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The Lithuanian Language and its Cultivation in Lithuania

Lithuania has a population of 3.4 million. The mother tongue of approximately 2.8 million people is Lithuanian (about 80 %) (2005). Lithuanian has constitutional status as the official language of the Republic of Lithuania, where it is used in all spheres of activity and in everyday interaction.

Lithuanian belongs to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family. The Baltic Branch consists of two groups: East Baltic, which consists of Latvian and Lithuanian, and West Baltic of which the only attested member is Old Prussian (extinct since about 1700). Lithuanian has retained more ancient forms of the Indo-European case forms and features of the old protolanguage than any other living Indo-European languages. The general tradition among linguists is to recognize two major dialects of Lithuanian. The first is Aukštaitish, also referred to as High Lithuanian. The second is Žemaitish, referred to variably as Samogitian or Low Lithuanian. The modern standard is based on High Lithuanian. Lithuanian uses a modified variety of Roman script. The current Lithuanian alphabet consists of 32 letters: the Latin characters with extra nasal letters (ą, ę, į, ū) and letters with diacritics (č, š, ž, è, ū).

The name 'Lithuanian' was first mentioned in 1009. The old Lithuanian state was multinational. Its inhabitants spoke many different languages. However, the Lithuanian language was used only in the western region, i.e. in ethnic territories. The first Lithuanian writings date back to the 13th century.

With the extension of Lithuania's territory to the East the chancellery language of Lithuania became based on the Slavic chancellery language. It was used by the government in relations with countries in the east. The written language of the 16th century became thoroughly Byelorussianized. Of the texts which have survived, the most numerous are those written in this language. Up to the 16th century only spoken Lithuanian was used for public matters. From the beginning of the 16th century scholarly treatises and fiction were written in Latin. However, Latin was never used as a spoken language, never interacted with the Lithuania language, thus had no direct effect on Lithuanian.

Some German influence resulted from the contacts with the German knights and German artisans and merchants living in ethnic Lithuania. The most widespread German loanwords associated with the government, the military and economics date back to the 13th century.

The Lithuanians came into contact with the Polish language later than with the Latin or Slavic chancellery languages, only from the end of 14th century when Lithuania's Grand Duke Jogaila became King of Poland and began uniting the two countries. The Catholic Church (introduction of Christianity in Lithuania - 1387) performed an important role in spreading the Polish language in Lithuania. After the Union of Lithuania and Poland in 1569, the Polish language became dominant in the *Zhczzpospolita* (the common Polish-Lithuanian state). From the end of the 16th century it was impossible to start a career in the civil service without knowing Polish. The Polish language was slowly achieving dominance and in 1697 Polish was legalized as the official written language of the state.

The threat of Reformation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania forced the ruling class to pay more attention to Lithuanian. The Jesuits invited to Lithuania established Vilnius University in 1579 and sought to influence and christianize the local populace speaking Lithuanian and other languages. The Jesuits had to establish and prepare printed Lithuanian works. Dialectal differentiation, however, complicated the formation of a unified written language. The first printed book in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuania Major) surviving to the present is *Books of Sermons* (*Postilla*) by M. Daukša. In the preface Daukša proclaimed the native language as a very important feature of national identity. The language in Daukša's writings is typical of that period of central Lithuanian Lowlands.

Lithuanian played a more important role in Lithuania Major than in Prussia. The first printed Lithuanian book appeared in 1547 in Königsberg, the Duchy of Prussia. It was the *Chatecismus* of M. Mažvydas. It is not long, it contains 79 small format pages (11x18). The words of non-Lithuanian origin make up about 20% of the lexicon used in the first Lithuanian book. Most loan-words are of Slavic origin, plus a few German words and some bookish Latin words. It is considered to be the first work of poetry, because one part of *Chatecismus* rhymes. The Bible was first translated into Lithuanian by J. Bretkūnas in 1579-1590. However, only Psalms were published in 1625. The 17th century witnessed a continuation of collective tradition of producing religious works in East Prussia (Lithuania Minor), as well as linguistic works exemplified by the first Lithuanian grammar, published by Daniel Klein in 1653, who tried to standardize the written language and its orthography.

