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Review Paper

COMMUNICATING TOURIST OFFER IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT COUNTRY TESTIMONIALS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to examine the way two different non-native English-speaking countries communicate their tourist offers. Websites of the selected hotels from Lithuania and Serbia were observed, more specifically their versions in English, as English is the language international tourism largely relies on. The content of the offer, within the available website menus was observed, as well as the phrases used to describe the selected establishments. Given the fact that the two countries are characterised by different attributes through the eyes of the Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, the results are discussed with reference to the very theory, as well as the Hall's theory differentiating between high- and low-context cultures. Apart from confirming some of the hypothesised differences, it has been shown that the two cultures, when communicating their tourist offers in English, also share common elements.

KEY WORDS:

Communication; High VS Low- Context Cultures; Hofstede's Theory; English; Tourism;

SAŽETAK:

Ovaj rad ima za cilj da uporedi način na koji dvije, kulturološki različite zemlje, Litvanija i Srbija, oglašavaju svoju turističku ponudu na engleskom jeziku, odnosno komuniciraju sa potencijalnim korisnicima usluga posredstvom internet stranica hotela. Posmatran je sadržaj odabranih hotela iz turistički primamljivih gradova dvije zemlje – Beograda, Novog Sada, odnosno Kaunasa i Viljnusa. Uporedna analiza je obuhvatila jezičke obrasce koji su upotrebljeni za opis turističke/hotelske ponude, a interpretirana je kroz prizmu klasifikacija iz teorije kulture – Holove diferencijacije kultura visokog i niskog konteksta i Hofstedove višečlane dimenzije nacionalnih kultura. Polazeći od brojnih razlika među dvije kulture, na koje ukazuju pomenute teorije, rad polazi od pretpostavke da odabrane kulture i svoju turističku ponudu, iako na engleskom, koji je jezik interkulturalnog komuniciranja, oglašavaju na različite načinje. I pored toga što rezultati pokazuju, i jednim dijelom potvrđuju polazište, takođe naglašavaju i neke, možda neočekivane, sličnosti.

INTRODUCTION

The previous decades have witnessed unsurpassed numbers of people travelling around the world for different purposes – business, schooling, relaxing, paying visits to their relatives, or just exploring all the realms of the world. Moving around from place to place is not a novelty the society we are familiar with has introduced – though the word travel is reported to have been first used back in the 14th century, developing from Middle English, even the Ancient Romans cherished this activity. Numerous well-developed means of transportation have become more affordable over the years and supported it all, inviting people representing most diverse parts of society to indulge as well. Nowadays, an array of options is at disposal for us to choose from – coming from the corners of e.g. medical tourism, religious tourism, wildlife tourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism, etc. Travelling, there is no doubt about it, broadens our horizons, increases awareness of all the differences the globe is comprised of, as well as, very often, our levels and happiness and wellbeing. No matter what the purpose of travelling is, it is intrinsically linked to the process of communicating; successful communication, especially when we are abroad, can save the day in many ways and different scenarios. The nature of such communication is, on most occasions, intercultural, requiring not only knowledge of, very often, a foreign language, but a skillset enabling us to interpret, as well as convey the intended messages exchanged between different cultures successfully. For these reasons, specific attention is to be paid to how we communicate in intercultural settings, many of which are intertwined with travelling. This is well-known by globetrotters, as well as those working in tourism industry – where even minor misinterpretations can lead to unsatisfied customers, that is, unwanted business outcomes. As regards those who communicate with their customers on a day-to-day basis, hotel workers, most definitely, present one of the most exposed groups. With this in mind, this paper aims to explore:

-       how different cultures, one of them being a low-context one and another a high-context one, communicate their tourism, more precisely, hotel offer to their potential guests;

- whether any similarities, apart from the expected differences will appear, that is –

- whether the language used in this sphere is a construct *sui generis* one, characterised by its own attributes, resilient to external factors.

To make it all more insightful, we observed how they do it in a foreign language, that is English, observing similarities and differences, and paying specific attention to the fact whether the selected countries preserve any of their inherent communication styles, characterising each of the cultures.

