
THE ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AMONG POLICE OFFICERS IN LITHUANIA AND SLOVAKIA

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Annotation. A linguistic competence is considered to be a measure of functional knowledge of the language. The authors have an opinion that any kind of communicative activity should be treated as a part of a wider approach towards linguistic competence. It means that linguistic competence is determined by the quality of regular language as well as by the speaker's internal culture. The concept of competence is described as a combination of the following elements: knowledge, skills, values and personal qualities. The purpose of this study is to reveal the characteristics of linguistic competence of the police officers, and their linguistic competence experience. The objectives of this article were to analyse the role of language in the human communication process, linguistic competence and its expression in police work, as well as to compare linguistic competences of the Lithuanian and Slovak police officers. The role of language in communication process has been reviewed by analysing the concept of communication, the main component of communicative competence – language (linguistic) competence. The analysis part of the article involves presentation of the methodology and results of the survey on the Lithuanian and Slovak police officers' approach towards the linguistic competence. Based on the analysis of the survey, confidence and positive evaluation of the police officers' language knowledge have been defined. Police officers were found to be interested in a regular and ethical language and its use. Police officers recognized that familiar, impolite and irregular communication affects the public image of the police. The results showed that respondents possessed a positive approach towards their existing linguistic competence. Furthermore, the survey revealed that police officers appreciate knowledge and skills of communication in foreign languages.

Keywords: language, communication, police, police officer, competence.

INTRODUCTION

For police officers, the communication represents one of the key components of their profession the use of which facilitates dispute resolution, enables helping the victims to overcome the stress, involves addressing family conflicts, passing remarks, interviewing the offenders, etc. Officers lacking appropriate communication skills are seen as being hostile,

which in turn forms a negative public attitude towards the police as such and its prestige and willingness to help.¹ In their publication *Public Speaking* the American researchers M. Osborn and S. Osborn state that grammar and other linguistic mistakes are usually treated as a lack of competency by the audience.² Respondents have indicated lousy and poor communication and impoliteness to be one of the reasons behind the distrust in police. Consequently, taking into account the psychological aspects of communication and the standards of commonly used everyday language, the police officers as representatives of the State are obliged to continuously develop their skills of communication and linguistic competence in order to prevent confrontation with the citizens involved and successfully perform their official duties. The subjects covered by the communication of police officers in Lithuania have not been comprehensively assessed yet. The model of competencies of the civil servants and methodology for its application define the set of general, managerial, leadership, specific and professional competencies; however, there is a lack of scientific literature on communication skills of the officers. Some of the communication skills of police officers were addressed by G. L. Pritchett (1993), M. J. Woods (2012), V. Justickis, G. Navikas (1995), J. Ruževičius, R. Kasperavičius (2008), V. Smalskys (2008), R. Dobržinskienė (2014), G. Paurienė (2011a, 2011b), R. Žemgulienė, G. Rimkus (2012).

The subject of the study – spoken and written linguistic competence of police officers.

The objective of the study – to reveal the patterns of the communicative competence of police officers and their experience of linguistic competence.

The following **tasks** were set for the purpose of achieving the above stated study objective:

1. To review roles of the communication and the competence.
2. To analyse linguistic competence of police officers – their ability to communicate with citizens and their attitude towards the irregular and non-ethical use of language.
3. To compare the attitudes of Lithuanian and Slovak police officers towards the linguistic competence.

The methodology used. For the purpose of analysis of the material available and presentation of the results obtained, a questionnaire survey was undertaken which was used to find out the attitude of police officers towards language use, and for the identification of their

¹ Lietuvos policijos generalinio komisaro 2011 m. sausio 18 d. įsakymas Nr. 5-V-532 „Dėl kvalifikacijos tobulinimo programos „Bendravimas su asmenimis“ patvirtinimo“. Retrieved from <http://www.policija.lt/>.

² Osborn, M. & Osborn, S. (1988). *Public speaking*. Boston a.o.: Houghton Mifflin.

experience of linguistic competence; the method of systematic analysis allowed making a synthesis of attitudes found while linking individual components of the internal links of the topic; the comparative method enabled contrasting and assessment of the statistical data gathered in Lithuania and Slovakia about the linguistic competencies of the police officers.

