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Soviet Authorities, Linguists, and the Standardization of the Lithuanian Language

NERIJUS ŠEPETYS

NERIJUS ŠEPETYS is an associate professor at the Faculty of History of Vilnius University and chief editor of the magazine *Naujasis Židinys - Aidai*. His research focus is historical memory and the writing of history; his latest book is Molotovo-Ribbentropo paktas ir Lietuva (2006).

Abstract
Lithuania has been an independent state for twenty-two years. However, full-scale regulation of the "correctness" of the national language still thrives there. The origins of such a situation may lie in Soviet language policy.
This article presents the primary results of archival documents research. Even though it is officially stated that the active standardization of the Lithuanian language during the Soviet period was a secret struggle against Russification, a number of facts show that this was initially the product of the planned command economy initiated by Moscow.
Unlike in prewar Lithuania and the free world, where language norms are considered to be established by usage, in the Soviet period, preference was given to the system of codification and language established by "scholarship" rather than linguistic reality (usage). The approach of the present Lithuanian language policy, stating that important issues of standardization have to be dealt with centrally, is an obvious and painful consequence of Soviet ideology.

> *Today nobody doubts any longer that a language can be regulated. An active approach to standard language usage is especially characteristic of Soviet linguistics. In our country, like many elsewhere in the world, we are implementing Marx and Engels' prediction – "Naturally, a time will come when individuals will start to fully control this product of the human race as well."*
>
> *Aldonas Pupkis, 1980*

Presumptions and questions

The chosen epigraph begs for an explanation. For the past twenty years, among different representatives of Lithuanian scholarship who started their activity during the Soviet period (at least before 1988), a clear explanation of the meaning of ideology in the scholarly texts of that time has been spreading and taking root. It has been asserted that scholarship was serious and deep then and that quotes and other ideological episodes from "classical Marxists" only served as "safety fuses," or as a tribute to communist political correctness.

Such an explanation is not very convincing. In those days, scholarship included everything – "safety fuses," pure ideological junk, and different combinations of scholarship and ideology. Aldonas Pupkis's popular textbook on language cultivation is a perfect example of this. This quote is also important because a conviction in both political "power" and scholarly prescriptivism are declared in it at the same time. But what should be the subject of norms or regulations? Is it of equal value when a decision about norms of a word used by somebody at some place is made by the "language user" himself, his addressee, the majority of a speech community or by its representative specialists, an educational institution, or, finally, by a political or administrative institution?

When speaking about the Soviet period it is not easy to identify such a subject. Today, we really have a clearly formalized policy for the Lithuanian language. We can easily identify "the language legislator" – the State Commission on the

Lithuanian Language (SCLL) and the "code" of its most important decisions (resolutions made by the SCLL, the "List of Major Language Errors," etc.), executive bodies, and "officials" – the State Language Inspectorate, language supervisors at state and municipal establishments, editors in different institutions and publishing houses. It would even be possible to find a simulacrum of the judiciary – the community of linguists or its imaginary consensus ("What would the linguists say?"). Where does all of this come from? Some will say that this is the result of euphoria from the period of the restoration of the state and the Reform Movement (Sąjūdis) in Lithuania. Others will go deeper: according to them, liberation created favorable conditions for the ideas of Jablonskis as the "father" of the modern Lithuanian language and for the spirit of standardization to revive and "flourish." Yet another group will look at this even more extensively; after all, in institutionalizing the supervision of the Lithuanian language, the experiences of France and Iceland were considered. However, in this article, I will focus on the other root of current Lithuanian language policy: Soviet Lithuania, which most often is semiconsciously overlooked, but included the genesis of the Language Commission as an institution and the theoretical idea of standardization, keeping both Soviet authority and language scholarship in mind. While agreeing that the relationship between Soviet authority and Lithuanian linguists can also be interpreted as an opposition, I want to explore whether there were no common inter7 ests, interacting attitudes, or even convergences of ideological position in the field of language cultivation. How much in this relationship will we find that which can be called Sovietism, identified as elements or rudiments of Soviet policy, with respect to the Lithuanian language? After finding those, one can better understand the state of scholarship in Soviet Lithuania, the current standardization policy, and our approach to the past/future of the Lithuanian language.

