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# TOXICITY PHENOMENON IN GERMAN AND SLOVAK MEDIA: CONTRASTIVE PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper approaches toxicity as a new phenomenon in the German and Slovak media viewed from a contrastive perspective. The corpus consists of four public speeches delivered by contemporary German- and Slovak-speaking politicians who are labelled 'toxic' in online media of Germany and

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a pilot project implemented with the aim of identifying the complexities and relevant factors for further research into toxicity as a media phenomenon in Germany and Slovakia. We express our gratitude to all participants in the associative and identification experiments: professors and colleagues of the Faculty of Philology (Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany), the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Mass Media Communication (University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia), the Institute of Political Sciences (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Silesia, Poland) and students of the Faculty of Translation Studies (Kyiv National Linguistic University, Ukraine) and of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication – Media Relations (University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia), as well as politicians, public people, journalists and moderators for their time and ardour.

Slovakia. The article presents the results of associative and identification experiments for studying concept, verbal and nonverbal correlates of the so-called toxicity that can be used in further studies of typological features of 'toxic' public figures within different languages / cultural traditions.

**Key words:** toxicity, contrastive, political, media, concept, verbal, nonverbal, German, Slovak.

*Don't let negative and toxic people rent space in your head.  
Raise the rent and kick them out. (Zig Ziglar)  
Donald Trump est un bon président [Donald Trump is a good president].  
(Michel Houellebecq, Interventions 2020)*

## 1. Introduction

Toxicity is a newborn concept gaining more and more attributes every year, which form its core and periphery but we consider it as a media phenomenon. A number of cross-cultural concepts (LIFE :: DEATH (Uberman 2018; Prihodko & Prykhodchenko 2018); LIGHT :: DARKNESS (Vorobyova 2017), TIME (Kranjec & McDonough 2011)) and ethno-specific (DUŠA / SOUL) (Wierzbicka 1997); (SCHADENFREUDE / GLOATING (Mizin & Ovsienko 2020)) are popular and well-studied research objects in the field of cultural linguistics and linguo-conceptological studies (Петлюченко 2017). The first two decades of the new millennium have seen the emergence of a large number of *new concepts*, which reflect novel socio-political (BREXIT) (MacShane 2016; Morozova 2017), epidemic processes (INFODEMIC) (Panasenکو et al. 2020a), and psychological states or emotions that a modern person experiences in the turbulent era of living in social networks and the chronic stress of today's multi-tasking environment – ABUSE, GASLIGHTING, BULLYING, MISOGYNY, MONOPHOBIA, DESELFING.

We are interested in the latter group that includes the concept TOXICITY, which, given its widespread use in the media, has attained the status of an interpersonal communication phenomenon reflecting the violation of personal boundaries and psychological harm. The emergence of terms such as toxic relationships, toxic communication, ideological toxins, toxic harm, toxic environment, toxic positivity, toxic masculinity, etc. in the media space,

shows that the metaphor of toxicity, which was accurately used by the American writer Rachel Carson in 1962 in her book "Silent Spring" (cited after Carson 2020) to describe the imperceptible and incomprehensible effect of pesticides on the mood and actions of a person, is becoming a term, which is actively penetrating into the humanitarian spheres of people's lives.

This paper approaches toxicity as a new phenomenon in the German and Slovak media viewed from a contrastive perspective. All the examples in the text are given in the alphabetical order: German first, Slovak next. Toxicity is understood as an extremely harsh, malicious or harmful quality, which can be inherent in a person or their individual actions and/or statements and manifests itself in unpleasant personal attacks and harsh remarks to a communication partner (opponent) (Toxicity, *s.a.*).

The phenomenon of toxicity is becoming a widespread, albeit uneven, state of the socio-political atmosphere and can be seen "from the scale of cells to the size of a lifestyle that is activated, limited and extinguished in broader systems of power, on the one hand, destroying existing order and way of life, and supporting lifestyles, on the other" (Liboiron et al. 2018: 331). Therefore, the study of the cognitive and discursive mechanisms of verbal toxicity in the media and politics is relevant both for creating algorithms for neutralizing various types of organizational toxicity (Daniel 2020: 129) and for analyzing the interaction of communicators on the political and media plane taking into account linguistic, general semiotic, socio- and ethnospecific factors (Taylor 2014).

In this article, we seek to accumulate the research approaches of four scholars who specialize in analyzing the oral discourse of political figures in Germany, Ukraine, Latin America, Spain through language and ethnoculture (Петлюченко 2010; Petljutschenko 2018; Petlyuchenko & Chernyakova 2019), functional-semantic types of speech in the Slovak media (Panasenکو 2016; basics of media communication (Petranova 2011; Vrabec

et al. 2014), category of modality in journalism and media communication (Panasenکو & Kryachkov 2020; Panasenکو et al. 2020b; Panasenکو et al. 2021), manipulation in public speeches (Stashko 2018) and media images of top officials in Ukraine and Slovakia (Stashko 2016; Stashko et al. 2020), and propose a model of toxic media communication on the basis of not closely related German and Slovak languages from a contrastive perspective. The model will be built using the deductive method based on the selection, description and comparison of concept, verbal and nonverbal characteristics of speeches of political figures who are labelled as 'toxic' in the German and Slovak media.

The research **hypothesis** is formed by several mutually exclusive approaches to the toxicity phenomenon.

Approach 1: Socio-political toxicity. This form of toxicity describes a person's addressee-oriented behavior that causes particular harm or discriminates against the addressee in the course of public communication. As a rule, it is characterized by a radical bias of the views of politicians and high-profile persons to the right or left; it is the result of attributing projections of a certain group of people and is verbally explicated in the public realm / media by using the attribute 'toxic'.

Approach 2: Personal toxicity. It is the result of addresser-addressee relations in public communication and is not associated with an addresser's political views. Toxicity is determined only by an addresser's personality, which ultimately harms those who support them. A person may not really be the most pleasant and easy to talk to, but at the same time, they will not necessarily be toxic to you. What one person would call toxicity and take personally, another would write off as character flaws of the interlocutor and not pay much attention to it. Therefore, toxicity is a relative concept, since a person cannot be born toxic or be toxic to everyone around him or her.

Approach 3: Toxicity as a means of destroying the personality of its bearer. In this case, toxicity means addresser-oriented behavior when a person behaves toxically towards himself or herself, that is, causes harm to themselves. They exhibit this behavior because it is in line with the social expectations, which they are trying to meet without realizing that it only hurts them.

In this article, we select the first approach, namely, socio-political toxicity determined by political views, because, firstly, it will facilitate the identification of public toxics, which are labelled as 'toxic' in the media discourses of Germany and Slovakia. Secondly, this will save us from the trouble of having to look for the conditions in which a toxic person interacts with other people and we will not need to trace the consequences of his or her toxicity in feedbacks when respondents directly verbalize their reactions to a particular public person's behavior and identify it as toxic.

## **2. Background and motivations of toxicity phenomenon**

The phenomenon of toxicity is investigated in psychology (Hemschemeier 2021), sociology (Kutz 2016), political studies (Liboiron et al. 2018), social communications (Lower 2016), and other humanities, and is used to describe destructive communication environments as a sociocultural development.

### *2.1 Toxicity in psychology*

German psychotherapist and RND (Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland) columnist Christian Hemschemeier was one of the first to bring the term to Germany and made a name for himself with the term "toxic relationship" as a best-selling author and in the psychological research community. In his book "Vom Opfer zum Gestalter – Raus aus toxischen Beziehungen, rein ins Leben" ["From victim to designer – out of toxic relationships into life"] (Hemschemeier 2021), he states that toxicity is a long-standing phenomenon in psychology, but the term 'toxic' has been used mostly in English-speaking

countries. As Burchardt (2021) claims, it reflects the feeling that you are in a relationship that is poisonous, where you are not doing well but you are stuck. Moreover, according to German psychologist Susanne Kraft, constant criticism, blame or degradation are signs of a toxic relationship (Wie erkennt man..., *s.a.*).

According to sociologist Angelica Kutz (2016), behavioral toxicity or 'traumatic communication' is considered as a cause of illness in companies and is closely related to the 'double bind' phenomenon (Bateson et al. 1956) when the double-biased subject perceives conflicting directions or emotional messages at different communicative levels, e.g., while love is expressed verbally, the non-verbal behavior demonstrates hate (Kutz 2016: 3).

The phenomenon of organizational toxicity is associated with identifying common causes of toxic emotions among employees in such workplace situations, which expose employees to inhumane or degrading treatment, and as a result of which employees experience fatigue and burnout, stress and anxiety (Daniel 2020: 7-16). Also, the consequences of unwelcoming working environments relate to the professional experiences of underrepresented minority (hereinafter referred to as URM) faculty members in U.S. higher education institutions, when various aspects of disparity in the identity of Black and Hispanic faculty and their social status negatively affect the health and well-being of URM faculty, as well as the ability of URM faculty to be successful at their jobs, and to flourish in academia (Zambrana 2018).

Toxic positivity as a new study object appeared in positive psychology (Halberstam 2011; Wright 2014), which is seen as such human behavior when individuals do not completely acknowledge, process, or manage the full spectrum of emotions, including anger or sadness (Panasenko et al. 2022). Individuals who engage in a constant chase for positive experiences or states of high subjective well-being may be inadvertently stigmatizing

negative emotional conditions, such as depression, or may be suppressing natural emotional responses, such as sadness, regret, or stress. Thus, positive psychology places too much importance on upbeat thinking, while shunting challenging and difficult experiences to the side (Smith 2020).

In gender psychology, the term 'toxic masculinity' was born out of the mythopoetic men's self-improvement movement in the 1980s and 1990s; it is used to describe toxic masculinity as the behavior of 'immature' males. Over time, the common understanding of 'toxic masculinity' has evolved over the years to its current definition: harmful social norms about how men should behave that lead to misogyny, homophobia, violence, and mental health issues (Longwood et al. 2012).

Toxic masculinity is based on traditional norms of male behavior that can be directed against both individual women and men, and society as a whole. The concept of TOXICITY does not aim to discredit traditionally masculine behavior; rather it emphasizes the negative consequences of conformism, which is manifested in traditional masculine forms of behaviour as domination, arrogance, and competition (Fosbraey & Puckey 2021; Hess 2016; Manno 2020). The Cambridge Dictionary defines toxic masculinity as ideas about the way that men should behave that are seen as harmful. The manifestation of toxic masculinity is explicated in the following ideas: (1) men should not cry or admit weakness or (2) men are just naturally violent (Toxic masculinity, *s.a.*).

Psychologists have found that men who are prone to manifestations of toxic masculinity are prone to mental disorders, among which the most common is the need for emotional control, risk-taking behavior, violence, dominance, sexual promiscuity, self-reliance, high importance placed on one's job, disdain for homosexuality, and the pursuit of status, etc. (Waling 2019). In addition, the observed disorders are exacerbated in those men who display excessive self-reliance and wielding power over women (Rubin 2020).

However, one can find examples of toxic femininity in the media. For instance, a description of toxic symptoms is given in German footballer Jerome Boateng's 20.08.2021 interview 'Innereinsichten einer toxischen Beziehung mit tragischem Ende [Insights into a toxic relationship with a tragic end] where he claimed that his ex-girlfriend Kasia Lenhardt, who died seven days later, had 1) blackmailed him, 2) forced him into a relationship, 3) threatened him with ruining his career and 4) caused him to lose his children (Gantenbrink et. al. 2021).

## *2.2 Toxicity in the media*

The media being one of the major influencers can easily be utilized as a carrier of 'toxic ideologies', e.g., the Al Qaeda ideology, whose leaders and affiliates have conducted active public relations and media campaigns since the mid-1990s (Boyd 2013). Moreover, the democratic ideology of progress transforms from an ideological tonic to an ideological toxin based upon its associated deployments within a new historical context (What does this text suggest..., *s.a.*). Progress has lost its democratic aspect because "the official standard bearers of progress (the bourgeoisie) have brought into being in the present destructive forces like crises and unemployment, etc." (Wainwright & Mann 2018: 94).

Media personalities (well-known actors / actresses, athletes, business people, talk shows hosts, movie directors, religious leaders, authorities in the medical field, etc.) serve their agenda of choice indirectly influencing the masses. Toxic narratives are framed and built inside newsrooms via news from various social networks and TV channels with hate-mongering that is far more toxic than one would expect from journalists. This happens when a certain ideology / opinion is being promoted in the media without open-mindedness, respect, understanding, tolerance, and compassion towards others; it is bound to become toxic, limiting, a femininity and potentially dangerous, for example, racism, sexism and islamophobia (Astha 2020).

