

Bridging Language Barriers: Future Needs of Florida's Law Enforcement Officers

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to identify language barriers in Florida's law enforcement community and future needs to overcome this issue. Many other states have experienced language barriers that Florida is recently beginning to experience. Nationally, population growth is tremendous with sharp increases in Hispanic populations; the Hispanic minority population in Florida far exceeds the rate of the national level. Information was gathered from articles and the internet along with a survey of current sworn and non-sworn personnel. In an attempt to predict the future growth trends of the State, what can be done to ensure that Florida's law enforcement officers are prepared to meet the needs of the growing minority population?

Introduction

Is there an impending need for Florida law enforcement officers to Bridge the language barrier gap? The population of the United States is growing at a tremendous rate, with the most pronounced minority population growth being of the Hispanic decent. Florida far exceeds the percentages of the United States in growth of the Hispanic population. With the fast growing diverse population of the State of Florida, criminal justice professionals should be looking toward the future, preparing for a greater onset of language barriers in communicating with this diverse population. We should also be thinking of solutions for the present day language barriers. Law enforcement officers have daily contact with a very diverse number of individuals, sometimes getting caught in the language barrier trap. In these situations unintended problems can arise, such as the lack of complete communications, unresolved crimes, officers and subjects face potential injury, the unnecessary detention of individuals, and the loss of public trust due to this lack of communication. Law enforcement action with language barriers in place can be costly, untimely and unpleasant for everyone involved. Every day an officer somewhere in the State has some type of an encounter with an individual that does not speak English. These encounters could range from the everyday traffic stop to resolving a domestic dispute in which case could place the officer and subjects in danger of bodily harm. (Projected Population of the United States by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2004), (Florida 2006 American Community Survey Data Profile Highlights, 2006)

Law enforcement interaction when language barriers exist has become an issue on a National level. Many states, to include Florida, have seen problems stem from the inability to effectively communicate with an individual. Officers spend a great deal of time attempting to communicate with the public, and an adequate interpreter may not always be available, there could be confusion in

court, crimes may go unreported and there could be a lack of trust in the community. (Witte, 2005)

In conducting this research, I would like to answer the following questions:

- 1) Identify the most commonly encountered language.
- 2) Are language barriers an issue for law enforcement officers in Florida?
- 3) Is there a need for officers to receive training in other languages?
- 4) Would officers be receptive to training in other languages?
- 5) Would overcoming language barriers lead to a more efficient and effective officer?

What does the future hold for the limited language communicating officer? With the ever increasing limited English speaking population having a greater number of contacts with law enforcement, the need to effectively communicate will become a must. With the increased number of calls for service and shortage of needed personnel, time can become an issue. Time spent waiting for an interpreter could be better utilized dealing with another call. If the officer were bi-lingual and able to communicate, he would become more efficient, effective, and able to conduct his duties safer, with added results that would benefit both the agency and community. The community as a whole would become more trusting of law enforcement and respect the duties they are sworn to perform. The tourist having problems with directions would be pleased with a more timely and accurate response, allowing them to enjoy their vacation here in the sunshine State, leaving them wanting to return again. Pleasant interactions with the non-English speaking workers would benefit the State by allowing greater access to trade with Florida industries.

Literature Review

Population Growth

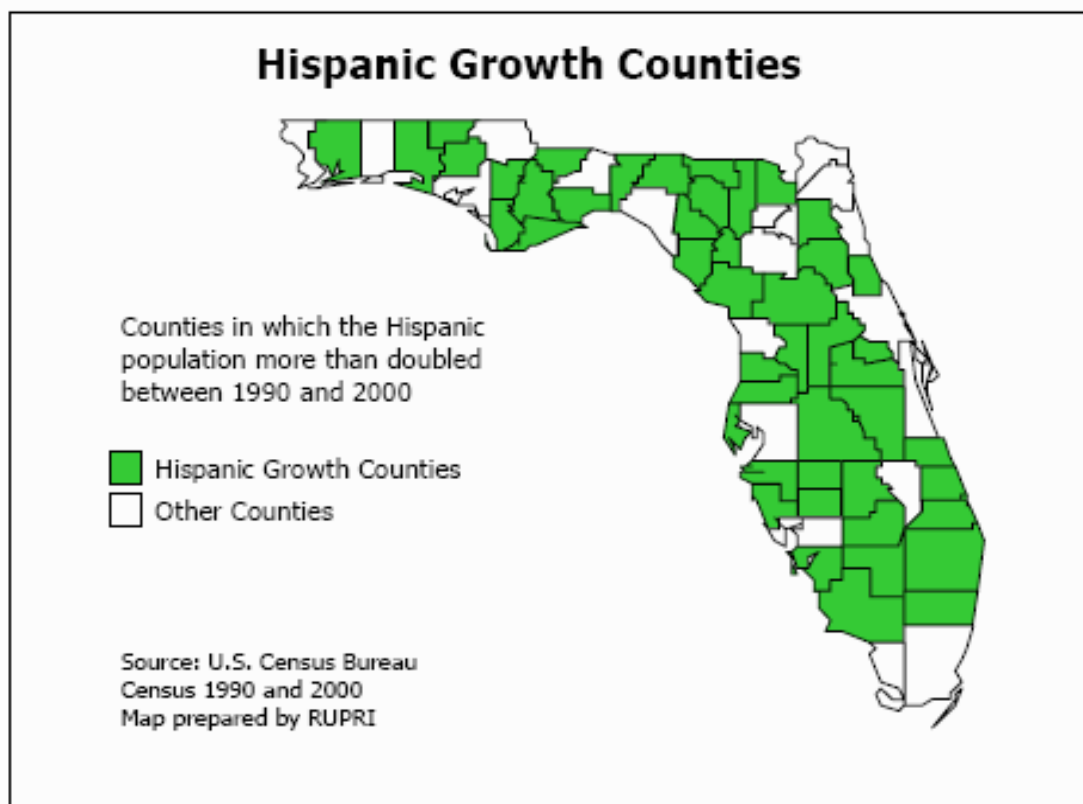
According to the United States Census Bureau's 2004 population projections, the U.S. population of 28.2 billion in 2004 will increase to 41.9 billion by the year 2050. (All percentages below have been rounded to the nearest whole number) During the 2000 census, the two largest minorities were Blacks at 13 percent and Hispanics (of any race) at 13 percent, with the majority White non-Hispanic population at 69 percent of the total U.S. population. The projected 2050 U.S. population will show a drastic change in minority percentages; Blacks will have the smallest increase in growth by 2 percent to 15 percent of the population. The Hispanic (of any race) population will have the greatest gain of growth by 12 percent to 24 percent of the U.S. population in 2050. The White non-Hispanic population will have a significant decrease of 19 percent to 50 percent of the U.S. population. (Projected Population of the United States by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2004)

The U.S. Census Bureau indicates Florida's population in the year 2000 at 15.9 million with the largest minority being the Hispanic population at 17 percent

followed by the Black population at 15 percent. The White population was the majority at 78 percent. (Florida census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights, 2000)

In the 2005 U.S. census Florida's population had grown to 17.3 million. The Hispanic population maintained the status of the largest minority in the State with an increase of 3 percent to 20 percent. The Black population increased slightly by 0.4 percent to 15 percent of the States population. The white population decreased by 1 percent to 77 percent. (Florida 2006 American Community Survey Data Profile Highlights, 2006)

The Hispanic population showed signs of significant growth in many Florida counties as indicated on the map below during the ten year period from 1990 to 2000.



