

## A NOTE ON JUOZAS BALČIKONIS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE STANDARTIZATION OF LITHUANIAN

WILLIAM R. SCHMALSTIEG

The Pennsylvania State University

The distinguished Lithuanian linguist, Juozas Balčikonis, was born in 1885 in Eriškiai in a numerous peasant family of eight children, of which Juozas and his brother Jonas and sister Kotryna were the only ones to live for a long time. Juozas learned to read at home. (Juozas Balčikonis. *Rinktiniai raštai*. I. 1978, ed. by Aldonas Pupkis. Mokslas, Vilnius.) In 1895 he began to go to the Ramygala elementary school, but since the children didn't understand Russian the studies did not proceed very well. (Remember that at this time most of Lithuania was in the Russian empire.) Having completed elementary school (which was four years), he took the examinations to enter the Panevėžys high school (gymnasium [which was eight years]). In those days, in the so-called *Real-Gymnasium*, German and French were the foreign languages which were taught and the language of instruction was Russian. The pupils spoke Polish with each other, since they felt that Poles and Lithuanians were one people and that people could speak Lithuanian only until they learned to speak Polish. (Polish was considered the language of the nobility and Lithuanian was considered inferior.) Balčikonis himself, not wanting to lag behind his friends, asked his father for money to buy himself a Polish prayer book. Still, the feeling of Lithuanian nationalism began to penetrate to the students of the *Real-Gymnasium*, and soon Balčikonis learned that the Lithuanians were a separate nation with their own language and culture.

Possibly Balčikonis' first publications were in 1906 in the *Lithuanian farmer (Lietuvos ūkininkas)* under either the pseudonym *Svyrūnėlis* or the initial M. (There is a poetic expression *berželis svyrūnėlis*, which means 'birch tree swinging in the wind,' the second element of which is derived from *svyruoti* 'to sway back and forth. *Svyrūnėlis* is dialect for standard *svyruonėlis*.) Having felt rather early the lack of good reading material in Lithuanian, as early as 1906 he began to translate some of Tolstoy's works into Lithuanian.

Having been graduated from the Panevėžys *Real-Gymnasium* Balčikonis entered the University of St. Petersburg (now of course, Leningrad) after passing the Latin examination for which he prepared on his own since he had had no formal training in that language. At first he entered the law school rather than the philology department because he had not had any Greek and a knowledge of Greek was necessary in order to enter the latter department. After studying Greek for a year (from a grammar lent to him by K. Būga) in 1908 he became a philology student. He did well in his exams in all the linguistic disciplines (Greek, German, Indo-European comparative grammar), in literature, logic and psychology. He studied also Latin, Polish, Bulgarian, Old Church Slavic, and Russian dialectology. In the courses taught by Edward Volteris he got to know Lithuanian and Latvian literature, Lithuanian folklore and Old Prussian grammar. Volteris valued Balčikonis very highly and encouraged him to collect folklore, invited him to help prepare the third edition of *Lithuanian chrestomathy (Lietuviška chrestomatija)*, which unfortunately never appeared, however.

While still at the university Balčikonis wrote his first linguistic articles, obituaries of Kazimieras Jaunius which appeared in *Hope (Viltis)* and the *Lithuanian farmer (Lietuvos ūkininkas)* in 1908. In 1911 he received his university degree, but then, as now, it was difficult to find a teaching position. So returning to Vilnius in the fall of the same year he worked on the editorial staff of *Hope (Viltis)* and later (1912-1913) on the staff of *Source (Šaltinis)*. He held teaching positions in 1914 and 1915. During his years working for the periodicals he published a number of translations of Aesop and such contemporary authors as Guy de Maupassant and Oscar Wilde. Particularly to be mentioned is the translation of Hans Christian Andersen's *Nightingale (Lakštingalė)*. From 1915-1918 he taught Lithuanian and Latin in the M. Yčas Boys' School (Gymnasium) in Voronež. During these years he lived in the same building that Jonas Jablonskis lived in and met him on a daily basis. It is certainly here that Balčikonis grew into the excellent specialist that he was, right under the very eyes of Jablonskis.

Immediately after the war in 1918 Balčikonis returned to Panevėžys where, on September 1st, he was appointed director and teacher of Latin and Lithuanian in the *Sun society (Saulės draugija)* high school (gymnasium). During his time in Panevėžys he was unusually active, teaching the Lithuanian language, literature, a course in language teaching methods, directing practice teaching, translating belles-lettres with the pupils and even going so far as to teach a course in bee-keeping. In the outlines of the Lithuanian language course, which have been retained from Balčikonis' Panevėžys period, one finds that he followed largely Kuršaitis and Jablonskis. During this period he continued his translating activity, publishing, for example, in 1921 his translation of Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days (Kelionė aplink pasaulį per 80 dienas)*.

