

LOSS OF LANGUAGE SENSITIVITY: IS THIS A REAL THREAT?

Summary

The author provides material for an open discussion on a widely recognized linguistic phenomenon of contemporary Lithuanian, i.e. the loss of intonation perception by native language speakers. After a comparison with the decline of classical languages (Latin and Greek), where the phonetic evolution of quantity opposition in vowels and the disappearance of syllable intonation is thoroughly described, the article offers an overview of the importance of intonation in Lithuanian according to the indications of the Commission of the Lithuanian language.

The second, practical part of the article, offers an analysis of rhymes where intonation is relevant in a few works of two Lithuanian poets, Maironis and J. Marcinkevičius. Principles of rhyming laid down since the XVIII c. by poetics theorists are here taken into account as a means to determine whether rhymes are well conceived, when words share the same intonation (the type *pajuōdę – ilgakuōdę*). The results of this brief analysis show that in J. Marcinkevičius verses, much more than in Maironis', phonetic discrepancy between rhyming words is very frequent (the type *pilkas – vilkas*).

Since many of these works are read to and by children, the author arrives to the conclusion that bad rhyming could hinder from building language sensitivity. Since native speakers also need to study their language, if there is a real commitment by authorities to safeguard and foster the Lithuanian language, measures have to be taken in order to improve its teaching from childhood onwards. An environment where good language is spoken and taught, starting from educated parents, leads to educated children.

KEY WORDS: standard language, accent and intonation, stress, language sensitivity.

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