While searching for answers, I have relied mostly on archival material and an independent interpretation of publications on language standardization from the Soviet period.[1]

Origins of the Lithuanian Language Commission – "Language issues are, at the same time, ideological issues"

In Soviet Lithuania, political concern regarding the standard Lithuanian language emerged much earlier than 1961, when the Lithuanian Language Commission (LLC) was established. For example, in a resolution of the 1952 Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences (AS) regarding the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and Literature (ILLL), a decision to establish a Department of Contemporary Lithuanian Language was made, partially on the grounds that Stalin's input into language scholarship was being assimilated too slowly at the institute. The commission assembled for its first session on October 27, 1961; the Presidium of the USSR AS was the first to form it from the specified members. The Council of Ministers (CM) of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic "legalized" the commission after it began operating. The CM formulated formal goals similar to the way the Presidium did, but at the same time, it expanded the power of the LLC:

> Terms and recommendations regarding disputable issues of the Lithuanian language prepared by the commission are mandatory for all editorial offices, publishing houses, radio and television, and all of the organizations publishing periodical and nonperiodical publications.

Just after the opening of the LLC's first meeting, its "living environment" was quickly revealed. Chairperson Juozas Žiugžda pointed out that the Commission had to "solve language issues that vary in practice." Deputy Chairperson Genrikas Zimanas, who offered to expand the commission's functions ("to also analyze deficiencies in individual books") highlighted: "The Central Committee of the Communist Party assigned a very important job to the commission. Language issues are also ideological issues." And it was not empty rhetoric – ideologists indeed dominated the Commission. Although only a few of the fourteen commission members were not professionally related to the Lithuanian language, only three could be considered representatives of language scholarship at that time.

To better understand the meaning of the ideological instructions, it is necessary to take a look at the broader context. The standardization of the Lithuanian language was certainly neither a continual nor a systematic concern of "the party and government." It was the Soviet Russian language, the language of the union, that was of concern to Moscow. In different places, it was only necessary to make sure that it was not deviated from, with respect to form or content. The Lithuanian language, in principle, could only be important in the field of correct translation or adaptation. Other issues, including standardization, were to be the concern of local specialists – the Soviet scholars of the Lithuanian language. However, silence dominated for a long time in this area of scholarship: descriptive work, i.e., empiricism; grammatical forms, i.e., pure scholarship; and the history of the language, i.e., the editing of linguistic sources, were the most popular and the safest areas of activity for Lithuanian linguists. During the Lithuanian Communist Party's VI Congress in 1949, Antanas Sniečkus summarized,

> Neither the Institute of the Lithuanian Language nor respective departments analyze the Lithuanian revolutionary press language of the past or the *language of contemporary Soviet reality*.[2]

This is especially obvious when looking through the documents of the Primary Party Organization (PPO) of the ILLL. On February 2, 1958, Institute Deputy Director Stasys Kruopas demonstratively advocated an ideological battle in the arena of language practice, and by February 25, 1959, he had already expressed joy because standardization was being carried out. This could have been both empty rhetoric and methodical prevention (Mr. Kruopas had already been dismissed from the university), because he had been carefully observed. In the 1960 annual report, PPO Secretary Vanda Barauskienė highlighted,

> But we need to look at the matter sensibly and remember that there are still quite a few people with old-fashioned views at the institute; they work and they are quiet, but other principles, more likely narrow principles of Lithuanianism and rescuing it, rather than Soviet patriotism or issues of ideological work, bring them to work.

