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Polarisation and Impoliteness in Lithuania: Insights from Discussions on Language Policies

Abstract

This paper aims to analyse polarisation in opinion articles related to Lithuanian language policies. In order to reach this goal, 11 opinion articles were analysed, using a pragmatic linguistic approach and a qualitative content analysis method. Our analysis revealed that authors direct their face-threatening acts towards individuals, institutions, or actions of them and that in opinion pieces, opposing Lithuanian language policies, FTAs are used more frequently. Also, our analysis revealed that strategies of positive impoliteness are used most often (94 times or 52% of all impoliteness strategies that were used in examined articles). The second most often used strategy was negative impoliteness (71 times or 39,2% of all the strategies). Off-the-record and sarcasm strategies were the least popular – they were used 13 times (7,2%) and 3 times (1,6%), accordingly.

Keywords: impoliteness, impoliteness strategies, polarization, Lithuania, language policies

1. Introduction

Information in mass and social media unconsciously shapes and influences people's perception, knowledge, and beliefs about the world (Lankauskaitė, Liubinienė 2018; Quattrociocchi *et al.* 2011). Doubtlessly, media plays a very important role in today's society. Individuals consume information on various media platforms, interpret that information according to their own understanding and form their own narratives "often biased toward self-confirmation" (Del Vicario *et al.* 2015: 1). Opinion articles are especially relevant because they are inherently biased. Unlike news reports, which aim for objectivity

and factual reporting, opinion articles reflect the personal perspectives of the authors. Opinion articles are subjective by nature, which can lead to polarisation, particularly when they address divisive topics like political views or ecology. In Lithuania, one of the polarising topics is language politics and its implementation.

The goal of this research is to analyse polarisation in opinion articles related to Lithuanian language policies. In order to reach this goal, 3 tasks were set: 1) to identify a polarising line of argumentation and determine whose identity it threatens; 2) to find out, in which articles – for or against language policies – face-threatening acts are used more frequently; 3) to determine what impoliteness strategies are used to convey polarising conversational moves. This research applies methods of pragmalinguistic approach and qualitative content analysis.

In responding to these questions, this research helps us to better understand how individuals use linguistic resources to express polarising lines of argumentation.

2. Impoliteness and Polarisation

"Polarisation" is a term used by both scientists and the media to describe the phenomenon of community fracturing. It is a topic of growing interest in the fields of linguistic pragmatics, social sciences and political sciences (Simchon *et al.* 2022; Karjus, Cuskley 2024; Sikder *et al.* 2020). Polarisation occurs when individuals endorse oppositional opinions on a particular topic and form communities with others favouring opposite opinions. However, claims regarding polarization "often remain frustratingly vague" (Bramson *et al.* 2016: 118) and it is still not clear how exactly participants undergo polarisation.

The pragmalinguistic approach focuses on how language is used in particular contexts to reach specific communicative goals. It may also help clarify some aspects of polarisation (Blitvich 2010: 541), such as what pragmalinguistic resources, *e.g.*, impoliteness strategies, are used in order to create polarizing texts. As this study is closely related to the field of pragmatics, it is important to define impoliteness in the terms of linguistic pragmatics.

(Im)politeness in pragmatics is defined as "an evaluation that the speaker and addressee mutually reach by sequentially interpreting each other's utterances as they occur against that background of their prior experience both as members of society at large and with each other" (Culpeper, Terkourafi 2017: 26). One's behaviour can be evaluated in different contexts, both verbally and non-verbally. In mediated polylogues (*e.g.*, TV shows, political debates), evaluations can be expressed verbally and non-verbally, but in opinion articles all the evaluations are expressed only verbally: belittling others, openly confronting them, *etc*.

The authors of opinion articles employ impoliteness strategies "to inflict the maximum sting to the out-group members" (Donohue, Hamilton 2023: 210). As impoliteness strategies are closely related to the use of face-threatening acts (FTAs), the next section of this paper introduces both theoretical concepts – FTAs and impoliteness strategies.

3. Face-Threatening Acts and Impoliteness Strategies

Contemporary research focusing on (im)politeness has its roots in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), which is closely linked to the concept of the face and the face-threatening act (FTA). In linguistic pragmatics, the term "face" is used to describe the positive social value that a person assigns to himself (Goffman 1982: 5). It is a universal, human feature which consists of two dimensions: negative face and positive face. Importantly, the concept of positive and negative face does not imply any judgement of good or bad; it simply describes two fundamental needs, universal to all people. A negative face represents an individual's desire to act independently without being impeded by others. A positive face, by contrast, describes a person's need to be valued and approved by others (Brown & Levinson 1987).

