

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 49, No.1 - Spring 2003

Editor of this issue: Violeta Kelertas

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 2003 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



LITHUANIAN IN THE 21st CENTURY: PART III Linguistic Snippets and Tidbits

See first part in *Lituanus*, vol. 48, no. 3, (2002) pp. 52-80; second part, vol. 48, no. 4, (2002) pp. 53-71.

ANTANAS KLIMAS

Translated from the Lithuanian by Alfonsas Laucka

XVIII. SMILETS

Between 1948 and 1956 I studied and subsequently taught at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. At that time, two prominent Lithuanian professors—the writer Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius and the linguist Antanas Salys also worked there. Professor Salys once told us an interesting story at his seminar. On his parents' farm, in Žemaitija, there was a smart farmhand. One day while the family, working in the field, had lunch, mostly whole-wheat bread, butter, cheese and kvass; the clever farmhand took a clasp knife out of his pocket—the tip of its big blade was broken off. Showing the knife to all those around him, he said: 'Šis peilis be galo geras.' This Lithuanian phrase is ambiguous—it can be understood, firstly, that this knife without a tip (lit. without an end) is good, and secondly, that it is exceptionally (no end of) good.

* * *

In 1947 and 1948, I happened to live in England. About 140 of us, Lithuanian men, lived in a hostel in Tadcaster, Yorkshire, between the two beautiful cities of York and Leeds. We were working on the farms and patiently learning English. Some of us had made good progress, while others could hardly understand or say a word.

One day, Mr. M., a former land surveyor from Lithuania, having learned some words in English, hopped on a double-decker bus. He wanted to go to Leeds. A beautiful young conductress asked him: 'Single or return?' Our compatriot, being single but advanced in years, and knowing only one meaning of the word 'single', answered with great pleasure: 'I'm single, single, single.' Of course, everybody on the bus smiled...

* * *

I came to England in the spring of 1947. Hundreds of Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, and Ukrainians were temporarily accommodated in the former US base at a big airfield in the environs of Full Sutton, Yorkshire. All of us were waiting to be given jobs.

On Sunday, a Catholic priest from a nearby town came to say Mass. We decorated the hall, covered a table with a white tablecloth and made an altar for the service.

In my young days, I used to be an altar boy, and I still remembered the Latin Mass (at that time the divine service was conducted in Latin), and I offered my services. Everything was O.K., but after the Mass the priest said he wanted to address the believers, who had filled the hall to capacity. In addition to Lithuanians, there were also scores of Latvians and Ukrainians. The priest had to say a sentence in English, and I was to translate it into Lithuanian and German. There were no problems with the first sentence, I understood and translated it quite smoothly. But after that... I managed to understand only one or two words in each sentence... The only way out of the situation was to say a sermon of my own, imitating a translation.

At the end of my 'translation', I noticed two nicely dressed ladies in the front row, who could hardly suppress their laughter. It turned out that they had been born into Lithuanian families in England and had come to see us in the camp. I understood

that by behaving so I had invited certain failure and wished that the floor would open beneath my feet. Nevertheless, before that could happen, one of them told me that my sermon was more interesting than that of the poor priest.

* * *

While living in Tadcaster, I was approached by a young local Englishman and his fiancée, a Polish girl. They had gotten acquainted in Germany, where he had served in the British forces, while she stayed in the Polish camp. The Englishman said he had heard that I spoke many languages and maybe I could speak Polish. I had to disappoint them—Polish and Lithuanian were quite different languages. Although I knew some Polish, I could in no way translate religious rites from English into Polish and vice versa. The young people were dismayed—they had planned to go to Australia after their marriage.

Then I asked them if they knew any German. It turned out that their knowledge of German was quite decent. Their Methodist pastor agreed that the ceremony would be conducted in English—German—English. In an old church, I stood between the bridegroom and the bride and translated sentence by sentence from English into German and vice versa.

I do hope that God understood us, and possibly those two people are still living in the land of the kangaroos...