Tourism in Lithuania and Serbia – A Background Story

UNWTO provides a rich overview of tourism-related status of the countries around the world. In that regard, the situation over the period of the previous two decades in Serbia and Lithuania respectively was observed (UNWTO offers the data ranging from 1995 to 2021[1]). In the observed time window, it is notably visible that Lithuania witnessed the apex in the number of overnight visitors in 2018 and 2019 (2.83 and 2.88 million people respectively) and the expected fall during the Covid-19 imposed years, i.e. 2020 and 2021, with the total numbers of visitors of 937 and 948 thousand (it is interesting to note that back in 1995, the first year available in the statistics provided, the number of tourists was even smaller than those of the pandemic stricken years – it was 650 thousand visitors).[2]
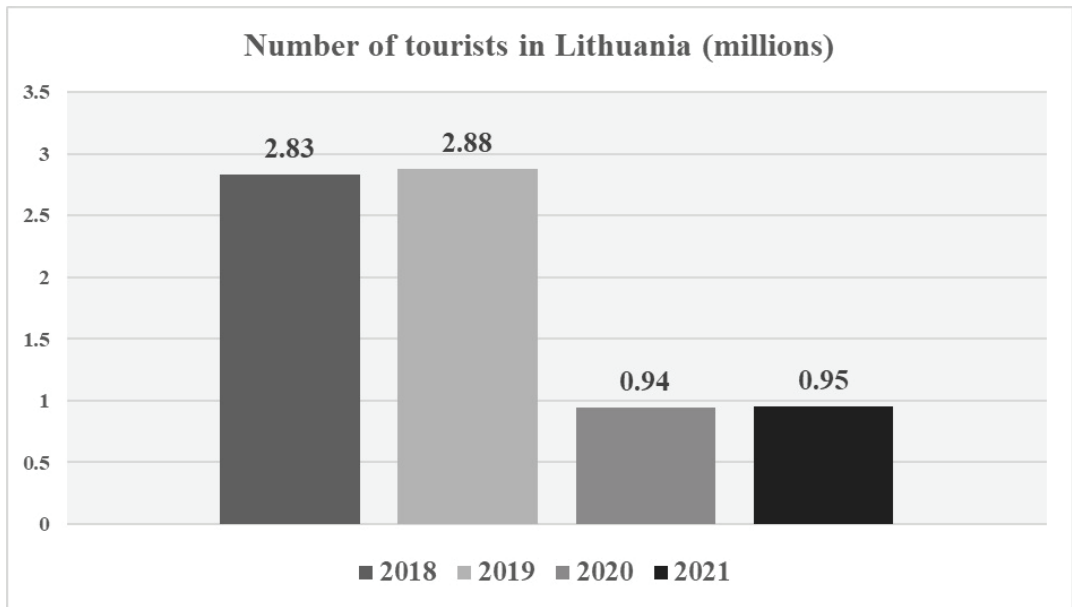
Figure 1 – Number of tourists in Lithuania

Irrespective of the year, visitors from Europe prevail, with a constant share of around 90%, while visitors from East Asia and Pacific, as well as the Americas, taken as a whole, account for up to around 8-10%. Many of these people stay in hotels and other similar establishments – looking back on the two busy years, namely 2018 and 2019, some 1.43 million, i.e. 1.58 million of visitors were recorded to have stayed at hotels. In 2018, we notice 50.5% of those visiting the country stay at hotels or similar establishments; 2019 saw even more – 54.9% visitors opting for hotels and similar establishments.

On the other hand, the data depicting the attractiveness of Serbia as a tourist destination also show a rather positive trend in 2018 and 2019 (the peak of the recorded lane), with 1.71, i.e. 1.85 million of tourists, while in 2020 and 2021 the numbers plummeted to 446 and 871 thousand respectively. In all the observed years, the vast majority of tourists comes from European countries (ranging 84-94%). As for accommodation, 1.51 million of visitors opted for hotel and similar establishments in 2018, while in 2019, the number was 1.63 million. The numbers show that the majority of those visiting Serbia do stay at hotels and similar establishments – here we talk about as much as 87.7% (2018) and 88.1% (2019).
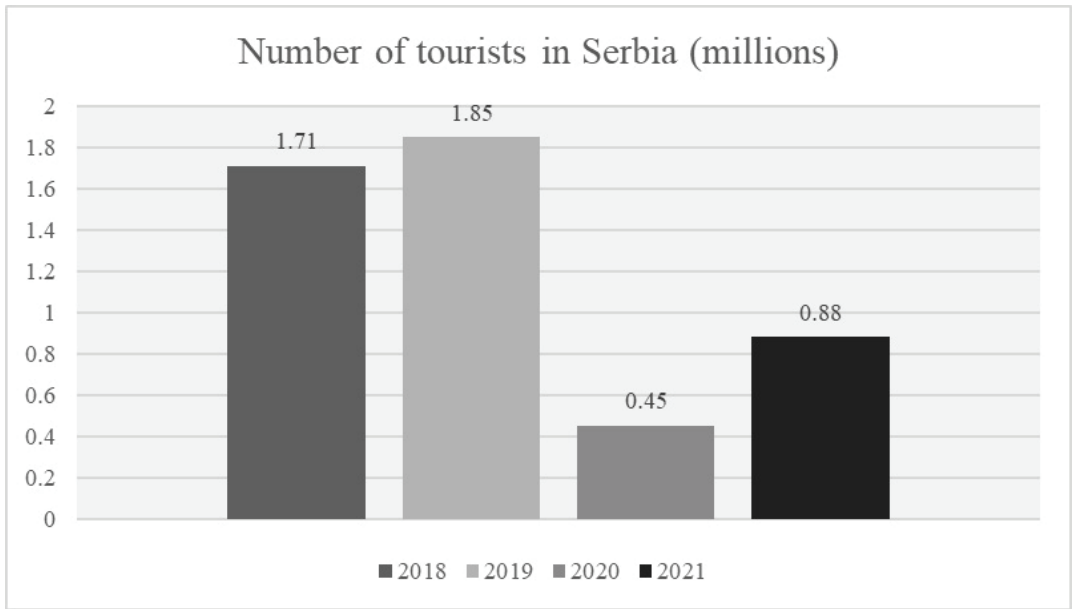
Figure 2 Number of tourists in Serbia
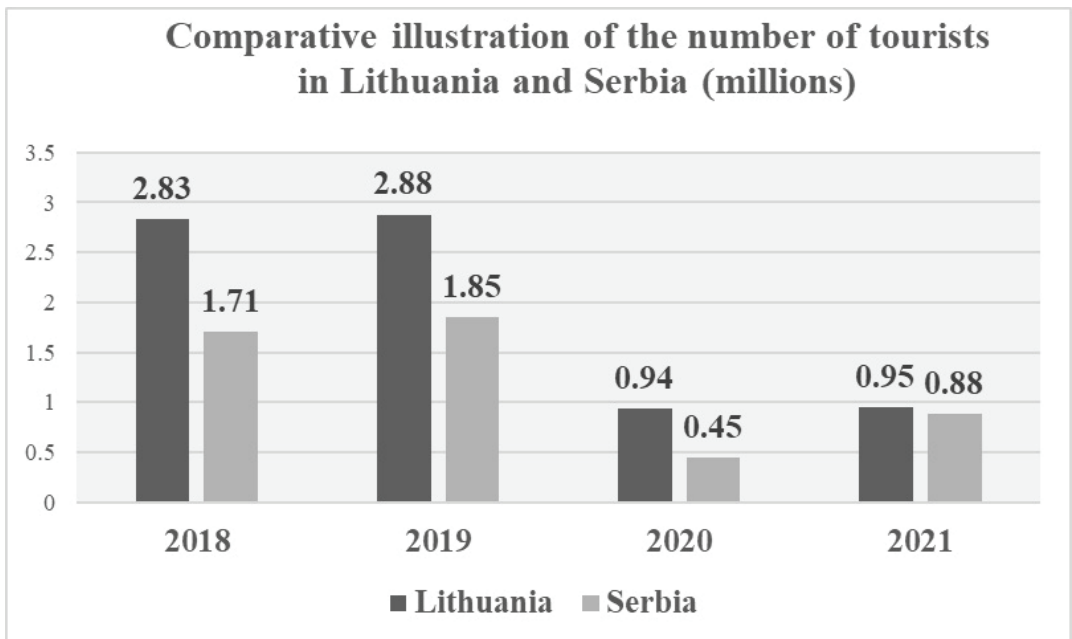
Figure 3 – Comparative Illustration

