1950. Between 1950 and June 28, 2022, the corresponding position was called *kormánymegbízott* (Government Commissioner). The *főispán* is now again the title of the local representative of the Government in Hungary, reintroduced by Act XXIV of 2022 on the Foundation of the Central Budget of Hungary for 2023, Chapter 58. According to the explanatory memorandum, this is necessary because “the reintroduction of the term *főispán* into the Hungarian legal system creates an opportunity for today’s Hungarian public administration to be more closely linked to the conceptual set of Hungarian state administration before communism, and thus to continue the constitutional traditions of the thousand-year-old Hungarian statehood in this form”.

⁶ Section 41 of the Act CL of 2016 on the Code of General Administrative Procedure [Summary procedure]. Previously, summary procedure was regulated by the Act XVIII of 1893 on summary procedure as a specific form of civil procedure, but currently this legal institution is not part of the civil procedure in Hungary.

*kezesség*⁷ ('suretyship for uncollectable claims'), *építményi jog*⁸ ('building right').

- Words or expressions (terms) that existed previously but were not really used by dogmatics for a long time are brought back into dogmatics, into everyday use: for example, *magánjogi hatalmasság* ('mightiness', referring to mightiness in private law⁹), *osztott perszerkezet* (referring to the fact that *civil lawsuits* can be *divided* into stages), *bírlalat* (referring to a specific form of possession).
- A term that existed previously but was not really used by dogmatics for a long time reappears both in the legal system and in dogmatics: for example, the term *szállomány*¹⁰.

However, there are signs of progress in Hungary. A visible digital transformation has started. Digital developments are already having a radical impact on the relationship between law and language in many areas. This is the case in legal translation and in software development efforts to promote clarity by providing automatic clarity suggestions to support the drafting of legislation and decisions (Kántor 2023). In Hungary, *ParLex*, the first digitized law-making system, was launched in the Parliament in 2017, followed by the *Integrated Legislative System (Integrált Jogalkotási Rendszer, IJR)* in 2021, which electronically streamlined the legislative process from the preparation of legislation to its promulgation, and extended it to the entire decree-making process.

A significant amount of recent research and professional dialogues have focused on exploring further uses of ChatGPT and other large language models (LLM) in relation to specific legal professions (Vadász, Görög 2022). All these changes inevitably make legal and administrative language and its outcomes, and all the dimensions of the technological transformation of law, one of the most frequently discussed topics in communication studies and linguistics research (Török, Zódi 2021; Németh 2023).

⁷ 6:421. § of the Act V of 2013 on the Civil Code.

⁸ 5:159/A. – F. § of the Act V of 2013 on the Civil Code. Effective from June 24, 2023, the Hungarian Civil Code has been amended, introducing a new legal institution known as *building right* (in Hungarian *építményi jog*). The concept of building right is not unfamiliar in the Hungarian legal system, as it was previously regulated in several Hungarian laws in the early 20th century. However, the first Hungarian Civil Code of 1959 no longer regulated building right.

⁹ *Hatalmasság* (EN 'mightiness') refers to the right to create, modify, or abolish rights, i.e. the right to unilaterally alter a legal relationship - also called a formative right. The term was introduced by the legal scholar Gusztáv Szászy-Schwarz in 1912.

¹⁰ A word coined in 1836 to refer to the transfer of ownership. See Szily (1902: 294). It was part of the legal system, but for a long time no new legislation used it, and it only reappeared in Act XIX of 2024 amending certain agricultural laws [28/A. § (2) and § 28/B. § (1)].

DEVELOPING A TERMINOLOGY STRATEGY OF THE HUNGARIAN LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LANGUAGE

Plain Language, Comprehensible Communication

According to both Drinóczi (2010, 2015) and Xanthaki (2011), comprehensibility is an important factor and accessibility of legislation is part of its quality. In order to achieve clear, comprehensible communication, it is necessary to guarantee the comprehensibility of legal and other documents, which is both an ethical, communicative, and financial issue (Tóth 2017; 2022; 2023; Németh 2022). Clear communication is accessible communication, and therefore the comprehensibility of documentation (legislation, technical documents, patient information leaflets, etc.) is the basis for effective official communication.