* * *

Since 1960, I have taken part in a number of international linguistic congresses in Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Rumania, Poland, etc. Occasionally, I met Dr. Valentin Kiparski, Professor of the University of Helsinki, at such venues. We usually spoke German. Once however, he suggested that he should speak Latvian and I Lithuanian. We understood each other perfectly, and afterwards we always communicated in that way—his command of Latvian was good and he understood Lithuanian, while I understood Latvian and, of course, could speak Lithuanian.

In 1978, I attended an international congress of linguists in Cracow, Poland. After the congress I spent several days in Warsaw, staying at the place of Professor Dr. D, who was a Karaite (Karaim), born and bred in Trakai, Lithuania. His Lithuanian was very good. Prof. D. took me around the city; we went sightseeing by bus and trolleycar, and we visited museums and other places of interest.

Sitting next to me, Prof. D. told me lots of funny stories about the Soviets and Communists, so hated and despised by the Poles, but nobody could understand us, since we spoke in Lithuanian.

XIX. WHAT NON-LITHUANIANS FIND HARD TO LEARN

At present there are scores of non-Lithuanians, living outside Lithuania, who have mastered Lithuanian. They are chiefly linguists, interested in Indo-European linguistics or in the studies of Lithuanian. Such speakers of Lithuanian can be found throughout the world: in the Americas, Europe, Africa (several of my students were from Africa), Australia, even in Japan. The command of Lithuanian of some of the nonnative learners is very good, others can only read it or understand the spoken language.

After March 11, 1990—the reestablishment of Lithuania's independence—there appeared one more group of speakers of Lithuanian. They were members of the US Peace Corps, who had worked in Lithuania for some time. I happened to meet one of them, a young girl, in the Central Post Office of Vilnius, and we talked for several minutes. She spoke with a thick accent, but could make herself understood quite freely.

There are also people who learn Lithuanian for other purposes. In Kaunas, I met a Norwegian, a representative of some Norwegian company; he had been residing in Lithuania for some five years and spoke quite good Lithuanian. In Vilnius, I met two Dutchmen, one of whom spoke Lithuanian, while the other was learning the language, since his fiancée, whom he had met at some university in Portugal [sic] was a Lithuanian.

I collected these facts in the course of several decades in dealing with my colleagues, teachers and students, and various other people. All in all, these are not statistical data, they are merely my personal observations.

A. Difficulties of the Sounds

Perhaps the most difficult Lithuanian sound for all learners is the soft *r* in such words as *rytas* 'morning', *ritasi* 'it rolls', *riba* 'limit', *rėtis* 'sieve', *beribis* 'boundless', etc. That is due to the fact that the soft (palatalized) *r* is rarely met with in other languages in comparison to the hard, more easily acquired *r* as in *ratas* 'wheel', *rožė*, 'rose', *jūra* 'sea', etc.

Some Lithuanian sounds are difficult to pronounce only for the speakers of certain languages. Thus, Russians have difficulties with the soft *š* and *ž*, since in Russian there are no similar sounds. Both the soft and the hard *l* are difficult for Germans—they often say *liabas/lebas* instead of *labas* 'hello.' The speakers of English have difficulties with the *c-*, in particular at the beginning of the word: *caras* 'tsar', *cigaras* 'cigar', *cypti* 'to peep'—in English there is no consonant *c* pronounced.

Nonnative speakers of Lithuanian find it hard to distinguish aurally between *é*, *ę*, and *ia*; even more so because the *e* can be both short—*melai* 'the lies', *tebesi* 'you still are'—and long (and stressed)—*kelia* 'they rise'. It is difficult to distinguish and pronounce correctly *kélé* 'they lifted/ kielé 'wagtail/ keli 'you lift', *ėrnė* 'they took', *ėrnę* 'having taken', *melas* 'a lie' in contrast to *meluoti* 'to lie.'

The diphthongs *ie*, *uo* are also difficult:

ie - *é* - *ę* - *ia*,
uo - *o* - *ó* - (*ū*)

Some non-Lithuanians do not find easy such words as *džiaugtis* 'to be glad', *pliaukšėti* 'to crack', and *žvirgždas* 'gravel,' as well as *choras* 'a chorus', *cholera* 'cholera', *kazachas* 'a Kazakh', *kazachė* 'a kazakh woman', *kazachu*. gen. pl. masc, *kazachiu* gen. pl. fern., *chimera* 'chimera', *chanas* 'khan', etc.