The Hispanic population doubled in the counties shown in green (dark shade). (Demographic and Economic Profile Florida, 2006)

The U.S. Census Bureau indicated in 2007 that eight counties in the United States have been added to the list of counties where the majority of the population is minorities or where the percentage of minorities is greater than 50 percent of the population. Florida counties were not a part of these additions. The latest data did reveal a growth in the Hispanic population in St. Lucie, Palm Beach and Martin counties from the 2000 census. St. Lucie County had the greatest increase of Hispanic population at 6 percent, totaling 14 percent of the population. The Hispanic population is currently at 17 percent in Palm Beach

County and 9 percent in Martin County. The Hispanic population in southern Florida is very diverse mostly comprised of people from Cuba, Puerto Rico and Mexico. The current population in Florida now exceeding 18 million is comprised of 20 percent Hispanic and 16 percent Black. An economics researcher at the University of Florida indicates that there are six counties in the State of Florida where minorities are now the majority population for the county. Those counties include Hardee, Osceola, Hendry, Gadsden, Broward and Miami-Dade. In Orange County the White non-Hispanic population is straddling the fence at 50.2 percent. Local leaders feel the Hispanic growth is a needed addition to the economic growth and political clout of the community as the Hispanic population is large enough for people to pay attention too. (Isger, 2007)

The shifting Hispanic population in South Florida has politicians believing that being able to communicate in more than one language is a realistic advantage. Florida's U.S. Senator Mel Martinez shocked the Nation as he spoke Spanish while addressing the U.S. Senate. The previous Florida Governors, Bob Martinez and Jeb Bush both speak a language other than English. The use of the Spanish language in politics has become a very powerful weapon as they are able to reach a larger group of voters. While it is considered to be a valuable tool to be able to speak the language, many more steps would be gained if we could understand the culture of these individuals. The Hispanic population has dispersed over the last few years, not just living in Miami or Tampa but through out the central Florida area. The growing Hispanic population in central Florida is inclusive of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, Dominicans, Venezuelans, Columbians and other Latin Americans. (Corral, 2005)

Criminal Justice Issues

Nation wide there is an increasing problem with criminal justice officials being able to effectively communicate with limited English proficient people. In a 2004 Maryland Court case involving the brutal murder of three children alone in their apartment with the accused assailants, two family members, the trial process became complicated for law enforcement, attorneys, interpreters and the victim's family and parents. The victim's parents became confused and needed special attention to understand legal issues. They had doubts that the correct assailants were on trial, and at times became reluctant to provide information. Defense attorneys focused on the rights of the accused during police questioning wondering if the subjects fully understood their legal rights. Interpreters during the trial became frustrated due to lengthy and confusing questions from attorneys, in some cases lengthening the trial process by repeated questions. The court systems are not properly equipped to meet the needs of limited English proficient individuals. This is reflected throughout the criminal justice system, to include the street level officer, attorneys, court reporters and judges. One police official stated, "As you watch society change, the police department has to change with it". (Witte, 2005)

In South Florida law enforcement officials are hampered by language barriers. Cuban refugees entering Charlotte County on the coast are causing

major headaches for law enforcement personnel due to the inability to communicate with the refugees. The majority of the first responding officers do not speak Spanish. A tourist from Virginia, David Tagle, became an interpreter for officers one weekend while on vacation on Little Gasparilla Island as 30 Cuban refugees came from the water. Charlotte County deputies were the first to respond. Of the six Spanish speaking deputies in the county, none were on scene. Usually the first responders are either the Charlotte County Sheriff's Deputies or the US Coast Guard both with very few officers that speak Spanish. The Coast Guard in the Ft. Myers area has 3 out of 50 officers that are bilingual, even with offered incentives for speaking a second language. Mr. Tagle expressed his concerns of non Spanish speaking officers not being prepared for this situation, when it seemed to be a routine event dealing with Cuban refugees. According to the Coast Guard, they have 13 officers that are bilingual from Ft. Myers to the panhandle area. (ABC 7 News, 2007)

On August 26, 1997 the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) published an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking for the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 49 Part 391.11(b)(2), which requires that drivers of commercial motor vehicles operating in interstate commerce be able to read and speak the English language sufficiently to converse with the general public, to understand highway traffic signs and signals, respond to official inquiries and make entries on reports and records. This advanced notice of proposed rulemaking was withdrawn on July 24, 2003 after a motion was filed with the Palm Beach County, Florida Court. The motion requested the court to declare FSS.316.302, which adopts the Federal Regulations for interstate and intrastate operation, unconstitutional due to possible enforcement of an arbitrary nature because of its broad scope of interpretation. State Representative Diaz-Balart opposed the regulation due to constituents reports of the suspension of their Commercial Driver's Licenses due to enforcement of this regulation. Traffic citations had been issued to the drivers because they were unable to communicate in English to the satisfaction of the officer involved. He further urged the agency to change the regulation to ensure the Constitutional Rights of non-English speaking drivers. He also indicated that this regulation leaves too much discretion in the hands of the officer, as the officer must determine the ability to communicate with no standard provided. Other members of Congress disagreed with Representative Diaz-Balart believing that the safety of the motoring public has a higher priority. Discriminatory enforcement was the focus of the American Civil Liberties Union, that it would unnecessarily impact minority drivers, possibly violating Federal civil rights laws. For a driver to obtain a Commercial Driver's License there is no pre-requisite to speak English and further the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has authorized agencies to administer commercial driver's license testing in other languages. The FHWA never intended for enforcement personnel to enforce this regulation roadside, referring it to the carrier as an employer issue. The FMCSA concluded that presently there is no need to modify the English proficiency regulation. (Sandberg, 2003)

In 2003 the Florida Supreme Court, recognizing language barrier issues, formed a committee comprised of chief judges from five judicial circuits, to evaluate the needs of Florida's citizens involving court interpretation for non English speaking individuals. This committee would assist in establishing rules in the use of interpreters along with qualification and certification requirements. The Supreme Court Interpreter's Committee worked to ensure that each judicial circuit provides qualified interpreters to those in need of language assistance. The established rule, The Rules for Certification and Regulation of Court Interpreters and the Rule of Judicial Administration 2.073 were adopted. The rule went into effect July 1, 2006 with a grace period for qualifications until July 1, 2008. (Florida Supreme Court, 2006)

As the population of the United States grows daily with immigrants attempting a fresh start at life, the law enforcement community is faced with growing issues dealing with communication barriers while encountering many of these immigrants. This is primarily due to cultural and language differences. In the nations from which many of these immigrants come, law enforcement officials are not there to serve the public but the political powers, through corruption, violence and control of its citizens by fear. Many states attempt to cross the cultural barrier by bringing law enforcement and nonprofit groups together to open communication channels through community policing programs and police-community partnerships. Regular meetings are conducted to exchange information regarding public safety in the community and to build relationships. (Bell, 2004)

