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LINGUISTIC INCLUSIVENESS AND EQUALITY OF ACCESS IN DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES: A SOCIOLOGY OF GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This article analyzes linguistic inclusiveness in digital public services as a sociological determinant of equal access. The author moves beyond treating platform language merely as interface translation, linking it directly to terminological clarity, navigational comprehensibility, support channels, mobile responsiveness, and the capacity of diverse social groups to complete services independently. A four-component model of "linguistic digital inclusiveness" and a sociological audit framework are proposed to detect communicative barriers along the user journey. The paper is conceptual in nature; empirical user data collection is planned for subsequent research.

Keywords: digital state, inclusiveness, state language, digital public service, equality, user experience, sociology of governance.

Аннотация: В статье языковая инклюзивность цифровых государственных услуг рассматривается как социологический фактор равенства доступа. Предлагается четырехкомпонентная модель, включающая понятность терминологии, навигационную ясность, доступность помощи и способность различных социальных групп самостоятельно завершать цифровую услугу. Представлен дизайн социологического аудита для будущей эмпирической валидации.
Ключевые слова: цифровое государство, инклюзивность, государственный язык, цифровая услуга, равенство, пользовательский опыт, социология управления.

Abstract *(Original English Record):* The article examines language-related inclusiveness in digital public services as a sociological factor of equal access. A four-component model is proposed, linking terminology, navigational clarity, assistance channels, and the ability of different social groups to complete a service independently. A sociological audit design is outlined for future empirical validation.

Keywords: digital government, inclusion, state language, digital public service, equality, user experience, sociology of governance.

Introduction

Digital transformation can accelerate public service delivery and reduce transaction costs; however, transitioning a service online does not automatically ensure equal access for all citizens. Alongside age, educational attainment, digital literacy, device type, and connectivity quality, the platform's linguistic and textual architecture critically influences whether a user completes a service successfully.

The mere presence of an interface in the official state language is essential, yet insufficient on its own to guarantee genuine inclusivity. If a service title diverges sharply from

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colloquial everyday concepts, if instructions are dense with legalistic-bureaucratic jargon, or if error notifications remain cryptic, formal language support fails to yield practical access parity. Therefore, linguistic inclusiveness must be examined within the sociology of governance as an independent dimension of digital inequality.

This study aims to sociologically operationalize the concept of linguistic inclusiveness in digital public services, substantiate its relationship with equality of access, and propose an empirical audit methodology.

Theoretical Framework: From Digital Inequality to Communicative Equality

Early research into digital inequality concentrated primarily on physical access to the internet. Subsequent paradigms expanded this focus to capture disparities in digital skills, usage patterns, and social outcomes. Within public administration, this distinction is particularly decisive: gaining access to a government portal is fundamentally distinct from locating, understanding, and completing a service autonomously.

Linguistic inclusiveness constitutes the communicative dimension of this "second-level" digital divide. It reflects a user's ability to locate a service without prior knowledge of agency-specific bureaucratic terminology, comprehend statutory requirements, recover from procedural errors, and understand outcomes. This approach repositions language beyond static questions of cultural identity or legal status, embedding it within practical service accessibility.

For the sociology of governance, the core inquiry is whether distinct demographic groups achieve equivalent success rates along identical service journeys. When textual complexity forces certain segments to rely disproportionately on intermediaries, practical inequality emerges beneath the veneer of formal legal equality.

The "Linguistic Digital Inclusiveness" Model

The author proposes evaluating linguistic digital inclusiveness through four interconnected components. Rather than duplicating generic communication metrics, this model focuses directly on the capacity of varied social cohorts to complete services independently.

Component	Core Research Question	Empirical Indicator
Terminological Accessibility	Can citizens locate the service using natural, need-based vocabulary?	Search query success rate; degree of keyword recognition
Navigational Clarity	Does the interface copy make the subsequent step intuitive?	Backtracking frequency; misclicks; time-on-task
Error Recovery Capacity	Do system error messages provide actionable guidance to resolve issues?	Post-error completion and task continuation rate
Autonomous Completion	Can users finalize the procedure without third-party assistance?	Demand for external support; unassisted completion rate

In this model, **autonomous completion** serves as the primary outcome metric. True inclusion in public services is demonstrated not by user sentiment toward the copy, but by their ability to achieve their objective through it. Naturally, failure to complete a service independently stems from multiple intersecting factors; technical, cognitive, and organizational variables must be controlled.

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The working hypothesis posits that terminological accessibility and navigational clarity correlate positively with autonomous completion rates, exerting a stronger effect on older adults and individuals with lower digital proficiency.

Sociological Audit Methodology

To conduct empirical evaluations, a **service journey audit** protocol is proposed:

1. **Service Selection and Mapping:** Several public services of high social significance are selected. The user path is mapped across each operational stage: discovery, requirements review, data entry, document submission, authentication/payment, and outcome retrieval. Interface copy, labels, and microcopy at every touchpoint are systematically coded.
2. **Task-Based Usability Testing:** Field tests are conducted with cohorts stratified by age, education level, and digital literacy. Researchers refrain from providing procedural prompts while recording completion duration, friction points, operational errors, and assistance requests. Post-test semi-structured interviews determine specific lexical items, instructions, or steps that caused cognitive strain.
3. **Portal Telemetry Triangulation:** Where portal telemetry is available, field usability findings are benchmarked against aggregate drop-off points and retry patterns. Data privacy protocols and research ethics standards must be rigorously enforced. No baseline completion rates or demographic disparities are assumed prior to empirical observation.

Policy Implications

Measuring linguistic inclusiveness provides an empirical foundation for genuinely citizen-centric service design. Portal interfaces should serve not as abridged legal statutes, but as functional communicative interfaces enabling everyday administrative transactions. Statutory accuracy can be preserved while integrating plain-language summaries, concrete examples, and contextual guidance at the interaction layer.

This paradigm expands public sector performance metrics beyond server uptime or gross transaction volume toward holistic outcome frameworks. A service's formal availability, practical utilization, and realized public value represent three distinct stages; communicative barriers primarily obstruct the transition across the second and third.

For public sector bodies, practical implementation includes piloting **communicative inclusiveness audits** on new and redesigned digital services, running pre-launch usability tests across diverse demographic cohorts, and systematically revising text segments associated with high support request volumes.

Scientific Novelty

The scholarly contribution of this study rests on three pillars:

1. Conceptualizing public digital communication in the state language through the lens of structural access equality.
2. Designing a four-component operational model of linguistic digital inclusiveness.
3. Developing a comprehensive audit methodology integrating journey mapping, task-based usability testing, and sociological field interviews.

Conclusion

The societal efficacy of digital public services cannot be evaluated solely by their presence online. Citizens must be able to locate services, comprehend instructions, recover from procedural errors, and complete submissions independently. Evaluating linguistic inclusiveness through these operational outcomes aligns official language policy with digital governance, social equity, and citizen-centered administration. The proposed model provides a framework for empirical validation across user cohorts in subsequent research.

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