

Informational Messages in Lithuanian and Ukrainian: a Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Analysis

Ramunė Kasperė | ORCID: 0000-0003-0782-3758

Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University
of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania

Corresponding author

ramune.kaspere@ktu.lt

Svitlana Matvieieva | ORCID: 0000-0002-8357-9366

Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University
of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania

svitlana.matvieieva@ktu.lt

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Abstract

The paper deals with the linguistic peculiarities of informational messages in the form of public signs. The aim of this study is to analyze and compare the structural and semantic content of the informational messages for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic representation. It draws upon the principles of the pragmatic-discourse analytic approach. A comparable corpus of randomly selected signs and posters referring to the information on COVID-19-related behaviour expectations from citizens while visiting public places in the form of photos was collected in Lithuanian and Ukrainian contexts in 2021–2022. A qualitative data analysis was conducted with the focus on spotlighting and comparing the syntactic/structural, grammatical, and lexico-semantic means of textual organization of such messages in two languages and cultures. Our research corroborates the findings of recent studies with Estonian, Finnish, French, Ukrainian, and other languages, but also shows that some differences are language dependent.

Keywords

informational messages – public signs – pandemic – Lithuanian – Ukrainian

1 Introduction

The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the proliferation of public signs which bear resemblances with respect to their setting, participants, commonality of form, key, register, and norms and regulations, albeit they may belong to different genres and be subject to prevailing social and cultural practices of territories, countries or cities (Mitits, 2021). One of the most important features of informational messages in the form of public signs, posters, notes and advertisements (this work does not aim to distinguish between message genres, so we group them all under the term ‘informational messages’) is persuasion as they are usually targeted at promoting behavioural changes among the residents of a country (Abdul-Ameer and Al-Sieedy, 2021). The official signs and messages, through a process of discursive convergence, perform the role of conveying messages and discourses of social distancing, public pedagogy, and community care (Marshall, 2021). Successful information transfer via public signs and posters is essential in critical situations, such as a natural disaster, as it helps people stay safe. The COVID-19 pandemic period has drawn attention of public institutions to the urgency of effective language use. In this context, our research contributes to the growing body of literature on the linguistic landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, building on previous comparative studies of signage in various languages and cultures (e.g., Ferencík and Bariova, 2023; Isosävi, 2023; Ogiermann and Bella, 2021; Panagiotatou, 2022; Tragel and Pikksaar, 2023). Public signs, originating from public bodies focusing on public health and regulating movement of people, have been seen to undertake an unprecedented and abrupt appearance during the COVID-19 period (Panagiotatou, 2022). As the pandemic struck, the first messages regarding prohibitions and restrictions on visiting public places and the use of protective masks were drafted, designed and published in no time. Previous research has shown that such texts generally tended to be similar to advertising texts (Matvieieva and Kasperė, 2022). Thus, the language of the pandemic discourse, including prohibition and directives, among other things, requires appropriate verbal implementation in order to achieve the inherent goal – to influence the user and encourage a behavioural change. Cross-linguistic and

cross-cultural studies (referring to a “comparative study of the use of language by human beings in different languages and cultures”, as defined by House and Kádár (2021: 1)) of informational messages disseminated through public signs and posters may help identify the linguocultural specificity of the verbal representation of the category of prohibition and outline the most appropriate language units and forms to make an effective informational impact on the recipients of such messages.

Building on this observation, we acknowledge that persuasion is not a single speech act, but a complex communicative goal achieved through the strategic deployment of various illocutionary acts. Our analysis, therefore, does not treat persuasion as a distinct category. Instead, it focuses on the specific linguistic tools and pragmatic strategies – such as the use of directives, expressives, and argumentation – that contribute to the overall persuasive effect of the messages. This approach allows for a granular examination of how different linguistic and cultural contexts shape the way public messages are designed to influence behaviour.

Thus, this study aims to: (i) identify and compare the syntactic, grammatical, and lexico-semantic strategies used in COVID-19-related public informational messages in Lithuanian and Ukrainian; (ii) examine how these strategies reflect broader cultural, institutional, and pragmatic norms; and (iii) operationalize key pragmatic concepts – such as impersonal constructions, mitigated imperatives, and expressives – to ensure transparency and replicability in analysis.

A question arises as to how informational messages in public signs and posters related to COVID-19 differ structurally and semantically across Lithuanian and Ukrainian languages and cultures, and what linguistic and discursive strategies are used to convey persuasive or prohibitive content effectively in these contexts. The study focuses on comparing the linguistic strategies of both directive persuasion (e.g., encouraging mask-wearing, maintaining distance, etc.) and expressions of prohibition (discouraging some actions) within public messages in Lithuanian and Ukrainian. To address the question raised, a qualitative data analysis was conducted to compare the syntactic and structural features, grammatical and lexico-semantic choices, cultural and pragmatic aspects of communication (e.g., politeness, authority, urgency), similarities and differences in how public behaviour expectations are framed and communicated across the two languages and cultures – Lithuanian and Ukrainian, taken into account that a particular genre may be “interpreted in cross-culturally different ways because its pragmatic features are conventionalised differently across linguacultures” (House and Kádár, 2021: 37).

2 Theoretical Background

The dynamics of Lithuanian-Ukrainian relations in recent years in the cultural, scientific and educational spheres results in the mutual influence of the Lithuanian and Ukrainian languages in the formation of the linguistic/communicative consciousness of their speakers (Grytsenko, 2020). Lithuanian-Ukrainian typological analogies are of a systematic nature, being a consequence of the construction of common cultural experiences using identical semantic models (Popova et al., 2024). Close textual analogies are based on common semantic-semiotic models generated by common cultural experiences of the two ethnic groups in the process of contacts (*ibid*).

Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspectives towards the language of prohibition in Lithuanian and Ukrainian require deeper research in terms of the structure, semantics, vocabulary, graphic organization and other features of such messages. Comparison of various such messages across countries and languages allow exploring potential strategies for effective communication through public signs (Tragel and Pikksaar, 2023). Thus, such studies are needed to identify strategic approaches that aim to attract the residents' attention and influence their behavioural patterns and/or enhance good habits.

Language facilitates behaviour change during public health emergencies. The linguistic nature of public messages and signs communicating the COVID-19 information (Bagna and Bellinzona, 2023; Hua, 2021; Nakamura, 2022; Lacsina and Yeh, 2022; Panagiotatou, 2022; Kalocsányiová et al., 2023) reflects the intersection of communicative clarity, cultural norms, and institutional authority. This, among other things, creates the need to employ various speech strategies and types of speech acts. In our research, we use Searle's taxonomy of speech acts (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives) to systematically analyze how language functions within our corpus (Schueler and Marx, 2023). Directives are of particular relevance in public health signage, as they impose obligations or prohibitions; expressives convey affective or relational meanings; and perspective-taking, realized through grammatical person or impersonal constructions, affects the social distance between the addresser and the addressee.

For clarity and replicability, we operationalize the key pragmatic categories in this study as follows:

- An impersonal construction – any clause lacking an explicit grammatical subject referring to the addressee, thereby shifting the focus from the agent to the action itself;
- An imperative mitigated by *please* or first person plural – a directive softened by the politeness marker *please* or reformulated as a first person plural imperative, framing compliance as a collective act;

- An expressive – any utterance whose primary purpose is evaluative or affective.

Thus, argumentation is a powerful persuasive strategy in the health domain, and it is pragmatically structured through the pragmatic components of speech acts, Grice's principles of cooperative communication, persuasive appeals, and argumentation schemes (Abdul-Ameer and Al-Sieedy, 2021). Besides, directive advice through the strategy of imperative is used frequently in COVID-19 discourse (Raheem and Nehal, 2021).