While some aspects of Brown and Levinson's theory have been questionned, such as the claim for universality (Eelen 2001; Al-Duleimi *et al.* 2016; Culpeper 2011), and for positive and negative face (Culpeper *et al.* 2003; Culpeper, Hardaker 2017), it is generally agreed that the concepts of "face" as well as "positive and negative face" are crucial analytical tools in pragmatic (im)politeness research (*e.g.* Garcia-Pastor 2008; Dridi 2021; Culpeper, Terkourafi 2017; Jucker 2024). This study analyses polarisation within the framework of pragmatic impoliteness theory, and thus makes use of this pragmatic concept of face, and its positive and negative needs.

The concept of the face-threatening act[1] (FTA) is another crucial theoretical tool for identifying polarising lines of argumentation. An FTA is any utterance that runs contrary to the positive or negative face wants. Acts that threaten an individual's negative face include orders, requests or other speech acts that restrict an individual's autonomy. Acts that threaten an individual's positive face include criticism, insults and other acts that indicate negative evaluation of a person or ignorance towards an individual's personal feelings.

In opinion articles related to polarising topics, FTAs function as a tool to create a sense of "us *versus* them" and to heighten the sense of membership in the in-group (Blitvich 2010). In this study, FTAs are perceived as texts whose propositional content damaged the face of individuals related to Lithuanian language policy forming and implementation.

A face-threatening speech act can be performed through impoliteness strategies. Strategy is defined here as a means of achieving a communicative goal (Culpeper 2016: 424). Authors of opinion articles aim to convey their arguments about Lithuanian language policy; an expressed opinion is considered to be polarising if it endorses an "extreme position in the direction already favoured by the group" (Lee 2007: 385). In this study, expressed opinion is considered to be a polarising line of argumentation if:

- it supports/denies aspects of Lithuanian language policy formulation and implementation or it includes people, who form or implement Lithuanian language policy;
- it is expressed as FTA, directed towards those individuals (or actions of those individuals), who form and implement language policies.

The polarising line of argumentation can be expressed using the following impoliteness strategies:

1) direct impoliteness (bald on-record impoliteness). The act of speaking is performed very directly;

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1   An *act* in linguistic pragmatics means anything that is intended to be done with verbal or non-verbal communication, *e.g.* to make a promise, to give an order, to express feelings and emotions.

2) positive impoliteness. The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face (*e.g.* ignore, use inappropriate identity markers);

3) negative impoliteness. The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face (*e.g.* invade the addressee's space, associate the addressee with a negative aspect);

4) off-record impoliteness. A speech act has more than one implicature[2], but one clearly outweighs the other;

5) sarcasm. The use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere and thus remain surface realisations;

6) withheld politeness. Keeping silent or failing to act where politeness is expected (*e.g.* not to say "thank you" after receiving a gift) (Culpeper 1996: 356; Culpeper, Hardaker 2017: 208–209; Blitvich 2010: 548–550).

FTAs directed towards language policy makers can be expressed by applying different impoliteness strategies. For instance, a statement such as "You, language policy makers, are idiots[3]" is an impolite line of argumentation, because the utterance is very direct and clearly impolite. The statement "Language policy makers are idiots, not us" is considered to use a positive impoliteness strategy, because it is directed towards damaging positive addressee's face – in other words, the need to be approved or included in the group. The statement "don't make any more stupid language regulations" is considered to use a negative impoliteness strategy, because it is directed towards damaging negative addressee's face – need to be unimpeded, have freedom of actions. The statement "I am happy that you, language policy makers, decided to refrain from one more stupid language regulation" is expressed applying off-record strategy, because it has 2 implicatures (first implicature – the author is happy and second implicature – linguists tend to make stupid language policies) and one implicature, namely the second, clearly outweighs the other. Also, the statement "What a smart thing to do!" said sarcastically, is considered to use the strategy of sarcasm.

Each of these examples illustrates that the same propositional content can be expressed while applying different impoliteness strategies. Also, all these statements are lines of polarisation, because they have features of a polarising language, discussed above: to address a divisive topic in Lithuanian society and inflict maximum harm to the out-group member.