In Louisiana and other areas along the gulf coast, dealing with language barriers caused by the post-Katrina demographic shift of Spanish only speaking families has added overwhelming needs to law enforcement officials. The current mass migration of Spanish speaking workers was created by the need for labor in rebuilding the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. Before Katrina, a small population of bilingual Hispanics lived in these areas. Now the current Hispanic population is Spanish only speaking. In one instance a Slidell, La. police lieutenant was dispatched to a motel where someone had repeatedly called 911. When he arrived, he made contact with a group of men that only spoke Spanish to which he was unable to communicate. Looking for assistance where ever he could, the lieutenant called his wife to translate over the phone; she was fluent in the Spanish language. In the end, all the men were trying to do is call home using a calling card, 911 was part of the number sequence on the calling card. The current interpreters in the area are working to capacity and in some cases beyond, causing some agencies to recruit fulltime and volunteer interpreters. Language barriers have lead to cultural barriers. Hispanics who are hand cuffed and placed on their knees in this country, may fear they are about to die, due to the tactics used by corrupt police in their home countries. Law enforcement leaders want officers to learn basic Spanish because experts feel this demographic shift is permanent. The demand for Spanish classes has increased, with many classes filling to capacity officers are being turned away from training. The classes offered range from a four day "Survival Spanish" teaching basic law enforcement commands to a 10 day intense training where students speak only

Spanish from the time they eat breakfast until they go to bed. Some are taking their own proactive approach by using tools from English-Spanish dictionaries to computers. (Rioux, 2006)

In Nashville Tennessee, police struggle with calls for service that have been nicknamed “no habla ingles calls”. Nashville has an estimated limited English proficient population of 40,000, who interact with a police force that only has 17 of 1300 officers that speak Spanish. Interaction with non-English speaking subjects on a daily basis makes the officer’s job tougher, often leading to unresolved crimes and an impression in the Hispanic community that the police are not there to assist them. This has led to time management issues as the bilingual officers may spend up to 80% of their shift interpreting for other officers instead of patrolling their assigned areas, thus not meeting the needs of the community. Young children often become the interpreter of the family, even in domestic violence situations, causing further emotional stress in their lives. This also may result in biased interpretations or legal issues in court. Hispanic business owners often don’t report crimes because they don’t trust the police due to the lack of ability to communicate and past law enforcement experiences in their native country. In dealing with the non English speaking subjects from small crimes to serious violent crimes, the time and resources needed to process them is taxing the agency and its officers. Sadly in lower level crimes, a few officers say that if the subject ‘no habla ingles’ they just let them go, rather than spend the whole shift processing them. Overall Nashville Metro Police Department officers maintain the attitude that their duties need to be performed to the best of their ability despite language barriers. (Wadhvani, 2004)

Possible Solutions

Should officers train to learn another language? The author of ‘Learning Another Language’ uses a good metaphor to answer the question, should I learn another language. “A skinny cat stood for hours waiting for a mouse to come out of a hole, so he could catch him. He was having little success. A fat cat walked by, and inquired about the difficulties, and volunteered to show the skinny cat the ropes. First, he had the skinny cat move away from the hole where they could not be seen. Next the fat cat barked, “Woof, woof”. The mouse thought a dog had scared the cat away and came out of the hole. The fat cat grabbed and ate him. “You see”, explained the fat cat, “it pays to be bilingual”. A problem associated with other languages is inherent to different parts of any country due to different accents, dialects and inferences. The individual would need to learn to be adaptable for complete understanding during communications. An ideal learning environment for any foreign language would be total immersion into the native society, where you are forced to use only the language that you are learning. This, in most cases, is not a viable option. The best way to learn another language for speaking abilities is first and foremost listen and then speak, mimicking the pronunciations as you heard them. One form of this method is audio CD’s, in which the student listens and then repeats. Through extended use

this can be a good learning tool. There are many other learning tools available to teach an individual a foreign language. (Encina, 2004)

Some states are addressing language differences by instructional training for current and recruit level law enforcement officers in both short and extended programs. Dual language to task training, where the student receives instruction for a task in two languages, at the recruit level has proven effective in one state. In Kentucky, through federal funding assistance, officers receive an 80 hour course to run in conjunction with a two week trip to Mexico to enhance their skills by conversational usage in an environment that is totally Spanish. State correctional programs are addressing language barriers with inmates by requiring some offenders to attend English language courses while incarcerated, while others offer incentives to those entering voluntary training. Inmates in New Mexico with sentences of 18 to 120 months are required to enroll in English Second Language courses. (Bell, 2004)

Baltimore, Maryland has taken the approach of recruiting Spanish speaking officers to assist in handling the growing Latino population. This decision was made in part by major unresolved crimes in the area due to language barriers and the trust of the Hispanic community. With more Spanish speaking officers the language and cultural barriers are more easily overcome. The Hispanic community will have greater comfort in dealing with an officer that speaks the same language. The city is attempting to increase the number of bilingual officers by traveling to Puerto Rico to recruit new officers. If the police force and the community speak the same language, the community may be more willing to provide, much needed, information to assist closing unresolved crimes. The concern for more Spanish speaking officers comes from a department that currently has 100 officers that speak Spanish. (Sentementes, 2006)

An increasing number of law enforcement officers are beginning to realize that they experience language barriers and are taking a proactive approach by learning a foreign language. Web based training may be one viable option by providing training and tools for the field. One fireman and reserve police officer, Brady Lewis realized this problem while conducting traffic stops. He decided to learn Spanish. Lewis now operates a website, www.Spanish4Emergencies.com, which caters to emergency personnel. More agencies across the nation are looking for bilingual applicants. The most widely sought training being offered is Spanish with Russian, Indo-European and Arabic following. Another available website for first responders to include law enforcement personnel is www.SpanishOnPatrol.com. The management team of this website feels that officer safety can be compromised if the officer can not communicate as needed depending on the situation. A small amount of training (familiarization) can mean a lot in some cases. (Thompson & Fretz, 2007)

Another popular, web based and program, training tool is the Rosetta Stone language program. Fairfield Language Technologies created this program in 1992, which governmental agencies and schools, such as NASA and West Point, utilize this training. Americans typically do not easily learn languages other than English simply due to the ability to use the language outside of the learning environment. This training program offers the learning of language the natural

way, by emulating learning as if you were a native born speaker. There is no grammar or word translations to memorize that tend to complicate the learning process. The program uses reading and spoken phrases along with photo selection to train the student to associate language with visual aids. The program attempts to place you in a non English speaking environment. Learning a language in an environment where the individual uses the language daily makes the process easier. This program creates that scenario, by the student listening and then repeating a phrase back to the computer, utilizing a microphone. The student's voice pattern is displayed along with the program's audio display, allowing the student to compare the speech patterns of the program to their own. This will assist the student in gaining the proper pronunciations and accents. The costs are minimal to agencies and/or the officers who wish to use this method of learning. (Mossberg, 2005)

Is there an impending need for Florida law enforcement officers to bridge the language barrier gap? Will enhanced training allow officers to conduct their duties more effectively? With the population of this state becoming more diverse, the law enforcement community along with the citizens of Florida will benefit from any attempts to bridge the language barrier gap.

Methods

The purpose of this research is to identify the future needs of Florida's law enforcement officers in an attempt to bridge language barriers. Data was gathered utilizing a survey proposed to the Florida Department of Transportation's Motor Carrier Compliance five regional commanders and each member of the current Senior Leadership Program. The regional commanders were asked to disseminate the survey to their subordinates to gather data from across the State. The 32 members of the Senior Leadership Program class 12 represent a diverse force of local and State law enforcement agencies. They were asked to share the survey with their sworn and non-sworn personnel.