THE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER COMPETENCES

Communication represents an important part of the sociability within the society: not so much as the means of transmission and receipt of the information but more as a factor determining the success in many occupational activities.³ The adequate level of language and communication culture has a direct influence on any further occupational development and progress made by a police officer and the entire attitude shaped by the society towards the institution of the police as such. It is generally assumed that people get involved in communication with the aim to satisfy their needs. Despite that communication takes only the third place in the Hierarchy of Needs by an American psychologist A. Maslow after the physiological and safety needs, it is obvious that it occupies a highly important position in the value system of any human being. After all, communication is also an absolute must as it serves to pass accumulated knowledge, experience, traditions, etc. from one generation to another. According to V. Humboldt, language determines pro-active actions and continuous generation of human intellectual and mental powers.⁴ Absence of language would make us unable to shape and express our thoughts, feelings and wills, it would make us lose an ability to share and exchange relevant information, and it would make it much more difficult for us to understand each other.⁵

L. M. Spencer and S. M. Spencer state that **competence** is comprised of a person's individual features, motives, attitudes, self-cognition and self-esteem, as well as characteristics pertinent to the individual that can be measured and compared to skills and features of some other individuals.⁶ Similarly, F. E. Weinert claims that development of human competences is

³ Almonaitienė, J. et al. (2007). *Bendravimo psichologija*, Kaunas: Technologija.

⁴ On Language: The Course of Man's Development (1999), *Philosophy Archive*. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/vhumboldt-wilhelm.htm>.

⁵ Babickienė, Z., Venckutė, R. *Kalbos mokslo pagrindai*. Vilnius: Mykolo Romerio universitetas, 2013.

⁶ Spencer, L. M. & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.).

influenced by the “abilities, knowledge, understanding, skills, activities, experiences, and motivation”.⁷ However, J. Winerton and E. Stringfellow suggest these resources to have no decisive influence over the competence level. Authors are also of the opinion that if people need intellectual abilities to expand their knowledge, and application of this knowledge leads to development of skills, consequently *abilities*, and *knowledge*, and *skills* are necessary preconditions for the development of the competence.⁸ While addressing the relation of competence and qualification P. Jucevičienė and D. Lepaitė report that competence should be understood as the ability of the individual to act in some particular environment in relation to his/her available knowledge, cognitions, skills, approaches, value attitudes and personal qualities of the individual.⁹ This is the concept of the competence on which this study is based. The developed model of competences of civil servants and the methodology of the application thereof suggests grouping civil servants’ competences into the following three groups: *general competences* (mandatory for every civil servant), *managerial and leadership competences* (mandatory for Heads and of institutions and their departments as well as their deputies), *specific and professional competences* (necessary for the accomplishment of functions of occupational activities). The group of general competences that are mandatory for everyone is focused on the *communicative competence*. The above-mentioned methodology describes this competence as follows: “*ability to engage into communication with the individual as well as within a group while choosing various means of communication and ensuring transfer and understanding of the information*”.¹⁰ Researchers (Bielinienė, 2000; Chreptavičienė, 2004) suggest that communicative competence is acquired only in presence of the comprehension of language rules, use of words, correct pronunciation, etc., i.e., in a possession of a particular linguistic competence. The linguistic competence is considered as the main and one of the most important structural components comprising the communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Paulston, 1992; Nauckunaite, 2000; Chreptavičienė, 2004).

⁷ Weinert, E. F. Vernleichende (2001). Leistungsmessungen in Schulen: eine umstrittene Selbstverständlichkeit. In: *Leistungsmessungen in Schulen*, Weinheim: Bertz Verlag.

⁸ Winterton, J., Stringfellow, E. Typology of knowledge, skills and competences: clarification of the concept and prototype. Cedefop: Thessaloniki (Pylea), 2006.

⁹ Jucevičienė, P., Lepaitė D. (2000). Kompetencijos sampratos erdvė, *Socialiniai mokslai* 22, 1.

¹⁰ VTB (2015) – *Valstybės tarnyboje būtinų kompetencijų analizė ir valstybės tarnautojų pareigybių aprašymų katalogas*. Retrieved from <http://vtd.lrv.lt/>

The concept of the linguistic competence was introduced by Noam Chomsky. According to B. Barman, the most prominent linguist of 19s N. Chomsky saw the competence as the cognition of language – comprehension of structural characteristics of all the sentences of the speech, moreover he was convinced that knowing a language is an innate ability.¹¹ As J. Podgorecki puts it, in 1970, the communicative competence by Cambello and Wales was added to the sociolinguistic terminology as having a wider sense than a linguistic competence. “The linguistic competence defines an ability to use abstract language rules [...], compose sentences of the accepted and allowable structures in any language whereas the communicative competence represents an ability to communicate by means of a language”¹². Consequently, in this study it is highlighted that linguistic competence forms a substantial part of the content of communicative competence and means “keeping in memory and possession the linguistic “inventories” (such as words, their forms, phrases, graphical and phonic items) as well as ability to use them (match, inflect, combine, paraphrase) according to the language patterns”.