Toxic online content refers to such content created by any public person that promotes hate speech, extremist slogans, harassment and misinformation. Toxic and inflammatory comments online have often resulted in real life violence, from religious nationalism in Myanmar to neo-Nazi propaganda in the U.S. Following these concerns, the Conversation Artificial Intelligence team (<https://conversationalai.github.io/>) invited developers to train their own toxicity-detection algorithms and released two public data sets containing over one million toxic and non-toxic comments from Wikipedia and a service called Civil Comments with 1) a 'Very Toxic' label indicating "a very hateful, aggressive, or disrespectful comment that is very likely to make you leave a discussion or give up on sharing your perspective", 2) a 'Toxic' label meaning "a rude, disrespectful, or unreasonable comment that is somewhat likely to make you leave a discussion or give up on sharing your perspective" (Hanu et al. 2021).

The role of toxic triggers in the media space can be played by hashtags (Shkvorchenko & Koltsova 2019), for example, #StopTheSteal, which emerged after the announcement of preliminary results and the victory of Joseph Biden and became the slogan of a series of events culminating in the storming of the Capitol by supporters of the loser Donald Trump (#StopTheSteal: Timeline..., *s.a.*).

American political analyst Joseph Zompetti believes that political conversations in the USA have turned "toxic" in recent years, and the media have a role to play in contributing to the trend of divisive discourse: liberals and conservatives go about expressing what they think, and it usually includes polarizing talk, which results in an 'us versus them' mentality that divides, rather than brings people together (2015). The 24-hour news cycle contributes to this, with social platforms encouraging the social platforms which encourage people to say whatever is on their minds and to share hyperlinks without checking the veracity of the sources (Toxic talk..., *s.a.*).

Toxicity as a media phenomenon is synonymous with the concept of HATE SPEECH, which consists of public communications consisting of intentional statements or messages with discriminatory content and is essentially one form of communicative production of human inferiority through categorization (Sponholz 2018; Wachs et al. 2021).

### *2.3 Toxicity in politics*

We find the first mentions of the attribute 'toxic' in the context of political discourse in 2011 in such a rather informal source as the Urban Dictionary, which captures the opinionated viewpoint of one of the opponents of the Republicans, where toxic political discourse used to "describe the sad state of politics in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is related to the increasing influence of talk radio and so-called new commentators demonstrating more vitriolic argumenting and shouting than ever. Such public figures as Sarah Palin, Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, and Mike Savage allegedly create a toxic political environment making political campaigns longer and more expensive every year". We believe that such judgmental comments are also important for the reconstruction of "young concepts", in particular toxicity (Toxic political discourse, *s.a.*).

Current sociological studies in the USA show that the nation's political debate during Donald Trump's presidency grew more toxic (Rubin 2020) and 'heated' rhetoric can lead to violence and contaminate political discussions with the following features: (1) acrimony and vitriol, (2) a lot of negative campaign ads, (3) people pull out all the stops on both sides of the political spectrum, (4) making a lot of personal character attacks, (5) the dominant voices in political conversations are yelling at each other (Drake & Kiley 2019).

In addition, toxicity is embedded in multifarious relations of power, and it has the potential to invent alternative political relations: the precariousness of toxic worlds enables the formation of resistances, coalitions and practices that expand the inventory of what

politics means and does in late industrialism (Liboiron et al. 2018: 341). Toxic politics is not about 'how much' toxicant or even 'what' chemical, but the why and how it is encountered, by whom, and to what end (Shapiro et al. 2017; Watts 2017).

## *2.4 Toxicity in linguistics*

Let us consider the chronology of the appearance of the TOXICITY concept in the media, as well as its etymological and semantic constituents in German and Slovak.

### *2.4.1 First appearance as a new (media) concept*

The Oxford Dictionary chose 'toxic' as its Word of the Year 2018 that best described the mood of that year. The word also should 'have lasting potential' as a term of cultural importance. Oxford said that in 2018 its data showed a 45 percent rise in searches for the word 'toxic' on its website (<https://languages.oup.com/>). The searches began with the toxic chemical poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Britain (Panasenko et al. 2018). Then, in Syria, a toxic chemical weapon attack killed at least 40 people and led to a missile strike from the United States. However, the increasingly common phrase 'toxic environment' has nothing to do with pollution. Oxford says people searched for this phrase in connection to unpleasant workplace environments, including the worldwide walkout of Google employees. They were protesting sexual wrongdoing, unequal pay and discrimination. Others wanted to know about toxic relationships, especially connected to the #MeToo movement against sex abuse and the confirmation hearing of Brett Kavanaugh as a U.S. Supreme Court Justice (Oxford's word..., 2018).

### *2.4.2 Etymological constituents of concepts TOXIZITÄT / TOXICITA in German and Slovak*

Toxicity emphasizes the mechanisms by which speech acts and discursive practices can cause harm, giving meaning to claims of harm caused by speech devoid of insults, pithets, or a narrower class categorized by Tirrell (2017) as 'deeply derogatory terms'.

To reconstruct the etymological constituents of TOXIZITÄT / TOXICITA in German and Slovak, we analyzed the etymological roots on the basis of the English, German, and Slovak languages.

For instance, the word *toxic* first appeared in English in the 1660s. It comes from the Latin word *toxicus*, which means 'poisonous'. The Latin word itself comes from the Greek term *toxikon (pharmacon)* [poison for use on arrows] (cf. Fr. *toxique* < Lat. *toxicus* [poisonous] < Lat. *toxicum* [poison] < Greek *toxikon (pharmakon)* [(poison) for use on arrows] < *toxikon*, neuter of *toxikos* [pertaining to arrows or archery]) (Toxic, *s.a.*).

In German, the noun *toxikum* (originally also *toxicon*) meaning 'Gift = poison' has been used in medicine since 1700 from Latin *toxicum, toxicon*, Greek. *toxikón (τοξικόν)* meaning '(Pfeil)gift' [(poisonous) arrow] from Greek *toxikós (τοξικός)* 'zu Pfeil und Bogen gehörig [pertaining to bow and arrows]' to Greek. *tóxon (τόξον)* 'Bogen, Geschoß, Pfeil [bow, bullet, arrow]'.

From the above-mentioned Latin stems, the German specialized language of medicine takes the compositional element *toxi-* (*tox-* before vowels) with the meaning 'Gift-, giftig [poison, poisonous]' and forms such special terms as *Toxalbumin* 'pflanzlicher Eiweißstoff mit Giftwirkung [vegetable protein with a toxic effect]' (19<sup>th</sup> century), *Toxämie* 'Zersetzung des Blutes durch Giftstoffe [decomposition of blood through poisonous substances]', *Toxidermie* [skin rash as a result of toxic effects]' (20<sup>th</sup> century), with a German ending *-isch* adjective *toxisch* 'giftig [poisonous]' (20<sup>th</sup> century), as well as *Toxin* with the suffix *-in* typical of the formation of names of substances with the meaning 'Giftstoff bakterieller, pflanzlicher oder tierischer Herkunft [poisonous substance of bacterial, plant or animal origin]' (about 1888) (Toxisch 2, *s.a.*).

The Slovak scientific term *toxický* has been used since the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the sense of 'otravný, jedovatý [poisonous]' and just as its German cognate goes back to Latin adjective *toxicus* from Latin noun *toxicum* [poison], which was borrowed from the Greek *toxikon (farmakon)* (τοξικον φάρμακον) [poison (to be applied to arrows that will be shot)] associated with a *bow, archery* from the Greek *toxon (τόξον)* 'luk [bow]' (Stručný etymologický slovník slovenčiny 2015: 619; Vel'ký slovník cudzích slov 2006).

Thus, based on the etymological analysis performed, we can conclude that the *common* motivating constituent of the concepts TOXIZITÄT / TOXICITA is their Latin stem *toxicum* → Germ. *Toxisch* / Sk. *toxický* *toxicum* [poison], which is indicative of the relationship of congruent coincidence in the etymological roots of the concept of TOXICITY in the German and Slovak languages.

#### 2.4.3 Semantic constituents of the concepts TOXIZITÄT / TOXICITA in German and Slovak

A definitional analysis of the direct and figurative meanings of the attribute 'toxisch [toxic]' in German allowed us to single out the following semantic constituents (meanings) of the concept TOXIZITÄT:

1. *toxisch* (direct meaning): a) giftig (Gebrauch: Biologie, Medizin) [poisonous (used in biology, medicine)], b) durch Gift verursacht, auf einer Vergiftung beruhend (Gebrauch: Biologie, Medizin) [caused by poison, based on poisoning (used in biology, medicine)], e.g., *toxische Krankheiten, Schädigungen* [toxic diseases, injuries];
2. *toxisch* (figurative meaning, often referring to relationships / contacts): sehr böse, gefährlich, schädlich, zermürend [very evil / malicious, dangerous, harmful, exhausting], e.g., *toxische Männlichkeit* [toxic masculinity], *eine toxische Beziehung beenden* [break-up of toxic relations] (Toxisch 1, s.a.).

Thus, we see that the Duden Dictionary records the figurative meaning of the attribute 'toxisch' as a negative psychological quality of a person, where we distinguish the following concept constituents (semes) of the concept TOXIZITÄT: 1) 'Böse [evil]', 2) 'Gefahr [danger]', 3) 'Schaden [damage]', 4) 'Zermürbung [wearisomeness]'.

The analysis of the attribute 'toxický [toxic]' in Slovak allowed us to distinguish the following semantic constituents (meanings) of the concept TOXICITA:

(1a). *toxický* (direct meaning): <Sk. toxický příd. spôsobující otravu, otravný, jedovatý: toxické látky; toxický účinok, toxický vplyv; toxické choroby; toxicky prísl.: toxicky pôsobiť na niečo ako jed (Slovník slovenského jazyka 1964: 552) / Eng. toxic adj. poisonous, toxic substances; toxic effect, toxic influence; toxic diseases; toxic; adv. toxic acting on something like poison.

Though for our study we have chosen German and Slovak, we find it possible to give the definition of the word *toxic* in Czech because in the definitions given in the dictionary, we see some additional meanings, which are important for us, i.e. disruption and damage:

(1b). *toxický* (direct meaning): 'lo. toxický příd. <ř> jedovatý, otravný: biol. toxické latky způsobující porušení buňky, popř. poškození organismu; toxicky přfsi.; toxicnost, -i ž toxicita (Akademický slovník cizích slov 1997) / Eng. toxic, adj. additive, annoying: biol. toxic substances causing cell disruption or damage to the organism; toxic adv.; toxicity.

Based on the definition of the direct meaning of the attribute 'toxický [toxic]' provided in Slovak (1a) and Czech (1b) dictionaries, we distinguish two concept attributes in the Slovak concept TOXICITA: 'narušenie [disruption]', 'poškodenie [damage]'.

Thus, our definitional analysis of German and Slovak (and partially Czech) dictionaries show that 1) the meaning of the attribute 'toxický' as a negative psychological trait of a person has not yet been recorded as a figurative meaning in Slovak dictionaries, 2) the concept TOXICITA is still at the stage of assimilation in the Slovak linguistic culture although in the Slovak media discourse, this figurative meaning is used quite extensively as an exact metaphor for conveying the negative image of Slovak politicians, 3) congruent coincidences can be identified in the arsenal of the two concepts in the common attribute damage → Germ. Schaden / Sk. poškodenie.

### 3. Aims, methods, and materials

This section presents the methods, corpus, program of the two-way comparative study of the spoken language of German- and Slovak-speaking politicians who are labelled 'toxic' in the media using a *tertium comparationis* model, associative and identification experiments.

The media discourses of Germany and Slovakia are the **object-matter** of our study; the verbal and nonverbal markers of toxicity in the speeches of public figures within the German and Slovak media discourses are the **subject-matter** of the analysis. The study aims to identify common and distinctive means of verbal and nonverbal expression of toxicity in the speeches of German and Slovak politicians who are labelled as 'toxic' in the media of the two countries.

We proceed from the fact that a person cannot be born toxic or be toxic to everyone around them. What some perceive as a manifestation of toxicity, others may perceive as a manifestation of strength, courage, or unique thinking (leadership). Thus, we attempt to introduce the chemical term 'toxicity' into the linguistic realm and adapt it for further use in the study of the communicative strategies of conflicting linguistic personalities in different types of discourse (politics, science, business, etc.).

### *3.1 Methods and program of our research*

In general, the study was carried out using the etymological and definitional analysis of the concept TOXICITY in German and Slovak, associative and identification experiments, as well as a contrastive comparison of the data obtained.

#### *3.1.1 Associative experiment*

In order to reconstruct the concept features of the TOXICITY in the German and Slovak media, an associative experiment was conducted involving ten native speakers of German and ten native speakers of Slovak. The participants of the experiment received four prompt questions (stimuli), which they had to answer in a free narrative essay and without hesitation: 1) which kind of human behavior is toxic from the viewpoint of Germans / Slovaks; 2) which German / Slovak politicians (men/women) are labelled as toxic in the German / Slovak media; 3) which other public figures besides politicians are characterized as toxic in the German / Slovak media; 4) how toxicity is reflected in the words, voice, and gestures. The time and extent of the written responses to the proposed stimuli was not limited. Thus, we identified the nuclear, medial and peripheral zones of the concept TOXICITY in German and Slovak and selected the most frequent attributes for the following identification experiment (see Appendix A for samples of a free narrative essay in Slovak and German).