The father of Lithuanian lexicography is considered to be Sirvydas, who prepared and published a trilingual Polish-Latin-Lithuanian dictionary (at

the beginning of the 17th century). In the middle of the 18th century the first complete translation of the Bible into Lithuanian was published, new editions of hymns were prepared, even several grammars and dictionaries. In East Prussia the first original Lithuanian *belles-lettres* work, *The Seasons* was written by K. Donelaitis (the 7th and 8th decades of the 18th century). Prussian Lithuanians published Lithuanian grammars and dictionaries, created *belles-lettres*, and investigated their language, folklore, and mythology, which was significant for the development of 18th century literary Lithuanian in Prussia. (In the 20th century the Lithuanian language in East Prussia disappeared, together with German, giving way to Russian in the newly emerged Kaliningrad Region).

In the 19th century an important event for the Lithuanian language was the appearance of August Schleicher's *Litauische Grammatyk* in 1856. It was a scientific grammar of Lithuanian written by an outstanding specialist in Indo-European studies at that time.

Following an unsuccessful uprising against Tsarist Russia in 1863, Lithuanians were forbidden to use the Latin alphabet in their written documents. The Czarist government took steps to stop Polonization in Lithuania, which lasted for over 400 years, and replaced it with Russification. The Tsarist Russian government required that all Lithuanian publications be printed in Cyrillic script. During this complicated period books written in the Latin alphabet began to be published in East Prussia and delivered to Lithuania. Encouraged by the bishop M. Valančius, forming of secret Lithuanian schools began. Due to this intensive Germanization in Lithuania Minor on the one hand and Polonization and Russification in Lithuania Major ruled by Czarist Russia on the other the threat of the eradication of the Lithuanian language and nation became real. The creation of a special scholarly society for the Lithuanian language was necessary. The first one was in Lithuania Minor - "Lithuanian Literary Society" (publications since 1880).

In Lithuania Major activists of the Lithuanian national revival, the new intellectual class, in the first newspapers *Ausra* 'Dawn' (1883-1886) and *Varpas* 'Bell' (1899-1906) began to publish ideas about the revival of the Lithuanian language and the creation of a new standard language. These newspapers determined to form current standard Lithuanian.

The ban on Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet was repealed in 1904. For a while the Lithuanian written language remained unchanged under Russian rule. When the press ban was abolished (1904), the Lithuanian language entered a new phase of development. Codification of the norms of standard Lithuanian was carried out by the linguist J. Jablonskis (1860-1930) as well as by other Lithuanian cultural activists and writers who helped enrich the language. J. Jablonskis began to base each standard

Lithuanian phenomenon on data from the living language spoken by common people, which he considered the most important source of and criteria for the norms of the language (Jablonskis published “Lithuanian Grammar” in 1919). K. Buga accomplished most in Lithuanian lexicology and lexicography. He was the initiator of the Lithuanian academy dictionary.

With the realization of Lithuania’s independence concept in 1918 Lithuanian became a state language for the first time and its extinction was no more under threat. From 1918 to 1940, when Lithuania was an independent republic, about 7 000 books were written in Lithuanian. Despite the fact that in 1920 the capital of Lithuania was severed from Lithuania and its environs were Polonized (Lithuania regained Vilnius only in 1939) in the years before World War II, a great deal was accomplished in the Republic of Lithuania: Lithuanian studies specialty was opened at Kaunas university, terminology was created for various fields; separate language styles were established; orthography, vocabulary, accentuation, place names and family names were standardized; dialect data, data for a thesaurus-type dictionary, etc., were gathered, loan words resulting from Polonization, Russification and Germanization were opposed. These activities later helped Lithuania hold out during the Soviet occupation and even in some instances to continue, for better or worse, work that had begun in earlier years, such as the publication of a large standard explanatory dictionary.

The years of the Soviet occupation (1940-1990) saw the propagation of bilingualism with the Lithuanian language being driven out of public life by the Russian tongue. Enforced emigration, deportations, concentration camps and genocide reduced the number of Lithuanian speakers by a third. Lithuania was ousted from diplomatic affairs, the army and from various other governmental spheres. The spoken language was getting worse. Barbarisms, foreign expressions and non-Lithuanian expressions declined the level of language. But written Lithuanian continued to be correct, standardized and improved. Some accomplishments in regularizing literary Lithuanian included normalizing the writing and pronunciation, bringing order into terminology of various fields, publishing the three volume scholarly Lithuanian Grammar and many dictionaries, nearing the completion of the Lithuanian academy dictionary. Approximately from the mid-1960’s linguistics became firmly established in Lithuania.