In his analysis of challenges faced in selection of police staff V. Smalskys reports that modern concept of police operation must be directed towards social service of population. According to the author, considering the qualification and competence challenges faced by police staff, the exclusive role in the police education and training system must be given to the social competence. Based on this idea the author continues to claim that the social competence is necessary for every police officer irrespective of his/her rank as it covers the ability “to keep in contact with citizens and resolve the conflicts”¹³. It’s worth noting that other researchers involved in analysis of various options for police operation quality improvement, also address the role of the communication discipline.¹⁴ It is assumed that besides the classic subjects taught to police staff, fields of “communication”, “negotiation” with citizens, ethics and protocol must be addressed, too.¹⁵ In this respect the communication psychology and professional ethics has profound implications. The psychological (mental) preparation level is claimed to significantly influence the effectiveness of activities performed, as this is the subject that teaches how to

¹¹ Barman B. (2012). The linguistic philosophy of Noam Chomsky, *Philosophy and Progress* 1–2 (p. 104–119).

¹² Podgorecki, J. (2005). *Socialinė komunikacija mokytojams*, Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginis universitetas.

¹³ Smalskys, V. (2008). Policijos personalo rengimo šiuolaikinės kryptys, *Viešoji politika ir administravimas* 23, 88–97.

¹⁴ Ruževičius, J., Kasperavičius, R. (2008). Lietuvos policijos veiklos kokybės tobulinimo galimybės, *Verslo ir teisės aktualijos* 2.

¹⁵ Ruževičius, J. & Kasperavičius, R. (2008). Lietuvos policijos veiklos kokybės tobulinimo galimybės, *Verslo ir teisės aktualijos* 2 (pp. 119–136).

make an initial contact with some other person. Personal qualities and ethical values of a police officer shall mismatch his/her words and practices if he/she is poor at professional ethics. **Professional ethics** represents an individual field of ethics intended for the representatives of some specific profession that establishes requirements and standards of their conduct.¹⁶ While studying the art of eloquence R. Koženiauskienė noted that success in any communication process is determined by the established ethical and moral attitudes of the individual (2005). The European Code of Police Ethics claims that any police officer must be capable of exhibiting his/her communication skills.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Code of Police Ethics claims that police officers, when performing their occupational duties, must communicate with other persons in a polite and business-like manner (subsection 4.13), continuously improve their language and communication culture (subsection 4.25), and follow the accepted principles of morality (subsection 4.28).¹⁸ These legal rules imply that despite difficulty of any situation, police officers are obliged to control their emotions and remain professional and constructive. It means that they have to communicate in a friendly manner but at the same time to keep a distance that requires for respectful treatment. According to R. Tidikis, in direct relations with citizens – if necessary – a police officer must be strict but he must always remain tactical, polite and fair-minded, [...] always respecting the required etiquette and courtesy rules.¹⁹ Accordingly, not only knowing the self-defence principles and possession of an excellent physical fitness makes a police officer to be professional; ability to communicate in a highly-cultured manner and use intonation, pauses, gestures, mimics to appeal and influence the collocutor is of the equally huge importance, too. In conflict situations, communication and diplomatic skills often happen to be much more effective in avoiding physical confrontations. Consequently, communication skills of any person are dependent on his/her occupied position and particular situation.²⁰

The communication competence is characteristic not only for making analysis of the communication in native language but also when addressing use of a foreign language. Processes of globalization continuously affect the society and influence clash of different

¹⁶ Palidauskaitė, J. (2007). *Viešojo administravimo etika*. Kaunas: Technologija.

¹⁷ „The Europe Code of Police Ethics“. Council of Europe: Committee of Ministers, Recommendation Rec (2001).

¹⁸ Lietuvos policijos pareigūnų etikos kodeksas (2004). Vilnius

¹⁹ Tidikis, R. (1994) *Policininko etikos bruožai*, Vilnius: Lietuvos policijos akademija.

²⁰ Rickheit, G., Strohner, H. (2008). *Handbook of Communication Competence* Berlin: Hubert & Co. Retrieved from http://npu.edu.ua/e-book/book/djvu/A/iif_kgpm_Rickheit_Handbook_of_Communication.pdf.

cultures. When analysing cross-cultural competence of police officers P. Paurienė notes that it is highly important for the representatives of this particular profession to be able to engage in communication with people from other cultures as it facilitates conflict resolution and problem solving.²¹ Police encounters with foreigners while performing their occupational activities can occur in a form of provision of assistance to foreigners or resolution of conflict situations. Although it is considered that law enforcement officials must be capable of adapting to ever-changing situations and make decisions in a creative manner, their discretion is often limited by legal regulations, implying that successful engagement in communication and elimination of potential difficulties also requires for particular set of personal qualities, i.e., “ability to understand, see and accept the differences, self-reflection of behaviours and mindset; an appropriate disposition for cross-cultural contacts, tolerance to other cultures, etc.”²² Besides the established personal attitudes the need to know foreign language becomes obvious. As a consequence, learning and knowing foreign languages becomes an integral part of the professional training. These skills help to improve the qualifications of police staff as well as to develop communication competence of foreign languages. Professional communication in both native and foreign languages is *conditio sine qua non*, as it contributes to the effective communication which stands as a basis for the appropriate society serving and satisfying its needs on both national and international levels.

