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# XXI A. PRADŽIOS LIETUVIŲ TARMĖS: GEOLINGVISTINIS IR SOCIOLINGVISTINIS TYRIMAS: ŽEMĖLAPIAI IR JŲ KOMENTARAI

Sudarytojos Danguolė Mikulėnienė,  
Violeta Meiliūnaitė

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In 2014 the monumental work entitled *The Modern Geolinguistic Research in Lithuania: The Optimisation of Network Points and the Interactive Dissemination of Information* was published in Vilnius, which is the result of long-term work of famous linguists doing research on the Lithuanian dialects, the Polish, Belarusian and Russian languages / dialects in Lithuania.

After the Second World War the Lithuanians developed a network of residential points of the Lithuanian language towns, covering more than 720 towns. The collected material was the basis for the creation and issue of “The Atlas of the Lithuanian Language” (*Lietuvių kalbos atlasas*). The collected material, which is understandable, reflects the situation of the decades behind, it does not concern other languages spoken within the Lithuania SSR. On the other hand, it contains a classification of the Lithuanian dialects (1966) developed by Aleksas Girdenis and Zigmas Zinkevičius.

It has been 60 years since the material was gathered, Lithuania has regained its independence, the demographic and socio-economic situation has changed. The factors mentioned above have influenced the language situation in the state of Lithuania. Both the Lithuanian and Latvian linguists have commenced new extensive research in order to show the contemporary condition of the Lithuanian and Latvian dialects on the territory of Lithuania and Latvia. This is all the more im-

portant because both languages are spoken by few inhabitants (in the state and in exile the Lithuanian language by approximately 4 million, the Latvian language approximately by 2 million), and the language is still considered to be one of the most important elements of national identity in these countries.

In 2009 *The Atlas of the Baltic Languages. A prospect*<sup>1</sup> was issued by the Latvian Language Institute in Riga and the Institute of the Lithuanian Language in Vilnius, and in 2014 the first volume of the *Atlas*, presenting the plant vocabulary (*Baltų kalbų atlasas. Leksika 1: Flora*)<sup>2</sup>. Another very important study is the book being reviewed now, crowning a multi-annual project entitled *The Modern Geolinguistic Research in Lithuania: The Optimisation of Network Points and the Interactive Dissemination of Information*. For three years (2010–2013) prof. Danguolė Mikulėnienė together with 33 colleagues and students was examining and analysing the Lithuanian dialects in the geolinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects.

The members of the project set several main objectives – to collect and publish the latest material depicting the central and peripheral Lithuanian dialects, to precisely determine the borders of the Lithuanian dialects and subdialects on the basis of the phonetic features analysis, to show the sociolinguistic situation in the entire area of the Lithuanian language and to carry out a preliminary analysis of the collected material. As many as 735 towns in Lithuania and 15 abroad were researched (in total approx. 5,000 hours of digital recordings), updating the network of dialectological points (some villages had already become extinct, and also new towns had been added) and creating a contemporary archive of the dialects of the XXI century.

The first part of the publication is devoted to theoretical aspects (theories, methodologies, terminology), as well as to the role and position of the Lithuanian dialectology within the world dialectology. The Authors stress that the very notion *geolinguistics* appeared in the Lithuanian dialectology only at the beginning of the XXI century. The traditional dialectology shows the language reality statically, and geolinguistics – dynamically. The Lithuanian dialects and subdialects required newer analysis and interpretation, which are consent to the achievements of the contemporary linguistics, regarding the linguistic, social and geographical aspects and with the latest terminology applied. For example, the Authors use the term *topolect* (after Chinese researcher, Victor H. Mairi), which relates to a code, which

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<sup>1</sup> *Baltu valodu atlants*, Anna Stafecka, Danguolė Mikulėnienė, Riga / Vilnius, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *Baltu valodu atlants. Leksika 1: Flora. Baltų kalbų atlasas. Leksika 1: Flora. Atlas of the Baltic Languages. Lexis 1: Flora*. 2nd revised edition. Editing by Danguolė Mikulėnienė and Anna Stafecka. Vilnius: Latvijas Universitātes Latviešu valodas institūts, Lietuvių kalbos institutas. The Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia and The Institute of the Lithuanian Language, 2013, 568 pp.

coexists on the same territory with other languages mutually incomprehensible, and topolects lack any independent linguistic identity. Thus, in respect of Lithuania the Authors treat as *topolects* all the local variants of the following languages: Polish, Belarusian, the local variant of the Russian language, Latvian.

The appropriate use of methodology (material collection and its elaboration) or terminology in this publication was very important, even crucial. Therefore, in the book we can find a detailed analysis and description of these issues (described by: Daiva Aliūkaitė, Violeta Meiliūnaitė, Jurgita Jaroslavienė, Danguolė Mikulėnienė).

