

Expression of sign language

The Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired in 1995, as a condition for the adoption of Act No. 149/1995 Coll. on Sign Language for Deaf Persons, ensured the processing of the codification of sign language for deaf persons. Linguist Professor Jozef Mistrík proposed 1,000 terms (words) that are most commonly used in the Slovak language and also used by the deaf to a certain extent. He also prepared the appropriate theoretical part. Another 400 words in the form of signs, based on the frequency of their use by the deaf, were added by Mr. Ladislav Ubár, a long-time methodologist of sign language for the deaf at the former Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired. Ladislav Ubár then processed these 1,400 words into the required forms for codifying sign language for the deaf - this was a book publication "Frequency Dictionary of Sign Language for the Deaf" by authors Jozef Mistrík (the aforementioned linguist), Ladislav Ubár (the aforementioned methodologist), and Štefan Csonka, at that time the director of the Secondary Vocational School for the Hearing Impaired on Koceľova Street in Bratislava. A VHS video tape was then produced at the Video Studio of the Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired with the concepts translated into sign language for the deaf. The selection of words and their realization into sign form was discussed and approved on January 18, 1995 by a special commission composed of experts and the deaf. It was composed of Milan Ručák, then secretary of the Slovak Association of the Hearing Impaired, who had deaf parents and lived and worked in the deaf community, Anton Uherík, who at the time worked as a psychologist at the Special-Pedagogical Consultation Office for the Hearing Impaired at the Elementary School for the Hearing Impaired on Hrdličkova Street in Bratislava, Darina Tarciová, who at the time worked at the Department of Special Education at the University of Comenius in Bratislava and is also the child of deaf parents, who used sign language for the deaf from a young age and the deaf community was represented by Irena Harsová and Miroslav Jankovič.

As already mentioned, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted Act No. 149/1995 Coll. on Sign Language for Deaf Persons on June 26, 1995 as a new law, which was at the time the third law of its kind in the world. By using the law in practical life, many experiences were gained and, as is customary, sign language also evolved. By 2014, the efforts of the deaf community to recognize their communication form, their communication system, as a full-fledged language reached its peak.



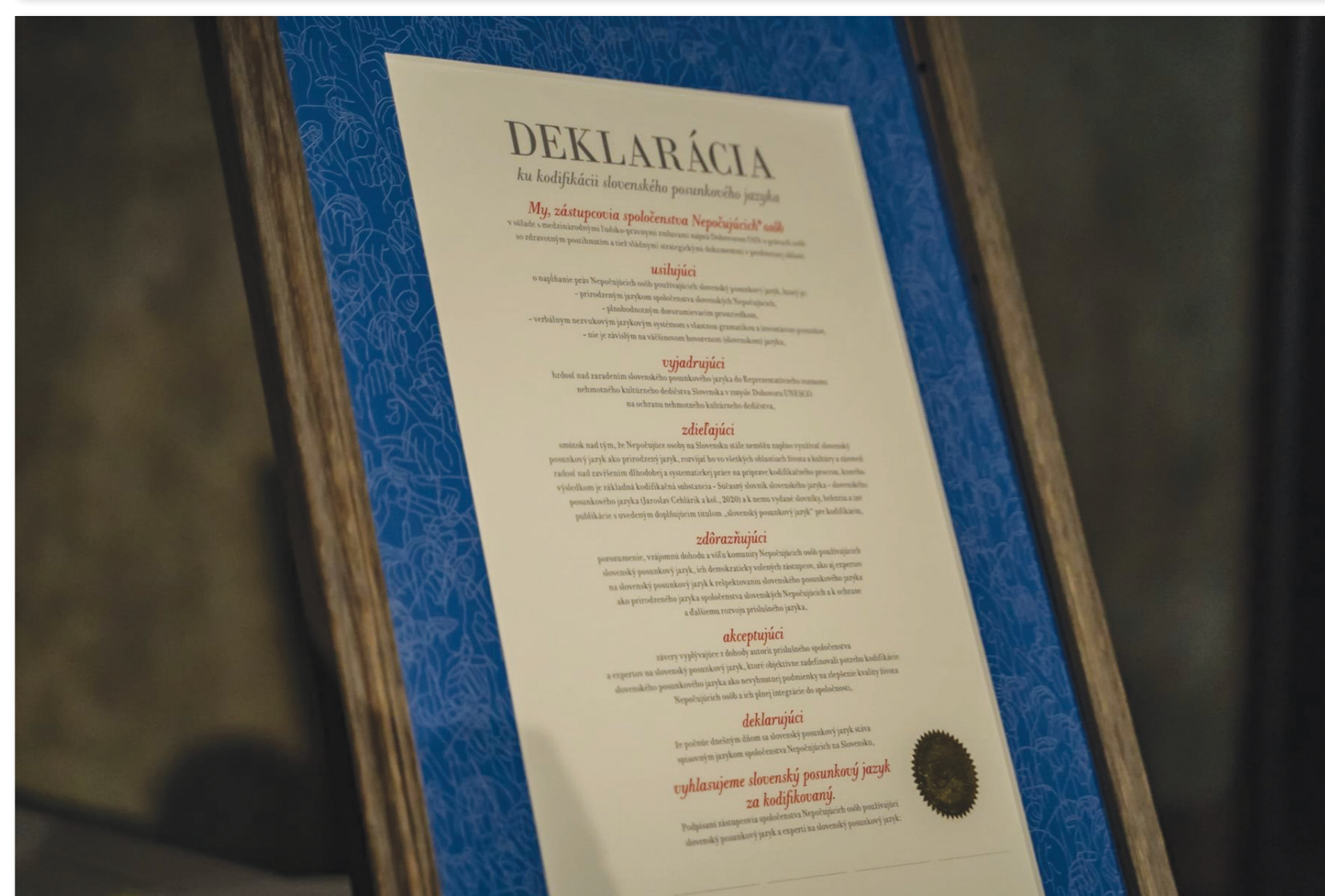
This important change was also the reason why the aspirations of the deaf community to make sign language a part of the representative list of intangible cultural heritage of Slovakia were fulfilled.

