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# Speech Register of Female Teachers in Primary Education: A Quantitative Analysis During Teaching of the Slovak Language in Slovakia

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**Annotation.** This study examined the frequency and variation of speech registers used by Slovak primary teachers across grades 1–4. Based on 32 observed lessons, teachers most often used calls, instructions, information requests, and encouragement. Praise and warnings were least frequent. Communicative acts were categorized by contact functions. The findings highlight authentic teacher–student interaction and differences in register use across grade levels.

**Keywords:** *communicative acts, speech register, structured observation, primary education teachers.*

## Introduction

Since the 1980s, several definitions of pragmatic competence have emerged in the field, each illustrating important knowledge and skills to teach in pragmatics. One of the early definitions comes from Thomas (1983), which considers pragmatic competence involving two knowledge dimensions: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. The former refers to the knowledge of linguistic forms used to achieve a communicative goal, while the latter involves the knowledge of cultural norms and social conventions

in the society. Leech (1983) first distinguished pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics; thus, pragmatic competence is divided into two parts of pragmalinguistic competence and sociopragmatic competence. The former is a pragmatic competence of using correct grammar and appropriate language form to realize certain communication, while the latter requires the speaker to conform to the social rules of language use to reach proper communication.

When a child enters elementary school, all aspects of their communication skills begin to develop, and their speech improves in both content and form, particularly through interactions with teachers. The concept of speech register is a complex phenomenon, involving a combination of linguistic, sociological, and psychological factors (Yule, 2014). Teachers serve as role models for students in many areas, including communication. Teacher-student communication is one of the fundamental structures of interpersonal communication and has many distinct characteristics that set it apart from communication in other institutional settings. The significance of speech register is profound, and its active use enriches the speech register of the students themselves. We believe that teachers are aware of the importance of employing a diverse speech register.

Spoken language can be segmented in various ways. The pragmatic level is one of the linguistic levels, which also includes the lexical-semantic, morphosyntactic, and phonetic-phonological levels. The pragmatic level pertains to the social application and practical use of communication skills and abilities. In the context of classroom discourse, the teacher's ability to deliberately select speech acts that are appropriate to the students' age, cognitive level, and communicative dynamics is of particular importance (Taguchi & Roever, 2020). Skills applied in practice include the ability to convey or request information, express thoughts, feelings, experiences, or relationships. Effective use of linguistic elements of the pragmatic level in appropriate communicative situations ensures the fulfillment of communication goals. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) stated that pragmatics is the study of maintaining relationships between linguistic forms and the human beings who use those forms. Although analyses of classroom discourse exist in the academic literature (e.g., Christie, 2002; Walsh, 2011), a quantitative analysis of teachers' speech register in the Slovak educational context, specifically during the teaching of the Slovak language at the primary level, is still lacking. Our contribution seeks to address and fill this research gap.

## Literature Review

### *Communicative Function*

To accurately determine the type of communicative function at play, it is essential to consider the theory of speech acts (a speech act being the fundamental unit of verbal communication). Every act of communication carries specific communicative intentions, which the communicator uses to achieve particular goals. These include concepts such as providing information, giving feedback, criticism, advice, requests, and promises. These functions are applied in the process of language-based interaction. The fact that there are differences between languages in relation to sociocultural norms and linguistic components and elements used to express a specific function in language may lead to certain verbal responses and wrong attitudes. In short, there is a failure in the use of communicative competence (Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Nur Ardini, 2022).

Since the research section of this study focuses on characterizing the teacher's communicative register in dialogue with students from a pragmatic perspective, we highlight the communication functions based on the pragmatic aspects of language. These functions are categorized by their frequency and application into three areas (Oluremi, 2016; Slančová, 1999):

1. Contact-related communicative functions: These include addressing and establishing contact.
2. Reactive communicative functions: This category comprises prompts, encouragements, commands or orders, instructions, warnings, and reprimands.
3. Informational communicative functions: These encompass confirmations, approvals, and praise.

All these communicative functions are actively employed by teachers in primary education. They will be further analyzed and categorized in detail in the empirical section of the study.

## Speech Registers

Every social group within a social environment utilizes its specific language. In addition to linguistic approaches, this study therefore integrates insights from pedagogical psycholinguistics (Lefstein & Snell, 2013), educational sociolinguistics (Khaghaninejad, 2024), and educational pragmatics (Mercer, 2019). A register constitutes an active component of communication within the social interactions of members of these societies. Each individual has both active and passive communicative registers, the scope and mastery of which depend on their linguistic experience. According to Yule (2014), a register is a conventional way of using language appropriate to a specific context,

often categorized as situational, occupational, or topical. Brown (2000) observes that registers are typically identified by phonological variations, vocabulary, idioms, and other expressions associated with particular professional or social groups. According to Bo (2019), language users adapt different linguistic variations and registers to suit specific communicative situations. Selecting an appropriate register within a given context is crucial for establishing the intended degree of formality. This skill enables us to approach specific individuals appropriately in particular situations and for specific purposes. Romaine (2001) states that speech registers provide insights into what people do. The concept typically pertains to linguistic variations conditioned more by use than by users, encompassing considerations of situation, context, purpose, and relationships among participants. In the classroom context, students would become familiar with multiple speech registers corresponding to the variety of teachers they encounter. In addition, students would explore how different language registers are shaped by diverse social contexts.