Although the pandemic has been at least seemingly defeated, certain countries have continued with publishing messages of various COVID-19-related content as public signs and posters. It is thereupon relevant to look at the verbalization and linguistic expressions of messages directed at effective behaviour changing. Crisis situations help acknowledge the role of language in crisis communication, particularly "the importance of language to changing public behaviours" (Vincent et al., 2023).

In crisis communication, it is important that the messages across different platforms and sources be consistent. This ensures credibility of the message and enhances their likelihood of its acceptance (Ahmad and Hillman, 2021). In public notices, the linguistic choices, such as speech functions and modality, reflect and construct institutional hierarchies, and their translation amplifies institutional authority by strengthening commands, obligations, and subjective orientation in target texts (Zhang and Pan, 2015). Analysis of directive expressions allows us to explore specific verbal strategies used in public signs. Imperatives are the most frequent type of directives, suggesting that businesses take a direct approach to instructing their customers (Wei, 2023).

In Ukrainian, prohibitory announcements are predominantly brief and simple but also structured around a diverse arsenal of linguistic (lexical, syntactic, stylistic, etc.) and non-linguistic (graphic, iconic, etc.) means (Matvieieva and Kasperé, 2022). The complete meaning of the pandemic regulatory signage emerges from the interplay of multiple modes. The integration of symbolic (language), iconic (pictograms), and indexical (emplacement) elements within sign aggregates points to transmodal semiosis. Besides, the observed processes of transmodalization are achieved through a gradual reduction of linguistic resources in favour of iconic resources which accompany linguistic texts as equal parts of inscriptions or even replace them altogether. The result of iconization and acronymization is the multimodal character of pandemic regulatory discourse (Ferenčík and Bariova, 2023).

The present study is positioned within the field of linguistic landscape research, which examines how language is used in public spaces. This field considers not only the linguistic features of signs and posters but also their visual and spatial aspects, treating them as complex semiotic artifacts. Within

this framework, our analysis of COVID-19 signage falls under the genre of public health communication, a sub-category of informational and regulatory discourse.

Our analysis also draws on terminology from Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics, which conceptualizes public semiotic spaces through three key systems: interaction order, visual semiotics, and place semiotics. This framework allows us to distinguish between different types of public spaces, such as passage spaces – transit zones like entrances, corridors, or station platforms – and to classify the discourses displayed there, including regulatory discourse aimed at prescribing or prohibiting behaviours. Applying this perspective to our corpus clarifies how the spatial placement of COVID-19 public signage interacts with its linguistic form: for example, signs in passage spaces often employ shorter, more directive wording to match the limited viewing time, while signs in waiting areas may allow for more elaborate explanations. Recognizing the spatial and discursive type, thus, strengthens our interpretation of the pragmatic choices observed in Lithuanian and Ukrainian contexts.

3 Literature Review

Research on public signage during crises has examined the interplay between the linguistic form, social norms, and institutional traditions. This body of work demonstrates that pragmatic choices in grammatical person, mitigation, modality, and multimodality are shaped by cultural expectations and institutional traditions, influencing how messages are received and acted upon.

The entitlement to a claim can be asserted using strong deontic modality. This includes direct commands (imperatives), high-grade modal auxiliaries such as *must*, and nominalizations that express an absolute prohibition, like *no smoking*. The deontic stance is often further intensified by adding phrases like *under no circumstances* (Svennevig, 2021).

German demonstrates four multimodality-centered patterns of verbal realization of the required actions (requirement, polite request, command, and indirect speech act), so “the formulation of directive acts on different space-time scales – first regarding access to indoor spaces, later regarding outdoor movement – is accomplished by different semiotic selections and arrangements, which contextualize the directive's participation framework and scope of validity” (Androutsopoulos, 2022: 144). Swedish COVID-19 keep-your-distance warnings belong to a non-standardized and emerging genre that is marked by great variation and ad-hoc design solutions, several of which

combine physical blocking functions with verbally based messages (Ekwall et al., 2021).

Speaking about interpersonal strategies, communicating empathy promotes cooperation, which is best achieved when the first (I-language) and the second person (you-language) are used within the same message together (Tragel and Pikksaar, 2023). The grammatical category of person in Estonian and German signage differs in the use of person because of “the differences in linguistic means and cultural contexts” (Tragel and Komissarov, 2023). Such public messages shape, among other things, cultural and national differences. And therefore, the linguistic choices are often country specific.

Chinese COVID-19-related public signs emphasizing cultural and social factors from national perspectives reflect the specifics of local cultural and social context activating the level of pragmatics (Jia and Zhao, 2023). Finnish and French signs of the first wave of the pandemic show some cross-cultural differences, namely that the impersonal perspective is prevalent in French signs, while a hearer perspective is more common in Finnish signs (Isosävi, 2023). Estonian COVID-19 signs invoke governmental justification more than twice as often as Chinese signs (41% vs. 14%). This shows the culturally divergent approaches to legitimizing public directives (Tragel, 2023).

Greek and English public signage have culture-specific differences in expressive speech acts such as greetings, apologies, thanks and wishes. The expressive speech acts in the corpus of British public signs are predominant compared with the Greek corpus (Ogiermann and Bella, 2021). In Greece, health officials emphasize the need for individual responsibility and for compliance with the legislation. In the UK, on the other hand, particular emphasis is placed on the need to protect the National Health System and prevent its collapse, as well as the need to work in unison against the spread of the virus (Bella and Ogiermann, 2022). While businesses in both countries supported the implementation of containment measures, Greek signs replicated governmental messages more closely (Ogiermann and Bella, 2023). However, the pragmatic choices of UK sign authors ((in)directness and (in)formality of directives used on the signs, conveyance of emotions, and the extent to which future encounters and transactions with the customers are thematized) reflect the relationship marketing approach to a far greater extent than those of their Greek counterparts (Bella and Ogiermann, 2024).

In Britain and Saudi Arabia, taking a look at effective communication strategies and cross-linguistic and cross-cultural aspects of the signs in crisis situations, the social media discourse of officials promotes healthy behaviour and compliance with health regulations. The persuasive rhetorical tactics in

both countries are inherent; the officials of both countries employ directive speech, rhetorical questions and assertions. However, among some differences, empathy in Britain and health literacy in Saudi Arabia can be named as the main communication strategies (Alhedayani and Alkhamash, 2023).

Studies focusing on mono- and cross-linguistic analyses reviewed here document a variety of linguistic features in depth. Our qualitative study is focused on a range of text peculiarities present in two datasets in order to reveal the various techniques of communicating information for behavioural pattern change in different languages and cultural contexts, aligning with and expanding upon existing research into COVID-19-related public communication in Arabic, Chinese, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German and Greek contexts (as noted), addressing how persuasive/prohibitive strategies vary linguistically and culturally. So, by examining a diverse range of studies on public signage from the named countries, this research aligns itself with and builds upon existing work that highlights the interplay between linguistic form, social norms, and institutional traditions. We deepen the detailed account of how pragmatic choices – in areas like grammatical person, mitigation, modality, and multimodality – are influenced by cultural expectations. This foundation is crucial as it allows our study not only to contribute to the broader body of knowledge on crisis communication but also to uniquely address the under-researched contexts of Lithuania and Ukraine, revealing how their specific persuasive and prohibitive strategies reflect distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics.

