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## Notes and Comments

### AN ENGLISH-SPEAKER STUDIES LITHUANIAN

Everyone knows that learning a foreign language, although a difficult and time-consuming experience, can be very rewarding and exciting. Most of us have had some experience with studying French, German, Latin or Spanish in schools, but there are probably relatively few who have had the courage to take on the more difficult (but in many respects more interesting) East European languages. In this article I should like to relate my own reasons for studying Lithuanian, the difficulties which I had, and what I am doing to make the study of Lithuanian easier for other English-speakers who may wish to venture forth into this difficult but exciting area.

My interest in East Europe dates from my undergraduate days at the University of Minnesota where I first enrolled in what was known as a 'Russian area program'; this included the study of the history, geography, political science, economics of Russia and East Europe and also, of course, the Russian languages. After graduation from the University of Minnesota, I enrolled as a graduate student in the Department of Baltic and Slavic Languages at the University of Pennsylvania. During my first term I took chiefly courses in Slavic linguistics and Russian literature with professors Alfred Senn, Anthony Salys and Vincas Kreve. These professors aroused in me a keen interest in Baltic studies and more particularly Lithuanian. I soon realized the importance of a knowledge of Lithuanian for Slavic linguistics and indeed for comparative Indo-European linguistics in general. It seems likely that most Americans studying Lithuanian will be linguists or Slavicists who realize its vital importance for these two fields.

After several years in the army, I re-entered the University of Pennsylvania where I began my first course in Lithuanian with Dr. Anthony Salys. In this course we used a Lithuanian grammar prepared for Lithuanians, but since none of us knew Lithuanian Prof. Salys gave us lectures in English on Lithuanian grammar and we used the text-book only for the complete listing of paradigms. For reading we used a short reader prepared by Dr. Senn. There are, of course, only a few grammars of Lithuanian prepared for English speakers; in fact it appears that none of these is suitable for college courses. In general the lack of introductory text-books in Lithuanian is a well-known fact. Even text-books of Lithuanian in other well-known European languages are not common, when one compares them with the numerous text books available for French, German, Spanish, etc. Fortunately for me, I was able to enlist the aid of several of my fellow-students at the University of Pennsylvania, namely Kostas Ostrauskas and Antanas Klimas, both of whom gave unstintingly of their time in order to help me with Lithuanian. In addition to the excellent course with Dr. Salys I also had the help of Messrs. Ostrauskas and Klimas with what to me were incomprehensible parts of the reader and difficult points of Lithuanian grammar. I took every opportunity to try to speak Lithuanian with them, but unfortunately since I have no opportunity where I am living now (State College, Pa.) to keep up with this, my knowledge of the spoken language is now slipping away.

Several years after I received my Ph. D. from the University of Pennsylvania, it occurred to me that it would be helpful to others if I wrote a grammar of Lithuanian in English. I soon learned that the same thought had come to my good friend Dr. Antanas Klimas, so I wrote to him and suggested that we combine our efforts. Dr. Klimas in turn suggested that we ask Dr. Leonardas Dambriūnas to help us and in this way it came about that the three of us are now collaborating on *An Introduction to Lithuanian*, a book which will be the most complete lesson grammar of Lithuanian ever published in English.

In principle the teacher of Lithuanian must remember that Lithuanian is exotic for the American student. Thus, for an American, the Lithuanian language appears as unfamiliar as Russian or Polish. One must start from relatively elementary text-books and all unclear points must be explained fully. Modern linguistics tells us that people learn languages not so much from trying to decipher apparently incomprehensible texts, as from the memorization of language structures. This is one of the reasons that older texts, prepared for schools where the decipherment method is commonly used, are not suitable for today's schools where the more modern methods of teaching, which include memorization of simple dialogues, substitution of various words in sample sentences, variation drills, etc. are used. In reading, it is most valuable to have a complete explanation of the text and preferable a translation whereby one can check oneself if there is no teacher available.

In substance then, *An Introduction to Lithuanian* may appear to some to be over-footnoted and too simple, but the authors believe that it will better satisfy contemporary educational needs.