Viewed through the lens of pragmatic language use, it is crucial to examine how teachers adapt their linguistic choices in response to the social context, the individuals involved, and the communicative purpose. In classroom interaction, pragmatics encompasses more than just the literal meaning of spoken language, it also includes implied meanings, speech softeners, and discourse markers (Culpeper & Haugh, 2014; Thomas, 1995). Cutting (2021) highlights that the pragmatic register used in classroom settings demonstrates a teacher's skill in adjusting language to guide interaction, establish authority, and simultaneously foster constructive interpersonal dynamics. To achieve this, teachers frequently employ hedging strategies and expressions of positive politeness, which convey respect and reinforce students' sense of autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Jogulu (2024) emphasizes the pivotal role of code-switching as a pragmatic strategy in multilingual classroom environments. This linguistic flexibility enables teachers to navigate diverse communicative contexts, bridging cultural and language gaps. Pragmatic tools such as code-switching contribute significantly to cultivating a safe, inclusive, and responsive educational space, one that encourages active student engagement and supports the development of linguistic and communicative competence.

Historically, the concept of "speech register" was not widely recognized or frequently employed in linguistic discourse. The only mention in Slovak linguistic literature comes from Mistrík (1993), who defines a register as a set of expressions characterizing speech based on the subject matter (e.g., mathematics, sports), the relationships between communication participants (e.g., informal conversation in a close circle), or the communication medium used (e.g., telephone conversation). Given that teachers constantly communicate with students during lessons, it is understandable that they shift between different registers. Slančová (1999) describes a speech register as a situationally conditioned form of linguistic expression associated with a specific type of

shared human activity. She perceives it as a way a language operates depending on the nature of the activity and the social environment. Speech registers are characterized by their dynamism, varying according to the age of the children and the class size. However, certain features of speech registers remain stereotypical and unchanging. Key elements of speech registers used by teachers in primary education include: high vocal tone, elevated intonation, careful articulation, concise sentences, frequent use of direct speech, repetitive phrasing, active initiation of communication, and short response times for students are some of the most notable features of communication in primary education.

Beyond the need to adhere to contemporary sociolinguistic and stylistic insights, the application of the concept of a communication register in teaching is also justified by the necessity of respecting the cognitive and linguistic development patterns of younger school-aged children. According to Agh and Frog (2015), the linguistic concept of the communication register is made accessible through substitutional questions, which serve to define its context and purpose: Where do we communicate? What are we communicating about? Why are we communicating? With whom are we communicating? How do we communicate? While Slančová (1999) identifies the fundamental communicative functions of teachers at the pragmatic level, more recent research (Christie, 2002; Walsh, 2011) highlights a shift in the teacher's register towards greater interactivity and the personalization of communication.

## Research Design and Methodology

### General Research Framework

Pragmalinguistics, an interdisciplinary field combining insights from linguistics and cultural studies, has been expanding within applied linguistics. It focuses on the pragmatics of speech acts, requiring an understanding of the relationship between a linguistic element and the individuals who create, use, and interpret it in a given communicative situation (Dressler, 1972; Marmaridou, 2011). Pragmalinguistics seeks to systematically catalogue all components of communicative competence. Judd (1999) highlights that a thorough understanding of pragmalinguistic theory, intercultural experiences, and a repertoire of teaching strategies is essential for a competent teacher. The register of academic language serves as a "primary gatekeeper" through which linguistic and literacy skills are developed, granting access to and membership in the broader community of "educated" individuals (Silliman & Wilkinson, 2014). However, questions remain about which aspects of everyday language registers predict specific academic language skills (Snow & Uccelli, 2009) or how academic language proficiency in oral and written domains impacts the development of more sophisticated everyday language registers.

The primary research aim was to examine the use of speech registers among primary education teachers in Slovakia. Specifically, we sought to investigate the frequency and application of speech acts in school communication. We established the **main objective** as follows: To observe the speech register of primary school teachers in Slovakia within teacher–student interaction and, based on the conducted classroom observation, to identify key pragmalinguistic categories present in the teachers' speech register as reflected in their communication with pupils.