Information gathered through the survey will attempt to determine the extent of language barriers encountered by Florida's law enforcement personnel; identify the most common languages encountered and what areas of the state have issues with language barriers. Additionally can language training be an option to overcome language barriers and which languages would be beneficial?

Biographical information was gathered through the survey to include the average age, education and experience of the sworn and non-sworn personnel along with an estimated number of bilingual law enforcement personnel associated with the polled agencies. A copy of the survey is included as an appendix.

Results

The data represents information gathered from sworn and non-sworn personnel from the twenty eight Florida Law Enforcement agencies listed in appendix D.

Each of the Florida agencies listed in appendix D has both sworn law enforcement officers and non-sworn personnel who have contact with the public. A survey was sent to an individual from each of the listed agencies with encouragement to share the survey with others in the agency. This encouragement resulted in a greater number of returned surveys than were actually sent out. 259 surveys were returned by individuals from the 28 agencies polled. Although all of the surveys were returned, some of the questions were not answered for unknown reasons. The data was compiled with percentage equivalents given to each survey question, as appropriate. The data was divided into four geographic regions of the State to evaluate which regions may have an issue with language barriers in general.

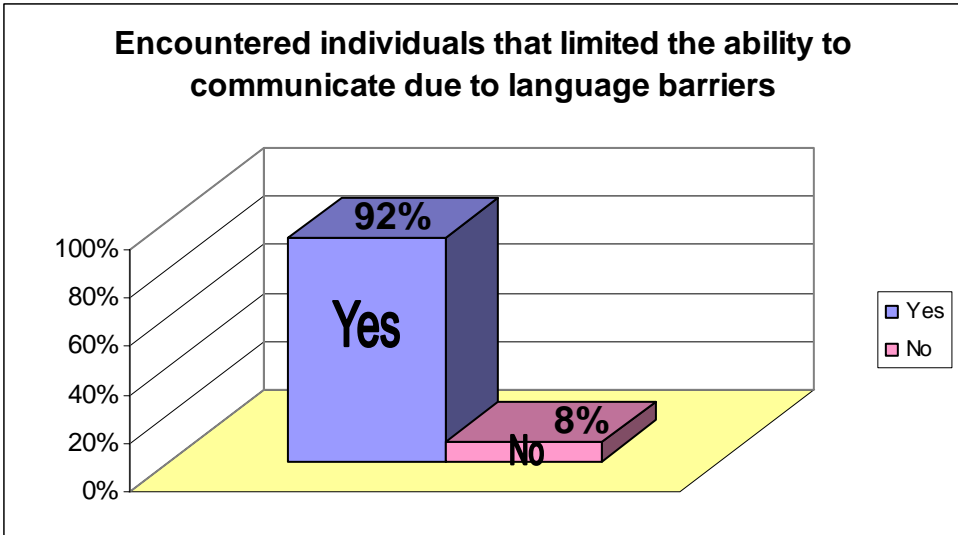


- Western region; east from the state line to include a border line of Madison and Taylor Counties
- Northern region; south to include a border line of Citrus, Marion, Lake and Volusia Counties
- Central region; south to include a border line of Sarasota, Desoto, Highlands, Okeechobee and St. Lucie Counties
- Southern region; all other counties south of the border line of Sarasota, Desoto, Highlands, Okeechobee and St. Lucie Counties

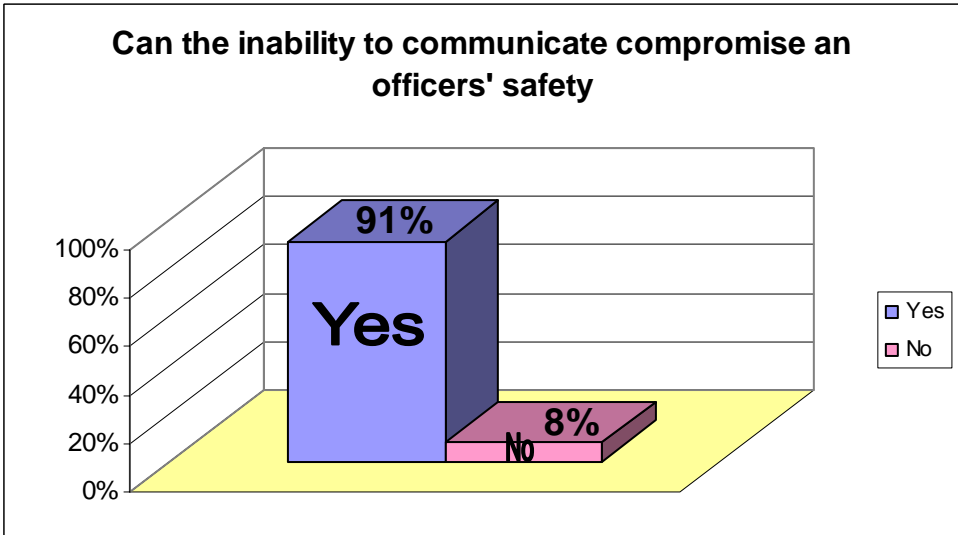
The personnel represented by the surveyed agencies represent a small portion of Florida's 76,163 law enforcement officers, to include full time certified police, correctional and correctional probation officers, as of November 14, 2007. These agencies represent a diverse group from across the State with a wide range of varying duties from supervision of inmates to felony crimes investigations.

Language barriers were determined to be an issue with criminal justice professionals by evaluating the data from survey questions 10 and 14.

- 10. Within the last year, have you encountered an individual that limited your ability to communicate with them, due to a language barrier?
- 14. In your opinion, could the inability to communicate with an individual, due to a language barrier, compromise the safety of a sworn or non-sworn member?

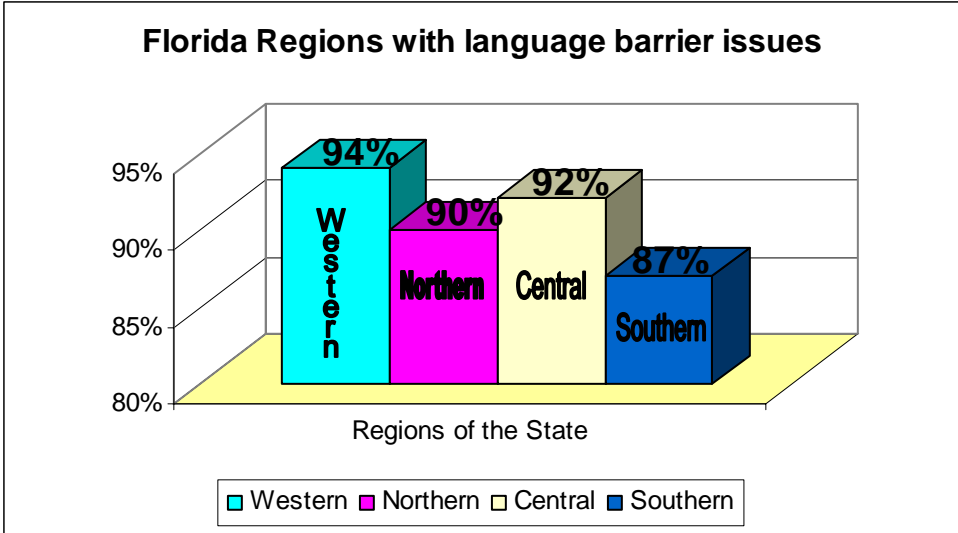


The limited ability to communicate with an individual due to a language barrier was encountered by 92% of the respondents within the last year.