In 1924 on the recommendation of Jablonskis, Balčikonis was invited to teach at the University of Kaunas. Here he taught the general Lithuanian language course (and one year the history of the language). His pedagogical work and linguistic activity drew him somewhat away from translations. At one point he even dared to contradict several of Jablonskis' statements. Jablonskis never answered these criticisms, but the two scholars remained friends nevertheless. During this period (1924-1928) there raged one of the most serious controversies ever to occur in the history of the Lithuanian language. This concerned the language of the Lithuanian translations of Kraševski's *Vytolio Rauda (Vytolis' Lament)*. (Translations were made in 1924 by F. Kirša and in 1925 by J. Talmantas.) Jablonskis always made it a strict requirement that the language of published books should have no gross lexical or grammatical errors. When Jablonskis criticized the language of Kirša's Lithuanian translation of *Vytolis' Lament* and Krėvė's *Skirgaila* a great furor arose against what the litterateurs considered picayune criticisms and the frustration of Lithuanian literature by Jablonskis. (One of the words applied to the criticisms was *blusinėjimas* which literally translated means 'ridding of fleas, delousing,' derived from the word *blusa* 'flee.') When the leadership of the ministry of education changed and the decision was made not to pay any attention to Jablonskis' opinion, and to give the green light to the use of *Vytolis' Lament* in the schools, in an open letter to the press Balčikonis declared that he was leaving the university. Balčikonis was supported by the rector of the university, P. Avižonis. In the ensuing discussion it became evident that Balčikonis was right in that stylistic nuances must be clearly distinguished from mistakes in language and that one cannot write the language with a good style if one makes grammatical errors. In any case, Balčikonis did not leave the university, but merely transferred from the Humanities faculty to the Theology faculty where he taught the same general Lithuanian language course, and, in fact, many of his former students from the Humanities faculty continued to come to his lectures which were now under the auspices of the Theology faculty.

On the first of December, 1930, Balčikonis was appointed the editor of the Lithuanian dictionary. He organized and taught the editorial staff, he arranged the material taken over from Kazimieras Būga's file, he planned for the nature of the new dictionary and began to organize a drive for the collection of words. At first, it was announced that the dictionary would begin to appear in a year or two, but the amount of work turned out to be more than had been expected and an entire decade had passed until, finally, in 1941 the first volume of the Lithuanian Academy Dictionary appeared.

From 1929-1934, and occasionally after that, Balčikonis lectured on the Lithuanian language over the Kaunas radio station. In the 1930's he edited various works, e.g., the works of Motiejus Valančius (1931), the works of Jonas Jablonskis (Vol. 1, Societal articles [Visuomenės straipsniai] 1933; Vol. 2, Educational affairs [Švietimo reikalai], 1934; Vol. 3, Orthographical matters [Rašybos dalykai], 1934; Vols. 4 and 5, Language matters [Kalbos dalykai], 1935, 1936), etc.

In front of each volume Balčikonis gave a short foreword, a few notes, mostly of a textological character and supplementary information. But Balčikonis gives no evaluation of Jablonskis' corrections. According to Balčikonis, whoever reads Jablonskis' writing will increase his knowledge of his native language and will gain the notion of what is correct and what is not correct, what is part of the living language and what is not. In addition, the reader will learn the methodology so that he can judge for himself what is correct and what isn't.

In 1939 the Institute of Lithuanian Studies (Lituanistikos institutas) was founded, and the editorial staff of the Lithuanian Academy Dictionary became a part of this institute. In November of 1940 it was moved to Vilnius along with the editorial staff of the dictionary. Balčikonis took care of the publication of the first volume and finished editing the second volume. During the war Balčikonis retired to his native village and collected words for the dictionary.

Following the war the burden of the Lithuanian linguistic science fell on Balčikonis, because many of the important Lithuanian linguists, such as A. Salys, Pranas Skardžius, Petras Jonikas had emigrated to the United States. Balčikonis was appointed as director of the Lithuanian language section of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences and chairman of the Lithuanian language department of the University of Vilnius.

From the teachers at the university Balčikonis managed to recruit people to work on the Academy Dictionary. He planned to do a number of other things, e.g., to write something about Mažvydas' orthography, to edit a practical periodical about Lithuanian. But because of a lack of time he succeeded only in editing the Academy Dictionary, the second volume of which appeared in 1947.

Because of the amount of work connected with his position at the institute and the university, Balčikonis resigned as chairman of the Department of Lithuanian in 1950. When the Lithuanian language section and the Lithuanian literature section of the Academy of Sciences were united in 1952 he would not accept the post as director of the newly formed combined institute. Because of disagreements with the further principles of editing the Academy Dictionary, he left his

editorial post, also, and from 1952 until his retirement in 1959, Balčikonis devoted himself to pedagogical duties as a university professor.

From 1955 to 1959 Balčikonis wrote a series of articles on problems of normalization of Lithuanian. He wanted to rid the language of inappropriate words and syntactic constructions and also he brought to the fore certain incorrectly used place names. But some of his assertions met with swift criticism. A linguistic discussion broke forth which soon passed the bounds of the press. On the 5th of May in the University of Vilnius' Hall of Columns an extended discussion was convoked in which university linguists, and representatives of the Academy of Sciences, the Writers' Union, the Vilnius Teachers' College and publishers all took part. The participants in the discussion criticized Balčikonis' demand that all aspects of the standard language be measured by the laws of the folk language, the people's language (*liaudies kalba*), and his unwillingness to recognize models of word formation which had been developed in the written language.