In pursuit of relevant data, we posed the following **research questions**:
- What is the speech register of primary school teachers?
- Which communicative elements dominate within the observed speech registers?

### Research Sample

The research sample comprised primary education teachers. The research included exclusively female teachers, as women significantly dominate the field of primary education in Slovakia. According to data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and international reports (OECD, 2023), over 90% of teachers at the primary school level are women. From a methodological standpoint, the choice to include only female teachers reflects the actual composition of the teaching population in the studied context and ensures the homogeneity of the research sample. Focusing solely on the female gender also eliminates potential variables related to gender-based communication differences (Tannen, 2007), allowing the research to concentrate more precisely on speech registers within classroom interaction without compromising data consistency. This selection should therefore not be viewed as a limitation, but rather as a deliberate decision grounded in empirical reality and methodological appropriateness.

Participants were selected through convenience sampling, as we had personal connections with them, and they consented to our presence during their lessons. All teachers were employed at primary schools in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. To address our goal of determining whether speech registers vary across grade levels, we selected four female teachers from different grades of primary education. The participants represented grades one through four. Their average teaching experience was approximately 20 years. The classrooms observed were heterogeneous, with an average class size of around 20 students. We conducted repeated visits to each teacher over two months, observing each participant for 8 teaching sessions. In total, 32 audio recordings were collected during these observations.

### Methods and Procedures

For the research, we employed a quantitative empirical method of direct structured observation. Numerous studies, including those by Cazden (2001) and Edwards and Westgate (1994), predominantly employ qualitative discourse analysis as their methodological foundation. Our study contributes by quantifying individual speech acts,

which allows for more effective comparison and metric tracking of communication types. The phenomena examined in the study were deliberately pre-defined to promote analytical clarity and maintain a focused research scope. We did not specially prepare the teachers for our observations, aiming to preserve the authenticity of their speech register. The observations involved systematically and purposefully monitoring the teachers' speech registers during lessons, specifically their interactions with students. We ensured a non-intrusive presence and did not intervene in any of the lessons. Our goal was to capture the real-time speech registers of both the teachers and their primary school students. Each teacher was observed over several days during Slovak language lessons, a subject deliberately chosen because we believed it offered the best context to capture and define speech registers. To record the speech registers, we used audio recordings. The objective of our observations was to document, categorize, and evaluate the speech acts employed by the teachers, guided by the theories of pragma-linguistics and speech register.

### Data Analysis

The stylistic quality, as a multifaceted attribute, is shaped by a specific configuration of interconnected and often hierarchically arranged qualitative elements. Based on the nature of these elements, we can analyze various aspects of the stylistic and stylistic quality of communicative acts and texts. This involves examining the qualitative dimension of verbal interaction concerning the defined aspects. Drawing from several weeks of observations conducted in primary schools, during which we meticulously listened to and recorded the speech registers of our participants, we conclude that all primary education teachers demonstrate an appropriate and rich verbal speech register. The teachers adeptly adjusted their speech register to align with the age and developmental needs of the students in the respective grades they taught.

## Interpretation of Direct Observations – Categorization of Speech Acts

The basis of structured observation is observed categories. By observed category we mean phenomena of the same properties. Based on our observations in Slovak language classes, we categorized the speech register of the most frequent contact communication functions. We also enclose a short example of the most frequently used communication functions in the speech register of teachers for each category. The categorization was inspired by Slančová (1999), who conducted detailed research on the speech register of kindergarten teachers.

### A Call

The call is the basis of all operational communication functions. The function of a challenge is to encourage the addressee to perform or not perform some activity. Svobodová (1991) understands a challenge as a milder form of a command, i.e. as a neutral call to complete a certain task to which the student is called upon. A teacher can use a challenge collectively for the whole class together or can use it to address a specific individual. During our observation, we found that teachers used the challenge only in a positive aspect. They did not use it in a negative way even once. During the observed lessons, teachers used a collective challenge a total of 286 times and an individual challenge 282 times. With a challenge, teachers sometimes emphasized the satisfaction of the ongoing activity.

Example:

T: *"Come, this group by the window, show us the poster with your classification of the selected words."*

S: *"These are them, teacher, and we have them in these clouds."*

### Command

A command is characterized by a higher degree of urgency and categorical assertion compared to a mere directive or request. It aims, without additional semantic nuances, to compel the interlocutor to act as the speaker desires. This presupposes opposing social roles between the participants in the interaction (Searle, 1979). Commands also include instructions or orders to begin or end an activity, carrying the utmost obligation for the recipient. They arise from the speaker's authoritative position within the given communicative situation. In our observations, commands were recorded 216 times. They were predominantly used in a frontal manner, addressing the entire group of students.