The second fundamental chapter, written by Danguolė Mikulėnienė, Asta Leskauskaitė and Laura Geržotaitė is devoted to the geolinguistic research in Lithuania. The Authors presented the development of research starting from the pregeolinguistic stage (end of the XIX century) through the intense development of the linguistic geography (Kazimieras Būga) until the present days – the neogeolinguistic stage. The greatest work of the Lithuanian dialectologists undoubtedly was the issue of *The Atlas of the Lithuanian Language* in three volumes (showing vocabulary, phonetics and morphology in 376 maps). It included the material collected within 15 years, in more than 800 towns (beyond the borders of Lithuania – 13 additional points), and the archive consists of 30,000 metres of magnetic tape and 15,000 pages of manual notes – prepared by 600 people. Another important event was also the publication of the *Atlas of the Baltic Languages*, depicting the material of the area of Lithuania and Latvia. The latest period in the Lithuanian dialectology – the neolinguistic one – began together with the above-mentioned project, which resulted in the publication being now reviewed.

Next the Authors discuss the traditional classification of the Lithuanian dialects and subdialects, stressing that there were at least three types of selection depending on the rules adopted by various researchers (and more specifically – on the choice of the appropriate phonetic features). Within many years almost one-fifth of researched points were corrected, but it did not change significantly the network of the dialectological points. This new classification, subject to corrections – i.e. changing the subdialect names – did not change, however, the geolinguistic situation in Lithuania, although some elements of this classification reflect even the prewar administrative-territorial division.

The third chapter of the book (Danguolė Mikulėnienė, Violeta Meiliūnaitė, Janina Švambarytė-Valužienė and others) describes the geolinguistic situation of the Lithuanian dialects in the XXI century and the optimisation of the field points. The researchers, in relation to the traditional dialectology, supplemented the survey forms with the socio-demographic parameters. The regional variantivity was analysed not only from the point of view of one language / dialect; the development characteristic and changes of variantivity were not treated as the phenomenon

of a closed system, but as a derivative of the cross-system interactions. The researchers determined a 7-stage level of regionality of the respondent speech, based, among others, on such criteria as a place of birth, a place of the residence during a period of up to 18 years of age, origin of parents, the present place of residence. The particular levels of regionality are reflected in the language / dialect quality.

In order to optimise the research points, several factors were specified, which had been taken into consideration by previous researchers: the geographical criteria of the point determination (distance between points is 8–12 km), the administrative-territorial division (old villages and settlements, rarely small towns), the criteria of the dialect purity – selecting a village not on the basis of administrative location, but its assignment to a particular subdialect group; the name of the town (villages of foreign, non-Lithuanian names were avoided). The point is not always one town / village, this may be a central and peripheral towns. The Authors of this project and publication also defined a notion of an active and extinct point. An active point is a point where all three generations live and speak one dialect or subdialect in everyday life. In case of changes (e.g. the village is extinct or the neighbouring town/village became a centre) the number of the point remained the same, but its name was altered. An extinct point is a point where there is no indigenous population in a particular town/village (centre) or in its neighbourhood.

The analysis of the gathered material confirmed the traditional division of the Lithuanian territory into two major dialects – Samogitian and Aukštaitian, covering the ethnogenetic division. The materials also showed the changes taking place – for the western Samogitian subdialects the level of activity was assessed to be very low, in contrast to the area of the southern, eastern and northern Žemaitija Region, where there are few extinct points. In case of the Aukštaitian subdialects we can also notice a very well-preserved structure of the dialect among the respondents. Exceptions to this rule are those points, which are located outside of the borders of the country – for example in Belarus – they disappear there. A positive exception, in the opinion of the Authors, are the Lithuanian subdialects in the area around Puńsk in Poland, where they are active and of large prospects of survival in the near future. The national uniformity in most of the areas of Lithuania supports the linguistic uniformity and good preservation of the Lithuanian subdialects' structure. Where there is multilingualism, changes in the Lithuanian subdialects' structure are faster, as it takes place in the Vilnius Region.

Special attention should be given to Chapter IV (*The local variants of other languages in Lithuania*). In the majority of countries, during working on the dialect atlases of a particular language, other languages spoken in the area are not usually mentioned at all. The Authors not only took into account other languages and subdialects, but also described them on the basis of the latest field studies. Thus

the reader obtains a complete overview of the linguistic situation in the entire Lithuania. The Latvian language is described in the article by Gintarė Judžentytė (*The Latvian language in Lithuania*). The Polish language of Northern Borderlands is described by Kristina Rutkovska, the Belarusian subdialects – by Lilija Plygavka, and the Russian language – by Nadežda Morozova. The Polish language concerns three regions: the Vilnius Region, the Kaunas Region and the Ignalina-Zarasai Region. The Polish people in Lithuania represent a significant proportion of the population – approximately 200 thousand, of which in the alčininkai District Municipality the Poles are as many as 79.5%, in the Vilnius Region – 61.3%, in the Trakai District Municipality – 33.2%, and in the Švenčionys District Municipality – 27.4%. They preserve their traditions, including the mother tongue, perfectly well. In the Kaunas Region and in the Ignalina-Zarasai Region the situation presents worse. The Belarusian subdialects are quite commonly used by the elder generation of inhabitants living in the south-eastern part of the country. In case of the Russian language we should speak of the Old Believers' dialect (their villages were not researched separately by the Lithuanian researchers) and of the speech of the Russians living in numerous towns.