B. Accentuation

Practically all learners have great difficulties in mastering Lithuanian stress patterns. The problem is that very few words retain the stress on the same syllable, e.g., *vyras* 'a man,' *bitininkas* 'a beekeeper/ etc. As a rule, the place of the stress in the word varies; it is shifted from one syllable to another:

nāmas 'house' : *namaĩ* nom. pl.
pasiuntinỹs 'envoy' : *pāsiuntinio* gen. sg.
aš mataũ 'I see' : *jis māto* 'he sees.'

What a Lithuanian learns subconsciously as a young child, a non-Lithuanian has to learn and remember. Things get still more complicated when one is dealing with tonemes:

aũ : *áu* *aũšti* 'to dawn,' *áušti* 'to get colder'; *laũk* 'get out!,' *láuk* 'wait'
aĩ : *ái* *kaĩ* 'when,' *káimas* 'village'
áĩ : *ál* *baĩnas* 'saddle,' *bálnas* '(an ox or cow) with a white patch on the back'
iĩ : *ín* *miĩti* 'to remember,' *mínti* 'to break flax',
giĩti 'to defend'.

I have met linguists who cannot distinguish between these sounds, though theoretically they know which toneme is to be used in which place.

Still more difficult are the tonemes or their traces in unstressed syllables. The rule, which a Lithuanian does not need to learn, is this: when a word contains several semidiphthongs or diphthongs, all of them are pronounced as if they had the circumflex toneme, e.g., *maištáujañčiu*. 'mutinous', *vergáujañčiu* 'being enslaved' (both gen. pl.).

C. Case Inflections

No other modern Indo-European language has such rich declension systems as Lithuanian. A table of case endings of the five noun declensions suffices to demonstrate that.

Singular

| | I | II | III | IV | V |
|--------|-----|-----|------|------|--------|
| Nom. | -as | -a | -is | -us | -uo |
| Gen. | -o | -os | -ies | -aus | -ens |
| Dat. | -ui | -ai | -iai | -ui | -eniui |
| Acc. | -ą | -ą | -į | -ų | -enį |
| Instr. | -ų | -a | -imi | -umi | -eniu |
| Loc. | -e | -je | -yje | -uje | -enyje |
| Voc. | -e | -a | -ie | -au | -enie |

Plural

| | I | II | III | IV | V |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Nom. | -ai- | -os | -ys | -ūs | -enys |
| Gen. | -ų | -ų | -ių | -ų | -enų |
| Dat. | -ams | -oms | -ims | -ums | -enims |
| Acc. | -us | -as | -is | -us | -enis |
| Instr. | -ais | -omis | -imis | -ais | -enimis |
| Loc. | -uose | -ose | -yse | -uose | -enyse |
| Voc. | -ai | -os | -ys | -ūs | -enys |

Mention should also be made of three adjective declensions and a number of the declensions of pronouns, numerals and participles.

After becoming acquainted with Lithuanian grammar, an American doctoral student of mine once wondered whether Lithuanians actually know and use all those great numbers of various endings. Lithuanians actually know and use all those great numbers of various endings. As a matter of fact, they really do.

Three verb conjugations with several tenses and thirteen participles also make the morphological structure of Lithuanian complex and intricate.

D. Twelve Verbal Prefixes

In Lithuanian, there are twelve prefixes which theoretically could be added to any verb to modify or completely transform its primary meaning. Compare the verb *mesti* 'to throw' and its prefixed derivatives:

| | | | | |
|-----|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | <i>apmesti</i> | to throw over; to outline | <i>apsimesti</i> | to pretend, to feign |
| 2. | <i>atmesti</i> | to throw back; to reject | <i>atsimesti</i> | to revert, to backslide |
| 3. | <i>įmesti</i> | to throw in | <i>įsimesti</i> | to befall |
| 4. | <i>išmesti</i> | to throw away/off | <i>išsimesti</i> | to abort, to cast |
| 5. | <i>numesti</i> | to throw down | <i>nusimesti</i> | to take/throw off |
| 6. | <i>pamesti</i> | to lose | <i>pasimesti</i> | to get lost |
| 7. | <i>parmesti</i> | to throw, to fling (down) | <i>parsimesti</i> | to throw over |
| 8. | <i>permesti</i> | to throw over | <i>persimesti</i> | to bandy, swing, wrap |
| 9. | <i>pramesti</i> | to miss | <i>prasimesti</i> | to invert, to concoct |
| 10. | <i>primesti</i> | to throw up to; to enforce | <i>prisimesti</i> | to add for oneself |
| 11. | <i>sumesti</i> | to throw together | <i>susimesti</i> | to bunch/club together |
| 12. | <i>užmesti</i> | to throw over | <i>užsimesti</i> | to put on |

These are subtle cases. I remember a colleague of mine, a linguist with a good command of Lithuanian, complaining that, when writing a letter, he always had to stop and think which of the prefixed verbs of *siųsti* 'to send' should be used in a particular context: *atsiųsti*, *pasiųsti*, *nusiųsti*, or *išsiųsti*.

There are also other difficulties, but most of them are common to all languages. For instance, every language has thousands of idioms and all kinds of set phrases. But one can dispense with them—why say *turėti pinigų kaip šieno* 'to have money to burn' when one can say *turėti daug pinigų* 'to have much money'?

The word order of the Lithuanian sentence does not present any particular problems—it is rather free. If a non-Lithuanian said or wrote in Lithuanian:

Antanas mėgsta Vilnių 'Anthony likes Vilnius' or
Mėgsta Vilnių Antanas 'Likes Vilnius Anthony'* or
Vilnių mėgsta Antanas 'Vilnius likes Anthony',

all three sentences would express the same idea correctly and would be perfectly understandable, although from the point of view of English grammar the last two variants would be complete nonsense. For a Lithuanian, however, the difference between them is that of the emphasis placed on one or another word, (*Anthony likes Vilnius. Anthony likes Vilnius*) the first sentence being stylistically the most neutral.

XX. THE STORY OF A BOOK

There are books that have a unique history. One of them is the Introduction to Modern Lithuanian. Such a voluminous manual (457 pp.) of the Lithuanian language had not been published before. Its first edition appeared in 1966; four more editions followed in 1970, 1975, 1982 and 1990.

The authors of the book were three linguists: Leonardas Dambriūnas, Antanas Klimas and William R. Schmalstieg.

I remember very well the entire process of producing this grammar. About the year 1950, I was still a student at the University of Pennsylvania; an old American university, established by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 (it is often mistaken for Pennsylvania State University, which is in the geographic center of the state). At that time, there appeared on campus a very gifted student, William R. Schmalstieg, whom we simply called Bill.

Two more Lithuanians worked at the university library. At that time, Bill was studying Lithuanian intensively; and while drinking Coca-Cola, we often talked about the necessity of having a good textbook of Lithuanian in English.

In the autumn of 1957, I moved to the University of Rochester near the Great Lakes and Niagara Falls. There too, I often thought about a Lithuanian grammar in English. In a special folder, I kept the materials for the first lessons. In the meantime, my colleague Schmalstieg had worked at several universities. By that time, his command of Lithuanian was good and we corresponded occasionally. About 1957, it turned out that he, too, had started writing a grammar of Lithuanian. Being old friends and colleagues, we got along well and decided to write the grammar together.

It was to be a handbook of forty lessons; with every fifth lesson a review. We were planning to add reading materials, a full grammar text and Lithuanian-English and English-Lithuanian vocabularies in appendices.

Our work proceeded approximately like this: I usually prepared the reading material and a Lithuanian-English vocabulary for each lesson. Bill would write a grammar text and notes, and then I added the exercises and dialogues of ten sentences, which Bill translated into English.

Professor Schmalstieg wrote the whole grammar appendix, which contained everything from the morphology of nouns, adjectives and verbs to some information on accentuation and the twelve verbal prefixes. By the way, at that time, no other grammar, including those published in Lithuania, contained such exhaustive information on the declension of the simple and adverbial forms of participles.