When the two countries are compared – the prevalence of hotels and similar establishments comes to the forefront, with the percentage higher in Serbia (taking into consideration the total number of tourists).

At the end of 2023, the UNWTO barometer estimates that the world has almost recovered after the pandemic-imposed crisis (with around 90% of the pre-pandemic tourist traffic returned to life). In that regard, it is believed that the estimates for 2023 (and most probably for 2024 year) could resemble those previously illustrated. Prior to the Covid-19 imposed era, it was assumed that international tourist arrivals would reach around 1.8 billion by the year 2030[3]; despite the grave seasons of 2020 and 2021, it could be seen that, on a global scale, tourism is bouncing back.

Also, given the fact that tourism industry workers in both countries work hard on their respective regions promotion, the figures can also be on the increase (some available UNWTO data show 2.17 million visitors in 2022 in Lithuania and 1.77 million visitors of Serbia in the same year).

Discourse of Tourism

While tourist offer plays a massive role when choices regarding a place to visit are made, one of the impactful components is the one of communication. Communication in tourism might be specifically delicate, as it is a common, if note sole, occurrence, that it is of intercultural nature. Jack, Pipps and Barrientos Arriaga[4] also noted this increase in tourism industry-related values and drew a conclusion that the rise does, with no doubt, lead to growing *opportunities for intercultural and multilingual encounters between tourists/ guests and locals/ hosts, amongst tourists, and amongst employees working in the multinational/ multicultural global tourism industry* .

Intercultural encounters, with no doubt, can take place in the street, at school, at a shop, but are prominently common in the sphere of tourism and hospitality, where, given the customer-service provider relationship, they are more exposed to misinterpretation, failure in communication, and even conflict.

In the field where a satisfied customer is a key to development, miscommuni-

cation and conflict is the last thing wanted. Consequently, given its powerful role, it is sometimes believed that in the world of business, oral communication should occupy a more important place; anyhow, both written and oral forms are rated high[5]. Although there are several official languages for UN tourism, English, as lingua franca of today's world, prevails in this sphere, like many other spheres of human endeavour. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) becomes active in such scenarios, with workers from tourism and hospitality sector trying their best to polish their language skills with the goal of meeting their customers' needs and demands in the best way possible. Apart from viable receptive and productive language skills, a specific intercultural skillset is needed as well, as the moment we embark on the ship of communication, we expose our face, along with all the beliefs, tradition, customs, fears, hopes, aspirations, etc., our cultural backpack[6]. This actually means that the task of the language used for communication in tourism and hospitality is a twofold one – conveying the indented message while, simultaneously, paying attention to the cultural norms of those we communicate with; both the former and the latter are seen as equally demanding, specifically when we take into consideration the symbolic nature of culture, which helps people to *communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life*[7].