#### *3.1.2 Identification experiment*

The aim of the identification experiment was to determine the verbal, vocal, and gesture correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alexander Gauland (since 2019, he has been honorary chairman of the AfD) and Alice Weidel (since September 2017, co-chair of the AfD parliamentary group and opposition leader) (Germany), and Igor Matovič (founder and leader of the conservative right-wing Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti [Ordinary people party] and Petra Krišťúfková (since 2016, member and vice-president of the National Council of the Slovak Republic from *Sme Rodina* [We are family] movement)

(Slovakia), who are labelled as toxic in the online media in Slovakia and Germany. For example, a Google search query for the phrase 'toxisch / giftig + Alexander Gauland' shows 7,840 results, 'toxisch / giftig + Alice Weidel' – 30,400, 'toxický / jedovatý + Igor Matovič' – 11,700, 'toxický / jedovatý + Petra Krištúfková' – 1,950. All these politicians are members of right-wing radical parties in Germany and Slovakia.

The identification experiment included 28 speakers of German and 28 speakers of Slovak, for which a Google form questionnaire was designed. The participants were to fill in the questionnaire with information about themselves, carefully read the preliminary notes, which briefly described the attributes of a toxic person, as well as the objectives of the experiment: 1) how correlates of toxicity are manifested in the oral discourse (in speech and gestures) of German and Slovak politicians; 2) what can serve as a marker of 'toxicity' in 1) words, 2) voice, 3) gestures (see Appendix B for a sample questionnaire).

### *3.1.3 Contrastive comparison*

The contrastive analysis of the spoken language of German- and Slovak-speaking politicians who are labelled as 'toxic' required a common comparison platform – *tertium comparationis* based on the concept of TOXICITY – formed by three levels of comparison: 1) the concept level (comparing concept correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse); 2) the verbal level (comparing utterances / phrases of German and Slovak politicians containing verbal markers of toxicity); and 3) the nonverbal level (comparing voice, gestures, and facial expressions of German and Slovak toxic politicians).

### *3.2 Language corpus and programme*

The following speeches of German and Slovak politicians were used for the identification experiment: 1) Alexander Gauland (Aktuelle Stunde zur Eskalation in #Idlib und den Folgen für #Europa, Rede von Alexander Gauland (AfD) [Current hour on the escalation in Idlib and the consequences for Europe, speech by Alexander Gauland (Alternative for

Germany)] (duration: 5.18 min), 2) Alice Weidel (Rede von Alice Weidel (AfD) zum Bevölkerungsschutzgesetz im Bundestag am 16.04.21 [Speech by Alice Weidel (Alternative for Germany) on the Civil Protection Act in the Bundestag on April 16, 2021] (duration: 6.49 min) (Germany); 1) Igor Matovič (Minister práce Milan Krajniak a premiér Igor Matovič o nových opatreniach po rokovaní vlády [Minister of Labor Milan Krajniak and Prime Minister Igor Matovič on new measures after the government talks], 25.03.2020 (duration: 46.59 min); 2) Petra Krištúfková (Petra Krištúfková po tlaku odstupuje z pozície splnomocnenkyne [Petra Krištúfková resigns after pressure from the post of plenipotentiary], 21.06.2020) (duration: 24.07 min) (Slovakia).

We identified the German / Slovak politicians who are described as toxic in the media as follows: 1) the politicians in question can be identified in Germany / Slovakia, 2) the source (media resource) that describes politicians as 'toxic' can be traced and documented; 3) the sources are (3.1) news and journalistic materials, opinion-forming or alternative media, (3.2) personal blogs of psychologists, sociologists, political experts or analysts, (3.3) search queries with a combination of the name of the politician or public figure in Slovakia and Germany with the attribute '*toxisch / toxický*'; 4) availability of sufficient video footage (and text transcripts) from sessions of the German / Slovak Parliament to analyze the 'toxicity' attributed by to media to individual politicians.

In our study, we faced challenges in disaggregating the Slovak material by gender due to the fact that a) the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the Slovak National Council (Parliament) are male politicians (Boris Kolar, Gabor Grendel, Juraj Seliga, etc.), b) women in the Slovak Parliament make up fewer than one-fifth of the parliament members. Members of this fifth are mostly passive, do not pass laws, usually have no speeches or amendments to laws, and are not especially visible.

## 4. Results and discussion

In this section, we present the results of the associative and identification experiments aimed at identifying common and distinctive concept, verbal and nonverbal correlates of toxicity in the German and Slovak media discourses.

### *4.1 Concept correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse (results of the associative experiment)*

The associative experiment enabled us to determine different and similar concept correlates of toxicity in German vs. Slovak media discourse in each of the four thematic groups: 1) toxic behavior, 2) toxic words, 3) toxic voice, and 4) toxic kinesics. In each of the thematic groups, the attributes were distributed as follows into nuclear, medial, and peripheral zones.

#### *4.1.1 Concept correlates of toxicity in the German media discourse (results of the associative experiment)*

The associative attributes of the German concept TOXIZITÄT totalling 48 units, identified using the method of free narrative essays, were distributed into four thematic groups as follows: 1) toxic behavior – 16 attributes, 2) toxic words – 12 attributes, 3) toxic voice – 11 attributes, 4) toxic kinesics – 9 attributes.

In the thematic group 'toxic behavior', one attribute 'männlich [masculine]' falls into the nuclear zone and reflects the relationship of toxicity that German speakers associate with harmful male social behavior and misogyny. The medial zone of this group consists of four attributes: 'aggressiv [aggressive]', 'narzisstisch [narcissistic]', 'übertrieben [exaggerated]', 'stur [stubborn]'. The peripheral zone of the German concept TOXIZITÄT is formed by 11 attributes: 'dumm [stupid]', 'egoistisch [egoistic]', 'egozentrisch [egocentric]', 'kategorisch [categorical]', 'manipulativ [manipulative]', 'opportunistisch [opportunistic]', 'rücksichtslos [reckless, unceremonious]', 'selbstgerecht [self-confident]',

'sexistisch [sexist]', 'unehrlich [dishonest]', 'zufrieden mit sich selbst [pleased with oneself]'. We see that the medial and peripheral zones of the thematic group 'toxic behavior' are formed by negatively perceived attributes, while the nucleus is assessed as neutral and determined by the masculine gender of the toxic person.

In the thematic group 'toxic words', one attribute 'rassistisch (Worte) [racist (words)]' falls into the nuclear zone and reflects the relationship of verbal units perceived by the addressee as toxic with the 'racial inequality' and the decisive influence of racial differences in the oral discourse of German politicians in the media. Eleven attributes form the peripheral zone of the German concept TOXIZITÄT without the transitional medial zone: 'abwertend (Worte) [derogatory (words)]', 'antisemitisch (Worte) [anti-Semitic (words)]', 'beifallheischend (Worte) [fishing for approval (applause) (words)]', 'demagogisch (Rhetorik) [demagogic (rhetoric)]', 'diskriminierend (Wörter / Worte) [discriminatory (words)]', 'einfach (Sätze) [simple (sentences)]', 'homophob (Worte) [homophobic (words)]', 'manipulativ (Worte) [manipulative (words)]', 'menschenfeindlich (Worte) [misanthropic (words)]', 'Schimpfworte [swearing]', 'von Stärke und Pathos handelnde (Worte) [charged with pathos and force (words)]'.

Thus, the nuclear and peripheral zones of the thematic group 'toxic words' are formed by a common set of negatively perceived attributes, while one neutral attribute 'beifallheischend (Worte) [fishing for approval (applause) (words)]' is associated with the intentions of the most toxic addresser, who is constantly in a state of expectation of approval and uses words that will draw applause, for example, 'Eingriffe in die Bürgerrechte [encroachments on civil rights]'. This technique is purely manipulative and is practiced by AfD members.

In the thematic group 'toxic voice', the attribute 'laut (Stimme) [loud (voice)]' forms the nuclear zone and reflects the relationship of vocal toxicity with strong sounding or a strong

increase in the volume of the toxic voice. The remaining ten attributes, as in the thematic group 'toxic words', form the peripheral zone without a transitional medial zone: 'langsam (Tempo) [slow (tempo)]', 'deutlich wie ein Geschichtenerzähler oder für taube stumme Ausländer (Diktion) [spoken exaggeratedly clearly by the narrator or as for deaf and dumb foreigners (diction)]', 'schnell (Tempo) [fast (tempo)]', 'aggressiv (Stimme) [aggressive (voice)]', 'kreischend (Stimme) [shrill (voice)]', 'schreiend (Stimme) [screaming (voice)]', 'hoch (Stimme) [high (voice)]', 'krätschend (Stimme) [screaming loudly (voice)]', 'kratzende (Stimme) [raspy (voice)]', 'unmelodisch (Stimme) [non-melodic (voice)]'.

We see that the nucleus is assessed as neutral and is associated with a subjective measure of the strength of sounds perception – loudness, which can depend on both the social status of the toxic person (leader) and his or her emotional state (anger). The peripheral zone of the 'toxic voice' thematic group is formed by negatively perceived speech attributes such as tempo, timbre, diction, melody, etc., while one parameter may have diametrically opposite attributes (langsam vs. schnell [slow vs. fast] (pace)).

In the thematic group 'toxic kinesics', the nuclear zone is formed by two attributes 'geballt (Fäuste) [clenched (fists)]' and 'übertrieben (alles) [exaggerated (everything)]', which reflect the relationship of gestural toxicity with exaggerated gesticulations and an aggressive form of the hands folded into fists. The remaining seven attributes, as in the 'toxic voice' thematic group, form the peripheral zone without a transitional medial zone: 'angespannt (Körperhaltung) [tense (posture)]', 'monoton (Gestik) [monotonous (gestures)]', 'unpassend (Gestik) [inappropriate (gestures)]', 'verkniffen (Gesicht) [distorted (face)]', 'wenig (Gestik) [insignificant (gestures)]', 'wild herumfuchtend (Hände) [wildly waving (arms)]', 'zusammengezogen (Augenbrauen) [frowning (eyebrows)]'.

Thus, the nucleus of this group is associated with the factor of excessive / exaggerated non-verbal accompaniment of toxic politicians' speech, with the periphery of the thematic group 'toxic kinesics' being formed by such negatively perceived attributes of non-verbal manifestations of a toxic person's behaviour as gestures, facial expressions, posture, etc., while the same parameter can have diametrically opposite attributes assessed as toxic ('wenig (Gestik) vs. herumfuchtelnd (Hände) [little (gestures) vs. strong gesticulation (hands)]').

#### *4.1.2 Concept correlates of toxicity in the Slovak media discourse (results of the associative experiment)*

Associative attributes of the Slovak concept TOXICITA totalling 54 units, identified by the method of free narrative essays, were distributed into four thematic groups as follows: 1) toxic behavior – 13 attributes, 2) toxic words – 16 attributes, 3) toxic voice – 8 attributes, 4) toxic kinesics – 17 attributes. In each of the thematic groups, the attributes were distributed into nuclear, medial and peripheral zones.

In the thematic group 'toxic behavior' of the Slovak concept TOXICITA, two attributes 'manipulácia [manipulating]' and 'narcistický [narcissistic]' fall within the nuclear zone and reflect the relationship of toxicity, which Slovak speakers associate with harmful behavior and heightened self-esteem, self-praising and vulgarisms, lack of empathy and not admitting one's errors and failures. The medial zone of this group consists of one attribute 'konfliktné prehlbovanie a hľadanie nových konfliktov [conflicting, deepening and seeking new conflicts]'. The peripheral zone is formed by ten attributes: 'drzý [bumptious]', 'falošný [fake]', 'kontaminuje (celý priestor) [polluting (the whole space)]', 'obťažujúci [annoying]', 'ohováranie [slanderous, defamatory]', 'otravný [meddlesome]', 'prehnany [overwhelming]'.

We see that the medial and peripheral zones of the thematic group 'toxic behavior' are formed by negatively perceived attributes, whereas the nucleus is assessed as trivial, elementary, petty defamatory and primitive aggressive. Both Slovak speakers pollute the media space with their marginal conflicts with everybody, their low political and diplomatic competence, and their inability to disengage from gossiping.