The study contributes to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research on persuasive and prohibitive public discourse, particularly: pragmatics and discourse studies of public informational texts, focusing on intentionality, addresser-addressee dynamics, and contextual meaning; applied linguistics and communication ethics, through the study's emphasis on responsible use of persuasive tools in sensitive topics, thus bridging language analysis with public policy implications; comparative sociolinguistics, especially in the domain of public health communication; corpus-based multimodal studies of signage and posters as semiotic artifacts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4 Data and Methodology

House and Kádár state that “cross-cultural pragmatics have generally agreed on the necessity of studying comparable corpora” (House and Kádár, 2021: 43). In 2021–2022, we collected a comparable corpus of 70 randomly chosen public signs and posters, 35 per two languages under analysis: Lithuanian

and Ukrainian. Based on the analysis procedures employed and the results achieved, we consider this number sufficient to study and demonstrate the trends.

We used public signs representing a form of naturally occurring data, which is a key component of a data-based approach to cross-cultural pragmatics. The signs and posters were photographed in various public spaces, including shopping malls, cafes, hospitals and train stations. After collection, the material was digitized for analysis.

The selection of diverse public spaces is crucial for the comparability of the datasets. While each space has a distinct purpose, they all function as highly frequented “microcosms” of public life. They are common venues where a wide range of individuals gather, and where official and commercial entities need to communicate critical information efficiently.

When selecting COVID-19 posters for analysis, the following factors were considered:

- availability and dissemination – this refers to the presence of posters in public sources (e.g., entrances and front doors of public institutions and organizations like hospitals, shops; public transport);
- theme and content – we focused on posters covering key aspects of the pandemic, such as prevention, symptoms, treatment, vaccination, behavioural guidelines, social distancing, hand hygiene, and so on;
- visual component – the quality of the texts, images, clarity of fonts, etc., which impacts information perception;
- diversity of formats and styles – the aim was to select posters demonstrating various approaches to visualizing and communicating information (e.g., informative, motivational, warning);
- target audience – posters were aimed at the general public, not specialists;
- time period – we selected posters created during the pandemic.

Since the period of data collection was mid-to-end of the pandemic, it was observed that the content communicated might have been at some point already selected from governmental sources; yet some signs and posters were clearly created by companies themselves.

The following steps were used for the analysis:

- 1) a compilation of a comparable corpus (two subcorpora) of texts: Lithuanian (35 texts) and Ukrainian (35 texts);
- 2) a continuous sampling, which allowed us to select the units for analysis and compile a register of constructions and words: Lithuanian (1513 words) and Ukrainian (839 words). This data forms the basis for the quantitative calculations in this work;
- 3) dictionary analysis of Lithuanian and Ukrainian units;

- 4) contextual (distributional, concordance) analysis of language units (words, sentences, phrases);
- 5) corpus verification and quantitative calculation of the results.

In general, we used qualitative analysis, supported by quantitative observations. All posters were thoroughly analyzed to ensure the completeness of content interpretation and the self-sufficiency of each text. This means that each message was treated as an autonomous unit that does not require additional context for understanding. Such an approach made it possible to preserve the integrity of the communicative intent and ensure the reliability of subsequent linguistic analysis. Via qualitative analysis, the textual data within the photos were analyzed for linguistic features. Although the corpus contained multilingual (2 of 35 in samples collected in Lithuania, and 13 of 35 in samples collected in Ukraine) and multimodal signs (27 of 35 Lithuanian and 27 of 35 Ukrainian), no attempt to conduct semiotic or multimodal analyses of these signs and posters was made. We focused only on linguistic features of textual data. In this study, we do not report analysis results of graphic measures (fonts, bullets, etc.) observed or punctuation marks (dashes, colons, etc.), except for the question mark to indicate an interrogatory type of sentence and an exclamation mark to indicate an exclamatory type of sentence. The analysis of the extralinguistic mode and codes (colours, logos, etc.) is also excluded from this report.

Following an example of Tragel and Pikksaar (2023), who analyzed Estonian signs communicating COVID-19 and classified their collected corpus into 4 main categories of grammatical person, we tagged the collected data for the main categories of the grammatical person and number: (i) 1st person singular; (ii) 1st person plural; (iii) 2nd person singular, (iv) 2nd person plural, (v) 3rd person singular, and (vi) 3rd person plural. Where text in a sign or a poster manifested more than one grammatical person and/or number, we tagged such a message for all manifestations of the two categories. In the analysis of the texts, the following linguistic units and categories will be examined: sentence type (declarative, exclamatory, imperative, and interrogatory, either affirmative or negative); and lexico-semantic: the most salient lexical items, terminological units and abbreviations, implicit/explicit addressee and/or addresser, absence or presence of the closing of the message in the form of appreciation. All observations and conclusions are based on objective indicators obtained through a quantitative calculation procedure.

In interpreting the use of the grammatical person in our data, we also draw on Goffman's (1981) participation framework, which distinguishes between the animator (the one physically producing the utterance), the author (the one who selects and organizes the wording), and the principal (the entity whose

stance is expressed). This perspective offers a valuable lens for understanding how public health signage constructs participant roles and relationships. For instance, the use of first person plural in Lithuanian (lith. “Saugokime vieni kitus” – en. *Let’s protect each other / let’s keep each other safe*) positions the issuing body both as an author and as a co-participating principal, sharing responsibility with the addressee. Conversely, Ukrainian impersonal constructions (uk. “Вхід без маски заборонено” – en. *Entry without a mask is prohibited*) dissociate the animator from the principal, foregrounding an abstract institutional principal as the ultimate authority. This framework thus enriches our pragmatic interpretation of pronominal choices by linking them to the negotiation of social distance, authority, and solidarity across the two linguacultures.

5 Analysis and Results

The results of the structural, lexico-semantic and pragmatic analyses are presented in this section. Following House and Kádár, “no cross-cultural pragmatic unit of analysis should be envisaged as a pragmatic layer strictly separable from the other units” (House & Kádár, 2021: 9).

The structural and lexico-semantic analysis serves as the empirical foundation for our more in-depth pragmatic investigation. It systematically compares the syntactic features, sentence types, and vocabulary in both the Lithuanian and Ukrainian corpora. This initial structural examination provides the necessary empirical data – such as the prevalence of declarative sentences or the use of impersonal constructions – that underpins our subsequent interpretations.

The pragmatic analysis is where our main argument is advanced. Building on the structural findings, it focuses on the functional and cultural implications of the linguistic choices. For example, we analyze how the structural difference in using impersonal constructions versus first person plural forms is directly linked to differing pragmatic goals, namely the expression of institutional authority versus collective solidarity. By maintaining a clear distinction between these two vectors, we explicitly show that our structural analysis supports the more nuanced pragmatic interpretations.

5.1 Macro-Composition and Quantitative Corpus Overview

Here we introduce the linguistic features observed and analyzed with some examples of the most noteworthy uses given for illustration purposes in both languages: Lithuanian and Ukrainian. The total number of words analyzed was 1513 in the Lithuanian corpus and 839 in the Ukrainian corpus. At the

same time, an equal number of texts was analyzed, regardless of the number of tokens.

The main principles of the informational messages – laconic presentation, informativeness, and a clear composition (Zahnitko, 2012: 63) – are primarily driven by the need for dynamic, concise presentation of information, and implemented, first of all, in the quantitative and qualitative composition of messages. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, laconic means “using or involving the use of a minimum of words” (MW, n.d.). In this case, we can talk about the Grice’s cooperative maxim of quantity, which concerned the amount of the information given: the information conveyed should be no more no less than is required (Abdul-Ameer and Al-Sieedy, 2021).