Example:

T: *"Be kind enough not to be late to my lessons. You barge in here without knowing what we're doing, clueless, looking around, and by the time you realize, the lesson is over. Don't do it again."*

S: *"I'm sorry, I didn't have my locker keys..."*

T: *"Then wear them around your neck or keep them... somewhere you can grab them quickly!"*

### Instruction

An instruction has a directive character with both operational and communicative functions. It serves as a form of pedagogical command. Instructions require an immediate physical response from students, often involving a direct and specific action. In primary schools, instructions are frequently used as calls to manipulate educational materials such as textbooks or workbooks. Our observations indicated that teachers

in primary education exclusively used direct instructions - explicit and clear verbal directives directed at students with the expectation of immediate execution. We did not record any instances of indirect instructions during the study.

Example:

T: *"The class monitor, if they have nothing else to do, will refill the markers. We'll need them today."*

### Warning

A warning can be defined as a teacher's verbal prompt intended to encourage a student to take a specific action that serves their own well-being or academic success. Within the classroom context, teachers frequently employ indirect warnings, which suggest a preferred behavior or course of action without stating it overtly. This subtle approach is often used to gently redirect students, promote self-regulation, and maintain a respectful tone, especially in situations where direct correction might provoke resistance or embarrassment. Indirect warnings thus function as pragmatic tools that support classroom management while preserving positive teacher–student relationships. A more assertive form of warning, as outlined by Müllerová (1994), entails the speaker explicitly cautioning the listener against engaging in a particular action. These warnings typically incorporate references to potential risks or negative outcomes that may arise if the undesired behavior persists. In our observations, teachers employed such warnings and reminders selectively, most often in situations they perceived as especially significant or potentially disruptive. The primary aim was to ensure that students did not disregard essential information, instructions, or responsibilities. This approach reflects a pragmatic strategy that balances authority with relational sensitivity, reinforcing both classroom order and student autonomy.

Example:

T: *"Let's make sure we focus on neatness as we work through this exercise. Sit properly - straight backs, you know how to do it... yes, straight! And no looking around for cobwebs; focus on your workbook."*

### Need for Information

This communicative act was consistently present in the speech registers of teachers across all grade levels, occurring during nearly every verbal interaction and frequently throughout an entire lesson. It is therefore classified as one of the most common communicative acts. This act supports the implementation of various pedagogical methods, emphasizing its significance in the teaching process.

Example:

T: *"And which grammatical categories do we use for nouns? Can you name them? Let's do a quick final review."*

S: *"Gender, number, and case."*

T: *"Perfect. Exactly right!"*

*Praise*

Praise is understood as a positive assessment of a student's activity, its outcome, or the knowledge demonstrated during the learning process. It typically arises in response to a student's immediate behavior or performance and is characterized by a distinctly affirming tone. In our observations, participants frequently used praise to approve students' actions or answers.

Example:

T: *"I must commend this pair – they answered very well, in full sentences, with clarity and structure. They clearly understand what they're writing about, and on top of that, it's interesting. It's evident they grasp the topic and seem to enjoy it… Am I right?"*

S: *"Yes, we enjoyed it and understand it. I even studied this at home."*

*Contact*

Within the observed teacher registers, the function of contact served to initiate, sustain, or re-establish communicative engagement with students. It served as a dialogic tool, fostering social interaction and active connection between students and their communicative partners (teachers).

Example:

T: *"Caroline, take a moment to consider whether it applies to both..."*

S: *"But can I begin now?"*

*Encouragement*

Encouragement is a form of more urgent prompting. Compared to other pragmatic content units, prompts are closely tied to an expected subsequent physical, verbal, or mental response. It requires various methods to encourage action, including motivational tools, offering special assistance, or emphasizing the significance of the intended goal more frequently. This form of urging was often accompanied by the teacher raising their voice to command attention or action.

Example:

T: *"Speak up... Come on, Sofi, louder... Let's go, let's go... Speak loudly."*

The teaching profession involves almost continuous communication with students, including during breaks, supervisions or random meetings on school premises. While investigating communicative intentions, we observed and classified communicative acts in the speech register of female teachers. Based on audio recordings, we determined what types of communicative appeals and with what frequency they occur in primary education teachers during lessons. Table 1 shows the occurrence of communicative appeals. In total, communication appeals were used: a call (collective) was made 286 times, a call (individual) 282 times, a command 216 times, an instruction 286 times, a warning 199 times, a need for information/action from teachers was made 361 times, praise towards pupils or a student 153 times, contact with an individual student 223 times, encouragement 275 times.