In the thematic group 'toxic words' of the Slovak concept TOXICITA, three attributes 'degradovanie (ostatných) [degrading (others)]', 'kritizovanie (ostatní neustále) [criticizing (others constantly)]' and 'ohováranie (hanobenie) [slanderos (defamation)]' fall within the nuclear zone thus reflecting political incompetence, populism, contempt of the audience and 'godliness' in the oral discourse of Slovak politicians in the media. The medial zone of this group is formed by two attributes 'nepravda (otázky) [fallacious (matter)]' and 'provokujúce (komentáre) [provocative (comments)]', 'uštipačnosť (komentáre) [biting (comments) (snide, poisonous, mocking, acute)]'. The other 11 attributes form the peripheral zone: 'samochvála [praising (oneself)]', 'útočenie (verbálne) [attacking (verbally)]', 'nepriзнание (chyby) [not recognizing (mistakes)]', 'nevďačný [ungrateful]', 'drsnosť (vyjadrovania) [harsh (expressions)]', 'poukazovanie (na nedostatky ostatných) [pointing (to the shortcomings of others)]', 'zveličovanie [exaggerating]', 'priamočiarosť [straightforwardness]', 'rozprávanie (o sebe) [speaking (about oneself)]', 'nadávky (vulgarizmy) [vulgar (vulgarisms)]', 'ironický [ironic]'.

Thus, the nuclear, medial and peripheral zones of the thematic group 'toxic words' of the Slovak concept TOXICITA are formed by a common set of negatively perceived attributes with a large number of exaggerations, instances of irony, and vulgarisms. These elements provoke the Slovak public and leave behind the feeling of impunity and impotence.

In the thematic group 'toxic voice' of the Slovak concept TOXICITA, one attribute 'nahlas (hlas, smiech) [loud (voice, laughter)]' forms the nuclear zone and reflects, as with

German politicians, the relationship of voice toxicity with a strong increase in sound / voice loudness. The other seven attributes form the peripheral zone without a transitional medial zone: 'ironický (hlas) [ironic (voice)]', 'krik (hlas) [screaming (voice)]', 'manipulatívny (hlas) [manipulating (voice)]', 'modulácia (hlas) [modulating (voice)]', 'prehnané (intonácia) [exaggerated (intonation)]', 'zdôraznenie negatívneho kontextu (hlas) [emphasizing negative context (voice)]', 'tichý (hlas) [quiet (voice)]'.

We see that, as with German politicians, the nuclear attributes in the 'toxic voice' group of Slovak toxics is associated with the physical parameter of loudness, which can be influenced by the social and emotional factors of the speaker. The peripheral zone of the 'toxic voice' thematic group is formed by such negatively perceived speech attributes as intonation, and voice, while for one parameter the attributes can be diametrically opposite '(nahlas (hlas) vs. tichý (hlas) [loud (voice) vs. quiet (voice)]'.

In the thematic group 'toxic kinesics' of the Slovak concept TOXICITA, the nuclear zone is formed by three attributes 'falošný (smiech) [false (laughter)]', 'falošný (úsmev) [false (smile)]', 'klamlivý drzý (pohl'ad) [deceiving impudent (look)]', 'skrývajúce skutočné pocity (pohl'ad) [hiding real feelings (gaze)]', which reflect the relationship of gestural toxicity with false mimic non-verbal effects such as laughter, smile, and gaze. The medial zone of this group is formed by four attributes 'invázia do intímneho životného priestoru iného (gestá) [invading the intimate living space of another (gestures)]', 'prenikanie do územia iného (gestá) [intrusion into the territory of another (gestures)]', 'zaberá veľa miesta v komunikácii (držanie tela) [taking up a lot of space in communication (posture)]', 'prehnané široké (gestá) [far from the body (gestures)]', which demonstrate a possible correlation of toxicity with the violation of the communication partner's personal space.

The remaining nine attributes form the peripheral zone: 'prešpekulovaná (mimika) [well thought out (mimics)]', 'expresívne (mimika) [expressive (mimics)]', 'ďaleko od seba

kolená (držanie tela) [knees spread apart (posture)], 'honosný (gestá, telo) [ostentatious (gestures, body)], 'oduševnený (pohľad) [soulful (look)], 'priamy (pohľad) [direct (look)], 'strecha z vašich prstov (gestá) [Merkel diamond, Triangle of power (gestures)], 'zdôraznenie negatívnych významov (mimika) [emphasizing negative meaning (facial expressions)], 'zdvihnutý ukazovák (gestá) [raised index finger (gestures)].

Thus, the nucleus of this group is associated with false mimic kinemes (laugh, smile, and look), the medial zone reflects the relationship of toxicity with the violation of the communicants' personal boundaries, and the periphery of the thematic group 'toxic kinesics' is formed by such negatively perceived attributes of non-verbal manifestations of toxicity as facial expressions, gestures, gaze, posture, etc., while the same parameter can be characterized by an opposite pair of attributes perceived as toxic, for example, 'skrývanie skutočných pocitov (pohľad) [hiding real feelings (glance)]' vs. 'oduševnený (pohľad) [soulful (look)]'.

#### *4.1.3 Different and similar concept correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse*

The contrastive analysis of the concept correlates of toxicity in German vs. Slovak media discourse has revealed similarities and differences of the four thematic groups. For example, we noted a relationship of complete coincidence in the thematic group 'toxic behavior' in the attribute 'narzisstisch [narcissistic] / 'narcistický [narcissistic]'. The contrasting attribute in this group is 'ohovárajúci [slanderous, defamatory]', which is a sign of toxic behavior among Slovak politicians.

In the thematic group 'toxic words', the use of harsh words and vulgarisms is a common feature; contrasting for German toxic politicians is the attribute 'beifallheischend (Worte) [fishing for approval (applause) (words)]', for Slovak toxic politicians – 'ohováranie (hanobenie) [slander (defamation)]'. In the thematic group 'toxic voice', the physical

parameters of loudness and exaggerated intonations, which are perceived negatively by all native speakers of German and Slovak, are common voice markers of toxicity among politicians.

In the thematic group 'toxic kinesics', common for toxic politicians in Germany and Slovakia is the exaggerated use of gestures and facial expressions, contrasting for German toxic politicians is the attribute 'verkniffen (Gesicht) [distorted (face)]', for Slovak politicians – 'strecha z vašich prstov (gestá) [Merkel diamond (gestures)]'.

Furthermore, in each language group, the experts named politicians and public figures with 'toxic' attributes, with the range of toxic individuals represented in the German media discourse being rather wide – including primarily right-wing politicians, but also, for instance, Conservatives and Greens: (politicians) Alexander Gauland, Alice Weidel, Beatrix von Storch, Björn Höcke, Jörg Meuthen, Lutz Bachmann, Armin Laschet, Claudia Roth; (other public figures) Attila Hildmann, Dieter Bohlen, Josef Ackermann, Klaus Esser. The toxicity of Slovak politicians is represented by a narrower circle of persons: (politicians) Igor Matovič, Petra Krišťúfková, Ľuboš Blaha; (sport personalities) Dominika Cibulková, Boris Valábik, (other public figures) Jasmína Alagič, Zuzana Plačková, Alena Pallová, Iveta Malachovská.

#### *4.2 Verbal correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse (results of the identification experiment, verbal level)*

The identification experiment allowed us to establish different and similar verbal correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse.

#### 4.2.1 Verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alexander Gauland (Germany)

The participants in the experiment identified Alexander Gauland as a toxic figure, because his manner of speaking (88.9%), the use of words (66.7%), gestures and facial expressions (22.2%) are perceived as toxic.

For instance, Alexander Gauland manipulates the German federal government and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas that did not clearly condemn Turkey's aggressive war in Syria, which is contrary to international law, by using the derogatory word 'Germ. Anbieterei / Eng. curry favour' (from German *anbiedern* = cling to, rub into trust, solicit friendship), which literally means "curry favor = to seek to gain favour by flattery or attention" ('curry favour': MWOD): Turkey accepts refugees instead of Germany, and for this the German government seeks to gain favor of Turkey by flattery or attention.

Thus, the manipulation lies in the fact that Gauland exposed Maas before the elections to the public as a bad foreign minister, but not in the fact that Maas himself is being manipulated like a puppet: Germ.: *"...Die Türkei führt in Syrien einen völkerrechtswidrigen Angriffskrieg...Die Provinz Idlib ist syrisches Staatsgebiet, nicht türkisches. Mit seinem Tweet gestand der Bundesaußenminister der Türkei en passant das Recht zu, mit ihren Truppen in Syrien zu stehen...Und als Krönung spricht der Außenminister einem Aggressor sein Mitgefühl aus. Diese Anbieterei zeigt, wie erpressbar wir durch den Flüchtlingsdeal geworden sind..."* [Eng.: "Turkey is waging a war of aggression in Syria that is contrary to international law ... The Idlib province is Syrian national territory, not Turkish. With his tweet, the Federal Foreign Minister recognized en passant Turkey's right to deploy its troops in Syria ... And to top it off, the Foreign Minister expressed his condolences to the aggressor. This attempt to curry favor shows how vulnerable to blackmail we have become as a result of the refugee deal ... "].

His words are toxic because he often taints the image of the German federal government and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas using words spoken with strength and pathos, e.g., Germ.: *"deutsche Grenzen schützen!"* [Eng.: "protect German borders!"] (60.7%), manipulative words, for example, Germ.: *"Anbiederei"* [Eng.: "curry favor"] (50.0%) and words of approval / demagogic rhetoric, e.g., Germ.: *"die Bundesrepublik macht sich mit diesem Handel erpressbar"* [Eng.: "the Federal Republic makes itself vulnerable to blackmail with this deal"] (46.4%) (see Fig. 1).

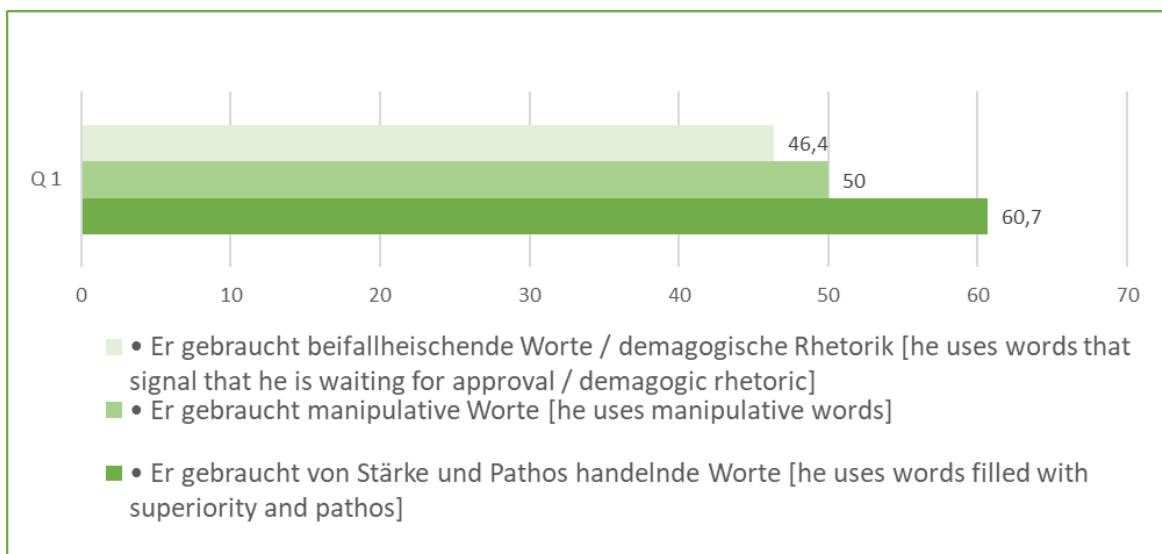


Figure 1. The recurrent verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alexander Gauland (Germany)

#### 4.2.2 Verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alice Weidel (Germany)

All the manipulative tactics of public toxic politicians, in particular, right-wing radical Alice Weidel, have one thing in common: the harm they cause to the person and the people around them. The harm can be public (image tainting) and personal (moral harm). The participants in the experiment identified Alice Weidel as a toxic figure because her manner of speaking (88.9%), the use of words (77.8%) and her appearance (22.2%) are perceived as toxic. The analyzed speech of Alice Weidel in the Bundestag is generally characterized by experts as damaging the image of the current German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her policy on combating the pandemic.

Toxicity in Alice Weidel's speech is explicated with words dealing with strength and pathos (lofty words), which elevate the tone of the whole speech and make it sound, e.g., Germ.: *"...Noch nie hat es eine Bundesregierung gewagt, in so wenigen Sätzen so viele Angriffe auf die Grund- und Freiheitsrechte der Bürger, auf Rechtsstaatlichkeit und demokratische Prinzipien unterzubringen wie in diesem Gesetzentwurf"* [Eng.: "Never before has a federal government dared to include so many attacks on the basic freedoms of citizens, on the rule of law and democratic principles in so few sentences as in this draft law..."] and exaggerated drama of events, e.g., Germ.: *"...Wir sagen dazu: Ausgangssperren sind unverhältnismäßig und verfassungswidrig!"* [Eng.: "We say, curfews are disproportionate and unconstitutional..."].