Thus, the Lithuanian corpus contained 6 texts consisting of 1 sentence, 8 texts of 2 sentences, and 21 texts of 3 and more sentences. The Ukrainian texts were divided as follows: consisting of 1 sentence – 9 texts, 2 sentences – 6 texts, 3 and more sentences – 20 texts. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the quantitative sentence composition percentage ratio in both languages.

Regarding the verbal structure, the messages were divided in the following way: messages of 2–10 words – 7 in Lithuanian, 13 in Ukrainian; 11–20 words – 3 in Lithuanian, 5 in Ukrainian; 21–30 words – 6 in Lithuanian, 4 in Ukrainian; 31 and more words – 19 in Lithuanian and 13 texts in Ukrainian. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the quantitative word composition percentage ratio in both languages.

The analysis demonstrates that laconic texts containing the fewest words possible constitute 20% of the Lithuanian and 37% of the Ukrainian dataset. These proportions suggest that a considerable number of messages in both corpora are relatively extensive. This tendency may be interpreted in light of Grice’s Cooperative Principle, according to which communicative contributions should be as informative as required. In the context of a novel pandemic, where public understanding of the situation and recommended actions was still forming, additional information and clarification may have been considered necessary to ensure that the messages were adequately understood by their recipients.

One of the challenges in creating such messages is to ensure that they are designed for rapid comprehension, as the communicative context in which they are encountered – often upon entering a space – typically allows only for quick scanning rather than careful, reflective reading. This aligns with Grice’s Maxim of Manner, which encourages clarity and brevity in situations where processing time is limited. In this situation, the structure of sentences is important. In Lithuanian, the texts were composed of both simple ($n = 96$) and complex ($n = 46$) sentences. In Ukrainian, there were only 6 complex sentences, while the rest of the sentences were of a simple structure. The prevailing simple

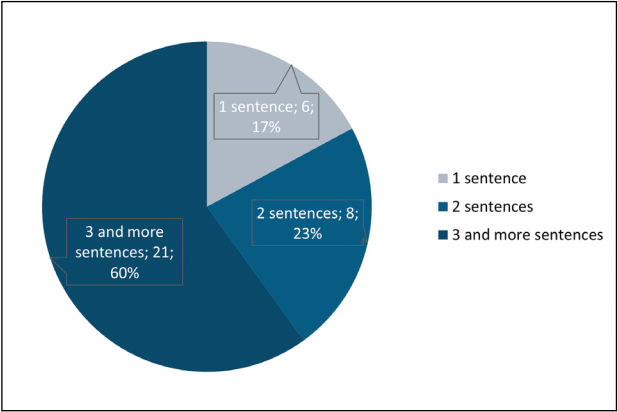


FIGURE 1 Text composition in the Lithuanian sample

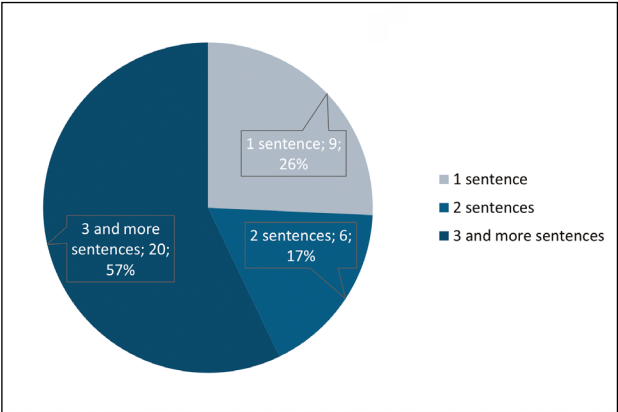


FIGURE 2 Text composition in the Ukrainian sample

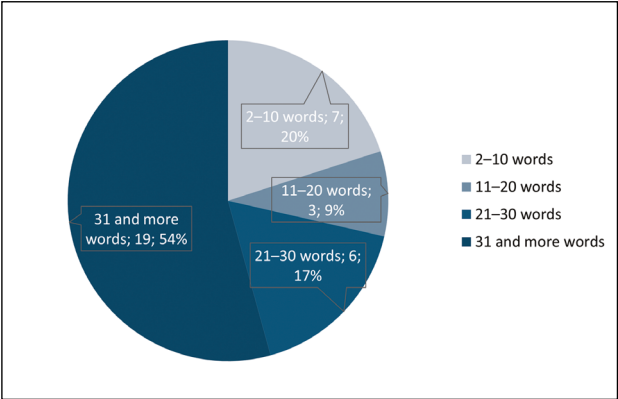


FIGURE 3 Number of words in Lithuanian sentences

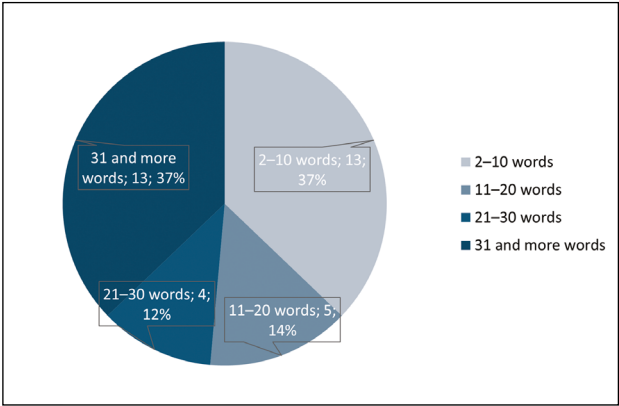


FIGURE 4 Number of words in Ukrainian sentences

sentences over complex constructions help to get the message across faster and better. Hawkins (2004) proves that there is a profound correspondence between performance data and the fixed conventions of grammars – structures containing the fewest words required for the listener/reader to parse the structure into constituents result in a more efficient processing.

5.2 Syntactic Structure and Modality

Concerning syntactic/structural features, sentence types are profoundly relevant categories for a discussion of prohibitive language because they directly influence how a prohibition is conveyed, perceived, and enforced. Different sentence structures carry different levels of directness, formality, politeness, and implied consequences, all of which are crucial in the context of forbidding an action.

The vast majority of the sentences within the Lithuanian corpus were declarative, 3 were interrogatory, 9 were exclamatory (all affirmative, of which 3 had multiple exclamation marks) and 29 were imperative (22 affirmative and 7 negative). Declarative sentences also prevailed among Ukrainian sentences. We recorded 3 interrogative, 32 exclamatory (all affirmative, of which 3 with 3 exclamation marks) and 60 imperative (57 affirmative, 2 negative, 1 affirmative + negative structures) sentences. A specific form in both languages is the verbalization of the imperative through the first person plural verb, which adds an expressive motivational connotation to the statement:

- uk. “Одягаємо маску!” (en. *Let’s put on a mask!*),
- uk. “Піклуємось разом!” (en. *Let’s take care together!*),

lith. “Saugokime vieni kitus” (en. *Let’s protect each other / let’s keep each other safe*),

lith. “Būkime supratingi, saugokime save ir kitus” (en. *Let’s be understanding, let’s protect ourselves and others*).

Questions and exclamations were rare in both datasets; however, taking into consideration the general principles of efficient communication (Istrate et al., 2023), a greater variety of sentence types including interrogative and exclamatory sentences could make more impact on the reader.

Lithuanian imperatives were structurally mitigated – either by plural forms or polite expressions – which pragmatically align with a cooperative and polite engagement model. Ukrainian’s direct imperatives and emotionally charged exclamatives structurally heighten salience and, pragmatically, convey urgency and enforce compliance.