The status of Lithuanian as an official language was partially restored in 1989 by virtue of the Decree passed by the Presidium of the Supreme Council (The Restoration Seimas) “Concerning the Usage of the State Language”. The restoration of the Lithuanian independence in 1990 led to the development of a consistent policy for state language primarily focused on the integration of non-Lithuanian speakers into public life. The

Lithuanian language had to regain its position as the state language once more. Opposition to Lithuanian as the state language continued even after the restoration of independence, especially in Klaipėda and Vilnius.

The Lithuanian Constitution (1992) stipulates that “the Lithuanian language is the official language of the Republic of Lithuania.” This means that it must be used in all areas of public life. In 1995, the **Law on the State Language** of the Republic of Lithuania was adopted and enacted by the Seimas (Parliament). The law regulates the use of the state language in public life of Lithuania, protection and control of the state language, and the responsibility for violations of the Law on the State Language. The Law does not regulate unofficial communication of the population and the language of events of religious communities as well as persons, belonging to ethnic communities. Other laws of the Republic of Lithuania and legal acts adopted by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania shall guarantee the right of persons, belonging to ethnic communities, to foster their languages, cultures and customs.

The basis for the implementation of The State Language Policy is language planning which includes the following fields: the status of the language, (i.e. creating and development of the legal base of language usage), language as a system and the usage, language teaching. There is language standardization, regulation and inspection: The State Commission of the Lithuanian Language, State Language Inspectorate, municipal language services. The Society of the Lithuanian language, other public organizations, pedagogues, specialists of different fields and students are involved in the development of public language. The Institute of the Lithuanian Language, Lithuanian language departments at universities and other institutions take care of the correct usage and standardization of the language.

In 1993 there was established **The State Commission on the Lithuanian Language** (Žveju Street 14A, LT-09310 Vilnius, Lithuania; e-mail: vlkk@vlkk.lt; <http://www.vlkk.lt/en>) at the Seimas. The Commission is responsible for monitoring and correcting the use of Lithuanian. It is also in charge of the implementation of the Law on the State Language and handles all the issues concerning codification, standard use. It also executes the teaching programmes of the national language, administers and uses the Budget and other assets which are allocated for the implementation of the programme. The State Language Commission coordinates the work of the Language Inspection inspectors, the work of controllers in counties and municipalities, and authorizes the Language Inspection inspectors and language controllers according to an established order. On the other hand, efforts are still being made to preserve the languages of minorities, Russian,

Polish, Belarusian, etc. The Commission published “The List of the Biggest Language Mistakes” (1998).

The enforcement of the Law on the State Language lies within the responsibility of the **State Language Inspectorate**, established in 1991 (S. Skapo str. 4, LT-01122 Vilnius, Lithuania, vki@takas.lt; <http://vki.lrs.lt/english.html>).

The Society of the Lithuanian Language is an independent and voluntary non-governmental organization. The Society bands together people of different educational and professional background, who are involved in maintaining the prestige of the Lithuanian language, its functioning and development as well as the linguistic education of the society (publishing the journal “Gimtoji kalba”).

The main activities of **the Institute of the Lithuanian Language** (until 1989 the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and Literature) (ILL, P. Vileišio str. 5, LT-10308 Vilnius, Lithuania; e-mail: all@lki.lt; <http://www.lki.lt/indexeng.php>) at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences are as follow: 1) lexicology, lexicography, and research into the grammatical structure of the Lithuanian language; 2) research into the history and dialects of the Lithuanian language, and sociolinguistic research; 3) research into the operation of the Lithuanian language in society, and into terminology; 4) research into Lithuanian onomastics. The Institute originated from the editorial board of the Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language that was established by *Jonas Balčikonis* in 1930. The main achievement of ILL is the preparation of the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language* (in 20 volumes; published 1941-2002; half a million of headwords, 22,000 pages; giving the words and illustrating their usage by quotations culled from all kinds of writings and dialect records from the period between the years 1547 and 2001) and its computerized version; the compilation of an Academic Grammar of the Lithuanian Language (3 volumes in 1965, 1971, 1976), research into the evolution of Lithuanian syntax, the gathering of data on and research into Lithuanian dialects, the preparation of an atlas of European languages, the compilation of a database of old Lithuanian writings, the analysis of the development of the norms and terminology of the Lithuanian language. Regular publications of the Institute of the Lithuanian Language:

1) *Archivum Lithuanicum* is an annual publication. Five volumes have been published so far.