Alice Weidel blackens the picture and thus creates a toxic image of the "apocalypse", e.g., Germ.: *"...der Mittelstand zugrunde geht, der Arbeitsmarkt durch staatliche Dauerintervention zerstört wird, dass Innenstädte veröden, dass eine ganze Schülergeneration verloren geht und dass das Kultur- und Vereinsleben stirbt. Zahllose Geschäfte werden nie mehr öffnen. Generationen alte Familienbetriebe verschwinden für immer!"* [Eng.: "...the middle class is perishing, the labor market is being destroyed by permanent state intervention, inner cities are becoming deserted, a whole generation of schoolchildren is being lost and cultural and club life is dying. Countless stores will never open again. Generation-old family businesses will disappear forever!..."].

Alice Weidel uses manipulative words such as 'interference with civil rights' to accuse Angela Merkel of neutralizing local and administrative courts that overturned her infringements on the rights of German citizens during the quarantine period, e.g., Germ.: *"...Sie misstrauen den Gerichten, den berufenen Kontrolleuren staatlichen Handelns. Deswegen stellen Sie die Amts- und Verwaltungsgerichte durch Zentralisierung kalt – möglicherweise, weil diese nämlich eben zuletzt einige Ihrer Eingriffe in die Bürgerrechte gekippt haben"* [Eng.: "You distrust the courts, the appointed inspectors of state action.

That is why you are neutralizing the local and administrative courts through centralization – possibly because they have recently overturned some of your encroachments on civil rights..."].

Experts also consider Alice Weidel's rhetoric to be highly toxic and demagogic, which is expressed in unprovoked and blistering attacks on Angela Merkel in the name of the German people without substantive answers, e.g., Germ.: "...*Sie misstrauen den Bürgern; deswegen wollen Sie sie tagsüber gängeln und nachts einsperren. Sie misstrauen den Ländern und Kommunen...Dieser Rückfall in den autoritären Ungeist geht vom Kanzleramt aus und von Ihnen, Frau Bundeskanzlerin*" [Eng.: "You distrust the citizens; that's why you want to peg them during the day and lock them up at night. You distrust the federal states and municipalities ... This return to the authoritarian mischief comes from the Chancellery and from you, Ms. Chancellor!..."]. Accusing Angela Merkel of authoritarianism is a distortion of the truth and pure demagoguery, which arouses thunderous applause only from fellow AfD party members.

Like her AfD party colleague Alexander Gauland, Alice Weidel uses rhetoric words, which can be perceived as toxic because she taints Angela Merkel's image as a democratic politician using words spoken with strength and pathos, e.g., Germ.: "*Angriffe auf die Grund- und Freiheitsrechte der Bürger*" [Eng.: "attacks on the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens"] (67.8%), manipulative words, e.g., Germ.: "*Eingriffe in die Bürgerrechte*" Eng. ["interference with civil rights"] (53.6%), demagogic rhetoric, e.g., Germ.: "*dieser Rückfall in den autoritären Ungeist*" [Eng.: "this relapse into the authoritarian demon"] (46.4%) (see Fig. 2).

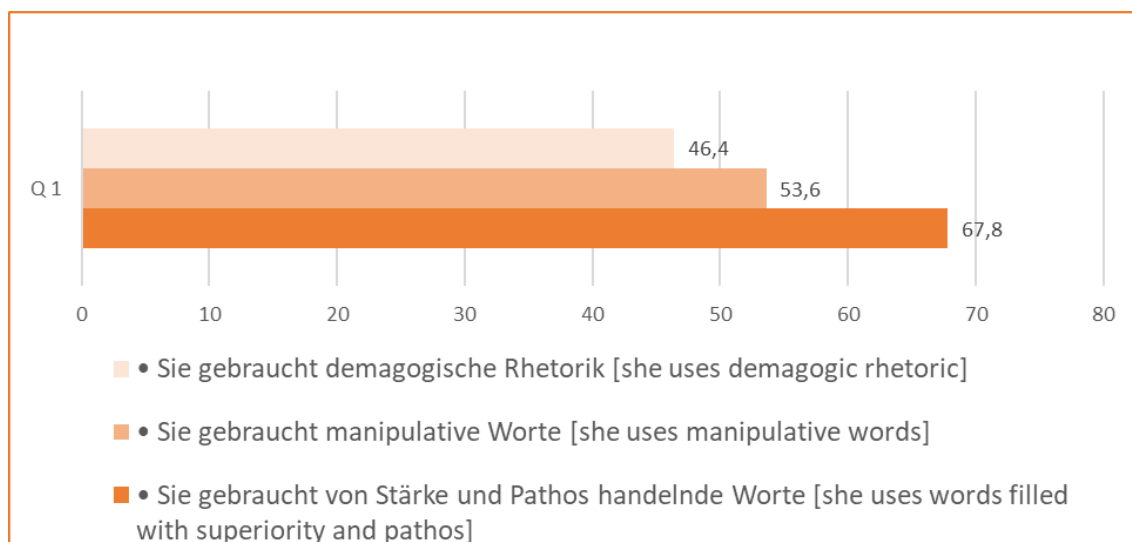


Figure 2. The recurrent verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alice Weidel (Germany)

#### 4.2.3 Verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia)

The participants in the experiment generally identified Igor Matovič as a toxic figure because his use of words (60.7%), manner of speaking (57.1%), gestures and facial expressions (46.4%) are perceived as toxic.

A wide use of derogatory words makes his speech toxic, e.g., Sk.: *"Ak štát zavlažuje (financuje) všade, tak pri sociálnej pomoci sa takto správa hlúpy štát."* [Eng.: "If the state irrigates (finances) everywhere, then the stupid state behaves in this way with social assistance."] (64.3%). In this example, we see metaphor (epithet) of evaluative character; to name someone or something stupid is always insulting. The speaker is not afraid and has no remorse for insulting the whole country.

In some cases, the politician sounds extremely cynically speaking about working senior people, whom he mercilessly and indiscriminately makes potential victims of COVID-19. The implication of the example given below is as follows: if you are old, you are doomed; you will die; thus, die and give way to younger people: Sk.: *"Pracujúci seniori nech zostanú doma. Keď na tú chorobu (COVID-19) ochorejú, majú 100x väčšiu*

*pravdepodobnosť, že na ňu zomrú, ako keď ju dostanú mladí ľudia.*" [Eng.: "Working seniors should stay at home. When they get the disease (COVID-19), they are 100 times more likely to die from it than when young people get it."]. The situation is aggravated by the fact that he understands that he is malicious, but nevertheless he persists on his opinion. Sk.: *"Ja v tejto situácii budem v pohode za zlého, lebo byť za zlého pre tých, ktorí tomu nerozumejú, je pre tých ľudí, ktorí tomu rozumejú ako byť za zodpovedného."* [Eng.: "I'll be fine with being the bad guy in this situation, because being the bad guy for those who don't understand means being the responsible guy for those people who do understand".] (57.1%), words that signal that he is constantly waiting for approval, etc. Very often, he is cunning, pretending that he needs approval and support, but in fact, he sticks to his point of view, e.g., Sk.: *"Ja sa sám seba pýtam, či je úplne správne, že vám, novinárom odpovedáme na úplne všetky otázky, lebo mám pocit, že v minulosti to tak nebolo zvykom. Keď to robíme náhodou zle, tak nám to povedzte, aby sme to robili inak."* [Eng.: "I ask myself whether it is quite right that we answer all of your questions to you, journalists, because I feel that this has not been the case in the past. If we happen to do it wrong, tell us to do it differently."]. The next statement is a good example of hypocrisy: people should be at work notwithstanding Corona crisis. But what was done to support families when due to the lockdown everything was closed? Nothing. Sk.: *"Majú byť ľudia doma s deťmi bez akéhokoľvek príjmu? Asi to správne nie je."* [Eng.: Should people stay at home with their children even if they lose income? Probably it is not right."] (42.9%) (see Fig. 3).

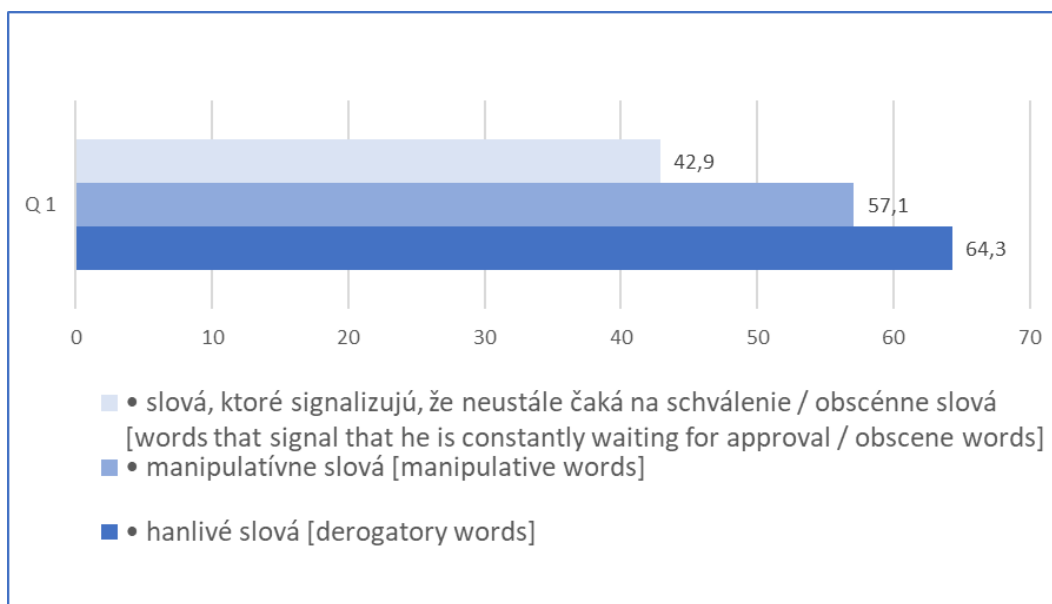


Figure 3. The recurrent verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia)

#### 4.2.4 Verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Petra Krištúfková (Slovakia)

Slovak politician Petra Krištúfková was characterized in the experiment as a toxic political figure who shows her toxicity through her manner of speaking and delivery (46.4%), words (35.7%) and the appearance (28.6%).

Her words are toxic because she most often uses manipulative words, like self-esteem, e.g., Sk.: *"je to zrkadlom toho, že si robím prácu dobre"* [Eng.: "it reflects the fact that I am doing my job well"]; speaking about Marián Kočner, who is now in prison for corruption and crimes, she shifts responsibility onto the media – Sk.: *"bol v médiách a vy (médiá) ste mu dávali moc"* [Eng.: "he appeared in the media and you (the media) gave him the power"] (53.6%), words full of superiority and pathos, e.g., Sk.: *"po rozvode mojich rodičov, nastalo v mojom živote obdobie rebelstva"* [Eng.: "after my parents' divorce, there was a period of rebellion in my life"]; being reprimanded for her friendship with Marián Kočner's wife, with whom she spent some time on their yacht, she changes the topic and passes from their cruise to her children – Sk.: *"žijem len pre svoje dcéry"* [Eng.: "I dedicate my life only to my daughters"] (50.0%), demagogic rhetoric / simple

sentences, e.g., Sk.: *"nechcem riešiť vaše slová, ktoré mi vy vkadáte do úst"* [Eng.: "I do not want to deal with your words that you are trying to put in my mouth"] (28.6%) (see Fig. 4).