Dialectically, criticism has to turn into self-criticism – during a PPO meeting held on March 15, 1962, dedicated to issues of language cultivation and the Institute's participation in public life, the Director of the Institute, Kostas Korsakas, summarized: "We are the headquarters of philological scholarship in the republic. Our enemy is attacking us and our headquarters are silent."[3]

The LLC was entrusted to the competence of Soviet Lithuanian linguists, primarily to those working at the "headquarters," but if these headquarters were not able to deal with problems, then the government offered them "help." We can see a form of such "help" in the establishment of the LLC, whose political background, after the plenary meeting of 1959 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), was the struggle with nationalism, the cleaning out of "nationalist cadres" in institutions of higher education (1959–1961), and the goals of creating a unified "Soviet nation" as well as "the blending of the peoples" (1961 XII Congress of the CPSU). The LLC kept making incorrect decisions (e.g., regarding writing a father's name not according to the established Russian way), or it put off making them (e.g., regarding the spelling of foreign names, not as in the original alphabet, but following their pronunciation, as in the Russian tradition of transliteration), and for this reason, the Party authorized other institutions to solve these problems.

After the Party stopped showing concern, the activity of the LLC was stopped. This concern was revived in 1976. At that time, in the environment of the AS, an understanding had developed that only professional linguists could solve language problems, although the AS's suggestion to establish a professional commission did not convince the Party – true Communists made up at least half of the LLC, which was expanded to twenty members. The situation in which, once again, a higher organ was necessary to "promptly resolve" the "complex issues of Lithuanian literary language" was very similar to the one fifteen years before. After the ILLL published the standard *Lietuvių kalbos rašyba ir skyryba* (Spelling and punctuation of the Lithuanian language) in the summer of 1976, disapproval and complaints regarding new features introduced were expressed, and for this reason, the printing of the rest of the edition was stopped. The publication of *Lietuviškoji tarybinė enciklopedija* (The Lithuanian Soviet encyclopedia) was also in a situation of stalemate, mainly over the principles of spelling foreign names. The LLC managed to find a common decision regarding spelling issues, but the rewriting of full names once again became a hindrance. The decision taken, to allow the original writing of full names in some places, did not convince the leaders of the party; the work of the commission stopped and it was reorganized in 1984.

So, the establishment of the LLC, the halt of its activities, and, later, the resumption of them (in 1976, 1984 and 1987) were conditioned by the immediate interests of the Party. However, at least in aspiration, the movement in the direction of a reinforcement of power can be noted. For example, in the regulations of the LLC, when it was resumed in 1984, one can read:

> The Commission is an institution which considers and makes *final decisions* regarding various and disputable issues of the Lithuanian language, which are important to the society [...] The Commission *controls* how science, educational and administrative institutions, public organizations, mass media, and art associations of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) carry out mandatory resolutions.[4]

It would be futile to talk about safeguards here; it is just that the scholarly and ideological lines of language standardization were themselves asking to be "joined together," just as linguists and ideologists were joined after the LLC was established. Of course, such joining did not necessarily have to mean the supremacy of ideology; sometimes, compromises were reached.

Norms and codification: "regulation of a language should be perceived in the light of a language policy"[5]

The practice of language standardization was far from theoretical in both the Soviet Union and Soviet Lithuania. Without going into a discussion about the language normalization process, it is necessary to emphasize that in Soviet times in Lithuania there really was not a large gap between the practice of Jonas Jablonskis's corrections or the principles of Kalbos patarėjas (Language adviser) at the end of the thirties. Even the magazine *Kalbos kultūra* (Language cultivation) itself, if we put the ideological passages and inclusions – which were not uncommon – in brackets, could be considered a successor to the principles of the prewar Gimtoji kalba (Mother tongue).

The first Lithuanian text of a theoretical nature about language normalization[6] published in Soviet Lithuania was also based not so much on the theory of Soviet language cultivation[7] as on the teaching of a group of prewar Lithuanian linguists about language norms[8] and the thoughts of the Prague School linguists who inspired normalization. However, it should be noted that, starting in the mid-sixties, the same school in Prague had an exceptionally strong impact on Soviet language scholarship. Actually, this is quite surprising, because, if the assignation itself of language norms and codification, the identification of the codification principal palette, and the separation of functional language styles were ideologically neutral, the assertion that fundamental language norms originated from usage and the recognition of written and spoken literary language and principal variance of norms, that is, the principle of anti-purity and descriptiveness, would

not be acceptable in corpore for Soviet language scholarship. In fact, the concepts and rules of the game were adopted first, and their specifics would essentially be changed later, cf.,