STUDY OF THE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OF POLICE OFFICERS

Methodology and organization of the study. Theoretical analysis of the police officers’ linguistic competence and reasoning behind the problem issue leads to the conclusion that the topic of the police officers’ linguistic competence lacks thorough investigation both in Lithuania and abroad. Consequently, an empirical study was undertaken with the aim to find out the opinion of police officers regarding linguistic skills and the experience with their possessed linguistic competence.

The subject of the study – the communication competence of police officers.

The objective of the study – to reveal the patterns of the communication competence of police officers and the experience with their possessed linguistic competence. Taking into

²¹ Paurienė, G. (2011). Tarpkultūrinė kompetencija ir jos ugdymas pareigūnų rengime, *Visuomenės saugumas ir viešoji tvarka: mokslinių straipsnių rinkinys 5*.

²² Paurienė, G. (2011). Tarpkultūrinė kompetencija ir jos ugdymas pareigūnų rengime, *Visuomenės saugumas ir viešoji tvarka: mokslinių straipsnių rinkinys 5*.

consideration the above-mentioned objective of the study, it was aimed to determine the meaning that incorrect and non-ethical use of language has for the police officers, to identify their attitudes towards the familiarity communication and to review skills and experience of police officers of communication in a foreign language.

The scope of the study. Questionnaire survey involved randomly selected police officers from Lithuania and Slovakia. In total 391 respondent took part in the questionnaire survey: 261 questionnaire was filled-in in Lithuania, and 130 questionnaires – in Slovakia.

The method of the quantitative analysis was selected to convert final study findings into numbers.²³ Interview is the best suited method for disclosure of the prevalent opinions as its accomplishment does not require for high expenses, high number of respondents can be interviewed in a rather short period of time, and obtained findings can be easily compared to any other data. Both questionnaires (in Lithuanian and Slovak languages) were identical as regards their structure and questions.

Analysis of study findings and results

Demographic profile of respondents. Study showed that 35.3 % of respondents were women (N=138), and 64.7 % were men (N=253) (Fig. 1).

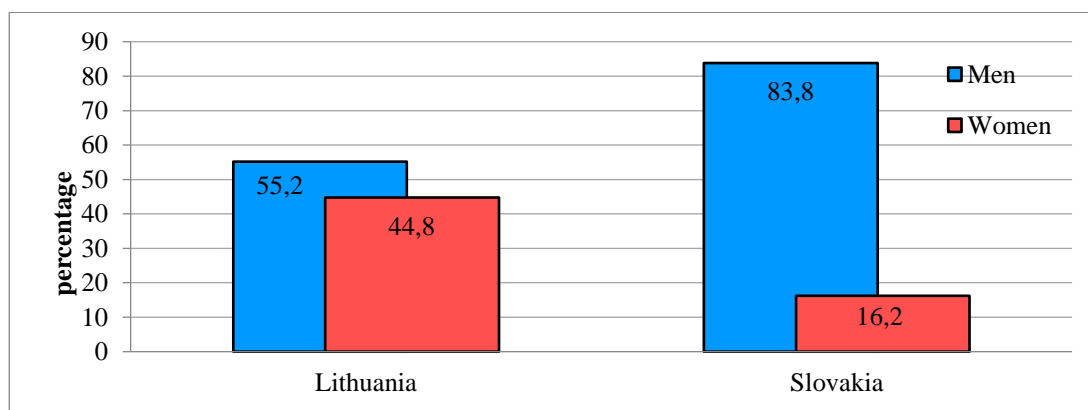


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender.

Data systematization resulted in the following 5 age groups of participants (Fig. 2).

²³ Tidikis, R. (1994) *Policininko etikos bruožai*, Vilnius: Lietuvos policijos akademija.