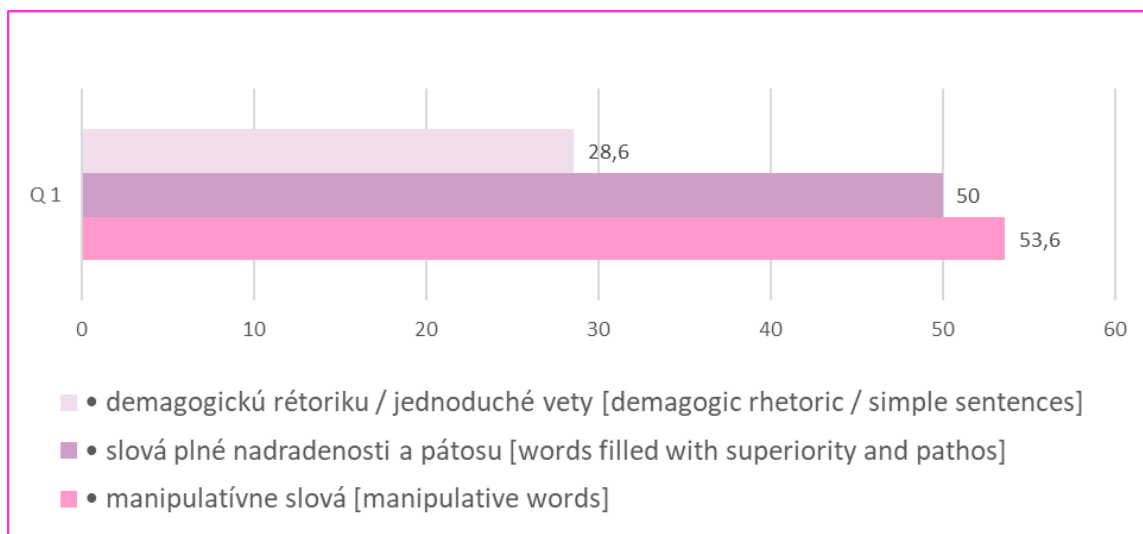


Figure 4. The recurrent verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Petra Krišťúfková (Slovakia)

The participants of the experiment added a large number of their variants of toxicity in the oral discourse of Petra Krišťúfková, which were not in the experimental questionnaire and which, in their opinion, are associated with attributes reflecting the female dominant of toxicity: 1) a large number of pauses in hesitation, e.g., Sk.: *"dlhé ticho"* [Eng.: "long silence"]; Sk.: *"zvuky bez významu"* [Eng.: "sounds without meanings"]; Sk.: *"Možete mi zopakovať otázku?"* [Eng.: "Could you repeat your question?"]; 2) interruptions of the interlocutor, e.g., Sk.: *"nechajte ma dohovoriť"* [Eng.: "let me finish"]; Sk.: *"už som na to odpovedala"* [Eng.: "I have already given you the answer"]; 3) attacks with counter questions, e.g., Sk.: *"Ani vy ste nevedeli, kto on bol, inak by ste mu ten priestor (mediálny) nedávali. Však?"* [Eng.: "Even you did not know what kind of person he was. Otherwise you wouldn't have given him that much media space. Right?"]; Sk.: *"A za kým som mala ísť?"* [Eng.: "And who should I follow after?"]; 4) evasive words that can cause regret or admiration in the interlocutor, e.g., Sk.: *"Nechcem energiu venovať tomuto lynčovaniu"*

[Eng.: "I do not want to waste my energy to this lynching"]; Sk.: "*neznášal ma*" [Eng.: "he detested me"], etc.

#### *4.2.5 Different and similar verbal correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse*

The contrastive analysis of the recurrent verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia) vs. Alexander Gauland (Germany) has revealed similarities and differences in each of the language subgroups. For instance, we noted relations of coincidence in the use by the two politicians of manipulative words as a means of verbal toxicity (cf. 50.0% / 57.1%), which coincides with the nuclear feature identified in the associative experiment 'shortened and simplified representations of complex facts for manipulating others'.

The distinctive features of verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia) vs Alexander Gauland (Germany) are determined by the German politician's inclination to use words dealing with strength and pathos (e.g., Germ.: "*Wir müssen endlich unsere Grenzen gegen illegale Migration schützen! Wenn die europäischen Außengrenzen nicht zu schützen sind, dann müssen wir die deutschen Grenzen schützen!*" [Eng.: "We finally have to protect our borders against illegal migration! If the European external borders cannot be protected, then we must protect the German borders!"]), while the Slovak politician prefers to express his assessment using derogatory or obscene words (see Fig. 5).

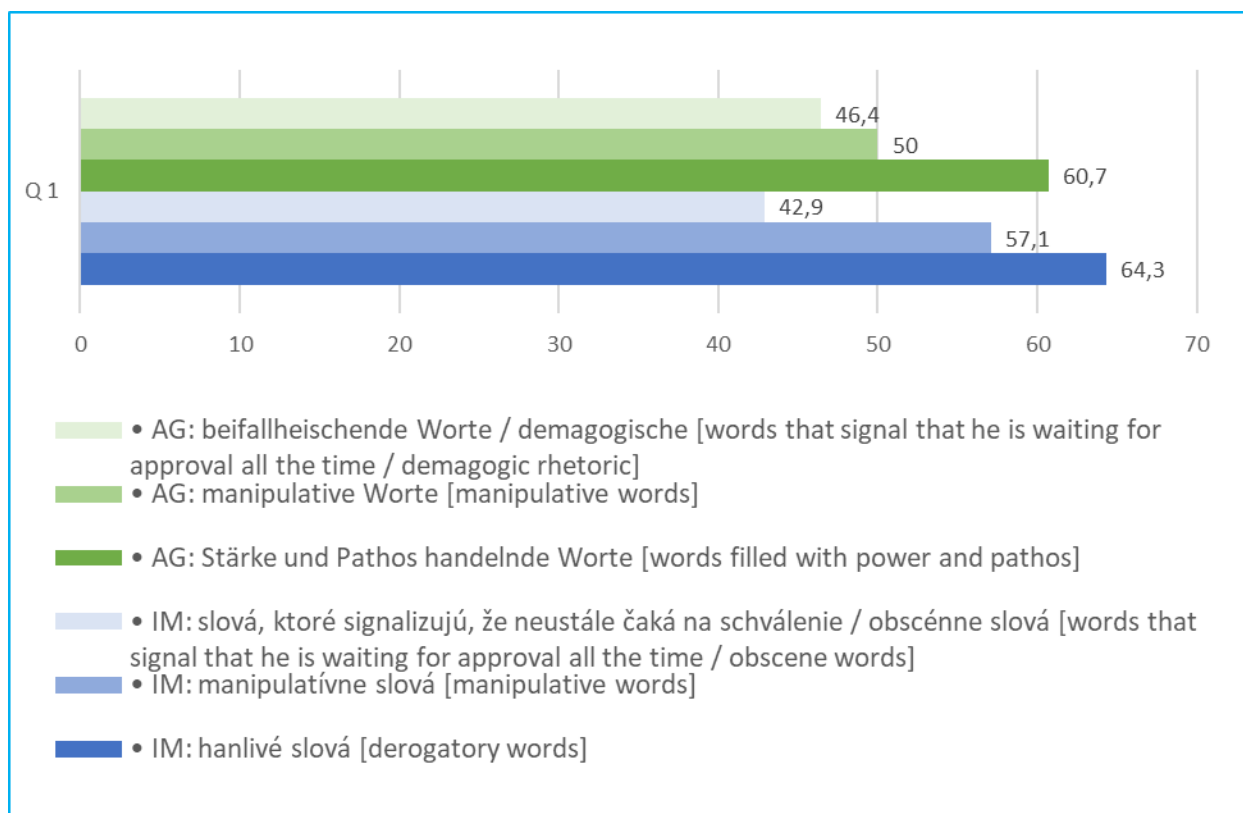


Figure 5. Verbal level of comparison (male gender): The recurrent verbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia) vs Alexander Gauland (Germany)

In the future, feedback signals in the form of disapproving reactions / hoots from the hall of deputies from other factions (opponents of the AfD) may become the object of a separate study of reactions to public toxicity, e.g., 1) Dr. Johann David Wadehul [CDU/CSU]: Germ.: "*Aber das ist gegen die eigenen Bürger und nicht gegen eine fremde Macht!*" [Eng.: "But that is against our own citizens and not against a foreign power!"]; 2) Christoph Matschie [SPD]: Germ.: "*Was für ein Unfug!*" [Eng.: "What nonsense!"]; 3) Germ.: "*Zuruf vom BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN: Quatsch!*" [Eng.: "Call from BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN: Nonsense!"]; 4) Thorsten Frei [CDU/CSU]: Germ.: "*So ein Schwachsinn!*" [Eng.: "What bullshit!"]; 5) Germ.: "*Gegenruf der Abg. Britta Haßelmann [BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN]: Ja klar, Sie sind blank bei dem Thema!*" [Eng.: "Countercall from MP Britta Haßelmann [BÜNDNIS 90 / DIE GRÜNEN]: Yes, of course, you are blank on the topic (=You don't know diddly-squat!)"], etc.

### 4.3 Nonverbal correlates of toxicity in German vs. Slovak media discourse (results of the identification experiment, nonverbal level)

The identification experiment allowed us to establish different and similar nonverbal correlates of toxicity in German vs Slovak media discourse.

#### 4.3.1 Nonverbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alexander Gauland (Germany)

The recurrent analysis of the identification experiment data shows that Alexander Gauland's manner of speaking is toxic because he speaks overly clearly (57%), slowly (42%), loudly (35.7%) (see Fig. 6).

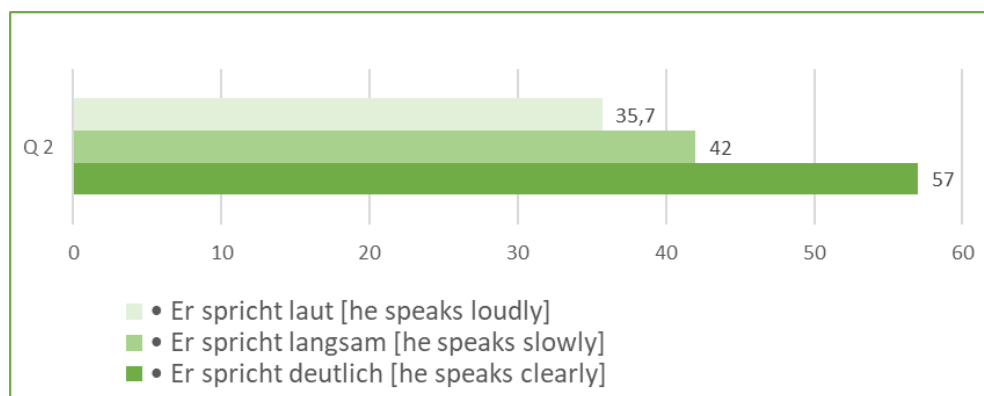


Figure 6. The recurrent voice correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alexander Gauland (Germany)

The gestures and facial expressions of Alexander Gauland are also considered as toxic because he has few gestures (60.7%), tense posture (46.4%), and monotonous gestures (28.6%) (see Fig. 7).

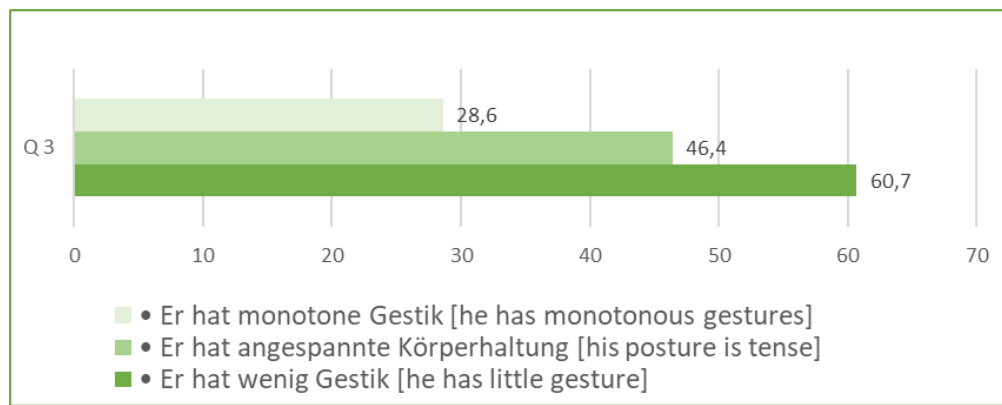


Figure 7. The recurrent gestures and facial correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alexander Gauland (Germany)

We also established that Alexander Gauland does not use 1) homophobic and swear words, 2) fast speech turning to screaming, 3) clenched fists and waving gestures as verbal and nonverbal correlates of toxicity.

#### 4.3.2 Nonverbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alice Weidel (Germany)

The recurrent analysis of voice correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alice Weidel shows that her manner of speaking is perceived as toxic because she speaks loudly (67.8%), overly clearly (60.7%), and aggressively (42%) (see Fig. 8).

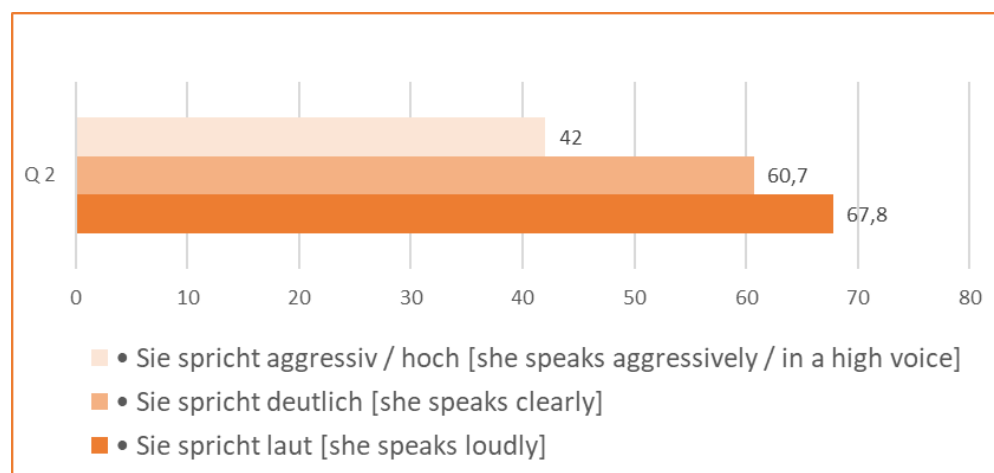


Figure 8. The recurrent voice correlates of toxicity in the oral Alice Weidel (Germany)

The gestures and facial expressions of Alice Weidel are also considered as toxic because she has a distorted face (71.4%), tense posture (50.0%), and wildly waving gestures (28.6%) (see Fig. 9).

