

GERMAN IN THE WORLDVIEW OF THE  
*DICTIONARY OF THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE*

*Summary*

The image of the *German* in the eyes of a Lithuanian has been scrutinised by ethnologists, folklorists, historians, linguists. However, their studies in that regard have so far omitted our largest linguistic tract, the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*, which can be approached as some kind of a chronicle covering material from our first writings dated 1547 until 2001.

A semantic analysis of roughly 650 illustrative examples associated with the *German* has revealed a very thorough, many-sided image of how Lithuanians have looked at Germans – their neighbours, sometimes close, sometimes not so – since ancient times until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This image is not just some biased opinion of a group of people: it consists of information that can be found in written texts, various dialects across Lithuania, and at different times. Of course, individual illustrative sentences recorded from the lips of living people are subjective and often emotional; however, taken together, they form an accurate homogeneous worldview. That Lithuanians knew Germans very well, has evidence in the ample quantity of headwords available in the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*: with reference to Germans, such words total a massive 52. These words not always have to do with nationality: sometimes they can also refer to the devil or a mushroom, a dance or a gingerbread cookie, and so on.

To begin with, according to the Dictionary, Germans were always enemies. Their cohorts would assault Lithuanians since ancient times, sparing no lives. They would do so with a variety of weapons, from rams to bayonets to rifles, grenades, machineguns, mortars, and airplanes.

Germans would not only fight with Lithuanians alone: they also had enemies in Prussians, Latvians, Poles, Englishmen, Norwegians, Belgians, Frenchmen, Americans; Germans were not immune to in-house squabble either.

Among the Lithuanian people, it was the residents of Lithuania Minor and Samogitia that first came into contact with Germans; later, Germans spread all over Lithuania.

Both as they marched across Lithuania and having settled there for an extended stay, Germans would do Lithuanians harm, taking away their livestock, grain, feed, food, shipping timber and other property off to Germany. What they would not take, they would destroy out of spite: houses, bridges, mills would be burned down, crops trampled, livestock shot or slaughtered; neither dogs nor bees would be spared. The people would be burdened by various obligations, even taken away to work in Germany, sparing neither the children nor the sick.

As a result, Lithuanians feared Germans and would try not to attract their unwanted attention. Lithuanians considered Germans a cruel, evil, arrogant, picky, lying bunch, but sometimes they would be regarded as foolish, unsightly, often fat and pot-bellied. The German language would ring foul and incomprehensible to the Lithuanian's ear as well.

Lithuanians would oppose Germans for as much as they could, fighting them ferociously in the old times without sparing their own lives; later, when they were forced

to surrender to such power, they would secretly stash their property away, harbouring resistance towards the invaders, if only in their hearts: Germans would be hated, despised, mocked; fellow Lithuanians who made bedfellows with the enemies, frowned upon.

On the other hand, Lithuanians saw positive traits in Germans as well, even though material pointing to that is much scarcer. In addition to warriors, Germans were craftsmen, merchants who introduced Lithuanians to some of the things the country had never known before. They were hard-working, careful, and sometimes welcoming; they would return favours and their women were pretty and well-dressed. The language of texts recorded in DLL<sub>e</sub> shows that it was a nation of scholars, writers, musicians.

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