

Cultural Identity, Language and School: the Case of Lithuania

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On the basis of the data of the two qualitative research studies ("Identity, Cultural Transmission and National Education" conducted in 2010 and "Dominant and Demotic School Culture: Analysis of Tension Fields" carried out in 2014–2015), the article makes attempts to discuss the attitude of school community members (school learners, teachers and parents) towards the Lithuanian Language. It is also analysed how this attitude depends not only on the public discourse and different ideologies of linguists but also on school cultures.

Key words: language, language education, identity, school community, school culture.

On the basis of the data of various studies which have analysed cultural identity, it can be stated that the language is considered as by far one of the most important elements of both personal and collective identity. This was particularly obvious when national movements reignited in Europe in the 19th century. At the political level, Lithuania was fighting for withdrawal from the composition of the Russian Empire. On the other hand, the dichotomy of Lithuanians–Polish became the source of inspiration for the formation of ethnic self-perception and identity. Such words as “obscurant”, “hind”, “non-catholic”, “pagan” were categories used to determine a Lithuanian by Polish people (Čekmonas, 1993, p. 111). Building up the ethnic identity and ideological conceptions about themselves, Lithuanians did not create any self-determining stereotypes but used the same Polish “boor” or “pagan”. However,

in the process of adaptation their meanings were inverted: the categories “boor” and “pagan” had a negative connotation and meant backwardness for Poles, whereas Lithuanians interpreted their meanings as the categories which determined the image of Lithuanians as that of an archaic nation with the glorious past, whose roots are deep in the Lithuanian countryside (Čepaitienė, 1995, p.11). However, in the course of time, the language has become the basis for identity in European (and not only) countries, which has been understood “as more crucial than the other symbols and expressions of nationality” (Fishman, 1996, p.163). In the opinion of the linguist Giedrius Tamaševičius (2011a), who quotes Czesław Miłosz, it can be even stated that the Lithuanian nation was born “from philology”.

Now, when the agrarian culture is declining fast in Lithuania and the old Baltic

faith is still approached as “as a relic of the glorious past” or a cultural phenomenon¹, the language has remained the main feature (in the opinion of the majority) or even the main condition of identity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the language and its teaching are the object of not only scientific discussions but also public debates.

However, besides the ascribing of the specific status to the language, when the language is referred to as “the oldest living language closest to the Proto-Indo-European language”, “sanctity”, the object of cult, “a weapon against influence from East as well as from West” etc.², there is an increasingly widespread conviction that the Lithuanian language is “a severely-ill patient” almost on the verge of death. Lithuanians professedly are not able to speak Lithuanian any more. How can this happen? The statement needs specification: Lithuanians are not able to speak correct *standard Lithuanian*. Linguist Arnoldas Piročkinas (2011) asks one more question: Who/what is to be blamed for this? And he immediately makes attempts to answer it: “May school, press, television, radio and finally the national mentality be responsible for it?” We will allow ourselves to ironically guess that the major fault lies in school, whereas school learners are considered to be the prime culprits. The discussions about the Lithuanian language become more intensive and heated every

¹ I use “still” as the old Baltic religion is gradually changing from a cultural phenomenon to a real religion with the community of 5118 members (2011) according to the data of the Statistics Department. Although it is only 0.17 % of the total population of Lithuania, it is the fastest growing religious community in the country.

² G. Tamaševičius (2011; 2011a) has carried out a comprehensive research on metaphors about the Lithuanian language.

summer when the results of the maturity examination of the Lithuanian language and literature are announced. This examination is mandatory, but the school graduates have the right to choose whether to take this maturity examination on school or state level. Although the focus of discussions in political circles or even courts has been more frequently laid on the examination of the Lithuanian language taken by learners from national minority schools, this examination, sat by students from Lithuanian schools, has also been intensively debated on. The same conclusion has been arrived at for several years already: “The illiterate generation is growing up”.

The question arises if similar statements are justified and refer to the real problems of the Lithuanian language and education or if they are only mere expressions of a moral panic which is particularly frequently observed in discussions about youth (Thompson, 1998; Cohen, 2002) and relations of different generations (Bennett, Maton, Kervin, 2008).

