

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 39, No.1 - Spring 1993

Editor of this issue: Antanas Klimas, University of Rochester

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1993 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



Dalija Tekorienė. *Lithuanian. Basic grammar and conversations.* Spindulys, Kaunas, 1990. 248 pages. Hard cover. Pocket size.

In the Preface, p. 3, we read:

'The method used in this book is based on a combination of simplified grammar and streamlined vocabulary. Our aim is twofold. The first is to give the prospective visitor to Lithuania a practical phrase book together with the explanation of basic grammar so that he may not only be able to read and say some Lithuanian phrases but also to understand how they are constructed. The subject index provided at the back of the book is designed to help the reader find the right phrase for each situation. Nevertheless, a thorough study of the book before the trip to Lithuania will enable him to do so more efficiently.

The second aim is to help anyone who is keen on learning Lithuanian to acquire the essential grammar and vocabulary in easy stages and to enable her to continue learning the language by reading more detailed works.

In addition, the book contains a sprinkling of useful information on the practical side of life in Lithuania, which will make a foreigner's stay in this country more enjoyable."

The book is divided into 30 steps which, possibly, sounds easier than, for example, the usual "Lesson". One may think that going step-by-step is easier than learning lesson after boring lesson.

Step one introduces the reader to the intricacies of Lithuanian spelling and pronunciation. Here, one would wish the author would have given more of the same phonetic approach to pronunciation as on page 10: the only case of such presentation in the entire book! If this book is used in a classroom situation, with a teacher, then it may be okay, but, for the person who does not have any previous knowledge of Lithuanian, it's almost impossible to figure out the correct, accepted pronunciation.

On page 5, for example, there is a statement: "C always represents the sound which is a combination of *t* plus *s*. It is similar to the *ts* in English *pants*." This is, of course, true, but the trouble here is that, in English, this sound (i.e., -*ts*) occurs only at the end of the words, or, in final position, never in the middle of the word, and never in the beginning. But most Americans as well as other speakers of English will hardly be able to pronounce it properly at the beginning of words, the position where it occurs mostly in Lithuanian such as in *cukrus* 'sugar' and *civilizacija* 'civilisation'. It would have been much more practical to give some kind of practical phonetic transcription here, something like *cukrus* /tsukruss/, or similar. Or even /'tsookrooss/.

On page 7 we find, obviously, a printer's mistake: where the author wants to indicate that the Lithuanian 'i' is always a short vowel, right underneath it, we find the letter *y* which is, of course, always long. It will be confusing for the beginner, especially the one trying to learn Lithuanian without a teacher.

There is a lack of any more detailed explanation with the Lithuanian 'ė'. It is simply stated, "It is always LONG." And, just above this statement, there is a very practical explanation about the pronunciation of a long 'e': "... very similar to the English [ae] in *map*, *cap*" (p. 7). This, of course, fits 100% for an 'ė' as well—always. As it is, a reader may think that a long 'e' and 'ė' are pronounced differently. Since a few users of this book may be somewhat familiar with the Polish 'ę' (like in Lech Wałęsa, the President of Poland), some remark, perhaps, should have been inserted here stating that in Lithuanian, the so-called "nasals" like *ą*, *ę*, *į*, *ų* have no nasality left whatsoever, but that they are always simply LONG.

And so, step by step, we are introduced to the basic grammar and the basic conversational patterns of Lithuanian. There are very few exercises, mainly only practicing some point of grammar. There are no translations either way, i.e., no translation exercises. However, all the conversations are given in Lithuanian and in English.

The basic Lithuanian grammar is introduced gradually throughout the 30 steps. On pages 221-229, on nine pages, we find this basic grammar again, in the "Grammatical Appendix". Here we find the basics: all five nominal declensions, all three

adjectival declensions, then the three verb conjugations, with the reflexive form given only in the present tense. There are only the three basic simple tenses: the present tense, the simple past tense, and the future. No past frequentative is mentioned, no compound tenses, although the past passive participle as well as the passive voice are given elsewhere.

Of the pronouns, all personal pronouns are fully declined, then there is a selection of the most important demonstrative, interrogative, relative and negative pronouns: *šis, šitas, toks, koks, kuris, niekas*.

Under "Numerals," several of the basic cardinal numerals **are** given in full declension: *du, trys, keturi, penki, and septyni: 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7*.

Is it enough? It is hard to say, but the author had to draw a line somewhere. Personally, I would have used, in addition to the past passive participle, a few more of the THIRTEEN Lithuanian participial categories, although some people may want to argue that, for the very basic conversation, one can muddle through in Lithuanian without using any of the thirteen participles. In other words, the participles may be considered too "rich," or even redundant. On the other hand, many Lithuanian dictionaries of all types will list many participles as separate parts of speech, mainly as adjectives, such as, for example the word *tinkamas* 'fitting, proper, appropriate' which is really a present passive participle of the verb *tikti* 'to fit, to be proper, appropriate.' As I have mentioned before, the author does discuss the Lithuanian past passive participle and the basic features of the passive voice in Step 28 (pp. 196-197). Although there is no mention of the participles in the "Grammatical Appendix" one can find them in the "Grammar Index", page 230.

The conversation patterns are modern, lively, and useful. However, as we have hinted at before, it will not be easy to figure out the pronunciation without a teacher, or, perhaps, without some cassette, with all these conversations recorded.

Basically, the book is done well and attractively. All the Lithuanian texts have stress marks, or accentuation marks used in standard Lithuanian grammars and textbooks, although NOT used in regular print. Whether the Lithuanian acute (*ˊ*) and/or the circumflex (*˜*) can really be called "tone", as it is being done on p. 6, I am not sure. In our *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian* (four editions: 1966,1972,1980,1990), we used the term "intonation". I am not sure which one is better.

Anyhow, Tekorienė's book adds a very well written short textbook of Lithuanian to the few existing textbooks—for the basic grammar and the basic patterns of conversation.

Antanas Klimas
The University of Rochester