On September 18, 2018, Slovak Sign Language was thus entered into the representative list of intangible cultural heritage and a certificate of this fact was issued on January 24, 2019. This list of intangible cultural heritage mainly defines the preservation of unique, significant, and unrepeatable Slovak customs and traditions that are characteristic of the culture of people living in a particular part or community in Slovakia. It is admirable that these may not only be tangible things, but also intangible things, such as the mentioned customs and traditions, and therefore the language, and our language - Slovak sign language, is an integral part of intangible cultural elements.

Slovak sign language was included in the intangible cultural heritage in the category of "oral traditions and expressions" due to the fact that it is a unique language, and nowhere else in the world exists a similar sign language that has exactly the same properties, vocabulary, grammar, language specifics as Slovak sign language.

In Slovakia, the sign language of the deaf appeared in the early 30s of the 20th century in special schools for the hearing-impaired, where students used this communication system among themselves unofficially, which was then banned as a separate teaching language. Later, with the development of special education for the hearing-impaired (surdopedagogy), various supportive methods of educating the hearing-impaired were developed, which began to use elements of sign language (bilingual method, comprehensive communication, etc.).

The deaf's efforts to have their communication system recognized as a full-fledged language culminated in the early 21st century, when the education of the deaf advanced to the point where a coding system for sign language was developed. This fulfilled the requirements of the law for this communication system to be officially recognized as a language, comparable and full-fledged like any other language. At that time, between 2014 and 2019, the Slovak Association of the Deaf was engaged in this matter and adopted a separate declaration on sign language, and subsequently pushed for the amendment of the aforementioned law.



The codification of the Slovak Sign Language has secured its position as a separate language in Slovakia, contributing to linguistic and cultural diversity. To codify the language, 5,000 concepts (words) were processed, resulting in an illustrated dictionary in the form of a video recording with QR codes. The signing of the Declaration of Codification took place on September 23, 2020, on International Sign Language Day, in the Hall of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, and the event was also endorsed by the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová.

The codification of the Slovak Sign Language will contribute to and bring closer the diversity of languages and cultures in Slovakia. It will help improve the lives of deaf people in Slovakia and allow them to understand themselves and others even more, thus being perceived as an equal language, not a universal world language. Finally, there will be more sign language interpreters in Slovakia due to the study, which was officially launched in September 2020. Currently, 40 students are studying sign language, thanks to whom the Slovak Sign Language will develop as the natural language of the deaf, enabling them to develop in all areas of life and culture.

Sources: *An introduction to the culture and world of the deaf*

Photo: <https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/slovensky-posunkovy-jazyk/>;

<https://www.komisarprezdravotnepostihnutych.sk/Aktuality/Spravy/Deklaracia-o-kodifikacii-slovenskeho-posunkoveho-jazyka/>;

<https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/slovensky-posunkovy-jazyk/>;

<https://www.komisarprezdravotnepostihnutych.sk/Aktuality/Spravy/Deklaracia-o-kodifikacii-slovenskeho-posunkoveho-jazyka/>;

https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SKZZ/2017/151/vyhlasene_znenie.html;