The comprehensibility of texts depends not only on the terms used in them, i.e. not only at the lexical level, but also at other linguistic levels, such as sentence and text level (e.g. structure), and context must be taken into account when considering the criteria for the *comprehensibility* of texts. In fact, studies on *clarity* mainly provide findings and guidelines on the structuring of texts, sentence length, complexity and structure, word order, impersonal structures and spelling; much less often suggestions for the replacement of terms, about which we find more stylistic guidelines, such as avoiding synonyms. Style guides on clarity should take into consideration the target audience (e.g. legal or lay) of the legislation and the text type of the document.

The *Plain Language Movement* in the USA (see Adler 2012; Biel 2023; PLM), born and strengthened as a result of social pressure and the growing importance of consumer protection, began as a citizens' initiative and was later taken up by the government and public administration and implemented in legislation. The European Commission's *Clear writing for Europe* campaign in 2010 was born with the aim of promoting clarity, in line with the ambition to bring EU citizens closer to legislation and to ensure that legislation is written in a language that the average citizen can understand. Here are some of their rules that apply to the use of words:

- “Use simple words and phrases. When you’re making word choices, pick the familiar or commonly used word over the unusual or obscure. There are many lists of complex words and suggested substitutes <...>” (PLM).
- Use the same terms consistently.

In practice, there are two ways (or a combination of them) to ensure that terminology is understandable. One is to replace LSP terms that are more difficult or unfamiliar to the recipient with more familiar (possibly colloquial) terms in the texts – this is known as intralingual translation based on register change from legal terminology to laymen language (Dobos 2023). The other solution, as set out in the technical standards (e.g. IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2019) and terminology recommendations, is to make technical texts easier to understand, both for lawyers and other professionals and for the lay reader, by

publishing in a database the definition of the terms and their place in the conceptual system. The creation of terminology databases is a key element in the implementation of the latter recommendation (Fóris 2023).

Legal and Administrative Terminology and Strategy

In addition to discussing the general issues of terminology strategy in Hungary, it is often mentioned that the establishment of a terminology strategy for different specialized languages (LSP's) and/or domains (subject areas) may be necessary and useful. One of the most significant is the field of legal terminology, legal documentation, which concerns not only professionals working in various fields of law, but also lay people whose everyday lives and work are governed by legal documents and other official documents. In particular, it may be important to develop a strategy for legal and administrative terminology in the fields of governance, to present strategies already in use in certain areas of law, and to publish information and good practice.

Of the three branches of government – legislative, judicial and executive (public administration) – all three are included in governance, and public administration includes local government and state administration. In the legal and administrative area, an increasing proportion of work is being done on digital platforms, where communication is not just one-way but two-way, and citizens can in many cases use e-government (Majzikné Bausz 2008). Work has been ongoing for almost two decades, including the development, operation and enhancement of e-government interfaces; the online delivery of government information and services via the internet or other digital media. Terminology plays a key role in this work.

In the legal field, the word *terminology strategy* is rarely mentioned in official documents. Linguistic terminology issues are most often addressed in publications in relation to issues of *accessibility*, *clear language*, *plain language* and *barrier-free legal communication* and are linked to *efficiency* and *ethical issues*. In the legal field, the issue of accessibility is most relevant in the drafting and translation of legislation, while in the administrative field it is mainly relevant in the communication with citizens, mostly lay people, and in the drafting of official documents (see Fóris 2024b).