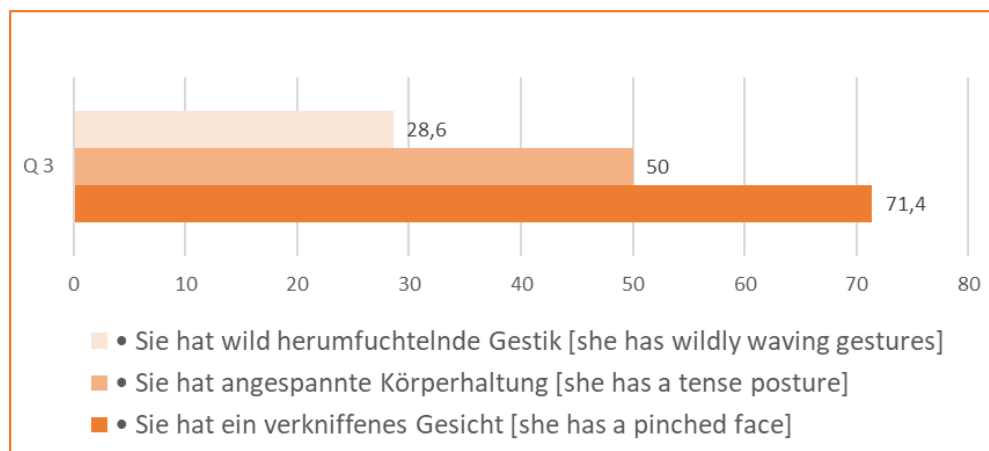


Figure 9. The recurrent gestures and facial correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Alice Weidel (Germany)

We also found that Alice Weidel does not use 1) homophobic and swear words, 2) creaking voice, 3) clenched fists, puckered eyebrows as verbal and nonverbal attributes of toxicity.

#### 4.3.3 Nonverbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia)

The recurrent analysis of the identification experiment data showed that Igor Matovič's manner of speaking is toxic because he speaks aggressively (57.1%), exaggeratedly clearly (59%), loudly (35.7%) (see Fig. 10).

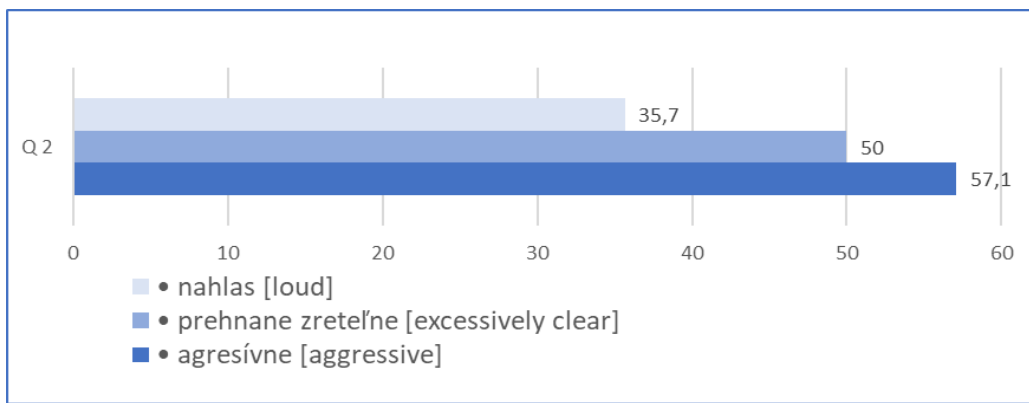


Figure 10. The recurrent voice correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia)

In addition, his gestures and facial expressions are considered toxic because he uses exaggerated gestures / facial expressions (42.9%), excessively spreads his arms (32.1%), and has a tense posture (28.6%) (see Fig. 11).

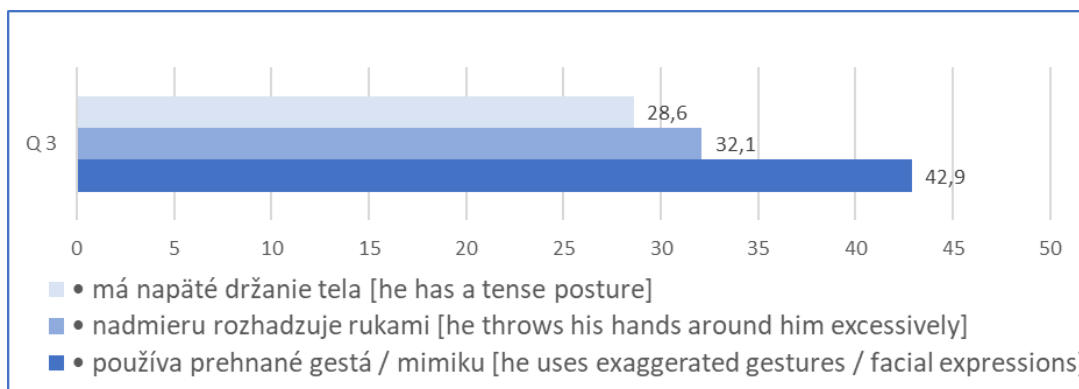


Figure 11. The recurrent gestures and facial correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia)

At the same time, the experts noted that in oral discourse, Igor Matovič rarely uses 1) gestures and facial expressions: uses few gestures (3.6%) and 2) squeaky, slow, fast speech (3.6%) and does not use 3) anti-Semitic, homophobic, racist words (0%) as verbal and nonverbal correlates of toxicity (see Fig. 12).

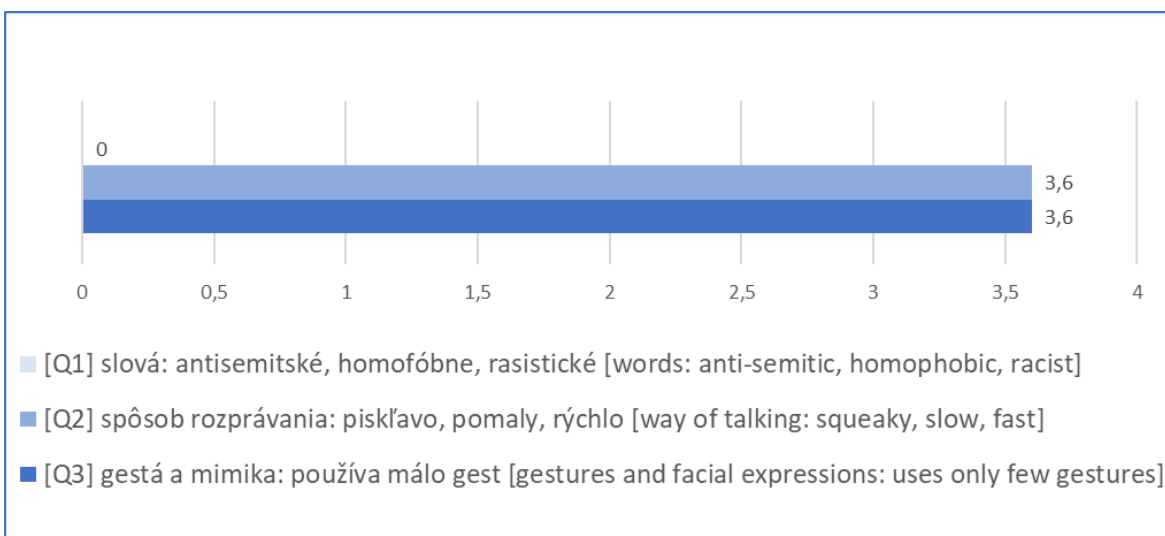


Figure 12. Rarely used verbal and nonverbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Igor Matovič (Slovakia)

#### 4.3.4 Nonverbal correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Petra Krištúfková (Slovakia)

The recurrent analysis of the identification experiment data showed that Petra Krištúfková's manner of speaking is toxic because she speaks aggressively (42.9%), in an overly accentuated manner (39.3%), in a high voice (35.7%) (see Fig. 13).

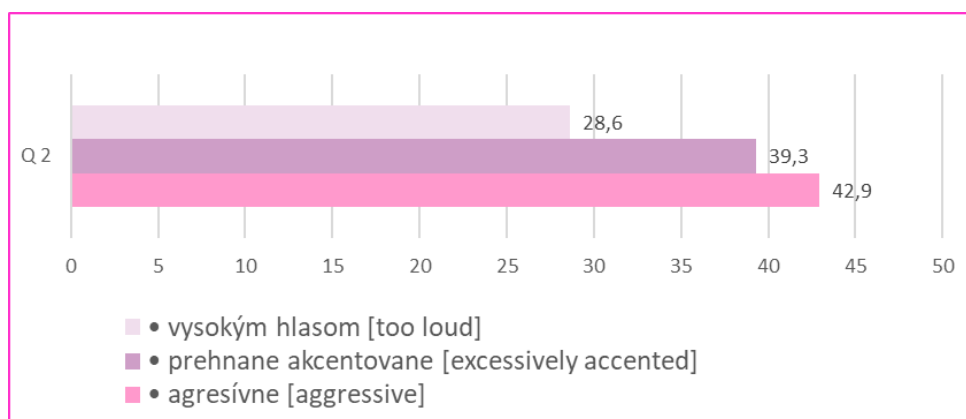


Figure 13. The recurrent voice correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Petra Krištúfková (Slovakia)

The participants of the identification characterize Petra Krištúfková's gestures and facial expressions as toxic because she has a tense posture (42.9%), uses few gestures (28.6%), and monotonous gestures (21.4%) (see Fig. 14).

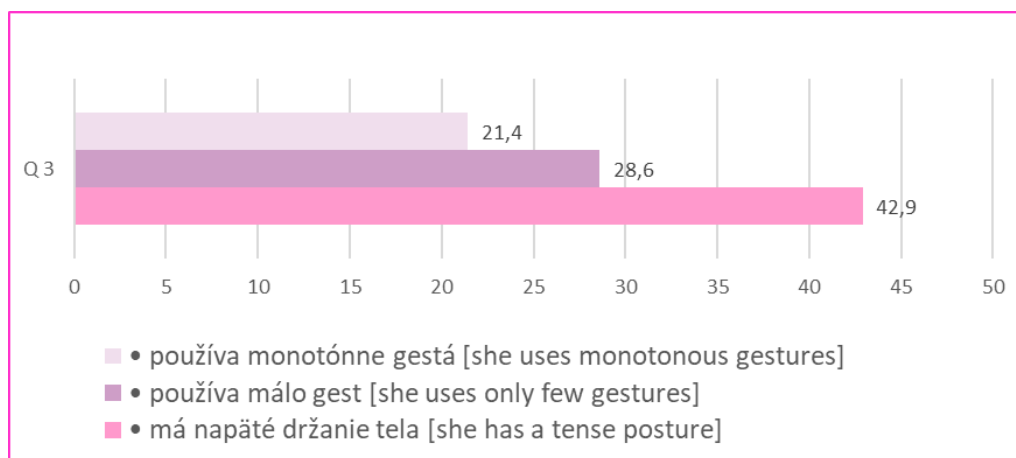


Figure 14. The recurrent gestures and facial correlates of toxicity in the oral discourse of Petra Krišťúfková (Slovakia)

We also established that Petra Krišťúfková does not use 1) derogatory, anti-Semitic, racist words, 2) hoarse speech, and 3) fists clenched as verbal and nonverbal correlates of toxicity.

#### 4.3.5 Different and similar nonverbal correlates of toxicity in German vs. Slovak media discourse

The contrastive analysis of the nonverbal correlates of toxicity in German vs. Slovak media discourse displayed a significant commonality of vocal toxicity, which is associated with voice parameters such as aggressiveness and loudness, as well as excessive hand activity, regardless of the gender of the toxic person.

## 5. Conclusions and final discussion

Our contrastive analysis of the oral speech of German and Slovak politicians who are labelled as toxic in the media of the two countries allows us to draw the following conclusions about toxicity correlates, which we analyzed at the conceptual level, verbal and nonverbal levels using two experiments.

We found that there are more similarities / overlaps between toxic politicians in Germany and Slovakia, both in the verbal expression of toxicity and their nonverbal accompaniment, than differences between them. In our opinion, this conclusion is logical, since the motivational base of political discourse is dominant and, accordingly, the set of verbal and nonverbal means will be common for German and Slovak politicians; in particular, both groups of politicians use manipulative methods of influencing the addressee as toxic means, conduct an aggressive verbal strategy using a loud voice and a large number of hand gestures. Such a set of toxicity correlates fully coincides with the persuasive basis of political discourse – influencing the addressee with the aim of convincing or calling for some action. Unlike other components of political communication (agonality, aggressiveness, and persuasiveness), toxicity as a behavioral and communicative model is ultimately aimed at causing psychological (emotional) harm in direct or indirect forms.