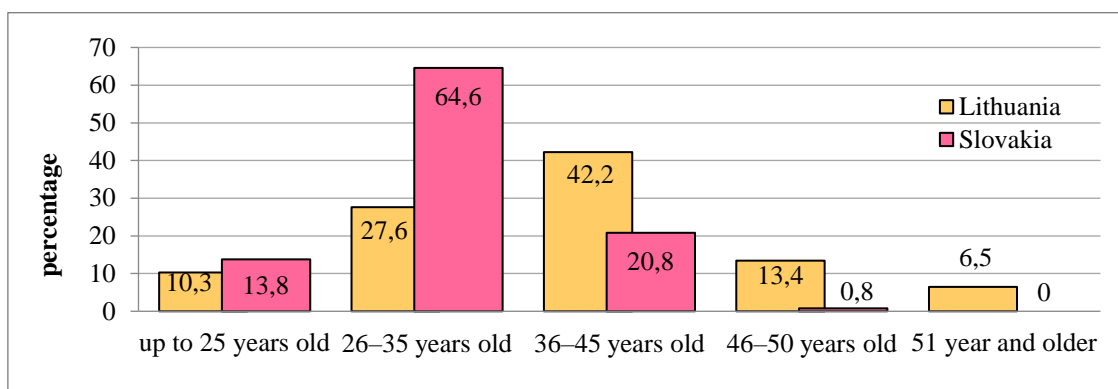


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by their age

As the data in above-figure shows, in both countries, police employ officers of different age however numbers of very young and elderly persons are rather low. In both countries under consideration majority of police employees are from 2 age groups, namely 26–35 years old and 36–45 years old. It’s worth noting that in Slovakia the number of 26–35 years old respondents was significantly higher, and there was only 1 respondent representing both groups of the middle-aged (46–50 years old) and elderly (51 year and older). The age of the youngest respondent – 22 years – was the same in both Lithuania and Slovakia; whereas the age of the oldest respondent involved in the questionnaire was 56 years in Lithuania, and 43 years in Slovakia.

Majority of respondents from Lithuania were 21–25 years old or they had less than 5 years of service in the police. Meanwhile in Slovakia more than a half of all the respondents involved had 6–10 years of service in the police. Such interview findings imply that persons employed in the police have a rather significant work experience what in turn justifies assessment of their competence level at work with respect to the issue under consideration (Fig. 3).

The assessment of the linguistic competence among police officers

Police officers were asked if the right use of their native language – both written spoken – was important to them (Fig. 4 and 5). Comparison of results revealed that there was a very small portion of respondents who selected answers “I have no personal opinion” and “No”, which in turn allows to assume that right use of the native language – both written and spoken –is important for the majority of respondents. The difference was minor however it’s worth noting that respondents from Slovakia placed a higher value on the right use of their *spoken* native language, whereas those from Lithuania – on its use *in writing*.

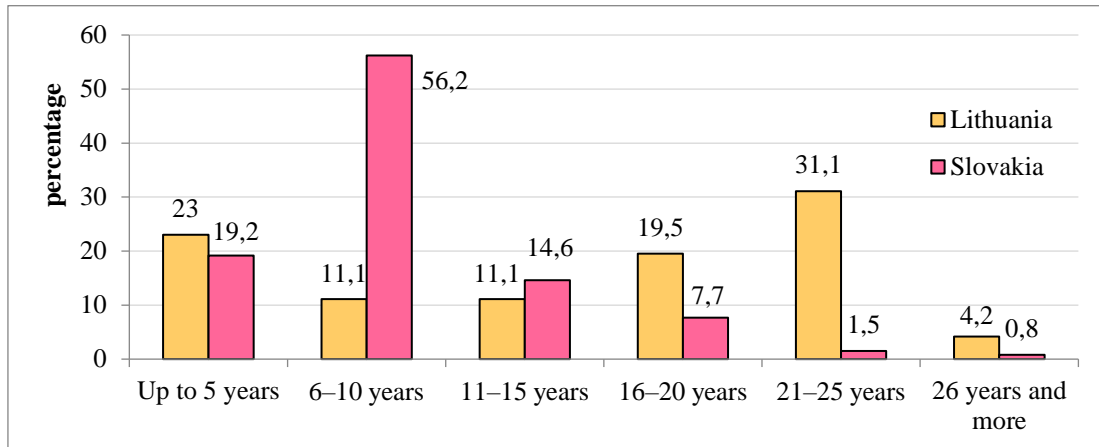


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by their service in the police.