What we can say for sure is that there is a need to collect terminological data, to process them from a terminological (linguistic and professional) point of view, and to publish them in multilingual terminology databases (in Hungarian and English, and/or other foreign languages). The creation of new terms is only necessary if we find a gap or ambiguity in the existing system. What is really needed, especially in the field of legal terminology, is terminology harmonization. (Public) terminology databases are an important tool for terminology harmonization. The recording and traceability of terminology data facilitates the harmonization of terminology and, where necessary, the renewal and standardization of terminology. One notable example of this is the EU administration's terminological work and the publication of terminology data in a database (IATE; Lesznyák

2010; Lánkos 2014). Other examples include the national terminology databases in some countries (e.g. the Lithuanian database [LRTB], see Umbrasas 2023).

Behind the system of legal and administrative terminology there is a complex network of institutional systems (see Peruzzo 2023). Among these, we will highlight a few that are crucial for legal terminology: university law faculties/schools, the Ministry of Justice, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The translation of legal and administrative documents spans over both the translation of foreign language documents into Hungarian and the translation of Hungarian documents into foreign languages. Several institutional (state-funded) actors are involved in this work¹¹ under the surveillance of the Ministry of Justice, and the translation service of the European Union (European Commission, Directorate-General for Translation, Hungarian Translation Unit; IATE database).

Since Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004, the Hungarian terminology has been added to the IATE database. In 2017, the Ministry of Justice launched a comprehensive program for translating Hungarian legislation into English. The English translations of Hungarian legislation have been published in a national repository and the terms generated during the translation are recorded in the *Termin* database (<https://termin.im.gov.hu/>). A guide to the translation of legislation was also published, it contains general guidelines on form, methodology, spelling, punctuation, and layout (Gáspár, Somssich 2019). Terminology is developed, stored and managed by various institutions, and their relationship to each other determines the possibilities and tasks of terminology management (for details, see also Fóris 2024b).

An overview of the situation, the relevant literature on legal and administrative language and terminology, and discussions and evaluations with stakeholders helped the research group to understand the situation and formulate recommendations for a legal and administrative terminology strategy. It is clear that the databases created by the Ministry of Justice have been instrumental in the publication and harmonisation of Hungarian and English terminology. However, it is also evident that further work is required, including encouraging law faculties striving for internationalisation in higher education to develop their own legal terminology databases.

CONCLUSION

In this article we provided a general overview of the Hungarian legal and administrative language and terminology, including the language of academic publications, higher education and legislation.

Three closely interlinked key concepts emerged from the research: the importance of developing a common national and sector-specific terminology policy; the requirement of comprehensibility in legal and administrative documents; and the presence of Hungarian

¹¹ Such as the Hungarian Gazette Publishing and Legal Translation Centre Ltd. (MKIFK), legal successor to OFFI Zrt. since 2024.

and English bilingualism in legal and administrative academic language. In the legal field, the term *terminology policy* is rarely used in official documents. However, issues related to linguistic terminology are frequently addressed in publications concerning *accessibility*, *clear language*, *plain language* and *barrier-free legal communication* (e.g. Biel, Kockaert 2023), and are associated with concerns about efficiency and ethics. In the legal field, accessibility is most relevant when drafting and translating legislation, whereas in the administrative field, it is primarily relevant when communicating with citizens (mostly lay people) and when drafting official documents.

We have demonstrated that the language of publications and higher education has already become bilingual (Hungarian and English), and that it is crucial for some legislative documents to be translated into English. This article suggests that law and administration faculties should prepare terminology strategy documents. This would not only include arguments for increasing the number of English-language courses but could also raise linguistic awareness across all courses. Such documents would draw attention to the importance of maintaining and developing Hungarian terminology, as well as its role as a research subject. We firmly believe that the shift towards bilingualism should prioritise additive bilingualism over subtractive bilingualism.

Clearly, there is a need for national-level discourse and collaboration on this subject. Although legal terminology differs greatly from country to country, the global influences (the impact of English, digitisation, LLMs, etc.) present very similar challenges, and the responses in different nations may be partly common.

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