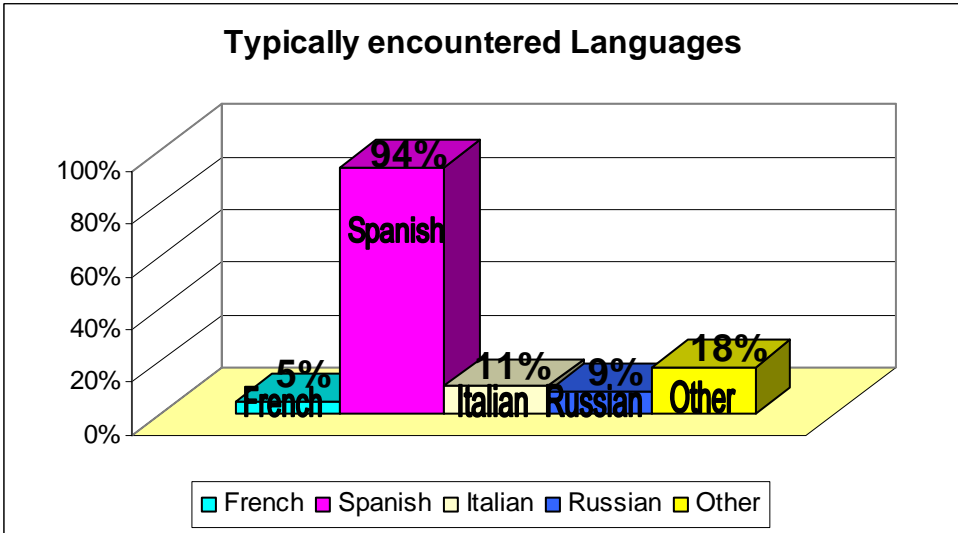


Ninety one percent felt that officer safety could be compromised by language barriers.

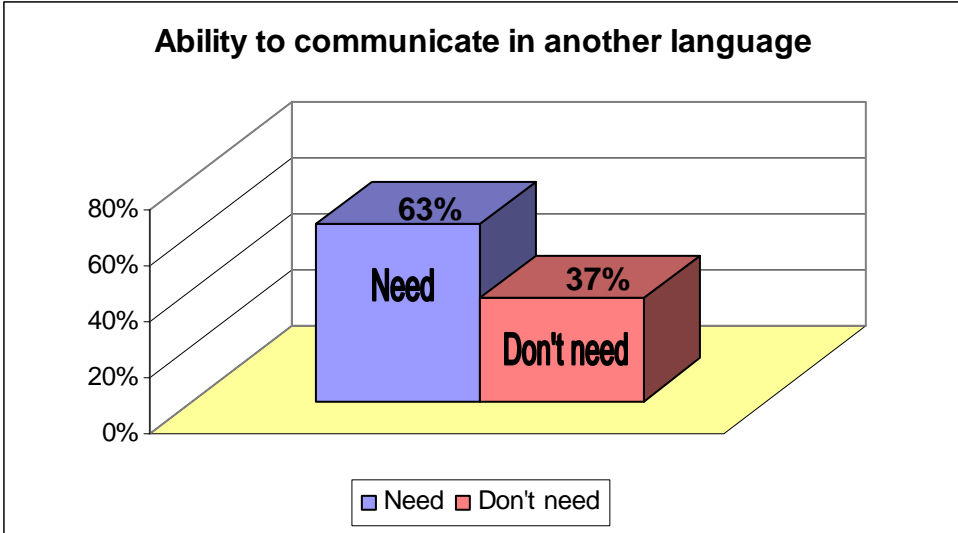
The average number of responses of the two questions; (10. and 14.) the limited ability to communicate and whether officer safety was compromised was used to determine the geographical differences for the issue of language barriers.



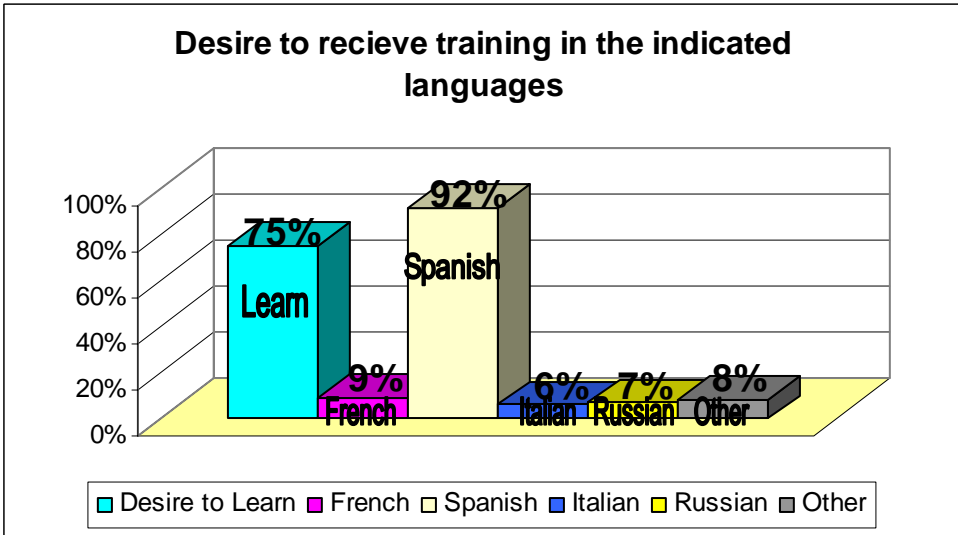
Ninety four percent of the respondents in the western region of Florida felt that language barriers were an issue. The central region of the State was next with 92%, followed by the northern region with 90% and the southern region with 87% of the respondents indicating language barriers to be an issue.



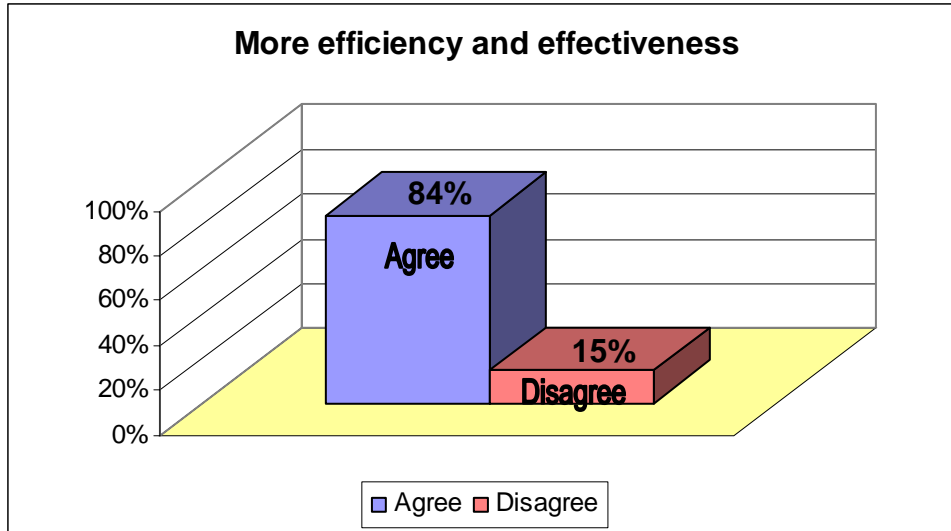
The most common language encountered by 94% of the respondents was Spanish.