In this article, we sought to answer the question of which attributes of toxicity as properties of (some) chemical elements, compounds and biogenic substances that adversely affect living organisms and human health are transferred from the specialized languages of medicine and chemistry and conceptualized as a destructive psychological property of a person in everyday language.

To this end, we developed the following model of psychological toxicity, which is based on a prototypical scenario of chemical toxicity, the attributes of which are metaphorized in the language and the media.

Let us compare two models of toxicity in their direct ('chemical toxicity') and figurative ('psychological toxicity') meanings:

(Model 1: CHEMICAL TOXICITY): Chemical toxicity destroys the physical constituents of a person and causes them PHYSICAL HARM.

(Model 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL TOXICITY): Psychological toxicity destroys the moral constituents of a person and causes them MORAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, and sometimes PHYSICAL HARM.

In Model 1, the carriers of chemical toxicity – toxins – are poisonous elements (gases, liquids, or solids), after entering the human body, cause the disruption of human life (poisoning, disease) and, as a result, its physical destruction / death.

In Model 2, the carriers of psychological toxicity are such utterances / implicit meanings – 'verbal / semantic toxins' – and/or actions – 'behavioral toxins' – of people that lead to the destruction of the personality / image of the addressee and, as a result, to his/her moral destruction.

Thus, the transfer of the meaning 'toxic poison' to 'toxic human behavior' or 'toxic utterance' is carried out based on the following general concept attributes: 1) the type of 'poison' / 'toxin' (a word, behavior, or a created situation (spread of rumors, fakes, etc.)), 2) the effect of the poison / toxin, and 3) the consequences of exposure to poison / toxin.

Factors such as the susceptibility of addressees to toxicity, its relativity, the extent of coverage of the target audience, and types of harm are subject to final discussion.

**Susceptibility to toxicity.** The main condition for the perception of statements, behavior and situations as toxic is the addressee's susceptibility to toxicity. If the addressee, while interacting with a toxic addresser, uses the following types of communicative antidotes: 1) commitment and adherence to their values and ideals, 2) awareness-building in the community, or 3) the addressee is toxic themselves (e.g., Donald Trump is immune to

toxic situations since he himself is assumed as toxic), then the toxicity of the addresser will not affect them, and they will not be drawn into a toxic situation.

**Relativity of toxicity.** When analyzing the discursive practices of toxic (media, political) persons, it should be noted that a public figure may not be the most pleasant and easy to communicate with, but at the same time, these people will not necessarily be toxic for everyone or for an individual recipient. What one calls toxic and takes personally, others will blame on character flaws of the communicant and will not pay much attention to. Therefore, toxicity is a relative concept – a person cannot be born toxic or be toxic to everyone around him/her.

**Extent of toxicity coverage and types of harm.** The interpretation of toxicity as a media phenomenon should take into account the extent to which the target audience is affected by the behavior and statements of toxic media persons, for example, one person (interviews, debates), group of people (communities in the social networks, informal associations), or wider communities (political movements, opposition parties, independent media). At the same time, the types of harm caused by the creation of a media toxic effect can affect both the psychological state of the addressee (aggressiveness, irritability, resentment) and his or her gender (binary / non-binary identities), age (ageism) and professional (labor discrimination) identities.

The proposed methodology, results, and conclusions of the study of the toxicity phenomenon can be used in further research not only in media communication, but also in the study of typological features of toxic public figures within different languages / cultural traditions and development of antitoxic communication skills. This study opens new approaches in the linguistic interpretation of various ideal types such as toxic, charismatic, authoritarian, genius, hedonist, etc. through the prism of their language and discourse.

## Notes

All the examples in the text as well as the quotations from non-English-language publications are translated by the authors: German – by Nataliya Petlyuchenko, Slovak – by Dana Petranová and Nataliya Panasenko.

## Abbreviations

AfD – Alternative für Deutschland

CSU / CDU – Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern e. V. / Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands

Fr. – French

Germ. – German

Lat. – Latin

MWOD – Merriam-Webster online dictionary

RND – Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland

Sk. – Slovak

SPD – Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

URM – underrepresented minority

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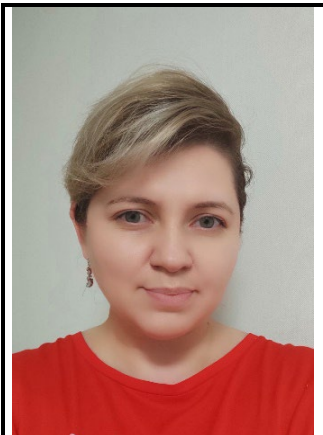
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#### Résumé

This paper approaches toxicity as a new phenomenon in the German and Slovak media viewed from a contrastive perspective. The corpus consisted of public speeches delivered by contemporary German- and Slovak-speaking politicians who are labelled 'toxic' in the media of Germany and Slovakia. The article offers the results of associative and identification experiments conducted to study concept, verbal and nonverbal correlates of toxicity, which can be used in further research of typological features of toxic public figures within different languages / cultural traditions. The authors propose a model of toxic media communication from the contrastive perspective, which is built using the deductive method based on the selection, description and comparison of concept, verbal and nonverbal characteristics of the speech of political figures who are labelled as 'toxic' in the German and Slovak media. We found that there are more similarities / overlaps between toxic politicians in Germany and Slovakia, both in the verbal explications of toxicity and their nonverbal accompaniment, than differences between them. This conclusion complies with the motivational base of political discourse, which is dominant and, accordingly, the set of verbal and nonverbal means will be common for German and Slovak politicians; in particular, both groups of politicians use manipulative methods of influencing the addressee as toxic means, conduct an aggressive verbal strategy using a loud voice and a large number of hand gestures. Such a set of toxicity correlates fully coincides with the persuasive basis of political discourse – influencing the addressee with

the aim of convincing or calling for some action. Unlike other components of political communication (agonality, aggressiveness, and persuasiveness), toxicity as a behavioral and communicative model is ultimately aimed at causing psychological (emotional) harm in direct or indirect forms. The results of this study can be used in further research not only in media communication, but also in the study of typological features of toxic public persons within different languages / cultural traditions and development of antitoxic communication skills.

**Key words:** toxicity, contrastive, political, media, concept, verbal, nonverbal, German, Slovak.

## Appendix A

### **Samples of the free narrative essay for the reconstruction of the concept attributes of toxicity in the Slovak and German media (associative experiment)**

(**German**). M.T.-S., M, DaF-Lektor, 40 <...*Toxisches Verhalten ist das Verhalten, dass besonders den Adressaten der Kommunikation verletzt oder diskriminiert. Auch eine niederschwellige Verletzung ist damit gemeint. Dazu gehört Misgendering, sexistische, ausschließende Aussagen, die über den GesprächspartnerIn abgelassen werden. Letztendlich provoziert solches Verhalten eine Antwort, die höchstwahrscheinlich auch toxisch sein wird... Alexander Gauland, Alice Weidel, Dieter Bohlen... rassistische, antisemitische, homophobe und andere diskriminierende Wörter/Worte...hohe Stimme, krätschende, kratzende Stimme, keine melodische Stimme ...eher weniger Gestik, oder eine sehr monotone unpassende Gestik sagt das Eine, zeigt mit Händen – etwas völlig anderes, unstimmiger Ausdruck...>*

(**Slovak**). OŠ, F, Lector, 45 <...*Sú to otravní, drží ľudia, stále upriamujú pozornosť iba na seba, hovoria o sebe, ostatní ich nezaujímajú, nevážia si iných ľudí, potláčajú jedinečnosť ostatných ľudí, vyžadujú neustálu pozornosť. Keď sa hovorí o nich, spozornejú, keď sa hovorí o iných, nezaujímajú ich to...Igor Matovič... Bývalá tenistka Dominika Cibulková, Podľa mňa aj moderátorka Iveta Malachovská, bývalý hokejista, v súčasnosti expert RTVS na hokej Boris Valábik – neviem, či sú v médiách takto označovaní ...Slová: hovorí o sebe, poukazuje na nedostatky iného, znevažuje iných, seba vychvaľuje, neprizná si chybu, nepoďakuje, stále kritizuje, preháňa, má uštipačné poznámky, je direktívny...Hlas: toxický človek*

*kričí... Gestá: gestami zasahuje do teritória iného – gestá príliš ďaleko od tela, gestikuluje so zdvihnutým ukazovákom. Robí strechu z prstov čo znamená, že len jeho názory sú najlepšie, názory ostatných ľudí nestoja za reč. Toxický muž sedí s kolenami ďaleko od seba, v komunikácii zaberá veľa miesta, rozloží si veci aj do teritória iného človeka. Summa summarum – toxicky kontaminuje celý priestor tak, akoby bol iba on sám na svete...>*

## Appendix B

### Sample questionnaire for the discursive assessment of toxicity correlates in the speech and gestures of German and Slovak politicians, who are labelled as toxic in the media (identification experiment)

**Experiment 1.** Discursive assessment of toxicity correlates in the speech and gestures of German and Slovak politicians, who are described as toxic in the media.

<p><b>Alexander Gauland</b> (since 2019 he has been honorary chairman of the AfD) (Germany)</p> <p>Photo available at: <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2019-01-23-Alexander_Gauland-Maischberger-1521.jpg">https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2019-01-23-Alexander_Gauland-Maischberger-1521.jpg</a></p>	<p><b>Alice Weidel</b> (since September 2017 co-chair of the AfD parliamentary group and opposition leader) (Germany)</p> <p>Photo available at: <a href="https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Weidel">https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Weidel</a></p>	<p><b>Igor Matovič</b> (since 2011 founder and leader of the conservative right-wing of Ordinary People party) (Slovakia)</p> <p>Photo available at: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igor_Matovi%C4%8D">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igor_Matovi%C4%8D</a></p>	<p><b>Petra Krištúfková</b> (since 2016 a member and vice-president of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for the My Family Movement) (Slovakia)</p> <p>Photo available at: <a href="https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&amp;PoslanecID=922">https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&amp;PoslanecID=922</a></p>
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#### Information about the participant of the experiment (Please be sure to complete!)

1. Name:
2. Place of birth, native language:
3. Specialty:
4. Political beliefs (if any):

#### Preliminary remarks:

People are *toxic* if they: 1) ignore your privacy and do things that do not concern them without any legal grounds; 2) do not feel guilty and are unable to admit mistakes; 3) they are attentive to your feelings and needs only when it serves their interests; 4) provoke quarrels over insignificant matters although the issue could be easily clarified with a short conversation; 5) they lie, manipulate and distort facts to protect their interests whether it makes sense or not; 6) subject others to emotional pressure and make them believe

that they are to blame; 7) elevate their stature by repeatedly mentioning that they know supposedly important people, etc.

**Assignment:**

In our experiment, we want to answer the questions:

1) How correlates of toxicity are manifested in the oral discourse (speech and gestures) of Slovak politicians and 2) what can serve as a marker of "toxicity" in 1) words, 2) voice, 3) gestures.

1. Please watch the following excerpt from \*\*\* speech:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=t-ycJZeB2HI>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=NojUSr9MHA8>

This person is considered toxic because... (Mark the variant that you believe is correct! Several variants are possible!):

- his/her words are toxic.
- his/her manner of speaking is toxic.
- his/her gestures and facial expressions are toxic.
- his/her speech is toxic.
- his/her appearance is toxic.

*Add your own variant* \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please watch the excerpt from \*\*\* speech once again:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=t-ycJZeB2HI>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=NojUSr9MHA8>

Mark the relevant variant!

**1. His/her words are toxic because...**

- he/she uses derogatory words.
- he/she uses anti-Semitic words.
- he/she uses words that signal that he/she is waiting for approval all the time.
- he/she uses discriminatory words.
- he/she uses demagogic rhetoric.
- he/she uses simple sentences.
- he/she uses homophobic words.
- he/she uses manipulative words.
- he/she uses misanthropic words.
- he/she uses racist words.
- he/she uses obscene words.
- he/she uses words filled with superiority and pathos.

*Add your own variation* \_\_\_\_\_

**2. His/her manner of speaking is toxic because...**

- he/she speaks aggressively.

- he/she speaks super clearly.
- he/she speaks in a high voice.
- he/she speaks in a raspy voice.
- he/she speaks hoarsely.
- he/she speaks with a squeal.
- he/she speaks slowly.
- he/she speaks loudly.
- he/she speaks quickly.
- he/she is screaming.
- he/she speaks immelodiously.

*Add your own variant* \_\_\_\_\_

### ***3. His/her gestures and facial expressions are toxic because...***

- he/she has a tense posture.
- his/her fists are clenched.
- his/her gestures are repetitive.
- his/her gestures / facial expressions are exaggerated.
- his/her gestures are inappropriate.
- he/she has few gestures.
- he/she has waving gestures.

*Add your own variant* \_\_\_\_\_

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