The research allowed not only to archive the contemporary condition of the Lithuanian dialects as well as other languages and subdialects spoken in Lithuania and in the neighbourhood, but also allow to do the long-term dialectological research and analysis of the linguistic situation on this territory, and even to make predictions of changes in the near future. The results of the linguists' work on this project showed the linguistic situation in Lithuania in a multi-layer and comprehensive way, and they constitute the great potential to analyse not only the particular dialects and subdialects, but also towards the general language and other languages (Polish, Belarusian, Russian, Latvian) spoken in various regions of the country.

The Authors draw our attention to the changes in the linguistic situation near the major cities (evolving process of urbanisation) even within the distance of dozens of kilometres from the centres. It is difficult to speak of the dialect in these places. Existence of other languages makes the situation more colourful – especially in Vilnius and Klaipėda (the Russian language). On the other hand, the speech of the Kaunas Region preserved the dialectal structure very well, which results from, among others, homogeneous structure of the population. In this chapter the Authors presented the contemporary classification of the dialects regarding the particular subdialect groups and their centres. The subdialects are better preserved in places where the speakers had its better symbolic awareness, which is better in the area of, for instance, Žemaitija and not Aukštaitija. In particular, in the eastern Aukštaitija it is difficult to recognise good preservation of the subdialect structure – the coexistence of various languages (Polish, Belarusian) caused the convergence – mutual influence of the languages and their assimilation.

The study being reviewed is of paramount importance as it presented the system of not only the linguistic and geographical factors, but also the social and cultural features. The methodology adopted enabled to analyse the linguistic continuum in Lithuania both at vertical and horizontal levels, liberating the Lithuanian dialectology from the classic research methods, showing only a fragment of the linguistic reality. The Lithuanian dialects are preserved in the majority of places marked earlier in *The Atlas of the Lithuanian Language*, but at present they are characterised by changeability and dynamism, and not stability like decades ago. The lowest vitality concerns the subdialects of western Žemaitija and southern and eastern Aukštaitija, the highest vitality – the Samogitian dialects. The research carried out by the Authors perfectly show disappearing and speaking of dialects, and creation of new, so-called derivative dialects. The eldest generation of speakers represents in the best way the static dialect model (horizontal changeability), middle-aged generation – huge dynamism (vertical changeability) – convergence with other languages or similarity to the literary language. The most multidimensional is the language of the youngest generation of speakers, and it is going to shape the linguistic situation in the near future. It will be the language that should be re-examined in the decades again so as to observe the changes in the language.

The presented book is an extremely important publication and even of crucial significance for the Lithuanian dialectology. It is not only the large material meticulously and professionally collected by the experienced linguists, but also the extensive analysis and interpretation carried out with the application of the latest methodologies. During the three year project the Authors performed titanic work. They collected the material of the entire territory of Lithuania, which enabled to compare the contemporary linguistic situation with the old research results, and it will be a very good benchmark for next field studies carried out in the future. Apart from an innovative approach to the geolinguistic research, special attention is attracted by the fact that the Authors took into account other languages spoken in the territory of Lithuania – Belarusian, Latvian, Polish and Russian. All the above mentioned facts allowed to present the real linguistic situation in Lithuania, including all the linguistic, social and administrative factors. The publication is of great archive-cognitive importance. The Authors put a lot of effort to supplement each chapter with numerous colourful maps, diagrams and charts, which together with several appendices give a perfect opportunity to compare the contemporary situation in the XXI century village with the situation of decades ago. In the publication there are 14 maps (for comparison, the old one – from *The Atlas of the Lithuanian Language* – and the contemporary one), showing the latest tendencies as regards the structure of the Lithuanian dialects and subdialects, including one map showing distribution of the Belarusian, Latvian, Polish and Russian language

points. At the end of the publication we can find an extensive appendix (concerning the research methodology, questionnaires, the list of the researched points – together with the names and numbering of *The Atlas of the Lithuanian Language* and the new ones, invented for the purposes of this project).

The presented work: *XXI a. pradžios lietuvių tarmės: geolingvistinis ir sociolingvistinis tyrimas. Žemėlapiai ir jų komentarai* constitutes also a perfect and thorough compendium of knowledge for researches of the Lithuanian dialects and language, people dealing with the Polish, Belarusian and Russian languages functioning in the territory of Lithuania, issues concerning the linguistic borders, as well as for the Baltic Studies students. The part of the materials gathered and elaborated by the Authors is available on a specially created website [www.tarmes.lt](http://www.tarmes.lt), which allows the reader to have easy access to the results of the Lithuanian dialectologists (prepared in Lithuanian and English).

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