That being said, we are aware that intercultural communication, as a complex concept, includes, but is not limited to, language skills, politeness norms, i.e. appropriateness, recognizing the rest of the iceberg (apart from the tip), and depends not only on the cultures communicators come from but also on their previous (intercultural) experiences[8]. Competence in intercultural communication is not a novelty in the sphere of tourism and hospitality; on the contrary, many researchers have focused on its influence so far. Tour guide communicative competence in intercultural settings was examined by Leclerc and Martin[9]; Liu, Liu and King[10] analysed different behavioural and language patterns in intercultural scenarios; Drozdova[11] observed communication among different cultures in tourism enterprises of Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden during Covid-19 imposed era; cultural differences between Croatia, Brazil, Germany and Serbia were observed by Podrug, Filipovic and Stancic[12].

In the light of the fact tourism leads to encounters of different beliefs, stereo-types, prejudices, traditions, values, etc. it comes as no surprise we see tourism as a mere *sociocultural event*[1314]. Even prior to travelling to our selected desti-nation, that is, even prior to gaining experiential knowledge of the target cul-ture, we are prone to creating some scenarios of what might be expected, seen, heard, eaten, smelt, etc.

While travelling, hardly can we avoid contacts with other cultures; in this re-gard, Allport[15] claims that intercultural encounters, i.e. contacts can strongly influence our own behaviour. To be more precise, conduct of one group affects the conduct of the other group, leading to a melange of different traditions, customs, expectations, etc. Tourist industry development can most definitely impact the areas attracting potential visitors in a number of ways, politically, economically, but also linguistically; it is not a rare occurrence that enhanced aspirations for language learning become visible; then again, the levels of moti-vation are not always triggered to follow a positive, rising trend – depending on a spectrum of factors, some of them being – historical relationship, previous ex-periences, encyclopaedic knowledge, gender, age, and many more (Dörnyei and Csizér[16] examined the situation in Hungary vis-a-vis Hungarian native speakers motivation for foreign language learning with the goal of strengthening tour-ism offer). We can even talk about a separate, tourism discourse, language used in this globally recognised industry for promotion, visibility, conflict resolution, intercultural encounters, etc.[1718], as well as the notion of tourist talk (TT), the language we use when either hosts or guests communicating with the other (consult Cohen and Cooper's[19] for further reading about TT and differentiation from FT, foreigner talk, that is the comprehensible language patterns of mother tongue we use as hosts assuming the guests do not have strong command of the language in question).

English Travels the World

We do know that travelling has been with us for centuries now – the available data claim that the first travel agency was founded in the middle of the 18th cen-tury in the UK; since then, a spectrum of means of transportation has enabled

people to visit different parts of the world. The introduction and access to the Internet has further facilitated it all – allowing us to search, compare and book our tourist choices in an easy way. Much of these, if not vast majority, as mentioned before, is done in English, as a medium of interaction – not only while we are organising our trips, but also once we reach the wanted destinations; from asking for a ride, checking in at a hotel, ordering some food, to complaining about the offer, asking about additional facilities, or compensation, etc. – all of this is commonly expressed in English.

Although English is seen as common ground in such exchanges – we have already mentioned that our cultural backpack inevitably goes with us[20], even when we use a foreign language. This, not surprisingly, can result in all the stereotypes, values, beliefs, prejudices, traditions, customs we are used to, potentially coming to the fore and interfering in the exchanges we take part in. Culture, encompassing numerous attributes, should, thus, not be overlooked when communicating in a foreign language – no matter how simple the exchanged messages are.

The role the English language plays in intercultural encounters – many of which take place while travelling, is undebatable and it is not a novel one. The intertwined world we live in, characterised by extensive consumerism, has supported this unprecedented role of the mentioned language. In this regard, it is a worthy note that the UNWTO lists 6 official languages (of tourism), Chinese, English, Arabic, Spanish and Russian – confirming its dedication to multilingualism on a global scale; however, though they are all actively used, in different contexts, and to a varying extent, the English language appears to dominate in the majority of settings.

This, nevertheless, is not the first time one language shows supremacy over others – the past witnessed similar role of the Latin and French language, the influence of which, then again, was more confined to specific spheres of human endeavour, whilst English is more flexible and is active in all the walks of life we can think of. Migrations, that is language contacts are definitely one of the reasons for its wide-spread usage, but apart from that – some scholars also

mention its openness to change, quite simple linguistic rules, rich vocabulary characterised by plethora of loanwords – which makes native speakers of different languages feel comfortable and able to relate.

Although we do use English for different purposes and in different spheres of endeavour, the language we need in the context of traveling is usually not very complex. On the one hand, language purists would suggest the activation of some standardised language variants, harmonised with the existing rules – notwithstanding the environment where the language is applied. On the other hand, those advocating a more flexible stand, and people practicing language, would claim that achieving proper understanding in communication, being the goal, is enough – and even less sophisticated language patters can lead to it.