It is understandable that we could work on the grammar only by fits and starts, since we were also teaching a number of courses and writing articles and reviews. When the work was coming to an end, we applied to Leonardas Dambriūnas, my former teacher at the University of Vytautas Magnus in Kaunas, for help. Schmalstieg was a Slavist by education, but was greatly interested in Old Prussian and Lithuanian. I qualified as a specialist of Indo-European and Germanic philology. Besides, in Kaunas, I had attended the lectures on Lithuanian philology delivered by Professor Pranas Skardžius, Petras Jonikas, Kazys Ulvydas and Dambrauskas; and, of course, I was born and bred in Lithuania. Dambriūnas was a well-known scholar of Lithuanian, and his aid was particularly valuable in accentuation. At that time, Schmalstieg was already teaching at Pennsylvania State University.*

*In 1995, Professor Dr. William R. Schmalstieg was awarded a well-deserved honorary doctorate by the University of Vilnius. He was the first American to receive an honorary degree from Vilnius.

In the course of the work on the textbook, thick manila envelopes were shuttled between Rochester, New York, State College, Pennsylvania and Baltimore, Maryland, where the late Leonardas Dambriūnas lived.

Thank God, the University of Rochester supported the work with a substantial grant, because the number of those thick envelopes was great. Again—luck was with us—Mrs. T., a gifted Czech woman, worked in the office of our University. She did not know Lithuanian, but she knew Latin, Czech, German and English. The most important thing was that Mrs. T. perceived the significance of such letters as s, c and z, since Lithuanian had borrowed these letters from Czech. Mrs. T. typed our voluminous manuscript twice on her electric typewriter, and the three of us kept correcting and correcting it.

My two co-authors would send their proofs to me, I inserted their corrections into my copy and gave it to Mrs. T. for retyping.

By about the end of 1965, we had the entire manuscript corrected and retyped and sent it off to our publishers—*Darbininkas*, owned by the Franciscan Fathers in Brooklyn, NY.

The publishing story, we might say, is also long. The actual publisher of the first edition was the late Monsignor A. Juozas Karalius, pastor-emeritus in St. George's Church, Shenandoah, an enthusiastic supporter of the Lithuanian press in the United States.

When I came to the USA from Great Britain in 1948, for the first two summers I stayed with my uncle, the late Jurgis (George) Klimas, in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, not far from several Lithuanian parishes. My uncle knew the Reverend Karalius very well, since he was previously my uncle's rector in Minersville, Pennsylvania, where my uncle had lived. I also happened to meet the Monsignor several times—he always touched upon the urgent need for a good grammar of Lithuanian.

On one occasion, Monsignor Karalius had sent the Franciscan Fathers one thousand dollars for the preparation of a Lithuanian grammar. When some twenty lessons were written, I sent the Monsignor a copy of the two of them. He liked the work and again wrote the Franciscan Fathers several checks for quite large sums.

At that time, the Franciscan Provincial was the Reverend Dr. Leonardas Andriekus, OFM, and the director of the Brooklyn printing house (still in operation!) was Father Pranciškus Gedgaudas, OFM. They both were great supporters of our grammar project.

Then the hard task of linotyping began—the stress marks had to be placed by hand on vowels, diphthongs and the consonants 1, m, n, f (computers had not yet been invented). The *Darbininkas* compositor Mr. V.A. and the designer Mr. P.B. nearly went crazy. The compositor once told me that he even began seeing some characters(\, /, ~) in his dreams.

And we—the three co-authors—read the proofs, nine times in all, since each of us read the whole book (457 pages) three times. Once again, thick envelopes traveled from Brooklyn to Rochester and from there to Pennsylvania and Maryland. And then again to me and back to Brooklyn.

Father Gedgaudas and his printers must be given their due—they were really patient. Before printing the book, they asked us how many copies could be sold in ten years' time. We did various counts and, finally, we indicated a print run of 2,000 (We were wrong: in the course of 34 years, there have been five editions; and the total number of copies was over 10,000). I read the last (tenth) proofs in the apartment of the Provincial Father in Brooklyn.

The book was published around Christmas in 1966 on good paper, with fine print quality, hard covers, and a nice dust jacket. We had not signed any contract with the publishers. We only asked them to produce a good book. The Provincial Father, then Dr. Andriekus, approved it.