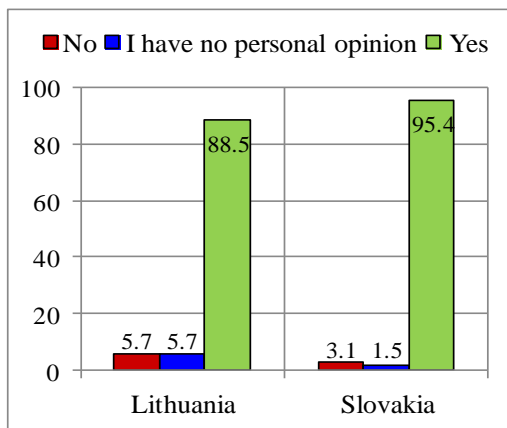


Figure 4. Respondents opinion on the correct spoken language use

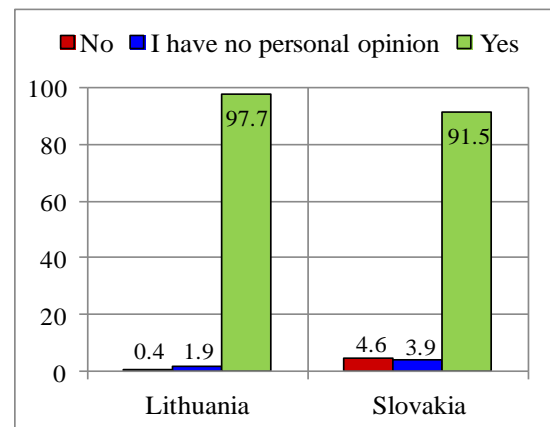


Figure 5. Respondents opinion on the correct language use in writing

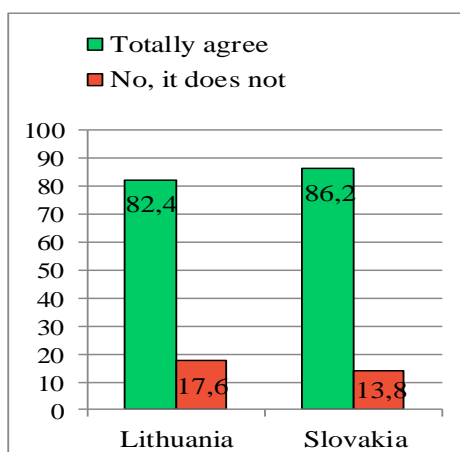


Figure 6. Impolite and unethical communication by individual police officers decreases trust in police

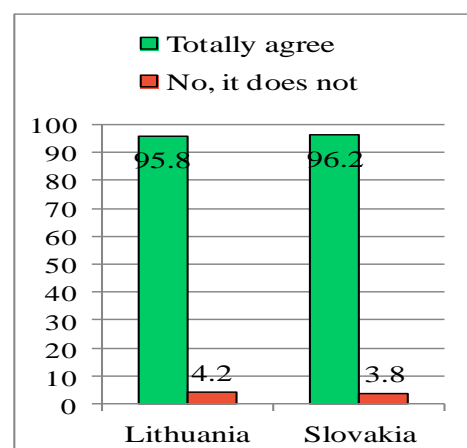


Figure 7. Incorrect use of native language by individual police officers forms a negative attitude towards the police

In that regard, the study was aimed at finding out what officers personally thought about the role of the language as regards the police image shaping. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the opinion of respondents regarding the effect of the impolite, unethical and incorrect communication by individual officers on the police image.

Results presented above show that police officers from both countries under consideration have the same opinion regarding the effect of impolite and unethical communication on trust in police (Fig. 6). 95,8 % of respondents in Lithuania, and 96.2 % of respondents in Slovakia totally agreed that impolite and unethical communication by each individual police officer contributes to decreasing the trust in police as a public authority. It is commonly assumed that in order for the police officers to be capable of fighting against law violators in a cultured and decent way, they must develop a sound immunity to the evil and a high communication culture as they face mean, dishonest and cruel persons in their everyday activities.

Rather different findings were revealed as concerns shaping of police image in a consequence of incorrect use of native language by individual police officers (Fig. 7). Interestingly, as many as 96 % of all the respondents involved in the study were of the opinion that impolite and unethical communication has a negative effect on population's trust in police, meanwhile only 12.4 % of respondents were not so sure that incorrect language use may invoke a negative attitude of a society towards the police. The distribution of answers regarding the incorrect use of native language was similar in both Lithuania and Slovakia (difference – 3.8 %). A total of 17.6 % respondents from Lithuania, and 13.8 % respondents from Slovakia were of the opinion that mistakes of everyday – both spoken and written – language have no effect whatsoever on the formation of the unfavourable public attitude towards the police and their operations.

In context of police officers' communication in the Lithuanian language a matter of huge importance is addressing people by using the second-person singular or second-person plural forms. The first one indicates communication in more or less familiar way whereas the second one represents a formal and polite way to address someone in communication. Sometimes it can be difficult to draw the dividing line between free, unrestrained communication and self-contained communication which is based on the established rules. This is particular the case when police officers are engaged in conflict situations involving aggressive, dangerous and saucy persons. Accordingly, the study was further aimed at finding out how often police officers tend to communicate with the violators in a familiar way, and if they always address them using

more formal plural term “You” (lith. *jūs*). In summary of the findings, 73.7 % of total number of respondents involved in the study reported that they *always* address violators using the formal plural term “You” (lith. *jūs*) instead of the familiar singular “You” (lith.: *tu*)²⁴, whereas 24.8 % of respondents indicated they used this formal term sometimes. Study revealed that 82.6 % of all the respondents involved in the study never opt for communication in a familiar manner with lawbreakers, 5.6 % do it sometimes, and 11.8 % – always. Out of the respondents who reported to always communicate with lawbreakers in a familiar way, 44 were from Lithuania, and 2 from Slovakia.

Correct pronunciation as well as knowing rules of lexis and syntax shall not help police officers to earn a favourable attitude of the population if they do not practice what they preach, i.e. if their personal qualities and ethical values mismatch their spoken words and practices.