**Table 1**

*Occurrence of Communicative Acts*

| Communication acts | 1st teacher | 2nd teacher | 3rd teacher | 4th teacher | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A call (collective) | 46 | 82 | 93 | 65 | **286** |
| A call (individual) | 60 | 80 | 66 | 76 | **282** |
| Command | 36 | 57 | 54 | 69 | **216** |
| Instruction | 60 | 45 | 80 | 101 | **286** |
| Warning | 42 | 45 | 53 | 59 | **199** |
| Need for information | 69 | 129 | 89 | 109 | 361 |
| Praise | 46 | 23 | 36 | 48 | **153** |
| Contact | 34 | 41 | 51 | 97 | **223** |
| Encouragement | 152 | 67 | 44 | 12 | **275** |
| Total | 545 | 569 | 566 | 636 | 2 281 |

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that the teacher in the first grade executed the fewest communicative acts, while the teacher in the fourth grade performed the highest number of communicative acts.

As part of our in-depth analysis, we chose to focus more closely on teacher communication in the 1st and 4th grades of primary school. This decision was motivated by an effort to capture the developmental range of teachers' communicative practices at the beginning and end of primary education – two fundamentally distinct developmental phases for pupils (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). In the 1st grade, children typically enter the realm of school language for the first time, and the teacher's language plays a key role in the processes of acculturation and acquisition of academic discourse (Schleppegrell, 2004). By contrast, in the 4th grade, pupils are already accustomed to school norms, and teacher communication tends to shift in both structure and focus - aiming more toward developing critical thinking and acquiring specialized registers (Christie, 2002). The decision to exclude a more detailed analysis of the 2nd and 3rd grades does not imply that these grades are irrelevant from a research perspective, but rather that they did not provide contrastingly distinct data compared to the selected grades. The quantitative analysis of communicative acts showed that teacher utterances in the 2nd and 3rd grades were very similar in both volume and function, and therefore did not introduce new analytical insights that would extend or challenge the findings from the 1st and 4th grades. From both a pragmatic and analytical standpoint, we therefore chose two contrasting grade levels that represent the most communicatively distinctive and developmentally distant phases within primary education.

**The first-grade teacher** most frequently used the communicative act of encouragement in her interactions with the class, employing it a total of 152 times. This underscores the importance of fostering motivation among younger learners to actively participate in educational tasks. The observations also highlighted moments when students were prompted to engage in more autonomous information processing. Although the teacher's language repertoire, refined through years of professional experience, was largely tailored to the developmental level of the pupils, her verbal interactions were often concentrated on a small group of preferred students. One notable and unexpected observation was the teacher's preference for addressing students by their surnames, a practice that stood in marked contrast to her colleagues, who consistently used first names. The volume of instructional input and informational guidance was well aligned with the developmental level of the pupils. Her communicative repertoire was rich in praise, contributing to a light-hearted and engaging classroom atmosphere that resonated positively with the first-grade students. Particularly striking was her ability to maintain a balanced and purposeful use of directives and commands, which supported both classroom structure and student responsiveness. At times, the teacher introduced technical terminology that exceeded the typical comprehension level for the age group; however, she consistently provided clear explanations and contextualized the terms to enhance understanding. A particularly noteworthy pedagogical strategy was her regular use of peer evaluation, especially in reading activities, which featured prominently in nearly every Slovak language lesson. The teacher justified this approach by emphasizing the value of reciprocal critique as a catalyst for student development, encouraging greater effort in both reading fluency and communicative competence. Overall, her speech repertoire, knowledge, and communication with students were assessed positively.

Here's a transcription example of the first-grade teacher's communication during a Slovak language lesson:

T: *"Let's stand up, children." "Look what I have."* (Collective call)

S*: "New markers and a cloth."*

T: *"Urban, come to the front."* (Individual call)

S: *"So we don't need to wipe with the cloth anymore."*

T: *"We don't. First, let's stand nicely, children, and let's pray."* (Instruction)

S: *"In Your name, Father, Lord, we begin to learn again, please bless our work with Your love. Amen."*

T: *"Urban, come to the front then."* (Individual call)
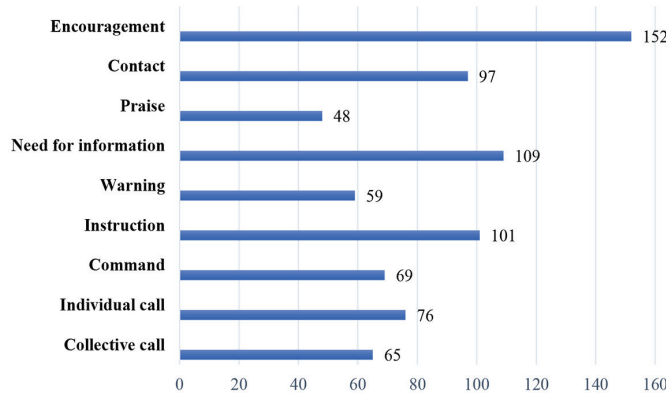
S: *"I'm coming!"*