In this respect, a rather simplified form of English has been activated – the concept of Globish (global English, decaffeinated English or a world dialect), serving the purposes of simple, everyday communication in intercultural settings. Containing around 1500 words, relying on basic grammatical rules, and avoiding the language of metaphors (proverbs, idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, etc.), this *dialect* of English can meet the demands of day-to-day communication conducted in a foreign language[21]. And it is not only Globish we can come across when communicating interculturally; also, it is more than the UK and the US English variants we usually take into consideration when English is discussed. Namely, around the end of the 20th century, Kachru[22] introduced three concentric circles of English – inner, outer and expanding, illustrating the English language used in different countries around the world. While the inner circle depicts the territories where English is used as a mother tongue, the outer circle portrays those where the language *lives* as a second language (hand in hand with another language at the territory, but in an official role). Lastly, the expending circle describes all those parts of the world where the English language is used as a foreign language (usually taught at school, with no official role). Acknowledging the existence of the circles, i.e., various forms of English that might differ to a significant extent supports inclusion, diversity, and increases cultural competence, which could be of paramount importance

in the world constantly *pushed* to work on international communication (and globalization on English[23]).
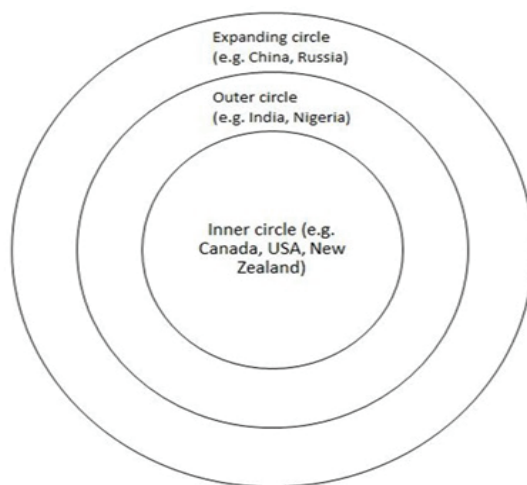
Figure 4 – Three Concentric Circles (Kachru, 1985)

At the same time, caution is called for here; when the language used is tailored to solely meet the needs of the local community it serves, it loses the potential to be used, i.e., understood on a global scale. For that reason, World Englishes we should be aware of, also ought to take into consideration all the changes surrounding them[24]. Though it might seem that Globish and World Englishes are characterised by utterly different attributes – they all strive to achieve smooth communication and should learn how to work hand in hand. Adding some nuances coming from the scope of World Englishes to not only Globish but the English language we know in other variants (the native ones) could only enrich our language repertoire, increase awareness of differences existing around the globe, lead to better understanding of some verbal and non-verbal behaviours, and more. Knowing that the majority of exchanges in English are done by language learners and not native speakers[25], can only support this need – to find out more about the native cultures of people using English, since these cultural nuances, irrespective of the language used, will unequivocally appear in communication. In this regard, it has been estimated that there are somewhat >1%

of people who are native speakers of English in Europe. This also leads to the necessity of using English as supportive means of communication in intercultural encounters[26].

Cultural Nuances

One of the theories stemming from the fact that cultures do differ in many respects is the differentiating between high and low-context cultures; while high-context cultures are regarded as more implicit, traditional, prone to reading between the lines, relying on the context, with not much being in the explicit parts of the message, those that are on the other pole of the continuum, i.e. low-context cultures, exhibit opposite conduct, expectations, that is – verbalise thoughts in a more explicit, direct way, and are believed to be more competitive inter alia[27].

Communication style one opts for will strongly influence the status of both his face and the face of those he/she interacts with. By face, we refer to the construct introduced by Goffman[28], and widely exploited in the area of pragmatics, more specifically intercultural pragmatics (Brown and Levinson[29] were among pioneers who talked about mechanisms for saving it), where it becomes delicately vulnerable. As our inborn attribute depicting integrity, face, appearing in two dimensions, positive and negative, inevitably soaks cultural treats we are exposed to; as a result, people representing different countries/cultures might interpret some identical language patterns in totally different ways – some of them seeing them and extremely threatening, while others regarding them as rather innocent.

In this regard, Ting-Toomey[30] worked on the face-negotiation theory which explores conflict resolution styles in different cultures precisely by relying on the notion of face. She theorises that people coming from high-context cultures are inclined to protecting the face of others, as well as to assimilate themselves (positive face activation); on the other hand, those from low-context cultures tend to be somewhat defensive and in need of independence (negative face activation).

When representatives coming from high and low cultures respectively meet, we do talk about a par excellence example of an intercultural encounter, but we also talk about fertile soil for miscommunication, resulting from misinterpretation rooted in cultural characteristics, i.e. *collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*[31].

The differences of all kinds can and usually do bring about the phenomenon of culture shock – feeling of uneasiness provoked by some unexpected codes of conduct we may experience for the first time, language being just one of them. In this respect, it is worth noting that culture shock has its stages and does not appear to cause intimidating feelings through all of them; on the contrary, the first stage is generally characterised as pretty euphoric – an individual is elated as novelties are all around them; then, one becomes aware of all the differences and similarities between his, i.e. source and the target culture he finds himself in; upon realising it, people either get stuck in the state of shock or move on, accept the differences, and even (for those who reach the so-called fourth stage) assimilate themselves[32]. Naturally, whether culture shock appears or not is directly resulting from a number of factors – one of them being, as we observe tourists here, the length of your stay, as well your previous experiences with similar cultures, which means that some tourists might remain in the elated stage all the time, thrilled to meet something not previously seen.