It is very not likely that in opinion articles the "withheld politeness strategy" will be applied. This strategy might be more expected in other contexts, but not opinion articles. As polarisation is related to the increased usage of the "positive politeness strategy" (Blitvich 2010: 541), this strategy should dominate opinion articles on polarising topics as well.

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2   "Implicature" is a term first used by language philosopher Paul Grice in his paper "Logic and Conversation" (1975). In linguistic pragmatics it describes the intended meaning of a particular saying, *i.e.* what speaker suggests or implies with particular text.

3   Examples given to illustrate impoliteness strategies are not from analysed data, but created for clarity by the authors of this paper.

4. Lithuanian Language Politics as a Polarising Topic

In Lithuanian society, there appears to be a divergence of opinion on a number of topics, including trust in the media, attitudes towards the EU and NATO, beliefs in conspiracy theories, attitudes towards human rights, and trust in governmental institutions and authority (Denisenko 2023).

The 14th article of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania defines Lithuanian language policy, and states that "The National language is the Lithuanian language"[4]. A number of governmental institutions have a role to play in forming and implementing Lithuanian language politics: the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language, the State Language Inspectorate of Lithuania, the Ministry of Science and Education, *etc*. The Main institution directly accountable to Parliament is the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language.

Regulations regarding the use of the Lithuanian language are polarising in the Lithuanian society. Discussions related to Lithuanian language policy often include the topic of a woman's married surname. Women have several options for how to change their surnames[5], but there are certain limitations. For instance, if a Lithuanian husband's surname ends with –*a*, his wife may not be able to take that surname.

In recent years politicians have proposed an amendment to this language policy on several occasions[6] with the aim to allow women to take marital surnames that end with –*a*. However, the amendment has not yet been accepted, and discussions about the language regulation regarding the married surname of the women have highlighted differing views on the matter. Some support the idea of woman having married surname if it ends with –*a* as a way to freely choose their own surnames, and some are against this regulation, because it might negatively affect Lithuanian language system.

Another polarising topic is related to the use of non-Lithuanian letters (*e.g. w, x, ł*) in the writing of a person's name and surname in documents. According to the latest Lithuanian language law[7], the foreign name and surname of a Lithuanian citizen with non-Lithuanian nationality (*e.g.* a Lithuanian Pole) in official documents can be written using non-Lithuanian letters, but without diacritic marks, such as ł.

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4   Full Constitutional article can be found here: https://www.lrk.lt/lietuvos-respublikos-konstitucija/1-skirsnis-lietuvos-val-stybe/22-14-straipsnis (date od access 10.06.2024).

5   According to the Lithuanian language policy, a married woman has several options of how to change the surname after marriage. 1) Add marital status revealing suffix "-ienė" or "-(i)uvienė" to her husband's surname (*e.g.*, if husband's surname is *Palionis*, wife's would be *Palionienė*, if the husband's surname is *Rimkus*, wife's would be *Rimkuvienė*). This way of constructing married women's surnames is the most traditional. 2) Construct a married surname from the husband's surname without the suffix "-ienė," only adding the ending "-ė", *e.g.* the wife of a man whose surname is Bliuvas could choose her surname between Bliuvienė and Bliuvė. First option has the suffix "-ienė" and that indicates her marital status. The second option does not have marital status indicating the suffix "-ienė," only the feminine gender indicating ending "-ė." 3) Not to change their surnames at all. 4) Have double surnames: the maiden and the married surname (*e.g.* Jonaitė-Bliuvienė, or Jonaitė-Bliuvė).

6   For instance: an offer to allow married women's surnames to end with –*a* was declined by the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language in 2023 (conclusion regarding person's name and surname: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalActPrint/lt?jfwid=f6r2n528l&documentId=82d87c81bc2d11ee9269b566387cfecb&category=TAK) (date od access 10.06.2024). Also, in 2024 an offer was declined (conclusion regarding writing person's name and surname: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/38ac12b0913511ef955ff95815eb5ce5?jfwid=inojhsnal [date od access 10.06.2024]).

7   Law of writing person's name and surname in the documents: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/en/legalAct/c8890cd07e6e11ec993ff5ca6e8ba60c (date od access 10.06.2024).