T: *"Oh."*

T: *"I like the song about dragons. Would you sing it for me?"* (Encouragement)

T: *"That's enough, thank you. Sit down."* (Collective call) *"Let's open to where you were supposed to read.* (Instruction) *It's page two. Stephen will start reading. Go ahead."*

**Figure 1**

*The Occurrence of Communicative Acts Among Teachers in the 1st Grade*



**The teacher in the 4th grade** communicated intensively with her students during lessons. The classroom atmosphere was pleasant and informal. At first glance, it was clear that a strong bond had been established between the teacher and the students. The students had clearly defined communication rules. The teacher used collective prompts sparingly, focusing more on individual prompts. She often addressed the students by name and made sure to inform them about what they were about to do or what activity was currently underway. The teacher frequently praised the students and addressed them kindly. She supported verbal communication with non-verbal cues, which the students responded to very actively. Of the four teachers observed, this one used the communication appeal of encouragement the least. Instead, she often addressed students by their names. Warnings and reprimands were used less frequently; instead, the teacher would either give individual prompts or calmly quiet the students.

**Figure 2**

*The Occurrence of Communicative Acts Among Teachers in the 4th Grade*
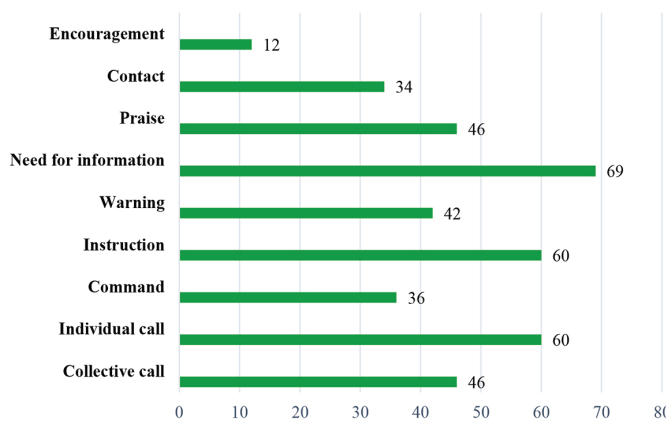
Example of a transcript from the observation of the teacher's communication in the 4th grade during a Slovak language lesson:

S: *"Should we start?"*

T: *"Yes, you're already doing it!"* (command) *"Move back so I can walk around."* (command) *"Is anyone sitting here?"*

S: *"No."*

T: *"Alright. How did it turn out?"*

S: *"Teacher?"*

T: *"Yes? If you don't know, put it aside."* (instruction) *"I'm not explaining now, I'll explain later."* (warning) *"What did you forget, how it's done?"* (warning)

S: *"No, I just want to find out whether the green sounds are soft or hard."*

T: *"Why are you paying attention to the color?"* (warning) *"What exactly are you concentrating on?"* (warning) *"No! Which letter should be there? We'll deal with the rest later. Do you understand?"* (contact) "Hurry up." (command) *"Just for a brief moment."* (warning)

T: *"A little quicker."* (individual prompt)

T: *"Ema, done?"* (encouragement) *"What's this here, John, so messy!"* (contact) *"Did you just throw it like that or what?"* (need for information) *"Alright, that's enough."* (instruction) *"We're not going any further."* (warning) *"Let's count the mistakes."* (collective call)

T: *"Alright, raise your hand if you've finished. Great!"* (praise) *"Hands down. Paul, you're fast, aren't you?"* (contact) *"Let's move on, nice and smooth."* (warning) *"Hands down. One error? Hands down. Two errors. Hands down. Three errors. Well, Paul. Oh dear."* (warning)

S: *"I wasn't able to do it."*

T: *"Shh, let's keep it quiet."* (command) *"How many mistakes did you have?"*

S: *"Four."*

T: *"Paul, read your mistakes. Let's go."* (individual call)


## Discussion

In recent years, applied linguists have increasingly emphasized the importance of enhancing both teachers' and learners' awareness of pragmatics and pragmalinguistic competence (Khadangi Barani & Mousapour Negari, 2023; Takimoto, 2014). Malec (2020) found that the language teachers prefer to use in the classroom differs from natural conversations in everyday life in linguistic terms. The type and quality of a speech register are often predictable if the participants are familiar with the communicative situation or the protocol required for a specific type of interaction (Iwasaki & Horie, 2000). Teachers in primary education serve as one of the first models of formal

language that children encounter, and therefore their speech register significantly influences pupils' language development (Cazden, 2001). However, it is impossible to establish a general standard for what an optimal teacher speech register should look like. It is entirely understandable that adhering strictly to a lesson plan or consistently maintaining a carefully structured speech register can be challenging. The dynamics of working with students are shaped by a multitude of variables, many of which emerge spontaneously and cannot be fully anticipated during the planning phase. Even minor issues, such as fatigue or mental discomfort, can impact a teacher's performance, not to mention class size. In our observations, the average number of students per class was 20.