Another prominent and widely-accepted and used classification is the one of Hofstede, which helps us to compare cultural traits on the basis of several dimensions, them being – power distance, individualism, motivation towards achievement/success, uncertainty avoidance, long/short-term orientation, and indulgence[33].

Seen through the prism of the 6-dimension classification, the two cultures in focus of this study could be compared as illustrated below.
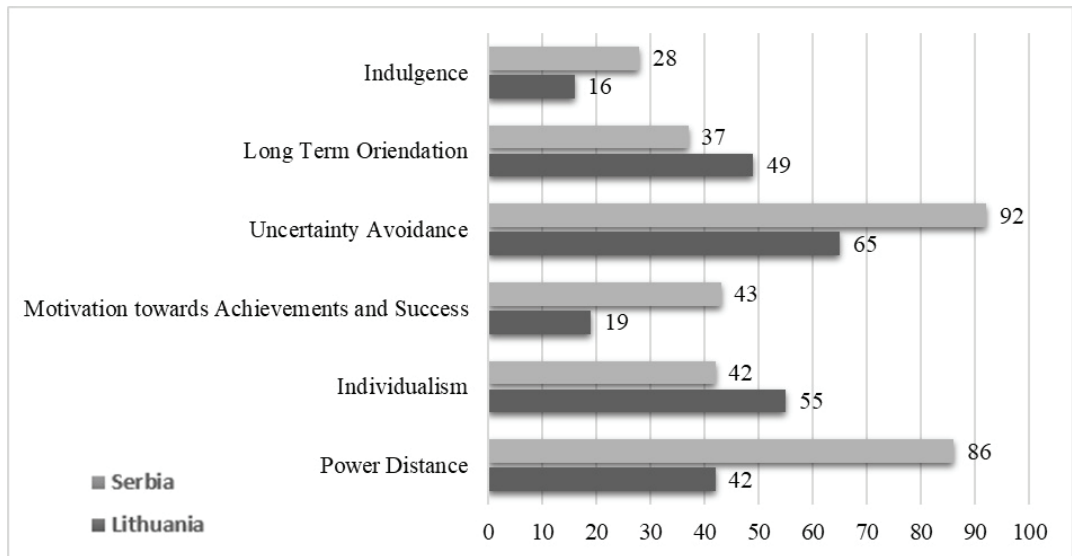
Figure 5 – Lithuania and Serbia through the eyes of Hofstede's Dimensions

The contrastive analysis some prominent differences; differences are visible for all of the 6 dimensions, however, those of Power distance, Motivation towards achievement and success, Uncertainty avoidance, and Indulgence stand out. The illustration confirms that, vis-a-vis the first dimension, observing how people accept hierarchical relations, people from Serbia totally accept hierarchy and have no problems acknowledging that everybody holds a specific position for some reasons (with no need for further elaboration/clarification); as regards the notion of power, Lithuanians, on the other hand, do prefer egalitarian fashion, that is to say – more collaboration and equality. Through the prism of the Motivation towards achievement and success dimension, the two countries are both regarded as those scoring pretty low (below 50); then again, the difference is still there, as Lithuania scores way lower compared to Serbia; this talks in favour of the fact that in both countries, consensus is expected, just like conflict avoidance; taking into consideration the score, it could be said that Lithuanians pay even more attention to that and often keep low profile. As for the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, it could be seen that both sides score pretty high – but it is still a worthy note that Serbia scores 1/3 higher; this

undoubtedly reads that people coming from the respective territories would love to avoid uncertainty and rely on some well-established regulations, and patterns which do not allow for much surprise. At the same time, given that they are not prone to novelties – such countries might be delicately careful in intercultural encounters. The last dimension selected, exhibiting some discrepancies, is the one of indulgence vs restraint; not much indulgence could be seen among Lithuanians and Serbs – where Lithuanians even show more restraint; both cultures tend to doubt, lean towards negative thought, predictions and feel that indulging themselves might be wrong. Taking these into consideration, an analogy could be said and stated that Lithuania is more oriented towards low-context traits, while Serbia is more characterised by high-context attributes. We should not forget anyhow that what we live in today is nothing more but a global village which has led to the fact cultures constantly mingle, interact, share attributes, and adopt some of the attributes that are not originally allocated to them.

Apart from all the differences, it can also be said that the two countries observed in the study do have something in common we would like to pinpoint – the first, they both strive to develop their tourist offer and recognisability; the second, their native languages belong to Slavic and Baltic branches respectively, both being distant from English, the language of wider communication, and more importantly, the language of business and at the same time business in tourism. As a result, it may be assumed that the two experience similar challenges and make similar effort when communicating in the sector of tourism and hospitality. Simultaneously, while communicating in the foreign language mentioned, hardly can they escape their own cultural traits and all the differences listed above.

Contrastive Analysis & Discussion

With this in mind, the study rests on the main hypothesis reading that intercultural communication in the field of tourism and hospitality, more precisely, hotel industry will differ in Lithuania and Serbia. To test the hypothesis, a research based on a corpus comprising hotel-related information available online

and in English was conducted. As hotels strive to establish some firm, loyalty-based links with their customers, that is, to make their brand recognisable and trustworthy, it is expected that they put much effort into how they communicate both virtually and in-person.