The addresser’s need to influence the addressee is often represented by the use of linguistic units denoting (i) possibility, (ii) obligation, (iii) permission, (iv) prohibition, e.g.,

(i) lith. “Jei turite galimybę, prašome atsiskaityti kortele” (en. *If you have a possibility, please pay by card*),

uk. “Ви можете скористатись рідиною для дезінфекції” (en. *You can use disinfectant liquid*);

(ii) lith. “Klientai turi laikytis ne mažesnio nei 2 metrai atstumo vienas nuo kito” (en. *Customers must keep a distance at least two meters apart from each other*),

uk. “Зберігання дистанції не менше 1,5 метра один від одного” (en. *Keeping a distance of at least 1.5 metres from each other*);

(iii) lith. “Įleidžiami tik apsaugines kaukes dėvintys lankytojai” (en. *Entrance is allowed only to the visitors wearing masks*),

uk. “Вхід в магазин дозволяється лише у засобах індивідуального захисту” (en. *Entrance to the store is allowed only in the means of individual protection*), “Вхід дозволений з розрахунку 1 людина на 10 м²” (en. *Entry is allowed at the rate of 1 person per 10 m²*);

(iv) lith. “Be kaukės į patalpas užėti draudžiama”, (en. *Entry to the premises without a mask is prohibited*),

uk. “Вхід без маски заборонено” (en. *Entry without a mask is prohibited*), “Забороняється вхід особам, які не досягли 14 років, без супроводу повнолітніх” (en. *Persons under the age of 14 unless accompanied by an adult are not allowed to enter*).

The social orientation of messages was implemented, among other things, by means of the deontic modality. The structural composition of both corpora highlights how prohibitive language is adapted to specific pragmatic goals. Lithuanian messages rely on cooperation and mitigated communication scenarios; meanwhile, Ukrainian messages rely more on direct imperatives and emotional salience to emphasize urgency and authority.

5.3 *Verbal Morphosyntax*

In the Lithuanian dataset, none of the signs contained sentences using first or third person singular verbs, and only 1 sign contained a sentence with a second person singular imperative affirmative structure, which means that the vast majority of texts (94%) were written in the plural number, and contained either one or multiple sentences with the first, second or third plural verb forms or a combination of these within the same sample text. Impersonal constructions are a typical feature of Lithuanian; however, in the corpus collected, only a little more than one-fifth of the messages contained such impersonal sentences.

In Ukrainian, the situation is significantly different. The results demonstrated that none of the messages contained sentences with first person singular verbs, 2 messages contained sentences with second person singular verbs, followed by 5 messages with third person singular verbs (3 feminine and 2 masculine), 10 messages with first person plural verbs, 4 messages with second person plural verbs, and 4 messages with third person plural verbs. As for the impersonal constructions, we found 17 messages (49%) with sentences of this structure. Impersonal sentences make it possible to shift the emphasis from the role of the actor to the actions directly, which is an important aspect for messages intended to inform about the obligation, prohibition or desirability of a certain action of the addressee. Table 1 demonstrates how verb person and impersonal constructions are distributed in Lithuanian and Ukrainian public messages, highlighting cross-linguistic tendencies and preferences in the structuring of public communication.

Lithuanian's preference for the first person plural structurally encodes inclusivity, framing the issuer and the addressee as part of a shared collective. Pragmatically, this reflects a solidarity-building strategy, encouraging voluntary compliance. Ukrainian's wider range of person forms, particularly when combined with impersonals, foregrounds institutional authority and the imposition of obligations without personal engagement. Viewed through Goffman's participation framework (1981), Lithuanian first person plural forms reduce the gap between the animator and the principal, while Ukrainian variation

TABLE 1 Distribution of verb person and impersonal constructions in Lithuanian and Ukrainian public messages

Verb type / construction	Lithuanian	Ukrainian
1st person singular	–	–
2nd person singular	1 message	2 messages
3rd person singular	–	5 messages
1st person plural	33 messages	10 messages
2nd person plural		4 messages
3rd person plural		4 messages
Impersonal constructions	8 messages	17 messages

and impersonal usage maintain a greater separation, reinforcing hierarchical authority.

In Ukrainian, impersonals structurally remove the issuer from the utterance, presenting the directive as an abstract, top-down rule. Pragmatically, this constructs the message as non-negotiable and rooted in institutional authority. Lithuanian’s lower reliance on impersonals keeps the issuer visible, pragmatically maintaining relational connection and a tone of partnership. In Goffman’s terms (1981), impersonals obscure the animator and highlight the principal as an institutional authority, a pattern more frequent in Ukrainian than Lithuanian messages.

5.4 *Lexico-Semantic Features*

In terms of the most salient lexico-semantic features, in Lithuanian, an addressee was mentioned only in 10 signs and posters, either as “mieli klientai” (en. *dear clients*) or “gerbiami klientai / pacientai” (en. *respected clients / patients*); meanwhile, in Ukrainian, only 6 messages had an addressee: “шановні покупці / відвідувачі / клієнти / гості” (en. *respected customers / visitors / clients / guests*), “до уваги відвідувачів” (en. *to the attention of visitors*). By using the practices of addressing a general public, the signs symbolically reduce the social distance between the parties and thereby evoke a logic of solidarity and cooperativeness (Svennevig, 2021).

Only 2 texts in each language had a closing expressive construction, lith. either “ačiū” or “dėkojame” (en. *thank you*), uk. “дякуємо за розуміння” (en. *thank you for understanding*). Only half of the texts in Lithuanian (n = 16) had an addresser indicated (either explicitly as a logo or more implicitly a

company's name or a public institution's title was mentioned within the text itself). In Ukrainian, the addresser was specified in 14 texts. The wording in a few signs and posters included the information about the requirements of the government or an institution, e.g. lith. "vadovaujantis X poliklinikoje nustatyta tvarka ..." (en. *Following the order in X polyclinic ...*) or "Remiantis Lietuvos Respublikos sveikatos apsaugos ministerijos nurodymais ..." (en. *Following the requirement of the Healthcare Ministry of the Republic of Lithuania ...*); uk. "згідно з постановою КМУ ..." (en. *according to a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine*) or "згідно стандартів МОЗ" (en. *in accordance with the standards of the Ministry of Health*).

Among the most extraordinary lexical features is the fact that one Lithuanian text contained a motivating message in the form of an exclamatory sentence: "Mums pavyks tai įveikti" (en. *We will succeed in defeating it*). No such motivating constructions were noted in any other samples of the Lithuanian corpus. The same sample contained another structure, namely "neskleiskite gandų" (en. *Do not spread rumours / misinformation*). These two sentences within one particular text stand out as they are emotionally appealing. One public sign contained a simile "Dėvėti veido kaukę po nosimi tas pats, kas apatinius štai taip" (en. *To wear a mask below your nose is the same as to wear your underwear like this*) with an associated graphic representation of a man and a woman with their underwear pulled down. All other Lithuanian texts were strictly informational, delivered recommendations or reminded of restrictions and prohibitions.

In Ukrainian, there was a similar sample: uk. "Поширюй інформацію, а не вірус" (en. *Spread the word, not the virus*); compare lith: "neskleiskite gandų" (en. *Do not spread rumours / misinformation*). Besides, one message contained a short text moving the addressee from the negative information about the virus and quarantine inconveniences to positive emotions and enjoyment of a pleasant shopping atmosphere: uk. "Тільки позитивні емоції всередині. Насолоджуйтесь приємною атмосферою" (en. *Only positive emotions inside. Enjoy the pleasant atmosphere*).