The answer partially lies in the studies conducted by sociolinguists (L. Vaicekauskienė, A. Čekuolytė, I. Vyšniauskienė and others), where analysing the ideals and ideologies of the Lithuanian language as well as identity shifts, a considerable attention is devoted to the language of youth and adolescents (<http://www.sociolingvistika.lt/>). Even though the sociolinguistic research contains a lot of engaging material which should be made known to educational community, i.e. both to language education policy makers and teachers practitioners, the linguistic rather than educational aspects are clearly addressed there.

On the basis of the two scientific studies carried out by the researchers of the

Department of Educology³, the article discusses the attitudes of school community members towards the Lithuanian language and its use, approaching the issue as one possible field of tension. Attempts are also made to analyse the problem from the perspective of school culture (cultures, to be more exact).

The first research *“Identity, Cultural Transmission and National Education”* was carried out in 2010. It aimed to analyse the attitude of members of communities of educational institutions in Lithuania towards the construction of cultural identity as well as towards cultural transmission from the perspective of time and space. One of the parts of the study focused on the analysis of language links with cultural identity and transmission of cultures. The sample of this qualitative survey was selected based on the choice of ten 11th formers from different (5 urban and 5 rural) schools in Lithuania and their educators who have a direct relationship with them in the process of education, i.e. ten study clusters were formed, each consisting of four informants (a student – his/her father or mother – his/her grandmother or grandfather – his/her class teacher/s). Using a semi-standardized interview method, 40 informants were interviewed in total.

In 2014, another research study *“Dominant and Demotic School Culture: Analysis of Tension Fields”* (2014–2015)⁴ was launched. It may be partially referred to as a continuation of the research of 2010. The research was conducted in six secondary schools (three from different Lithu-

anian towns and three from rural areas). This research has been conducted following the post-structural methodology and characterised by ethnographic sensibility. Its focus embraced (1) narrative (methods: individual interview, storytelling, takings); visuality (methods: observation and fixation of school space, symbols, artefacts, daily school life and celebrations, etc.), and discourse (methods: school documents, information on the official school website analysis). Analysing the linguistic aspects, the researchers were interested not only in the communication of school students, teachers and administration, but also in their understanding of each other.

Entry prohibited: struggle for language is going on

Discussing the attitudes towards the youth language in Lithuania (2012), L. Vaicekauskienė employs the metaphor of the door. According to her, having opened one door, we will hear that young people cannot speak in a nice way, they do not bother to pronounce accurately and only swear and use slang. It will also be announced that young people tend to break writing rules (naturally, while writing SMS). Categorical opinions that young people mangle the Lithuanian language may also be heard. We are likely to have opened a number of such doors during our research. A lot of representatives of the elder generation who took part in our research stated that young people are neither able nor willing to speak Lithuanian (i.e. the Standard Lithuanian – I.S).

In fact, children are not able to speak. Only “yes” and “no” and that is all (Teacher of history, 2010);

³ The author was a member of these research groups.

⁴ This research was funded by a grant (No. MIP-074/2014) from the Research Council of Lithuania.

The language has turned into a certain slang. The one, which has reached us from that defective – telephone – keyboard: non-Lithuanian abbreviations and ... all these sentence structures have become so non-Lithuanian, so clumsy and sometimes impossible to understand because of this strong willingness to identify with modern technologies (Teacher of mathematics, 2010).

Hence, it can be concluded that information communication technologies are seen as one of the reasons for debasing the language. A number of informants expressed a very categorical attitude towards the influence of modern technologies. According to one of them, the unstoppable intrusion of ICT into people's daily life is marked by the demolishing influence not only on the language but also on culture or even civilisation: *"firstly, [ICTs] vitiate the language. We are back to primitive society as we send signs instead of writing words"* (Mother, 2010).