Sixty three percent felt that criminal justice professionals should have the ability to communicate in a language other than English.



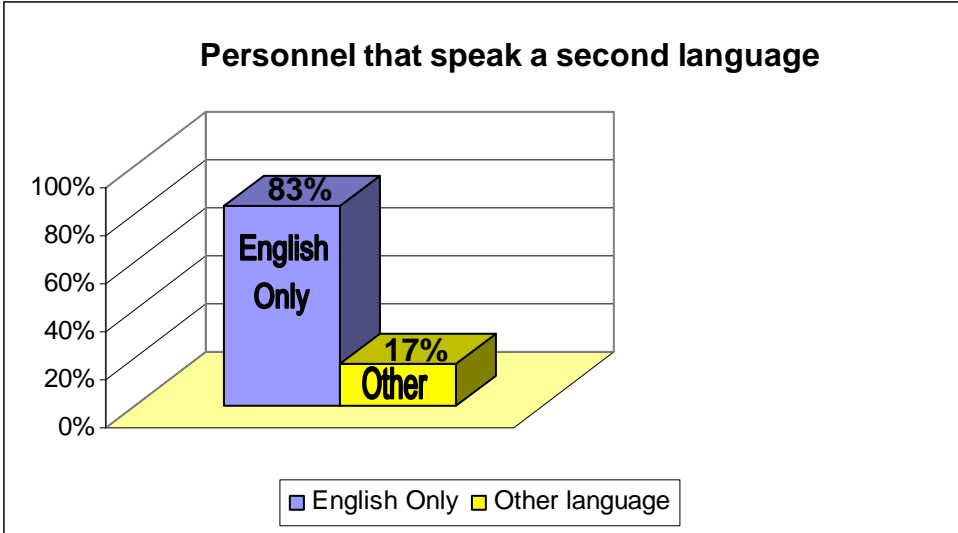
The desire to receive training in a language other than English was reported by 75% of the survey respondents. The most desired language to receive training in was reported by 92% of the respondents as Spanish.



Eighty four percent felt that overcoming language barriers would enable an officer to conduct their duties more effectively and efficiently.

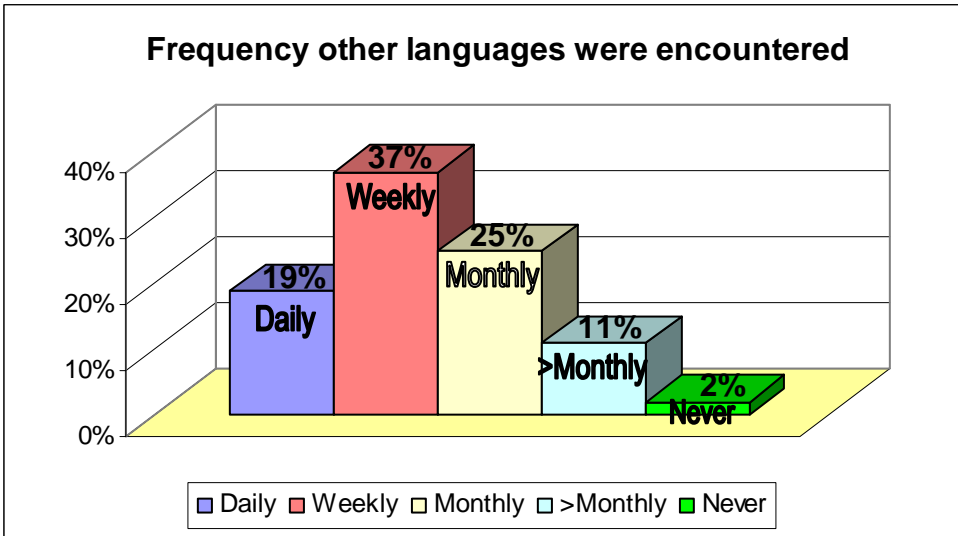
The greatest numbers of respondents were 31 to 40 years of age, with 19 to 30 year olds representing the lowest number of respondents. The majority of the respondents had received an education level of college or university studies. The majority of those individuals had greater than five years of experience with a law enforcement agency. Of those returning the survey 81% were sworn law enforcement officers with non-sworn personnel representing 17% (approximately 2% of the respondents did not answer this question for unknown reasons). The estimated number of personnel represented from the responding agencies ranged from 10 to 5,000 personnel with an overall average of 646.

The survey data represents information from across the State divided into four geographic regions, west, north, central and south. The southern and central regions were represented by 37% each, of the respondents, the western region was represented by 22% and the northern region was represented by five percent, of the respondents.



Of the surveyed individuals 83% do not speak a language other than English. Of the 17% that reported speaking a language other than English, the majority or 77% speak Spanish, 2% reported speaking French, 5% speak Russian and 9% reported speaking Italian. Sixteen percent reported speaking languages other than those represented above to include Chinese, German, Urdu, Korean, Hebrew and Sign language.

Within the last year, 92% of the respondents reported encountering individuals that limited their ability to communicate with them due to a language barrier.



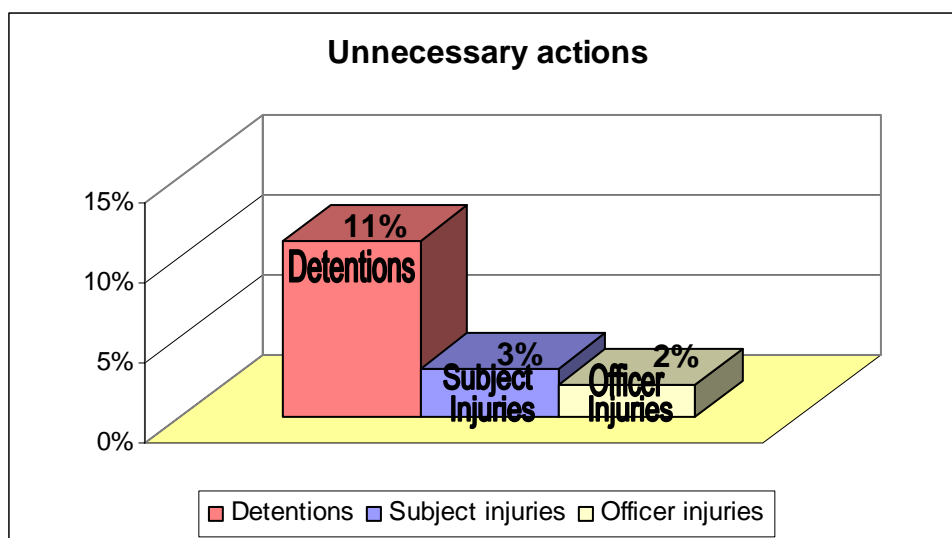
The frequency that non or limited English speaking individuals were encountered was reported to be on a weekly or monthly basis by the majority of those surveyed. The most significant language encountered was Spanish 94% of the time, Italian 11% of the time, Russian 9% of the time, French 5% of the time

and a language other than those listed above 18% of the time. Languages other than those above were reported as Chinese, German, Portuguese, Haitian, Iranian, Korean, Japanese, Israeli, Syrian, Iraqi, and Indian.