In the Ukrainian dataset, there were 2 texts of a combination of interrogative and exclamatory sentences which adds emotional and motivational component: "Захворів? Сиди вдома!" (en. *Got sick? Stay at home!*), "З'явилися симптоми? Дзвони лікарю!" (en. *Have symptoms appeared? Call the doctor!*). Moreover, this form of questioning and answering within the same context transforms a monologic text into a dialogic one, thus transforming the addressee into an active and involved participant of a communicative situation. In this case, we refer to rhetorical questions.

Some messages contained utterances that could be characterized as both advice and a certain wish. We believe that at the subconscious level, such references can strengthen the pragmatic component of the text and influence the addressee's internal desire to comply with the prescription, as they appeal to the personal interest of the addressees – their health, namely:

lith. "Būkite sveiki – saugokite save ir kitus" (en. *Be healthy – take care of yourself and others*),

uk. "Бережіть себе" (en. *Take care of yourself*), "Бережіть здоров'я" (en. *Take care of your health*), "Будьте здорові" (en. *Be healthy*).

No cases of the latter type (second person singular imperative affirmative construction) were found in the Lithuanian dataset, as they were all in the second person plural construction.

The messages also differed in strategies of assigning responsibility for compliance with all quarantine requirements. In the first type of statement, the responsibility was placed on visitors: uk. "Зайшовши у наш магазин, ви підтверджуєте, що маєте зелений COVID сертифікат" (en. *By entering our store, you confirm that you have a green COVID certificate*), "Відвідуючи наш магазин, ви підтверджуєте наявність сертифікату про першу дозу вакцинації / повну вакцинацію" (en. *By visiting our store, you confirm that you have a certificate of the first dose of vaccination / full vaccination*). No such type of messages was found in the Lithuanian dataset, as this may have been related to the fact that in Lithuania each store and/or institution was obliged to ensure themselves that all visitors entering the premises were vaccinated by checking their COVID passports (usually obtained in the digital form). This implies that the general trust in residents' honesty is higher in Ukraine, while in Lithuania the situation required a much stricter order for the stores to check and only allow in vaccinated customers.

The second type of texts, again found only in the Ukrainian dataset, uses the technique of uniting the addressee and addresser into a team against a threatening situation and sharing responsibility: uk. "Піклуємось разом!" (en. *Let's take care together!*). Lexical variation in Lithuanian supports subtle and personalized appeals to collective responsibility. Ukrainian's frequent repetition of key terms structurally reinforces the central directive and, pragmatically, leaves no interpretive ambiguity regarding the expected behaviour.

Another situation implements a pattern of behaviour as a model from the authors of the text (using the pronoun *we*): uk. "Ми дотримуємось правил запобігання COVID-19" (en. *We follow the rules for preventing COVID-19*),

“Ми працюємо безпечно та піклуємося про наших відвідувачів” (en. *We work safely and take care of our visitors*), “Ми вакциновані від COVID-19” (en. *We are vaccinated against COVID-19*). In the Lithuanian dataset, there were a few messages where customers were invited to follow a behavioural pattern by the example of a store: lith. “Užtikriname saugų atstumą tarp darbuotojų bei darbuotojų ir klientų” (en. *We ensure a safe distance between staff and between staff and customers*). This communication tactic implements the strategy of engaging a person in certain patterns of behaviour. Here, the pronoun *we* can be used to create a sense of unity and shared responsibility, particularly in prohibitive language. It can be effective when the goal is to encourage a collective effort in adhering to rules or avoiding certain actions. Moreover, the personal pronouns are an incredibly relevant category for a discussion of prohibitive language because they directly engage with power dynamics, inclusivity, social control, and the very act of addressing or referring to individuals or groups within a system of rules and restrictions.

Some messages contain references to the reasons for the demands mentioned in the texts. Ukrainian texts use the following words and constructions: uk. “карантин” (en. *quarantine*), “запобігання розповсюдженню COVID-19” (en. *preventing the spread of COVID-19*), “для збереження Вашого здоров’я” (en. *to protect your health*), “карантинні обмеження” (en. *quarantine restrictions*), “захист від коронавірусу” (en. *protection against coronavirus*), “з метою профілактики” (en. *for the purpose of prevention*). In the Lithuanian dataset, these references were verbalized by the following examples: lith. “COVID-19 prevencija” (en. *COVID-19 prevention*) or “COVID-19”.

As mentioned above, 2 messages in Lithuanian and 13 in Ukrainian contained foreign language elements. In Lithuanian, the messages were fully translated, e.g. lith. “Prašome dėvėti veido kaukę. A face mask required”. The Ukrainian dataset did not contain fully bilingual messages. However, 5 messages had the names of the brands in English, 5 messages contained medical terms (*Corona* (an informal term for the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2), *COVID*, *COVID-19*), and 3 messages had both names of the brands and medical terms. The name COVID-19 has gone from not even existing prior to February 11, 2020, to entering the vocabulary of the vast majority of the world’s eight billion people (Piller et al., 2020).

Overall, the lexico-semantic features of both corpora demonstrate a shift from strict institutional directives to crisis communication through solidarity-building greetings and collective pronouns.

5.5 Specialised Terminology, Abbreviations and Spatial Vocabulary

In the messages, we observed a large number of medical terms, e.g., lith. “respiratorius” (en. *respirator*), “dezinfekuoti” (en. *disinfect*), “saviizoliacija” (en.

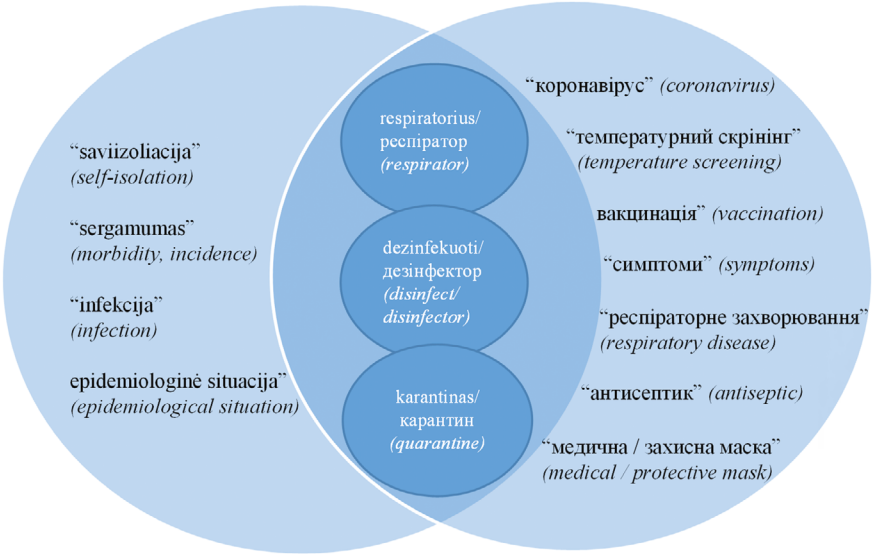


FIGURE 5 Medical terms used in Lithuanian (on the left) and Ukrainian (on the right) texts

self-isolation), uk. “коронавірус” (en. coronavirus), “температурний скрінінг” (en. temperature screening), “вакцинація” (en. vaccination), “симптоми” (en. symptoms). Figure 5 shows the medical terms used in both Lithuanian and Ukrainian, as well as the terms used in each language separately.