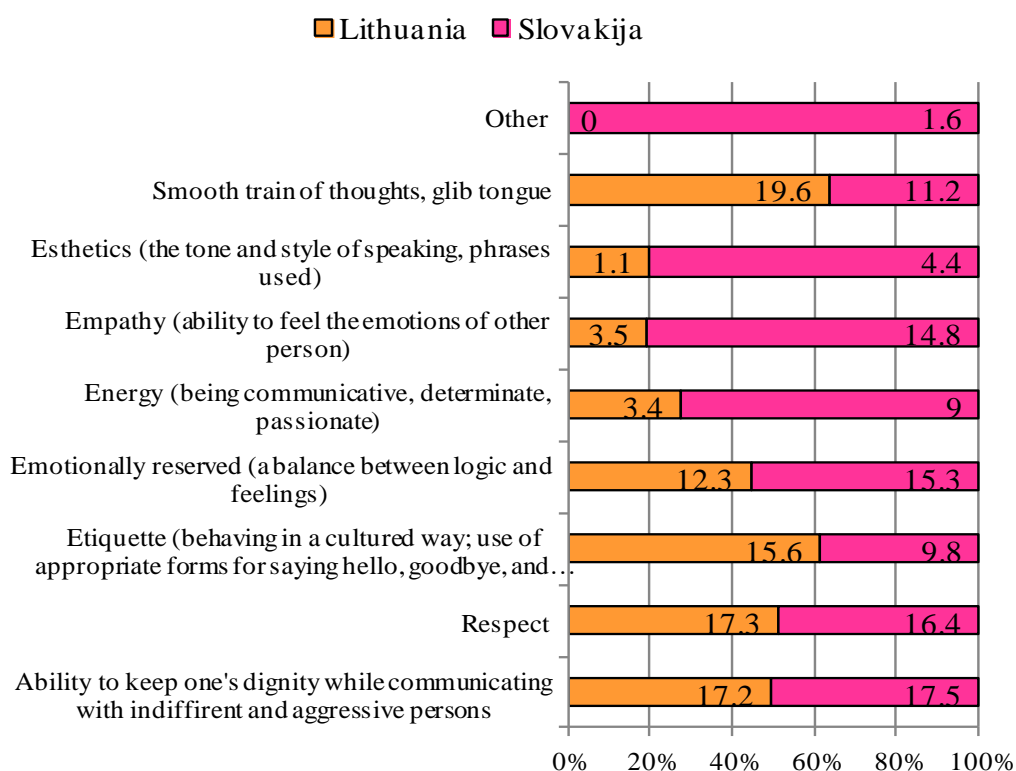


Figure 8. Distribution of respondents by personal qualities of a police officer necessary for successful communication with other persons.

²⁴ It is specific for the Lithuanian language that the pronoun “tu” (Eng. *You* sg.) indicates a familiar way of addressing someone or form of communication whereas “jūs” (Eng. *You* pl.) represents a polite and formal communication and addressing.

For this reason, respondents were asked to mark three personal qualities that they considered to be the most important for a police officer in determining a successful communication process (Fig. 8).

In Lithuania, respondents have distinguished the following personal qualities of a police officer as being the most important ones: *smooth train of thoughts, glib tongue* (19.6 %), *respect* (17.3 %), *ability to keep one's dignity while communicating with indifferent and aggressive persons* (17.2 %). Meanwhile in Slovakia, police officer's *ability to keep one's dignity while communicating with indifferent and aggressive persons* has been raised into the first place (17.5 %), and was followed by the same answer that got many answer in Lithuania, too – *respect* (16.4 %), while leaving being *emotionally reserved* in the third place (15.3 %). Comparison of answers showed that following the rules of etiquette was by far more important for the respondents from Lithuania (15.6 %) than for those from Slovakia (9.8 %).

However, respondents interviewed in Slovakia found personal qualities such as empathy (14.8 %) and energy (9 %) much more significant than in Lithuania (empathy – 3.5 %; energy – 3.4 %). Respondents were also given an opportunity to write down their own version of the answer. As a consequence, 1.6 % of respondents mentioned *intelligence, cleverness, skills about the personality of the criminal, their identification, expertise, knowledge of legislation and ability to explain them to the citizens*.

Although native language helps police officers in everyday communications, sometimes in exceptional situations some foreign language might be used as well. The study also enabled to find out the frequency of foreign language use among respondents while on duty in Lithuania and Slovakia (Fig. 9).

Frequency of foreign language use	Lithuania	Slovakia
<i>Every day</i>	4.2 %	6.2 %
<i>Once a week</i>	8.4 %	9.2 %
<i>More than once a week</i>	4.2 %	11.5 %
<i>Once a month</i>	13.8 %	14.6 %
<i>2 – 3 times per month</i>	11.9 %	13.9 %
<i>Once a year</i>	13.8 %	8.5 %
<i>Several times a year</i>	36 %	24.6 %
<i>Never happened before</i>	7.7 %	11.5 %

Figure 9. Distribution of respondents by the frequency of foreign language use while on duty

Analysis of respondents in relation to the question how often police officers tend to use foreign language during their service hours revealed that police officers from Slovakia tend to communicate more often with foreigners than those from Lithuania. This is seen from the following sum total of percentages accounted for by the answers *every day, once or more than once a week, and several times a month*: 28.7 % in Lithuania, and 40.8 % in Slovakia. Although the difference can be seen as rather minor (12.1 %), it's worth mentioning that even several contacts per month with foreign citizens requires having competences of communication in foreign language.