Discussions on the use of non-Lithuanian letters were intense: people expressed their opinion often and in various media platforms: TV, radio, social media, news portals. Those in favor of the use of non-Lithuanian letters argued that it would allow various ethnic groups in Lithuania (*e.g.* Poles) to retain their original family names. Those who were opposed to the regulation argued that the use of non-Lithuanian letters would destroy the Lithuanian language system and is contrary to the Constitution, which defines the Lithuanian language as the sole official language in Lithuania.

As discussed above, a number of groups within Lithuanian society have felt the impact of language policies. Some felt discriminated against their right to choose their married surname freely, some – against their right to keep their original family surname if it was non-Lithuanian. In other words, Lithuanian language policies created obvious divisions in Lithuanian society between those in support Lithuanian language policies, and those against them.

5. Methodology

The methodology employed in research on polarisation varies depending on the specific focus and perspective of the study. In scientific literature, polarisation has been discussed from 2 perspectives: ideological polarisation and affective polarisation (Kleinfeld 2023: 14–33; Reiljan 2019:1). Ideological polarisation research focuses on how far are the political parties or polarizing issues from each other in the ideological space (*e.g.,* Kaprāns, Mieriņa 2019). Affective polarization studies, on the other hand, focus on individuals' attitudes towards the parties and various issues in society (*e.g.* Reiljan 2019; Herold, Joachim, Otteni, Vorländer 2023). Also, some studies combine both perspectives of polarisation in order to study the relationship between affective polarisation and individuals' preferences (*e.g.* Bettarelli, Van Haute 2022; Segovia 2022).

To study polarisation on popular attitudes and how they change in period of time, scholars employ a range of techniques, including surveys and the use of prescriptive statistics (Herold, Maik 2023; Kaprāns, Mieriņa, 2019). To analyse issues related to polarisation and societies, researchers conduct sociological research (*e.g.* Keijzer *et al.* 2024; Cárdenas 2013). To study polarising language, researchers apply impoliteness theory and qualitative content analysis, and create databases in order to develop dictionaries of polarising language (*e.g.* Blitvich 2010, Simchon *et al.* 2022).

This study focuses on one polarising topic in Lithuanian society – attitudes towards language policies and is related to the concept of affective polarisation. From a methodological point of view, polarisation in Lithuania has been explored through conducting surveys (*e.g.* Danisenko 2023), or applications of discourse analysis (*e.g.* Jonutis, Davidavičius 2023). While the pragmalinguistic approach has been proposed by researchers as a means of analysing polarising lines of argumentation (see section *Impoliteness and polarisation* of this paper), to the best knowledge of the authors of this paper, there have been no such studies in Lithuania to date.

To reach our goal – analysing polarisation in opinion articles related to Lithuanian language policies – 11 opinion articles were examined. The opinion articles were published in the main media newspapers: http://www.15min.lt and http://www.lrt.lt (date od access 10.06.2024). These news portals were selected for two reasons: firstly, both are popular in Lithuania; secondly, one is national (http://www.lrt.lt [date od access 10.06.2024]) and the other is commercial (http://www.15min.lt [date od access 10.06.2024]).

Additionally, these media portals have an "Opinions" section which provides a platform for individuals to express their opinions. All analysed articles were related to the topic of Lithuanian language policies and were written by well-known Lithuanian public figures. All opinion pieces examined are from the year 2023 (period from 29.3.2023 until 17.11.2023), when the topic of Lithuanian language policies was a highly discussed topic in society.

All identified polarising lines of argumentation have code LT, which means that data is related to the Lithuanian language. Each identified polarising line of argumentation was coded according to which in a row article was analysed and which in the order was identified line of polarisation. *E.g.* code LT2.5 would mean that it was the second article analysed and identified polarising text was the fifth item in that article.

After identification, each polarising line of argumentation was transferred to an *Excel* file, where they were grouped into impoliteness strategies and analysed qualitatively.

6. Results

After analysing 11 opinion articles, a total of 181 polarising lines of argumentation were identified and analysed by applying qualitative content analysis method. This section presents and discusses distribution of FTAs and impoliteness strategies in the analysed opinion articles.

6.1. Distribution of FTAs in Opinion Articles

All FTAs were directed towards people and institutions who are involved in forming and implementing Lithuanian language policy, or who are directly affected by these regulations (*e.g.* writers, businesses):

- authors of opinion articles;
- participants of organised public discussion related to language policy forming;
- members of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language;
- actions of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language;
- Lithuanian linguists (in general).