These terms have gone beyond the boundaries of the terminology system and are actively functioning in the common language. Many of these units have long been used in non-specialist texts due to the social significance of quarantine, pandemic situations, etc. Other words with a terminological meaning are only in the process of becoming part of the general language. Taking into account the number of uses of the specified medical terms in non-special (non-medical) texts we can confidently speak of a rapid loss of their terminological characteristics.

These texts also contain abbreviations of medical terms and elements of specialized texts. These units do not have any explanations or decoding in the texts under study, which are not specialized medical texts: lith. “PCR” (en. PCR – polymerase chain reaction), lith and uk. “Covid” / coronavirus disease, uk. “ПЛР-тест” / полімеразна ланцюгова реакція (en. PCR – polymerase chain reaction). However, for an average language user (not a medical specialist), these abbreviations acquire all the features of ordinary words. People use such linguistic units in the same way as ordinary words, without having to know their terminological decoding.

The quantitative parameterization of the collected corpus helps find the lexical basis of the genre of public messages in the thematic area under study.

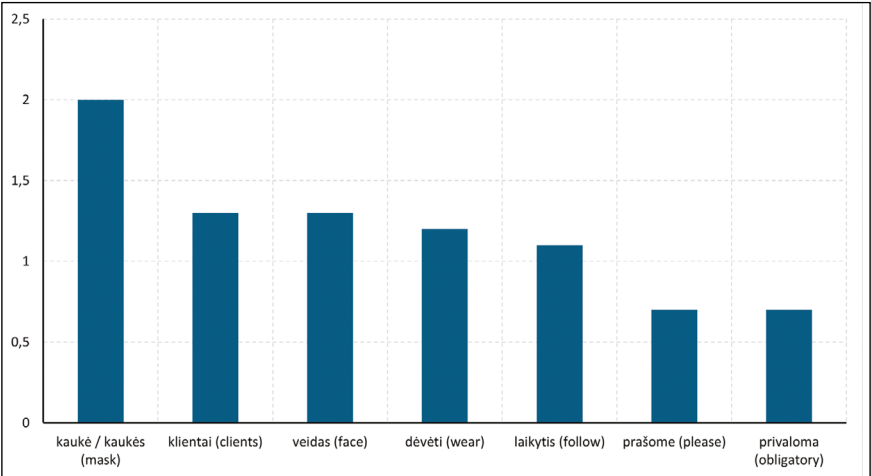


FIGURE 6 Words frequency in Lithuanian

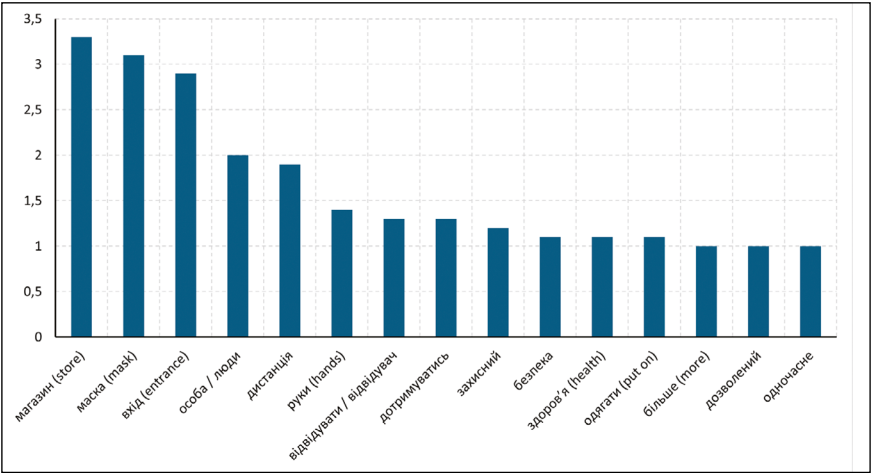


FIGURE 7 Words frequency in Ukrainian

Thus, in the Lithuanian corpus, the most common content words used were “kaukė / kaukės” (en. *mask*) in their different cases, “klientai” (en. *clients*), “veidas” (en. *face*) in the genitive case, etc. From the high frequency words, it is clear that the message is related to the context of asking the clients to wear face masks and follow obligations. As for the Ukrainian dataset, the most commonly used units were “магазин” (en. *store*), “маска” (en. *mask*), “вхід” (en. *entrance*), “особа / люди” (en. *person / people*).

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the percentage word frequency in both languages. The findings indicate a higher frequency of recurring words in Ukrainian texts

and a greater level of uniqueness and originality in Lithuanian texts. Thus, the quantitative parameterization of the text collection allows us to identify the semantic accents of the entire corpus and, further, the genre of public messages about quarantine rules and restrictions.

The specificity of the content of the analyzed messages – the regulation of norms and rules of behaviour in certain premises – explains a significant number of words and constructions denoting the categories of (i) space and (ii) movement:

- (i) lith. “įstaiga” (en. *institution*), “parduotuvė” (en. *store*), “įėjimas” (en. *entrance*), uk. “приміщення” (en. *premises*), “територія” (en. *territory*), “місце” (en. *place*);
- (ii) lith. “atvykti” (en. *arrive*), “įleisti” (en. *allow in*), uk. “входити” (en. *to enter*), “відвідувати” (en. *to visit*), “скупчуватися” (en. *to crowd*).

Since space and distance are important factors in the spread and containment of viral diseases, vocabulary with locative-directional meaning effectively emphasizes these aspects and verbalizes the message about safe distances between sick and healthy people. From a geosemiotic perspective, much of this vocabulary indexes the passage space function of signage, where regulatory discourse is dominant and requires concise, high-visibility wording.

The heavy use of medical terms and spatial language shows how quickly technical jargon has become part of everyday vocabulary during the crisis. The data show the real-world purpose of these signs: Lithuanian messages tend to use a wider, more varied mix of words, while Ukrainian signs rely on clear, repetitive phrasing to mark out safe boundaries.

6 Discussion

As noted in the theoretical framework, our analysis is grounded in key pragmatic concepts, including impersonal constructions, mitigated imperatives, and expressives. The findings from our two datasets provide a window into how these concepts are realized in Lithuanian and Ukrainian, revealing distinct cultural and linguistic preferences in a crisis context.

Linguistic landscape is a key concept that helps us understand how a community's language is made visible in public spaces. As Landry and Bourhis (1997) define, it is the sum of all visible language on things like road signs, billboards, street names, and commercial signs. This concept is crucial for understanding how societies organize themselves for safety and well-being, as Demska (2024) points out, by structuring physical and mental space to meet the demands of the time. The increasing concentration of informational and directive texts in a city's linguistic landscape, such as those related to public

health or safety, shows how language is actively used to shape behaviour and maintain order. Together, these ideas highlight how language in public spaces is not merely descriptive but is a dynamic tool that reflects and influences a society's organization and safety in a given time and place.

It is the verbal component of messages that is aimed to provide the addressee with a sufficient minimum of key information in a concise manner, ensuring the necessary level of perception of the message through the qualitative use of language tools to convey the idea and influence the addressee's consciousness and actions. In geosemiotc terms, these public health messages operate primarily within regulatory discourse and are often located in passage spaces, which constrains their linguistic structure and promotes brevity.