Our findings show a marked dominance of functional speech acts such as instruction (286), calls or prompts (individual and collective combined, 568), and commands (216), indicating a strongly directive function of the teachers' speech register. This pattern aligns with the findings of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), who identified the predominance of instructional and regulatory utterances in classroom discourse within their well-known IRF structure analysis (Initiation – Response – Feedback). Similar distributions of speech functions have been confirmed by other scholars as well. Smith et al. (2004), in a study of British primary schools, found that over 70% of teachers' utterances during lessons were instructional, regulatory, or organisational in nature. Walsh (2006) points out that classroom interaction is often asymmetrical and teacher-led, with prompts and directives forming the core of teacher talk.

Since teacher trainees will be teaching future generations (Karatepe, 1998), they should be well-equipped with the knowledge to enable them to cope with the demands of all aspects of language teaching. As part of their qualifications, non-native speaker trainees or teachers need to have a well-established pragmalinguistic awareness. This would provide them not only with an understanding of how pragmalinguistics operates but also an insight into the role of pragmalinguistics in relation to other components of language.

A teacher's speech register is shaped by a wide range of influencing factors. Among the most essential components of a high-quality register is the educator's authentic enthusiasm for teaching and sincere concern for the well-being and development of their students. The quality of a teacher's speech register also depends on their expertise and their commitment to continuous and purposeful professional development. Santosa & Kurniadi (2020) also found that the effective use of appropriate speech register classifications during lessons is rooted in the teaching approach adopted by the teacher. To enhance the quality of teacher speech registers, we recommend ongoing reflection, targeted communication training, and peer exchange. Teachers should use clear, age-appropriate language, avoid inappropriate expressions, and ensure equal interaction with all students. Varying speech styles helps maintain engagement and adaptability in diverse classroom situations.

The outlined recommendations play a key role in shaping a teacher's speech register and overall communicative competence. Continuous development through reading, reflection, and professional dialogue helps educators expand their vocabulary and adapt their communication style. This enables them to engage students more effectively and foster inspiring classroom interactions. However, it is critical that students comprehend the teacher's speech register. Chapman (1982) highlights that a successful teaching register requires a high degree of communicative proficiency. A teacher's communicative acts should consistently address all students at an equal level, ensuring inclusivity. Ideally, each student should experience at least one instance of direct communicative exchange with their teacher every day. While we recognize that achieving this is challenging, particularly in classrooms with more than twenty students, it remains an essential goal for fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Pragmalinguistics is deeply rooted in culture and communication because the culture on which a language depends not only dictates how, when and with whom it is spoken but also helps native speakers to decode and encode messages and their meanings in the locative, elocution, and perlocative plane (Searle, 1969; Haugh et al., 2021).

The teaching profession is among the highest-risk occupations in terms of vocal strain, which also affects the quality of verbal expression (Sala et al., 2001). During our observation of teachers' speech registers, we noticed that some teachers tend to overuse their voices, not paying adequate attention to varying their speech tempo. In some cases, we also observed shouting. However, we do not believe that the shouting stemmed from anger; such instances were rare. Instead, it appeared that teachers resorted to raising their voices when they felt that students' attention was waning, using it as a strategy to regain focus. Although this strategy may briefly engage students, it risks unsettling the classroom atmosphere and may lead to student discouragement. To address this, we recommend that teachers, of their own initiative, consider consulting with a vocal coach at least once. Working with a voice coach can support teachers in improving vocal modulation, sustaining a positive classroom climate, and enhancing communication with students. Regular sessions also serve as a preventive strategy against long-term vocal fatigue (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Recent studies highlight that successful classroom communication depends not only on clear content delivery but also on the teacher's ability to tailor their speech register to specific interactional contexts and instructional aims. Walsh (2011) defines *classroom interactional competence* as the teacher's skill in adjusting language to meet students' communicative needs and foster active engagement in learning. Christie (2002) identifies two key layers of teacher register: the instructional, which conveys subject matter, and the regulative, which structures classroom interaction. Gao (2024) further demonstrates that effective use of pragmatic markers like acknowledgements and prompts can significantly enhance student participation. Wei and Li (2024) demonstrate through quantitative analysis that the discourse marker "OK" serves multiple functions both