Ninety one percent of those responding felt the inability to communicate with an individual, due to a language barrier, would compromise the safety of sworn or non-sworn personnel. An interpreter was easily accessible to 51% of the law enforcement personnel responding. Seventy seven percent reported having others within their agency that are bilingual. The estimated number of bilingual personnel in the agencies was reported as:

- 36% having 1-5 bilingual personnel
- 16% having 6-10 bilingual personnel
- 15% having 11-20 bilingual personnel
- 6% having 21-30 bilingual personnel
- 24% having greater than 30 bilingual personnel

Within the previous five years, the inability to communicate with an individual due to a language barrier has lead agencies to experience a minute number of unnecessary detentions, subject injuries and officer injuries.



Unnecessary detentions were reported by 11% of the respondents with the majority unsure of the existence of any unnecessary detentions. Three percent of the respondents reported subject injuries with the majority unsure of any subject injuries. Officer injuries were reported by two percent of the respondents, while the majority was unsure of any known officer injuries.

Sixty three percent of the respondents felt that criminal justice professionals should have the ability to communicate in a language other than English. Thirty seven percent did not feel that criminal justice professionals should have to have the ability to communicate in a language other than English. Approximately 10% of those individuals added written comments reflecting their view on additional languages in the United States; they felt that individuals coming to this country should learn English and that Americans should not need

to learn other languages to accommodate them. Eighty four percent of the respondents felt that the ability to speak an additional language would allow them to conduct their duties more effectively and efficiently.

The desire to receive training in an additional language was reported by 75% of the respondents. Of those with the desire to receive training, the following languages were desired; 92% wanted to learn Spanish, nine percent wanted to learn French, seven percent wanted to learn Russian, six percent wanted to learn Italian and eight percent had the desire to learn a language other than those previously listed. The additional languages that personnel desired training in were; Creole, Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Farsi and Sign language, respectively. (See Appendix C for a further break down of the survey data)

Discussion

While this study collects data from a small portion of law enforcement personnel from across the State the data indicates an issue with language barriers on a state wide level. Each of the four regions represented in the survey indicated closely related issues with language barriers, while the western region of the state had the greatest issues, the southern region had the least amount of issues, both were within seven percent of the other. In relation to the initial research finding language barriers an issue on a national level, the data collected for this study indicates language barriers to be an issue on a state level also.

A greater number of personnel have encountered individuals that limited their ability to communicate due to a language barrier than not. The majority of the personnel also had the opinion that the inability to communicate with a subject due to a language barrier could compromise the safety of the officer. The respondents belief concerning officer safety issues was not confirmed by the study, as a very small percentage of officers were injured due to the inability to communicate with a subject. The higher percentage value of the combination of these results was interpreted as language barriers are an issue with Florida's law enforcement officers.

Legal litigations were not indicated as an issue due to the low percentages of officer and/or subject injuries and unnecessary detentions attributed to the inability to communicate with a subject. As indicated in the initial research litigations can be lengthy and costly. They can also lead to unenforceable statutes due to the prospect of civil rights violations because of language issues.

Personnel encountered limited or non-English speaking individuals predominately on a weekly or monthly basis, with the most frequently encountered language being Spanish. The frequency that the Spanish language was encountered compared to any other language was of a significant difference. This holds true with the initial research in finding that Hispanics are the fastest growing population in the state and nation.

The majority of personnel had the opinion that personnel should have the ability to communicate in a language other than English; the percentage was near two-thirds of those surveyed. Of the lower percentage of respondents, some

had the view that immigrants coming to America should learn and use English instead of Americans having to adapt to meet their needs. The percentages of this survey question may have been drastically different with rewording of the question. The above is an opinion that I would normally agree with. Except, we are gaining no ground communicating with a fast growing population if we can not learn and adapt to the situation in an attempt to keep up with the fast growing population. This in itself creates a need for Florida's law enforcement personnel to receive some form of training to maintain the ability to serve the public as a whole. This need is multiplied due to the fact that a large majority of the surveyed personnel speak no other language than English.

Three quarters of the personnel indicated that they would be receptive to training in another language. Most of those that would be receptive to training have a desire to learn the Spanish language. The desire to learn Spanish was followed by French, Russian, Italian, and assorted other languages to include sign language. The initial research indicated that training in other languages is a highly sought after remedy to bridging language barriers. There are many training options with training sessions filling to capacity causing long waiting lists.

The majority of the personnel felt that the ability to communicate in another language would give them the ability to conduct their duties in a more efficient and effective manner. In most law enforcement positions we find ourselves as part of a team but usually working alone with no close help in sight. The ability to communicate would allow us to conduct our duties without the additional assistance of an interpreter. This belief agreed with the initial research with many examples in that many agencies were recruiting bilingual personnel, added interpreters allowed the ability to effectively communicate with subjects and training others to communicate would allow them to do the job without additional interpretive assistance.

The ability to effectively communicate with the fast growing non-English speaking population of Florida will quickly become an impending need for law enforcement personnel. As indicated by the initial research Florida has one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations due to our economic growth in tourism and agriculture. To maintain an effective service in the interest of public safety, I believe that Florida's law enforcement agencies need to move in the direction of preparing for the future in training our personnel to deal with situational events. This in turn would create a safer environment for the officer in the field by allowing them the ability to understand and communicate with subjects that do not speak English. Meeting the future needs of Florida's law enforcement officers by bridging language barriers is of the up most importance for our safety and in the best interest of the citizens that we serve.

Recommendations

To further evaluate the need to bridge language barriers, I would suggest that an agency directly involved with the training of law enforcement officers on a state wide level expand this study to gather and evaluate this need on a higher scale, due to the actual number of active law enforcement personnel compared to those already surveyed.

I would also recommend that, based on the results of a larger study, an in depth training program be developed to enhance the ability of law enforcement personnel to communicate with the limited or non-English speaking public. While quick reference cards and computer assistance programs are helpful, the ability to communicate one on one would lead to a more effective and efficient system.

Captain Steve Park has been in law enforcement since 1984. He has worked for the Florida Department of Transportation's Motor Carrier Compliance Office since 1994. Steve has worked as an Officer, Field Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Training Lieutenant and Patrol Lieutenant. Steve is currently the Commander of Region 1 located in Florida's Panhandle. Steve has an AS degree in Industrial Electronics from Santa Fe Community College.

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Appendix A

Criminal Justice Professional,

I am currently participating in the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Senior Leadership Program, class 12. As part of this program I am conducting a research project involving language barriers between criminal justice personnel and the public. As part of this study, I have created a survey to gather needed information to assist in determining the issues and needs of criminal justice professionals in overcoming language barriers.

I am asking for your assistance in gathering this information because of your daily encounters with the public, you are the best source of information. Your assistance in gathering this information, by completing the short survey, would be greatly appreciated. The results of this survey will be anonymous and will only be used for statistical data.

If you would like to help in determining these issues and needs, please complete, print and return the survey. If you choose to return the survey by e-mail, you may need to save the document, depending on your e-mail system. I would like to reassure you that the survey is anonymous; surveys returned by e-mail will be printed followed by the deletion of your incoming e-mail. I am only interested in the needed statistical data to enhance the effectiveness of criminal justice professionals. Please feel free to share this survey with other personnel in your agency that have contact with the public. The survey will need to be completed and returned no later than September 21, 2007. If you have other information that may be valuable that was not generally addressed in this survey, please forward your comments.