The discussion had important effects in the further work of language culture. Most important of all was the fact that for the first time in the post-war period the difference between the written language and the folk language was clearly and unambiguously defined and the fact that there are necessary and correct language models which have the right to exist in the written language and yet which are not to be found in the folk language. According to the decision of the group which had been called together, even words which are not completely correctly formed have the right to exist if they have become rooted in the written language and the everyday spoken language.

Balčikonis devoted the last years of his life primarily to preparing Lithuanian translations and to re-editing earlier translations of such works as the popular Arabic story, *A Thousand and One Nights* (*Tūkstantis ir viena naktis*). On February 5th, 1969, Balčikonis died.

Balčikonis' contributions to Lithuanian lexicography are enormous. He created an entire school of Lithuanian lexicography and trained several generations of Lithuanian dictionary makers, was the founder, organizer and editor of the greatest Lithuanian linguistic achievement of the twentieth century, the Lithuanian Academy Dictionary. Balčikonis was the one who prodded Būga to apply himself only to the dictionary. Balčikonis took care of the financial aspect and practically made Būga sit down to work on the dictionary. After Būga's death, it was six years until Balčikonis was appointed as Būga's successor.

Būga's card file was taken over, but it soon became clear that it would be very difficult to write a good dictionary. There was a lack of words from well known literary sources and the dialect material was scanty. Balčikonis had the manuscript of Bretkūnas' Bible translation, the manuscript of Brodovski's two-part dictionary, the Königsberg Chronicle (*Clavis Germanico-Lithuana*) sent from Königsberg and gave them to his collaborators to copy out words. In addition, words were copied out from the Chylinski, Rėza and Baranauskas Bibles, A. Juška's dictionary and the works of S. Daukantas, M. Valančius, Žemaitė, V. Kudirka, Vaižgantas and many others. By 1940 the editorial staff had gone through about 2,000 various literary documents and had copied out about a half a million slips.

Balčikonis undertook drives for gathering lexical material and in the decade of the thirties he wrote 33 articles on the subject of the dictionary. He even turned for help to the general public urging them to take part in the collection of words. In his articles he explained the method which should be used and gave examples of words which had been collected. For a long time he asked that the parish in which a word had been found should be noted, but later it came to be felt that it would be more accurate to know the settlement and the person from whom the word emanated. Through the press Balčikonis appealed to various elements of society. He urged students, school children, agronomists, physicians, foresters and other specialists, but he hoped for the most from teachers. Balčikonis even had the Ministry of Education establish required norms for teachers. Each month Lithuanian teachers were to turn in five slips a piece and other teachers one slip. He called not only upon the self-respect, but upon the patriotism of people in order to get them to gather words. Although Balčikonis did not get the expected help, still a lot of words were collected. By 1941 his helpers had garnered from the spoken and written language 559,986 words, written down by 857 people and the editorial staff itself had collected about as many words. Thus, at this time Būga's file, which had 617,553 slips, was supplemented by about a million more and altogether there were about a million and a half slips. During the decade of the thirties, the card file almost doubled and now there are about three and a half million slips.

When he undertook the work, Balčikonis had no idea that the Academy Dictionary would grow into such a huge enterprise. At first four large volumes were promised, but by 1946 they were already talking about eight volumes and they thought that volume 4 would come out in 1950 (it actually appeared in 1957). In 1952 ten volumes were expected and in 1976, when volume 10 was published, 15 or 16 volumes were planned. As far as I know, the most recent volume is number 11, which appeared in 1978.

In 1952 a conference took place at which certain of the principles used in the formation of the dictionary were discussed. Various criticisms were made, e.g., concerning the dispersing of phraseological sequences throughout the dictionary, inconsistencies in noting verbs used with the accusative or other cases. It was thought also that the principle of nesting one verb with different prefixes should be given up.

A new set of instructions was drawn up in 1953, most of which can be found in the foreword to Volume 3 of the Dictionary (pp. III-V). Among the instructions are the new manner of giving a separate article for each prefixed verb, the notation of

whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, the inclusion of international words, the inclusion of certain phraseological sequences, etc. Balčikonis was unhappy with the new set of instructions and left the editorial staff of the Academy Dictionary, although he continued to collect items for use in the dictionary.

Balčikonis soon recognized the imperfections of Būga's dictionary. Therefore, he immediately rejected proper names, the history of words, dialectology, etymology and the explanation of words in foreign languages. A real problem was whether a borrowed word should be included or not. The principle applied was the following: a word should be known in the older writings and widely known in the dialects to be included. Rare regional and new barbarisms were not considered appropriate. Those that were indeed given from the old writings and not considered appropriate are preceded by the letter x.

In sum, then, Balčikonis was one of the most important figures in Lithuanian linguistics of the twentieth century.