To achieve this goal, websites from two most vibrant cities of the two countries, Belgrade and Novi Sad on the one hand and Vilnius and Kaunas on the other hand were consulted[34]. What we focused on is the language describing the very hotels, and their rooms (if available). Twelve hotel sites in total were observed – three per each of the cities observed. The analysis gathered 3 and 4-star hotels, trying to avoid those most luxurious, belonging to well-recognised hotel chains. This decision stems from a wish to reveal as much cultural attributed expressed via language as possible, assuming that the websites accompanying the famous chains are of uniform nature and language.

Despite the fact that we talk about language translated from mother tongue – Lithuanian and Serbian respectively, into English, differences are still expected, given all the cultural characteristics attributed to the two countries; more text, context, i.e. longer phrases, descriptive adjectives are expected in the examples taken from Serbian websites describing hotels than in those depicting Lithuanian context.

Table 1. Phrases describing hotels and the overall offer – Lithuania	
'the best choice for guests'	'harmonious leisure'
'unforgettable relaxation'	'details that are unobtrusive'
'bright and cosy rooms'	'rooms... especially adorable'
'subtle interior designs'	'rooms...spacious, bright'
'professional service'	'real comfort'
'comfortable communication'	'charming hotel'
'luxury restaurant'	'special intimate atmosphere'
'ideal place'	'cozy and spacious'

Table 1 – Phrases describing hotels and the overall offer – Lithuania

Table 2. Phrases describing hotels and the overall offer – Serbian side	
'situated in the immediate vicinity of'	'superb amenities'
'convenient location'	'intersection of the city's culture, entertainment and political life'
'an ideal choice'	'luxuriously arranged'
'luxurious and ultimately comfortable hotel'	'the first high-ranked hotel'
'an oasis of luxury and comfort'	'specialized Business Hotel'
'multifarious but healthy menu'	'hotel fits perfectly to its location'
'pleasant, peaceful and comfortable ambience'	'complete comfort'
'perfectly positioned'	'carefully selected details'

Table 2 – Phrases describing hotels and the overall offer – Serbia

At first sight, the choices appear to be pretty similar; a number of descriptive adjectives is what characterises both groups. Such adjectives dominantly find their places in noun phrases (i.e. adjective phrases serving as pre-modifiers in noun phrases), in both attributive and predicative positions/roles. Then again, in the part of corpus coming from Serbian websites, however, more adverb + adjective combinations are seen (e.g. carefully selected, perfectly positioned, luxuriously arranged, ultimately comfortable) than in the Lithuanian part, supporting the high-context culture characteristic of being verbal in a more complex way. Other than that, more absolute adjectives and adverbs (in the mentioned adverb + adjective combinations) were found on the websites from Serbia (among them – superb, complete, perfectly positioned, ultimately comfortable, immediate vicinity); such choices speak in favour of stronger, more ornamented messages, which might be interpreted as a high-context culture tendency and aspiration to influence emotions in an effective way.

Apart from examining the lexis used to describe the offer and the selected hotels, the complexity of the menus available on websites was observed. The insight into the menus, that is, their contents, yielded in the tables below:

Table 3. Hotel website menus – Lithuania	
Hotel 1	Home, rooms, about us, location, contact
Hotel 2	Rooms, restaurant, conferences, fitness, about hotel, contacts
Hotel 3	Hotel, conference centre, wellness centre
Hotel 4	Rooms, meetings, restaurant, services, gallery and tour, contacts, book now
Hotel 5	Rooms, restaurant, conference rooms, hotel deals, location, contact
Hotel 6	Get a room, conference rooms, about us, contact us

Table 3 –Hotel website menus – Lithuania

Table 4. Hotel website menus – Serbia	
Hotel 1	Rooms and apartments, additional content, about the hotel, gallery, contact
Hotel 2	Capacity view, photo gallery, restaurant and bar, see more
Hotel 3	About hotel, accommodation, restaurant and bars, conference and meetings, offers, locations, contact and reservations, career
Hotel 4	About us, accommodation, services, seminars, contact, promo packages
Hotel 5	Home, conference rooms, parking, accommodation, history, price list, restaurant, photo, contact
Hotel 6	About, rooms, guests, news, gallery, Novi Sad, booking, contact

Table 4 – Hotel website menus – Serbia

The menus accompanying the selected Lithuanian hotels are rather straightforward, service-oriented and clean; they dominantly start with room sections, focusing on what their potential customers must be most interested in; it is also prominent that they do not forget sections dedicated to conferencing, which also supports their low-context culture, direct, content-oriented, professional, concrete fashion in delivering messages, i.e. *explicitness and directness in their communication style[35]*.

Those, on the other side, accompanying Serbian hotels are, with no doubt, more complex; they usually start with about us portions, providing the users with

more background information about the very faculty, environment/city, history, fun facts, etc.; another thing that stands out is the one of gallery corners, isolated as such, brimming with different shots of not only rooms and amenities, but also the atmosphere waiting for the guests of these hotels, which eventually might attract some visitors, and motivate *them to make further inquiries and eventually a booking*[36].

The findings vis-a-vis both menus and vocabulary used entirely support the view of Katan, who claims that a low-context culture expects the visitors to pay attention to the precision of the information they are looking for, while a high-context culture would be more interested in illustrating the atmosphere and emotions triggered[37].