2) *Terminologija* is an annual publication. It aims to cover all spheres of Lithuanian terminology, and dwells not only on issues of the standardization of terms, but also on the development of the language of science. It discusses the peculiarities of scientific style, the sources of present-day

terminology, the demands caused by it, standardization mistakes and inaccuracies in usage, and some amendable terms.

3) The *Information Bulletin on Language Recommendations* provides an opportunity to get acquainted with a large part of the language recommendations of a particular period, to absorb linguists' most recent advice on language use, to get acquainted with debatable and newly assessed language phenomena.

4) *Kalbos kultūra* (Language Culture) is a regular publication on the theory and practice of the culture.

5) *Acta Linguistica Lithuanica (ALL)* is published biannually. It presents articles on various subjects of Lithuanian and Baltic linguistics as well as reviews and survey articles reflecting recent developments in Lithuanian scholarship.

Vilnius University publishes a journal "Baltistica". It is designed for the Balts' linguistics, their relations with other Indo-European countries. A journal "Kalbotyra" (Linguistics) is designed for Lithuanian, Slavonic, German and Romance languages. The Publishing House of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences publishes a scientific journal "Lituanistica" covering various aspects of the Lithuanian language.

There was published a Lithuanian grammar in English and Russian as well as a lot of bi- or multilingual dictionaries. Some of the dictionaries are prepared abroad. "Atlas of the Lithuanian Language (3 volumes: lexis, phonetics, morphology; the 4th volume is being compiled) is a very important publication. There are 376 supplementary maps, which reflect the variety and distribution of thousands of different phenomena of the Lithuanian language.

For the period 2003–2008 there were created the guidelines for the State Language Policy. The main objective of the Policy is to preserve the Lithuanian language and foster its development, to ensure the functioning of Lithuanian in all spheres of public life. In addition, the development of the state language should be directed in a planned and creative way in order to make the society understand the value of its own language. The development of the state language is fostered by 4 language schemes passed by the Government: the State Language Usage and Development Programme for the years 1996-2005, Lithuanian Language in the Information Society in 2000–2006, Substitution of Loanwords with Lithuanian Equivalents in the years 2001-2010, and Preservation of Dialects and Ethnic Toponyms in the years 2001–2010. The Lithuanian language specialists are trained at five universities of Lithuania.

In 2003 **The Law on the Bank of Terms** was adopted. It regulates the creating of the Bank of Lithuanian Terms, its setting up, usage and sponsorship.

As far as the influence of foreign languages is concerned the role of the English language is increasing in Lithuania's economical, social and cultural life. It is natural because access to the world's intellectual and material market is ensured in English. The growth of motivation is evident not only in studying English itself, but in taking up English language related jobs and intellectual products. Thus, the prestige of the Lithuanian language becomes weaker. The State language policy has to create standoff to new value orientation under the conditions of globalization. Otherwise, the intelligentsia may lose their own language and national identity. However, the main document on the State language policy – the Law on the State Language – does not outline precisely the spheres of the state language usage, its relation to other languages, language standardization, links between bodies dealing with inspection and regulation of language usage, etc. Legal documents connected with language policy and its implementation should be improved.

Another problem is that with the advent of the Internet the old Latin alphabet is seen as the most modern alphabet. It is true that in the last few years the developers of universal fonts, Internet browsers and e-mail programmes have made great efforts to show more respect to Lithuanian specific letters, to make them convenient to use and safe against discrimination in any way. Fortunately, in 2004 in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the recovery of the Lithuanian press in Latin characters, the first genuine Lithuanian computer font called *Palemonas* was developed.

The most famous linguistic school in Lithuania is Lithuanian Phonological School, which synthesizes in its own way the best traditions of the Prague School and Glosematics. The most prominent representative is Aleksas Girdenis.

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