The survey may be returned:

By mail;

**Captain Steve Park
Florida Dept. of Transportation
Motor Carrier Compliance Office
6025 Old Bagdad Highway
Milton, FL 32583**

Faxed:

**Attn: Capt. Steve Park
(850) 981-3034**

By e-mail:

steve.park@dot.state.fl.us

Thanks in advance for your assistance with this study. If you have any questions regarding this survey, I can be contacted at (850)981-3001.

Steve Park

Captain Steve Park

**BRIDGING LANGUAGE BARRIERS
FUTURE NEEDS OF FLORIDA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS
Survey**

1. What is your age?
19-30 31-40 41-50 51+
2. What is your education level?
GED HS Diploma College University
3. Number of years employed with a law enforcement agency?
<5 5-10 11-15 16-25 25+
4. What is your current position?
Sworn Non-sworn
5. Please estimate the number of personnel in your (local) agency.
6. What area of the state are you assigned to?



- South Central North West
7. Do you speak a language other than English?
Yes No
 8. If you answered yes to question 7, what language(s) do you speak?
French Spanish Italian Russian Other

9. If you answered question 8 as other, please list the language(s) spoken.
10. Within the last year, have you encountered individuals that limited your ability to communicate with them due to a language barrier?
- Yes No
11. If you answered yes to question 10, how often do you typically encounter limited or non English speaking individuals?
- Daily Weekly Monthly >Monthly Never
12. What language(s) other than English do you typically encounter?
- French Spanish Italian Russian Other
13. If you answered question 12 as other, list the language(s) encountered.
14. In your opinion, could the inability to communicate with an individual, due to a language barrier, compromise the safety of a sworn or non-sworn member?
- Yes No
15. Do you have easy access to an interpreter to assist in communicating with a limited or non English speaking individual?
- Yes No
16. Are you or others in your (local) agency bilingual?
- Yes No
17. If you answered yes to question 16, please estimate the number of bilingual personnel in your (local) agency.
- 1-5 6-10 11-20 21-30 >30
18. Within the previous five years, has your (local) agency experienced any known unnecessary detentions due to the inability to communicate with a limited or non English speaking individual?
- Yes No Unknown

19. Within the previous five years, has your (local) agency experienced any known subject injuries due to the inability to communicate with a limited or non English speaking subject?
- Yes No Unknown
20. Within the previous five years, has your (local) agency experienced any known officer injuries due to the inability to communicate with a limited or non English speaking subject?
- Yes No Unknown
21. In your opinion, should criminal justice professionals have the ability to communicate in a language other than English?
- Yes No
22. Would the ability to speak an additional language allow you to conduct your duties more efficiently and effectively?
- Yes No
23. Would you like to receive training in an additional language?
- Yes No
24. If you answered yes to question 23, what language(s) would you like to receive training in?
- French Spanish Italian Russian Other
25. If you answered question 24 as other, please list the language(s).

**BRIDGING LANGUAGE BARRIERS
FUTURE NEEDS OF FLORIDA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS
Survey**

Total Surveys 259

1. What is your age?

19-30 35=14% 31-40 83=32% 41-50 79=31% 51+ 61=24%

2. What is your education level?

GED 4=2% HS Diploma 64=25% College 117=45%
University 73=28%

3. Number of years employed with a law enforcement agency?

<5 50=19% 5-10 58=22% 11-15 45=17%
16-25 71=27% 25+ 33=13%

4. What is your current position?

Sworn 211=81% Non-sworn 45=17%

5. Please estimate the number of personnel in your (local) agency.

1-100=37%, 101-500=36%, 501-1000=1%, >1000=17%, Not answered=9%

6. What area of the state are you assigned to?



South 95=37% Central 96=37% North 14=5%
West 57=22%

7. Do you speak a language other than English?

Yes 43=17% No 216=83%

8. If you answered yes to question 7, what language(s) do you speak?
- French 1=2% Spanish 33=77% Italian 4=9%
 Russian 2=5% Other 7=16%
9. If you answered question 8 as other, please list the language(s) spoken.
Chinese 1 German 3 Urdu 1 Sign 2 Korean 1
Hebrew 1
10. Within the last year, have you encountered individuals that limited your ability to communicate with them due to a language barrier?
- Yes 237=92% No 20=8%
11. If you answered yes to question 10, how often do you typically encounter limited or non English speaking individuals?
- Daily 50=19% Weekly 95=37% Monthly 64=25%
 >Monthly 29=11% Never 4=2%
12. What language(s) other than English do you typically encounter?
- French 12=5% Spanish 244=94% Italian 28=11%
 Russian 23=9% Other 47=18%
13. If you answered question 12 as other, list the language(s) encountered.
- Iranian 1 Japanese 1 Haitian 2 German 3 Indian 1**
Korean 1 Israeli 1 Syrian 1 Iraqi 1 Portuguese 2
Oriental 1 Chinese 6
14. In your opinion, could the inability to communicate with an individual, due to a language barrier, compromise the safety of a sworn or non-sworn member?
- Yes 235=91% No 22=8%
15. Do you have easy access to an interpreter to assist in communicating with a limited or non English speaking individual?
- Yes 127=49% No 132=51%
16. Are you or others in your (local) agency bilingual?
- Yes 200=77% No 58=22%
17. If you answered yes to question 16, please estimate the number of bilingual personnel in your (local) agency.
- 1-5 71=36% 6-10 35=16% 11-20 29=15%
 21-30 15=6% >30 47=24%

18. Within the previous five years, has your (local) agency experienced any known unnecessary detentions due to the inability to communicate with a limited or non English speaking individual?

Yes 29=11% No 60=23% Unknown 167=64%

19. Within the previous five years, has your (local) agency experienced any known subject injuries due to the inability to communicate with a limited or non English speaking subject?

Yes 7=3% No 72=28% Unknown 179=69%

20. Within the previous five years, has your (local) agency experienced any known officer injuries due to the inability to communicate with a limited or non English speaking subject?

Yes 4=2% No 70=27% Unknown 182=70%

22. In your opinion, should criminal justice professionals have the ability to communicate in a language other than English?

Yes 164=63% No 96=37%

24. Would the ability to speak an additional language allow you to conduct your duties more efficiently and effectively?

Yes 218=84% No 39=15%

25. Would you like to receive training in an additional language?

Yes 195=75% No 61=24%

24. If you answered yes to question 23, what language(s) would you like to receive training in?

French 18=9% Spanish 179=92% Italian 11=6%
Russian 13=7% Other 16=8%

26. If you answered question 24 as other, please list the language(s).

Creole 7 Portuguese 2 Chinese 4 Arabic 5 Farsi 2
Vietnamese 2 Sign 1

Appendix D

Florida Department of Transportation,
Motor Carrier Compliance Office

Florida Department of Environmental
Protection, Park Police

Florida Highway Patrol

Florida Department of Corrections,
Probation and Parole Services

Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office

Panama City Police Department

Orange County Corrections Department

Fort Pierce Police Department

Altamonte Springs Police Department

Lee County Sheriff's Office

Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office

Plantation Police Department

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission

Eustis Police Department

Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Department

Collier County Sheriff's Department

Jacksonville Sheriff's Office

Pinellas County Sheriff's Office

Charlotte County Sheriff's Office

Lakeland Police Department

Melbourne Police Department

Volusia County Division of Corrections

Palm Bay Police Department

Florida Department of Environmental
Protection, Investigations Division

Polk County Sheriff's Office

Ocala Police Department

St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office

Marion County Sheriff's Office