The insight into the content showed a specifically frequent word that was used to define location in both parts of the corpus. Namely, the usage of the word 'heart' stood out; seven out of 12 hotel location depictions include the phrases containing heart (warmer compared to the term centre, which it actually points to). While the first part of the analysis supports the starting hypothesis and the expected differences between how a low and a high-context culture communicate when presenting their respective tourist offers, the usage of heart points to some similarities. The language of metaphors, metonymies and other figures of speech, conveying abstract pieces of information, is expected in high-context cultures rather than those which are low-context. Figures of speech, vague messages allow for more reading between the lines, as well as more aesthetics, i.e. stylistics, and language decoration. In a similar vein, as high-context cultures are believed to express their thoughts indirectly, it is via metaphorical language inter alia that they can achieve indirectness as well. To see whether the messages surrounding the term heart differ in the two cultures, some contexts where the word appears are illustrated via concordance sample of *heart*.

Table 5. Concordance sample of heart – Lithuanian hotel websites	
1	hotel is in the **heart** of Kaunas on the longest pedestrian street
2	the building is located in Liberty al. The hotel is a ..... - a modern **heart** of the city
3	Originally built in the 19th century, Hotel ...... is situated in the **heart** of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius

Table 5 – Concordance sample of heart – Lithuanian hotel websites

Table 6. Concordance sample of heart – Serbian hotel websites	
1	..... Hotel Belgrade is located in the very **heart** of Belgrade, in the immediate vicinity of the main pedestrian area
2	it is situated in the city centre and in the **heart** of Belgrade Cultural life
3	... Hotel is a specialized Business Hotel 4 * located in the **heart** of the business center of New Belgrade
4	Location in the very **heart** of Novi Sad, the European capital of culture

Table 6 – Concordance sample of heart – Serbian hotel websites

As seen in the examples above, the phrase in the heart of is used for the very same purpose, that is, identical meaning in both sections of the examined corpus; the expression refers to the central location of the hotels, highlighting the proximity of theirs to the respective city centres. Whereas the term centre was also applied for the same messages, heart was the one which notably prevailed. It is a worthy note that equivalent metaphors including heart do exist in Serbian and Lithuanian languages which might be the reason why the two groups opted for it when translating their messages in English as well. The situation where we have the same metaphor lying behind the identical meaning in both target and source language shows both conceptual and semantic correspondence.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude this paper, we go back to the starting assumptions, stemming from the fact that the paper investigates two unrelated cultures, one of which is high-context, the other one being a low-context one. Through the prism of the mentioned high vs low context differentiation, i.e., seen through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions – the two cultures selected are characterised by an array of differences. For this reason, it was hypothesised that Lithuania on the one hand and Serbia on the other hand would communicate their tourist offer in different ways (even when it comes to communicating in a foreign – English language).

What the investigation did show is that Lithuanian and Serbian hotel industry, as regards the organisation and language used on hotels' websites in English – do exhibit both similarities and differences. While, expectedly, Lithuanians proved themselves to be rather content-oriented, on point, plain, their counterparts confirmed the tendency for more implicit, ornamented, form-oriented approach. The analysis comprised three sections – dedicated to – the content of the phrases describing the overall offer, the organisation, i.e. the menus of the hotel websites, as well as the usage of expressions containing the word heart (as it came to the forefront upon the insight into the corpus). As suggested, some of the discoveries are harmonized with the starting hypothesis – and that is notably visible in the part discussing the descriptive expressions used; then again, though many of such combinations were of similar nature, we found more adverb + adjective combinations are seen on the Serbian hotel websites than on the Lithuanian ones; in a similar vein, and in additional support of high-context culture characteristics, more absolute adjectives and adverbs were found in the Serbian part of our corpus. At first sight only, even the menus appeared similar – yet a deeper analysis showed that the menus accompanying the chosen Lithuanian hotels are rather straightforward and service-oriented, while those accompanying Serbian hotels are more complex and offering numerous sections describing the environment, atmosphere, history, etc. in perfect agreement with what is expected from a high-context culture. What is a worthy note,

and what draw our attention in the usage of expressions containing the word heart on both sides, when they refer to the hotels' position, i.e. want to deputize for the word centre; as a low-context culture representatives, Lithuanians are not commonly inclined to using many metaphorical expressions, asking for further interpretation and reading between the lines; however, when communicating their messages in English, they applied this metaphor as frequently as their Serbian counterparts did. All things considered, despite the fact some unexpected similarities popped up, the two observed cultures, even when communicating their offer in a foreign language, did prove their cultural, inherent traits, compliant to what is usually related to high-, i.e. low-context cultures.

Given the number of the examined hotels, and the fact that the observation was of a one-time nature, rather than a longitudinal one, repeating similar investigations, on a more complex sample, and for longer periods of time might lead to some new insights and show some novel sociocultural behaviours. Furthermore, exploring similarities and differences with more high- and low-contact cultures could be rather insightful. In this regard, we do believe that some of the existing or future discoveries could also be further addressed in educational contexts (other than those of tourism, cultural studies, and communication per se), either through the prism of ESP, discourse analysis, or intercultural pragmatics.

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