Thus, the authors of articles analysed above direct FTAs towards various people and institutions, who are directly (*e.g.* members of the State Commission) or indirectly (*e.g.* some authors of opinion articles) involved in the process of forming and implementing Lithuanian language policy.

The general word count of articles expressing each position towards Lithuanian language policies and distribution of FTAs is shown in the following table:

Tab. 1. Word count and distribution of FTAs in opinion articles about Lithuanian language policies.

	Word count	FTAs found
For language policies	9425	80 (44,2 %)
Against language policies	9266	101 (55,8 %)
Total	18658	181

As it is shown in table 1, more than half FTAs – 55,8 % (or 101 instances) – were found in opinion articles against language policies and 44,2 % (or 80 instances) of all FTAs were identified in articles for language policies. It is interesting to note that the general word count of articles advocating for language policies is slightly lower (9425) than the word count of articles advocating against language policies (9266). But despite a slightly lower general number of words, FTAs are more frequent in opinion articles advocating against language policies.

6.2. Distribution of impoliteness strategies

Tab. 2. Distribution of impoliteness strategies used in opinion articles.

Impoliteness Strategy	Number of occurrence
Positive impoliteness	94 (52%)
Negative impoliteness	71 (39,2%)
Off-record	13 (7,2%)
Sarcasm	3 (1,6%)
Total	181 (100%)

Table 2 illustrates the frequency of impoliteness strategies used in opinion articles. The most often used was the positive impoliteness strategy. This strategy was used 94 times and it makes up 52% of all 4 impoliteness strategies that were used in examined articles. The negative impoliteness strategy, related to a person's desire to be independent and act autonomously, was used 71 times and it makes up 39,2% of all the strategies. Off-record and sarcasm strategies were the least popular – they were used 13 times (or 7,2%) and 3 times (1,6%) accordingly.

Examples 1–3 illustrate the usage of positive impoliteness strategies:

Ex. 1:
keista, kad I. Pakarklytė, valdančiosios koalicijos atstovė, **užmiršo garsųjį jau minėtą trijų raidžių** įstatymą **(už jį ji pati balsavo!),** kurio 3 straipsnyje jau įteisintas pavardės skirtumas lyties pagrindu (LT4.5).
[**it is strange that I. Pakarklytė**, the representative of the ruling coalition, **forgot the already mentioned famous three-letter law (she herself voted for it!)**, Article 3 of which already legalises the difference in surnames on the basis of gender.]

Ex. 2:
Ne įstatymas, ne **kelių kaprizingų moteriškių per politikus daromas spaudimas**, o pati kalbos raida, dauguma kalbėtojų tai padarytų (LT3.10).
[Not the law, **not the pressure exerted by a few capricious women through** politicians, but the evolution of the language itself, most speakers would make it.]

Ex. 3:
Žodžiu, šiandieninių **kalbos prievaizdų nuomone**, lietuvių kalbos nemokėjo nei S. Šalkauskis, nei V. Mačernis (LT7.8)

[In other words, **in the opinion of today's language wardens**, neither S. *Šalkauskis* nor V. Mačernis knew the Lithuanian language.]

In example 1, author directs FTA towards one person – the representative of the ruling coalition in Seimas – and states that this person "forgot the already mentioned famous three-letter law (she herself voted for it!)." In this example, author of FTA refers to the law that was issued in 2022, and according to it Lithuanian citizen's name in personal documents can be written using letters that are not in Lithuanian alphabet: *x, w, q*. In other words, the speaker states that this person voted for this three letters law and then forgot it. This implies that the opponent is not trustworthy and competent politician. This propositional content is related to person's desire to be appreciated and approved, thus, damages person's positive face.

In example 2, the author belittles members of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language by stating that their actions regarding the regulation of the Lithuanian language are exertions of power. In other words, the opponents are unfit to regulate the Lithuanian language. Also, the author of example 2 uses a derogatory adjective, calling them "capricious woman." Similarly, in example 3, the author also uses derogatory term "wardens" to describe people who are involved in any institution, responsible for implementing Lithuanian language policies. Moreover, the author ironically states that nobody speaks "good Lithuanian" for these language wardens – even well-known, acknowledged Lithuanian writers – Šalkauskis and Mačernis. Discrediting one's actions, using derogatory words damages person's wish to be appreciated and is considered to be a display of positive impoliteness strategy.