> The question of whether the codification should be descriptive or prescriptive was never important to Soviet norm research. It was always clear that when fixing the norms in dictionaries they had to be consciously selected.[9]

In general, ignoring variants was part of totalitarian Soviet state language policy, when, in unifying sociocultural variations, attempts to cover up existing social stratification were made.[10] Furthermore, the freedom of the source of norms – usage – was in principle impossible in Soviet society. As Roman Redlikh formulated it back in the times of Stalin, "Soviet language is not free, and that is what is most important about it."[11]

How and in what way free and Soviet adaptations of the Prague School thesis differ can be vividly illustrated by a few Lithuanian examples, concentrating on the most important criterion raised by the Czechs – appropriateness. In the report mentioned earlier, Petras Jonikas stated:

> The most important criterion of a standard written language is the purpose to which this language is addressed. When talking about any linguistic expression, one should first evaluate how it fits the task for which it is intended. If this expression fulfilled its task (and fulfilled it well), this means it is good, if it did not do so, it is not good.

After fifteen years, (in the emigrant newspaper Aidai), Leonas Dambriūnas, in a slightly provoking way, turned this context-bound appropriateness into an instrument for giving "usage" priority over "rules":

> In this way, the basic criterion of standard language correctness is the development of standard language, the usage of its facts. Language scholarship itself has come to this conclusion: what is correct in language is what is used (*Richtig ist, was ueblich ist*). [...] When speaking in general, one can state that everything that is used (that is, everything that is used widely) is appropriate. And, for this reason, usage itself, which is the basis of correctness, is the most common and important criterion of norms. [12]

Linguists of Soviet Lithuania also acknowledged this criterion of appropriateness (simply for the reason that "it also appeared in Soviet scholarship"[13]). In a work on norms from the Soviet period, theoretically the most mature of this period, called *Bendrinės kalbos normos ir jų kodifikacija* (The norms of standard language and their codification), Aleksas Girdenis and Pupkis quite strictly declared that communicative appropriateness is "not only the most important, but also the only real codification principle of language norms."[14] This is a theoretical position, but in practice, completely different principles of codification might have existed. On the other hand, after attempts to make such a position more accurate and pure (according to the Soviet adaptation of the Prague School principles), it became clear that the principle of functional appropriateness has to imply the evaluation of linguistic expression, not from the point of view of a situation, but from the entire system of standard language;[15] here a communicative situation is replaced by a language system, and an individual speaker is replaced by all the users of a standard language:

> Clearly, here [in our society] we mean public (social) appropriateness, because only what is appropriate and functional for the whole speech community, and not just for a few of its members or a certain group in society, becomes firmly established, and has the right to become firmly established in a language.[16]

In the third edition of *Kalbos praktikos patarimai* (Advice on language practices), the functional criterion of appropriateness is already defined as "one that allows the codification of what is appropriate, that is, necessary, acceptable, suitable, handy, adequate, and having prospects for *the whole society*." And who knows what a society needs? Correct, a linguist does, because "it is always necessary to take into consideration the goal for whose achievement the action of codification is being performed."[17]

Instead of conclusions

Having just begun research on language policy in Soviet Lithuania, it would be premature to pursue conclusions or generalizations. However, a few reflections, borrowed or formulated, will be useful.

1. The application of the "national in form and socialist in content" formula for the language field is hardly proper: looking at the Lithuanian language in different cultural and scientific domains, one can see that the language itself gradually "reformed" from a normal and living language to a Soviet and wooden one. It was not Glavlit censorship, not the KGB, and not the Communist Party of Lithuania, but first of all fear, and the necessity to adjust (as well as the editors of texts published for the public) that created Lithuanian Newspeak, an example of which was used in the article's epigraph.

2. When commenting on Soviet Newspeak (in the Russian language), Redlikh emphasizes its triteness:

> the problem of the active captivity of a language is its uncontaminated cleanliness, and not violations of literary language norms. The problem is that living and sometimes the most necessary concepts are forcefully changed for dead and fictional concepts. A language whose freedom is taken away and which is purposefully raped not only

loses its expressiveness, but also loses its vital powers, and its spirit dies. A dead stencil, pattern, stamp or fake replaces the living truth and expanse of the language.