Taking into account the fact that 9 % of all the respondents involved in the study have never had to communicate in foreign language during their service in the police, the study was further aimed at finding out the foreign languages that respondents can speak, understand and write. Comparison of answers to the question "*In what foreign languages are you able to easily hold a conversation?*" showed the dominance of **Russian** and **English** among respondents from Lithuania, and **English, German** and **Czech** among respondents from Slovakia. Far more respondents in Slovakia know German (4.9 % in Lithuania versus 17.7 % in Slovakia), however Russian was observed to be more commonly known and understood in Lithuania (49.3 % in Lithuania versus 9.1 % in Slovakia). Knowledge and understanding of English language was observed to be on the similar level in both countries under consideration: 29.7 % of respondents in Lithuania compared to 35.6 % in Slovakia.

A small portion of respondents from Lithuania indicated that they also knew some other foreign languages: German (4.9 %), Polish (4.6 %), and French (2 %). In Slovakia, a greater diversity of known foreign languages was observed. If besides the above-mentioned foreign languages respondents from Lithuania are also able to understand in Spanish (0.7 %), Ukrainian (0.5 %), Serbian (0.3 %), Latvian (0.3 %) and Belorussian (0.5 %), respondents from Slovakia, besides the above named languages (except for Latvian and Belorussian), also indicated Czech (15.1 %), Hungarian (3.9 %), Croatian (2.2 %), Italian (0.9 %), Romanian (0.4 %) and Bulgarian (0.4 %) languages.

Knowing two and more foreign languages was reported by 27.7 % of all the respondents involved in the study. In Lithuania, they accounted for 20.8 %, and in Slovakia – 24.6 % of respondents. The percentage of those knowing and understanding none of foreign languages amounted for 6.7 % of all the respondents involved in the study, out of them 18 respondents (6.9 %) were from Lithuania, and 8 respondents (6.2 %) from Slovakia.

Answers to the question about the ability to write in foreign languages revealed that respondents from Lithuania write best at writing in Russian (57.9 %), and respondents from Slovakia – in English (46.2 %). A rather small portion of respondents reported ability to write in other foreign languages such as German (in Lithuania – 5.4 %, in Slovakia – 22.7 %), Polish (in Lithuania – 3.1 %, in Slovakia – 2.5 %), French (in Lithuania – 1.5 %, in Slovakia – 0.8 %).

Consequently, it can be concluded that police officers from both countries, Lithuania and Slovakia, considered correct and ethical use of native language to be important, and they also noted that it affected formation of public attitude towards police. Moreover, majority of police officers involved in the study indicated their willingness to improve their linguistic competence, especially as concerns skills in communication psychology, correct writing and creating a smooth train of thoughts, and improvement of communication skills in foreign languages.

CONCLUSION

The individual's need for communication is determined by his/her social nature. Language is considered to be the major tool for the communication process which functions in spoken and written forms. The language (linguistic) competence represents the main building block of the communication competence. As the organization involved in social service delivery to the society, police are oriented towards continuous engagement in communication with the population, and for this reason its interaction with the environment starts with the verbal communication. As regards activities performed by police officers, the communication competence is an integral part of their everyday work: it facilitates dispute resolution, enables helping the victims to overcome the stress, involves addressing family conflicts, passing remarks, interviewing the offenders.

The questionnaire survey of police officers from Lithuania and Slovakia revealed the correct language use to be of relevance for police officers. As regards the assessment of linguistic competence, knowing language rules and ability to apply them in practice is equally important as the inner culture of the speaker. According to the officers interviewed, their strict and rather familiar communication with the violators is usually determined by personal qualities and behaviours of the latter in a particular situation. This is often related to the age and mental status of criminals, armed, dangerous and aggressive persons.

Police officers admitted that language use by individual police officers influences the formation of the image of the police. According to respondents, major effect on the public trust

in police comes from impolite and non-ethical communication. The incorrect language use was treated by respondents more lenient as they were of the opinion that mistakes in everyday – both spoken and written – language have no effect whatsoever on the formation of the unfavourable public attitude towards the police and their operations.

As regards importance of foreign language in police officers' operations, the study showed that police officers tend to communicate more often with foreigners in Slovakia than in Lithuania. When communicating in foreign language, police officers were best at English both spoken and written. Meanwhile, in Lithuania when communicating in foreign language police officers speak and write best in Russian, which is followed by English. It's worth noting that police officers working in both countries under consideration know at least two languages or more, and the number of those who do not know any foreign language at all is minor.

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