Like in other studies (e.g., Isosävi, 2023; Nakamura, 2022), our datasets were primarily monolingual. The syntactic and grammatical analysis revealed a number of specific linguistic techniques and tactics used within the same sign or a poster and within the dataset overall. While these findings effectively identify the what of our data – namely, the balance between solidarity and authority and the use of politeness mitigation strategies – a deeper interpretive framework is required to understand the why. Our analysis suggests that the observed cross-linguistic differences are not merely stylistic but are firmly rooted in distinct cultural and institutional norms that govern public communication in each country. This framework allows us to advance a more in-depth explanatory interpretation of our results. For instance, the high prevalence of impersonal constructions in the Ukrainian corpus can be interpreted as a reflection of a more entrenched, bureaucratic, and top-down institutional tradition, where messages are framed to emphasize a non-negotiable obligation rather than a collaborative request. This register, inherited from a Soviet-era communicative legacy, prioritizes authority and depersonalizes the directive. Conversely, the more frequent use of first person plural verbs in the Lithuanian corpus points to a culturally rooted preference for an inclusive, cooperative framing. This approach positions the issuing body not as an impersonal authority, but as a partner in a shared effort, thereby promoting a sense of communal responsibility and solidarity. A closer reading of representative signs from each corpus – for example, comparing a typical Ukrainian sign stating *It is forbidden ...* with a Lithuanian one stating *We ask you to ...* – would concretely illustrate these distinct socio-institutional approaches. By articulating these explanatory links, our discussion directly engages with the second and third aims of our study: to examine how these strategies reflect broader cultural and institutional norms and to operationalise key pragmatic concepts.

Tragel and Pikksaar (2003) maintain that cooperation promoted by communicating empathy may be most efficiently achieved using the first and the second person language within the same message. Our study results reveal a high proportion of impersonal constructions followed by almost a third of messages using first person plural verbs in the Ukrainian corpus, and almost two-thirds of the messages containing first person plural constructions followed by half of the messages containing second person plural in the Lithuanian corpus. Messages containing both first person plural and second person plural that may be considered to communicate empathy and achieve cooperation were less dominant: only one-third of the Lithuanian corpus and one-fifth of the Ukrainian corpus had the combination. Following Tragel and Pikksaar (2023), using both first and second person in such messages creates an important component of solidarity and friendship between the addresser and the addressee. Based on the analysis, it is contended that this postulate demonstrates an insufficient representation within the examined corpus. This suggests an unexploited capacity for its more extensive deployment as an efficient methodological technique.

Impersonal constructions may signify the shift of the emphasis from the role of the addresser to the responsibility of higher authority. They distance the addresser and the addressee (Lakoff, 1973). In our data, impersonal constructions were much less prevalent in the Lithuanian corpus compared with the Ukrainian corpus. The prevalence of sentences without a subject is a specific feature of Ukrainian professional texts. The evidence of such cross-linguistic and cultural differences also found by Isosävi (2023) has been shown to exist between French and Finnish in a similar study of urban signs in relation to the impersonal perspective.

Imperatives are a typical form of directives. One of the main functions of public signs is to impose certain directives, yet the imperative on its own may be seen as too direct and impolite. Accompanied by the word *please*, i.e. mitigated, the imperative manifests the required politeness, which, on the other hand, softens and weakens the imperative meaning. Such a weak imperative eliminates ultimatum, carries the meaning of non-compulsory performance of an action, which is unacceptable in the situation under study. While the imperative was generally not prevalent in Lithuanian, our study findings do not seem to completely contradict those of Wei (2023) who found a dominant use of imperatives accompanied by *please*, which is close to the results for the Ukrainian language. A mitigation of a directive in Lithuanian may be said to have been achieved through the use of the first person plural present tense

declarative sentences starting with “[we] ask you to ...”. All cases of the imperative in the Lithuanian dataset, except for one sign, demonstrated the use of the second person plural imperative form, which is also less direct and may express a directive in a milder verbalization compared with a singular second person imperative.

Expressives on public signs are culture-specific, as maintained by Ogiermann and Bella (2021). Our findings of very few public messages and signs using expressives may further call for a more in-depth study; yet, a tentative inference could be drawn that neither Lithuanian nor Ukrainian writers and creators of public signs show preferences for expressives.

7 Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the data collected in two cultural contexts and languages, namely Lithuanian and Ukrainian, allows us to draw preliminary inferences about the similarities and differences in the syntactic/structural, grammatical and lexico-semantic design of informational messages during a crisis. In terms of the syntactic/structural peculiarities, the differences seem to lie in the length of such messages, but the prevalence of simple sentences of a declarative type over complex constructions in both languages serves the purpose to get the message across faster and more efficiently. In terms of the grammatical person and number peculiarities, first person singular is absent and second person singular is very rare. Meanwhile, the majority of the sentences in both datasets were formed using the plural. A noteworthy difference observed between the two datasets was in the use of impersonal sentences. Half of the messages were impersonal in Ukrainian, but much less in Lithuanian. Since impersonal sentences allow shifting the emphasis from the role of the actor to the action, they may imply that the addresser shifts the responsibility from themselves to higher authorities. It is much easier to inform in such a way about the obligation, prohibition or desirability of a certain action of the addressee. On the other hand, in Lithuanian, the prevalence of the messages formed using the first person plural rather than the impersonal construction may imply more solidarity and empathy on the addresser's part and a cordial request for a change in a behavioural pattern.

Expressive semantics is realized in syntactic constructions (exclamatory sentences, imperative structures, rhetorical questions, etc.), while only emotionally neutral vocabulary was used. The lexico-semantic analysis of the data revealed a frequent use of typical pandemic- and social etiquette-related

lexical items. A significant number of words denoting space and movement relate to the specificity of the content.

By analyzing each structural category in immediate connection with its pragmatic function, we show that form and function are inseparable in shaping persuasive and prohibitive public messages. Lithuanian structurally and pragmatically favours inclusive, cooperative framing, while Ukrainian often prioritizes structural forms that maximize clarity, urgency, and institutional authority.

These findings align with the core objective of our study, which was to identify and compare specific linguistic strategies in these two languages, thereby revealing how broader cultural and pragmatic norms are reflected in public health communication. Cross-cultural differences often stem from varying degrees of conventionalization in specific situations. In our case, the ways informational messages are structured in Lithuanian versus Ukrainian contexts are seen as examples of culturally specific conventionalization. Our operationalization of pragmatic concepts has enabled a transparent analysis that demonstrates concrete differences in how persuasive and prohibitive content is framed across these two linguacultures. Crisis communication is not culturally neutral as institutional traditions and cultural communicative models dictate the language of public safety. Pandemic signs in Lithuania and Ukraine show strategies how both countries balanced and prioritized safety. Lithuania used more cooperative requests to build teamwork, while Ukraine chose more strategies of clear, direct language to protect the public with a sense of urgency.

We see the prospect of further studying the issue of informational messages communicated via public signs and posters in conducting larger-scale multimodal linguistic landscape research in the countries under analysis as well as further extending the topics of such messages to include war- or natural disaster-related information. A translation landscape study may also bring in valuable findings for cross-linguistic studies, as they are now but a few (see e.g. Lees, 2022). Among the limitations of this study, a small sample size of the corpus may be reported as well as the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in its second half may have been already less acute, and public signs and posters may have been in certain cases already ignored or possibly not even updated since the first wave. However, effective and successful transfer and intake of the public content in high-risk situations is crucial. Beyond the linguistic features analyzed, a more comprehensive future study could also examine how these elements function within the overall rhetorical organization of informational messages, specifically by identifying the sequence and type of speech

acts performed (e.g., directives, commissives, expressives). This approach would reveal how the strategic ordering of illocutionary acts contributes to the ultimate goal of behavioural change. We thus believe that preliminary inferences here reported may inspire further research and have practical relevance to public bodies and institutions in crises.

Competing Interests Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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