The second most frequently used impoliteness strategy was negative impoliteness. It is related to person's wish to be independent and not imposed by others. This strategy is illustrated by examples 4–6:

Ex. 4:

Tačiau šios meilės vėzdu neįskiepysi, tad **baudžianti kalbos politika yra prastas būdas saugoti lietuvių kalbą** (LT2.7).

[However, this love cannot be instilled by force, so **a punitive language policy is a poor way to protect the Lithuanian language**.]

Ex. 5:

Pavargau sekti **lietuvių kalbos normintojų kaprizus**, kai dešimtmečių dešimtmečius buvę teisėti žodžiai ūmai tampa nevartotinais nelegalais (LT7.17).

[I'm tired of following **the whims of Lithuanian language regulators**, when words that have been legal for decades suddenly become unusable and illegal.]

Ex. 6:

Kalbininkai **rūsčiai suraukia kaktą** ir sako: „Taigi eilinė lietuvė moterytė nesupras, kodėl ji turėtų laužyti liežuvį? – nejuokauju, iš tiesų esu girdėjusi tokį kalbininkų ir redaktorių **mizoginišką, Lietuvos moteris** žeminantį **argumentą** (LT7.24).

[Linguists **furrow their brows** and say: "So an ordinary Lithuanian woman won't understand why she should break her tongue?" – I'm not kidding, I've actually heard **such a misogynistic argument from linguists and editors, humiliating Lithuanian women**.]

In example 4, the author directly states that the Lithuanian language policy is punitive; that is, according to the author, people are punished for using the Lithuanian language incorrectly (*e.g.* business name does not comply with language policies), and not motivated to use it correctly. Also, the author

adds that it is "a poor way to protect the Lithuanian language." Evaluating actions of other negatively illustrates the usage of negative impoliteness superstrategy.

In example 5, the author of the examined article states that actions of people, responsible for implementing Lithuanian language policies, are only their own "whims," and adds that "words that have been legal for decades suddenly become unusable and illegal." In other words, the author discredits Lithuanian language regulator's actions, related to implementing Lithuanian language policies, and makes fun of them.

In example 6, the author ridicules actions of people, responsible for forming and implementing Lithuanian language policies. First of all, the phrase "furrow their brows" reveals condescending attitude towards Lithuanian linguists. Secondly, the phrase "I'm not kidding" indicates the author's disbelief and highlights absurdity of linguists' argumentation about rules of transcribing foreign names into the Lithuanian language. This condescending attitude is expressed towards linguists' actions and illustrates the use of negative impoliteness strategy.

Another strategy used to implement impoliteness was off-record. This strategy describes implicated impoliteness. In other words, when a statement has more than one implicature, but one clearly outweighs the other. Off-record strategy is illustrated by 7–8 examples.

Ex. 7:

Taigi, greta kitų demokratinių teisių, **Konstitucija mums visiems** (žemaičiams, aukštaičiams, dzūkams, suvalkiečiams, gyvenantiems miestuose, miesteliuose ir kaimuose, gimtakalbiams ir tiems, kuriems lietuvių kalba negimtoji) **garantuoja teisę komunikuoti lietuviškai savo** žodžiais**, savo akcentais ir savo galva** (LT10.2).

[So, along with other democratic rights, **the Constitution guarantees all of us** (people of *Žemaitija*, Aukštaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija[8]), living in cities, towns and villages, native speakers and those for whom Lithuanian is not a native language) **the right to communicate in Lithuanian in our own words, with our own accents and with our own head**.]

Ex. 8:

Ar tikrai taip norime sujaukti savo vardyną, kurį jau esame sistemiškai sutvarkę po visų okupantų, kitataučių valdymo ir prievartinio mūsų vardyno nutautinimo? (LT3.4)

[**Do we really want to mess up our naming convention**, which we have already systematically organized after all the occupiers, foreign rule and forced nationalization of our naming convention?]

Example 7 consists of 2 implicatures: 1) the constitution of Lithuania guarantees every citizen the right to communicate in Lithuanian, and 2) institutions, related to forming and implementing language politics, are anti-constitutional.

The first implicature is a statement that might be neutral, if it was communicated in another context, *e.g.* some event, where Lithuania and its politics was introduced. But it was communicated in an opinion article and from the tone and context of it becomes clear that author implies that the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language violates Constitutional right to communicate "in Lithuanian in our own words with our own accents." The phrase "in our own words" means that people have the right to communicate in any dialect of the Lithuanian language. In other words, the author implicitly states that the Commission is an anti-constitutional organisation and this implicature clearly outweighs the first one.