A word about the illustrations. The maps and tables were drawn by a student of mine, Dr. William Babcock. Other illustrations were rendered by the artist Paulius Jurkus, and the photographs were by the renowned photographer Vytautas Augustinas; they were generously put at the disposal of the Franciscan printing house.

The Franciscan Fathers sent the first copy of the book to Monsignor Karalius. He was satisfied with the job.

In 1999, the sixth edition, renamed *Beginner's Lithuanian*, was published by Barnes & Noble.

Thus, our grammar of Lithuanian spread throughout the world—in the USA, Canada, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. On its pages, it carried the 1920 map of Lithuania, the Statue of Liberty, the Lithuanian tricolor, and the mention of February 16, proclaiming the independence of Lithuania.

The first reviews started to appear. Its publication was greeted by Prof. Skardžius in *Draugas* newspaper. German linguists were glad to have a comprehensive grammar of the Lithuanian language at long last. By the way, two young associate professors at the University of Hamburg had started its translation into German. Unfortunately, they were too late—another textbook of Lithuanian appeared in German.

The phonetics laboratory of the University of Rochester hurriedly produced oral exercise tapes. I myself wrote two keys—one for the exercises, the other for the translation of Lithuanian texts into English.

Orders began to arrive from the whole world: students of linguistics wanted to learn Lithuanian. The tapes and keys were sold by the laboratory at cost. The book itself, on the instructions of Monsignor Karalius, cost only \$7, subsequently \$10, \$15, and \$20. I saw the book in a big Chicago bookstore selling for \$48! Similarly, several book shops in Great Britain, Germany and France made a handsome profit on our book.

Later, the Franciscan Fathers produced audiocassettes recorded by the late actor Vitalis Žukauskas. Thus, hundreds of audio tapes (subsequently cassettes) and lesson keys spread throughout the world.

It was impossible to establish when and in how many copies our work reached Lithuania, the homeland of the language. I have heard that several copies managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain through Poland, and I know for sure that one was in the library of renowned linguist Professor Juozas Balcikonis.

Many authors, writing on the Lithuanian language after 1966, made use of our grammar. Even in publications, issued after 2000, I find sentences and phrases, taken from our book. Some writers make reference to it, others do not. It does not matter, after all.

Finally, I am going to mention some episodes related to the book. Perhaps the most diligent learner of Lithuanian was a student of mine, Mo Chien Chin (now Professor Dr. Mo). I believe that he is the first Chinese scholar to have learned Lithuanian. When a doctoral student in our department, he worked at night in a hotel, where he could read. A former pilot of the Taiwanese air force and a terrific Chinese cook, according to his friends, he was tenacious in pursuit of his goals. He studied so intensively that the pages of the well-bound textbook disintegrated, and I had to present him with a new copy.

Our grammar was studied most thoroughly perhaps by Professor Dr. Dominico Valenti, an Italian-American from Brooklyn, N.Y. Now he speaks perfect Lithuanian without the slightest accent. He used to send us his critical remarks and helpful suggestions, and we made respective revisions in the new editions.

Because the first edition of the textbook contained a reference to forthcoming lesson tapes and keys, since 1967 I have received a lot of letters about them and other matters related to the Lithuanian language. Here are some examples.

A fourth-generation Lithuanian wanted to buy a Lithuanian Bible for her grandmother. I advised her to apply to the *Draugas* bookstore, and she was grateful for that.

A lady of Lithuanian descent, living in Alaska, made a trip to Vilnius and was glad to have found the city (the Cathedral, Gediminas' Castle, etc.) just as it was described in our book.

Several scores of people applied to me for an explanation of the origin of their surnames. I still remember some of them. Mr. E. thought that his name was German. I told him that most probably it was Lithuanian, since it contained the root eid-, and the stem -un-, which are Lithuanian,

I believe that no other book on the Lithuanian language, Lithuania and the Lithuanians is so widespread as our *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian*. Now, renamed *Beginner's Lithuanian*, it is accessible all over the world on the Internet through Amazon.com and other book dealers.