in managing classroom interaction and enhancing student confidence. Their interdisciplinary insights offer a valuable foundation for this study's quantitative examination of Slovak language teachers' speech registers in primary education. Reflecting on the academic register used in language is a complex task, as school language simultaneously functions as a tool for communicating school content in classrooms and for conveying social significance (Eaton, 2018; Heller & Morek, 2015). We recognize that being a teacher has never been, and still is not, an easy profession. The teachers we observed rarely relied solely on phrases and memorized formulas during their lessons. Through their speech register, they conveyed life experiences, knowledge, advice, and ideas to their students. In Slovak language lessons, they actively engaged students in numerous dialogues. Our presence during the observations had no noticeable effect on the teachers; they conducted themselves professionally. Across the 32 observed lessons, it became evident that the teachers predominantly used their speech register in a positive manner. Students were encouraged to listen attentively, not only when the teacher explicitly expected it and issued communicative prompts to the class but also during unforeseen communicative situations that arose in the course of a typical school day. A teacher must be acutely aware that delivering a command or warning (or any other communicative act) in an inappropriate manner can have a profound impact on the students.

As suggested by Bower et al. (2011), practices such as peer observation, recording lessons, and conducting detailed analyses could be beneficial in this regard. Effective classroom communication requires an equitable distribution of attention among all students. Unconscious favouritism towards some may reduce the active participation of others (Mercer, 2000). Today, with the growing prominence of the social economy and global environment, students are no longer satisfied with merely acquiring linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammatical rules. Instead, they aim to enhance their pragmatic competencies (Shu, 2018). Every educator, regardless of the level of education or the number of students, must prioritize the importance, professionalism, and consistency of their speech register (Napoli & Tantucci, 2022). This focus should not be limited to classroom instruction but should extend to breaks and informal interactions as well. It is encouraging to note that the teachers in our study incorporated praise, humour, and light-hearted comments into their speech registers. Kurdghelashvili's (2015) research showed that teachers often employed interpersonal functions such as agreement, disagreement, comprehension checks, and confirmations. Students, in turn, also used speech acts of agreement when teachers asked for their opinions on peers' contributions. Teachers confirmed understanding with expressions like "okay," "all right," "yes," "uh-huh," and "of course." Azhari et al. (2018) examined the range of speech acts used in teacher–student classroom interactions, alongside the communication strategies speakers employ to fulfil their communicative intentions. Their focus on speech acts underscores their central role in language use, bridging

both linguistic form and pragmatic function. Being a communicatively comprehensible speaker in our study presupposes not only the adequate use of appropriate language exponents from the metalinguistic level, nor the usual strategic or discursive adaptation of the social and cultural context, but the actual act of pragmalinguistic use of various pragmatic and sociopragmatic elements, which makes the speech act communicatively successful. This is also claimed by Rodríguez (2017).

## Conclusion

We realized how little primary education teachers engage with the concept of speech registers. Some teachers, prior to meeting with us, had not only never heard of speech registers but were entirely unfamiliar with the concept. We believe that topics related to speech registers and overall communication during teaching are of paramount importance. Teachers should be well-informed about speech registers, work to strengthen their use of them, and participate in training and workshops designed for this purpose.

Based on the above, we consider the development of the teacher's speech register to be a continuous and professionally guided process that is an integral part of the educator's professional development. In light of current research in the fields of speech communication and didactic interaction, we recommend the systematic strengthening of teachers' linguistic competencies as a key element of effective education.

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# Mokytojų (moterų) kalbos registras pradiniame ugdyme: slovakų kalbos mokymo kiekybinė analizė

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## Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama Slovakijos Respublikos pradinių mokyklų mokytojų kalbinė komunikacija. Autoriai tiria, kaip mokytojai taiko kalbos registrus bendraudami su mokiniais per slovakų kalbos pamokas. Tyrimas buvo atliekamas struktūriškai stebint keturias pradines klases ir analizuojant 32 pamokas. Rezultatai parodė autentišką turtingo kalbos registro naudojimą. Dažniausiai pasitaikančiais komunikaciniais veiksmais yra kreipimaisi, nurodoma, prašoma informacijos ir padrąsinama. Pagyrimų ir įspėjimų pasitaikė rečiau. Šis tyrimas atskleidė pragmatinio kalbos aspekto svarbą švietimo procese ir nustatė, kad tinkamai pasirinktas mokytojo kalbos registras gali teigiamai paveikti mokinių kalbos vystymąsi. Straipsnyje taip pat nurodoma būtinybė taikyti komunikacijos strategijas, skirtas mokinių kalbos kompetencijoms stiprinti. Pateikiama naujų įžvalgų pedagogikos ir lingvistikos specialistams, pabrėžiant kokybiškos komunikacijos, kaip pagrindinio pradinio ugdymo veiksnio, vaidmenį.