As Redlikh notes, such usage of stencils, depending on the communicative situation, made a strong impact even on people with an elaborated sense of language (again, see the epigraph for comparison).

3. For the majority of Lithuanian linguists, the preservation of the Lithuanian language was their primary concern. However, things that one is concerned about at the beginning of Lithuanian language studies transform into something else after becoming a scholar: more and more one starts caring about the Lithuanian language as a self-contained value, similar to the way a scientist in a laboratory begins to worry about the research object at his disposal. Prewar and Western linguists realized that, first of all, language and speech exist as an independent and uncontrollable reality. Norms are established in speech, and linguists describe, evaluate, and codify them. In the late Soviet period, Lithuanian and Russian linguists acted as if they had already experienced a turning point: there is no norm without codification and no speech without a language only as a social/formal system, defined and perceived by language scholarship. This assumption is a worldview that can be interpreted as both socialist and positivist.

4. Throughout all of the Soviet period, Moscow was the initial and final authority concerning all issues for the Lithuanian Soviet administration. Whatever happened with the Russian language had to happen with the Lithuanian language as well; this was the primary concern of the Party. It is important to note that Lithuanian linguists were not very eager to accept this point of view, and they did not avoid defending competency limits of language scholarship, even though they did not go into the opposition. However, at least in the LLC, administrative work came before scholarly work, and when scholarly and ideological arguments clashed, the latter usually outweighed the former. Over the last fifteen years of Soviet government, the issues of language standardization in Lithuania were mostly addressed using the principles of planned economy, collectivist world outlook, and bureaucratic administration.

5. It is ironic that Lithuanian linguists have won an autonomous political power in the form of the SCLL only in independent Lithuania, but an understanding of how to implement and enforce this power was brought from the Soviet authority and system. This understanding has not yet been fully thought through.

Translated by Chad Damon Stewart

Notes:
1 In Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (LCVA, Lithuanian Central State Archives, http://www.archyvai.lt/en/archives/centralarchives.html), the documents of the following institutions were studied: the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature (R-1012, 1), the Lithuanian Language Commission (R-1034, 5), the AS Sector of Public Sciences (R-1001, 4). In Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (LYA, Lithuanian Special Archives) the documents of ILLL party organizations (13023) were studied.
2 See: LYA, 1771, 51, 214, 68–89. Italics mine.
3 LYA, 1771, 51, 6, 9.
4 LCVA, R-1034, 5, 13, 1–2. Italics mine. It is interesting that the same rhetoric remains in the times of the Rebirth: “We need to create a language monitoring system that would cover all of society and all fields of language usage.” (Resolution Regarding Fostering of the Lithuanian Language); the government was asked to give the Commission more authorization “to apply sanctions for negligence and failure to comply with the requirements” (1989-11-19).
5 Liebich, *Zur Entwicklung*, 78–83.
6 Palionis, “Apie literatūrinės kalbos,” 5–22.
7 Sergey Ozhegov, the scientific editor of the first standardized Russian Language Dictionary, developed it in the magazine he ran *Вопросы культуры речи* (Issues of language cultivation) (1955– 1967).
8 Jonikas, “Mūsų problema,” 12. The resolution of the Association of Lithuanian Language, “Bendrinės kalbos normalizacijos kriterijai” (Normalization criteria of standard language), see *Gimtoji kalba*, No. 9, 1938, 143–144.
9 Liebich, *Zur Entwicklung*, 97.
10 Ibid., 64.
11 Редлих, *Сталинщина*, 102.
12 Dambriūnas, “Kalbos mokslas”, 152.
13 Pupkis, *Kalbos kultūros pagrindai*, 41.
14 Pupkis and Girdenis, “Bendrinės kalbos,” 65–67.
15 Pupkis, based on Russian theorist Kirill Gorbatchevitch: *Kalbos kultūros pagrindai*, 51.
16 Pupkis and Girdenis, “Kalbos norminimo,” 5. Italics mine.
17 Pupkis, *Kalbos kultūros studijos*, 172.

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