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8   Žemaitija, Aukštaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija are cultural regions of Lithuania.

Example 8 also consists of two implicatures: 1) we have a well-organised naming convention, and 2) we do not want to ruin it, but we will if we change laws regarding writing foreign names with non-Lithuanian characters. The second implicature, as understood from the whole article, is the main idea of this statement.

Sarcasm was the least used strategy to express impoliteness. *E.g.*:

Ex. 9

Taip, tikrai – kodėl turėtume išmokti ko nors naujo, kam tobulėti? Likime sovietiniais agorafobais (LT7.25).

[Yes indeed - why should we learn something new to improve? Let's remain Soviet agoraphobes.]

Ex. 10:

Platus valstybinis požiūris vaisingai skleidžiasi šviežioje ir originalioje Kristinos Sabaliauskaitės mintyje, kad savo atlyginimą gaunu iš mokesčių mokėtojų (LT8.22).

[A broad national approach is fruitfully spread in Kristina Sabaliauskaitė's fresh and original idea that I get my salary from taxpayers.]

In example 9, the author sarcastically comments on the rules for transcribing non-Lithuanian names in the Lithuanian language (*e.g.* Winston Churchill in Lithuanian text must be transcribed as *Vinstonas Čerčilis*) and asks "why should we learn something to improve" and sarcastically urges people to remain "Soviet agoraphobes."

In example 10 author refers to previous article, where strict views against Lithuanian language policy forming and implementation were expressed. Also, in previous article it was stated that one member of the State Commission, author of example examined, receives salary from Lithuanian citizens. So the said author sarcastically calls this statement "a broad national approach" and in the responding article counts that his salary counts 13–14 cents per year for each taxpayer.

So our hypothesis – that Positive impoliteness strategy will dominate in opinion articles related to Lithuanian language policies – was confirmed: authors belittled each other most often by damaging the desires of their positive face: the need to be appreciated and valued by others.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, an attempt was made to explore how individuals engage in polarisation. In order to achieve this, a pragmalinguistic approach was applied, using FTAs and impoliteness strategies analytical tools to: a) identify polarising lines of argumentation and determine targets of FTAs; b) to find out in which articles – for or against language policies – face-threatening acts are used more frequently; and c) to determine which impoliteness strategies are used to convey polarising conversational moves.

A qualitative content analysis of 11 opinion articles suggests that face threatening acts in opinion articles, related to polarising topic, are used as an opposing tool between those who support Lithuanian language policies and those who are against it. This conclusion clearly supports the idea that FTAs function as a polarising tool (Donohue, Hamilton 2022; Blitvich 2010).

Analysis of FTAs in terms of direction revealed that FTAs were directed towards individuals, institutions, as well as their actions. In total, 5 groups of targets for FTAs were identified: a) authors of

opinion articles; b) participants of organised public discussion related to language policy forming; c) members of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language; d) actions of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language; e) Lithuanian linguists (in general). These groups of targets of FTAs might also be interpreted as some indicator of which groups of people are related to and affected by Lithuanian language policies, presented above (*Lithuanian language politics as a polarising topic*).

Our analysis of the distribution of FTAs in opinion pieces supporting and opposing Lithuanian language policies revealed that more FTAs were expressed in articles in which authors formulated views against Lithuanian language policies (55,8% of all FTAs identified) than those, in which authors offered views supporting language policies (44,2% of all FTAs identified). This reveals that opposing views are more often expressed in a way that belittles others than supporting views.

Our analysis of impoliteness strategies revealed that the *positive impoliteness strategy* is used most frequently. This finding is consistent with the context of mediated polylogue on political topics in the USA (Blitvich 2010), where an increased usage of the positive impoliteness strategy was related to polarisation as well. In this study, the positive impoliteness strategy was used 94 times and it makes up 52% of all 4 impoliteness strategies used in examined articles. The second most frequently used strategy was the negative impoliteness strategy, which was employed on 71 occasions, representing 39,2% of all the strategies. Strategies involving off-the-record communication and sarcasm were less prevalent, with 13 instances (7.2%) and 3 instances (1.6%), respectively.

This research suggests that impoliteness theory could be a useful lens to examine polarisation in a variety of cultural and contextual settings. Additionally, it proposes that the increased use of positive impoliteness strategies may be a common phenomenon across different cultures and contexts.

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