Another threat identified by the informants is related to the prevalence of the English language⁵:

And now, the English language has become...I don't know... English, English, English... as if there were no other languages. My attitude towards other languages is definitely very positive (what is learnt is not carried out on one's hump). But the Lithuanian language should be prioritised and not only... A foreigner comes and everybody sees him or her as a holy cow almost... Yes, I am categorical... (Teacher of history, 2010);

I have noticed that school students speak English better than Lithuanian. And what their language is like now.....It is strange...and sad...<...>it is not good that

such influences emerge and barbarize their language (school learners – I. S.). Sometimes it is complicated to communicate with them because English now is the language of friends (Teacher of French, a native speaker of French, 2014).

The teachers of the Lithuanian language expressed huge concern regarding such situation. According to one of them, school learners need regular reminding that they allocate too much time to English and, thus, neglect the Lithuanian language:

And school learners think that they are Lithuanians and already naturally know the Lithuanian language. Sometimes it is necessary to emphasise this. We will forget how to write and to speak because all these words which penetrate into our language from English or other words of unclear origin pollute the Lithuanian language (Teacher of Lithuanian language and literature, 2010).

In the opinion of these teachers, where else if not at school it is possible to fight against barbarisation of the language and the position of the school (administration and teachers, to be more exact – I. S.) *"should be rather strict"* (Teacher of French, 2014). The above-mentioned informant would hardly agree with the colleagues who pointed out that care must be taken not to overdramatize the situation:

I don't think it's a tragedy. If, generally speaking, you nurture your Lithuanian language, a few words which are introduced into it (I understand you have in mind English) <...> do not have any influence. I think the situation should not be exaggerated. The influence of Russian was huge not even to compare with that of English, when everything was double. (The Lithuanian language – I.S.) is coping with, has resisted and will face up to this influence (Teacher of fine arts, 2010).

⁵ The policy on English language teaching in Lithuania has been broadly discussed by Tatjana Bulajeva and Gabrielle Hogan-Brun (2008, 2009, 2014).

The proclaimers of “danger” and hardliners would definitely receive some support from the linguists. According to the latter, the Lithuanian language is exposed to a much more serious danger compared to the times of the Soviet Union when foreign words came from Russian. Pranas Kniūkšta (2007, p. 30) pointed out that “no one was allowed to openly denounce them; they were to be corrected secretly and quietly. The substitution of Russian loan words by Lithuanian equivalents was a form of national defence. Presently, foreign words come into Lithuanian from the West, mainly from English. They spread with hardly any opposition, since they are not concerned with compulsion or violence“. This linguist regards not only loan words but also the slang as dangerously flooding the Lithuanian language and threatening to turn it into “a mixture of languages“ (cited in: Subačius, 2013, p. 6). According to Kniūkšta, “in the face of danger” it is necessary to take strict administrative measures rather than to involve in scientific debates. Moreover, he argues that there is even no point in discussing the situation of the Lithuanian language with the linguists from the young generation who “approach this situation with certain apathy” (Kniūkšta, 2007, p. 30; Kniūkšta, 2011).

Sociolinguist Giedrius Tamaševičius is likely to be ascribed to “the indifferent observers“ (or even to “the openly subversive”) as he points out that nowadays the discussions about the language occur on the same note and are grounded on the same arguments as in the Soviet times, i.e. on postulates of the unity of the national language, allegiance to the nation, standard language as the unachievable goal but a desirable ideal, threat of foreign language

es to specifics of the Lithuanian language and the obligation to obey authority of linguists (2011, p. 314). The same list of linguists “dissidents” should also include Giedrius Subačius (2013) who with open irony approached not only “administrative measures” (in particular the List of the Great Mistakes (1997)) inspired by the Commission of the Lithuanian Language but also the belief by a number of linguists that they are the only power capable of *controlling* the development of the language, employing *disciplinary mechanisms* (described by M. Foucault) for control, which practically prohibit actually everything what is not regulated. In fact, *disciplinary mechanism* is particularly useful at school (Foucault, 1998). However, according to the opinion of the teachers in the research, it has become less and less efficient. According to one of them, “*you cannot prohibit them* (school students – I.S.) *much. You know, the more you prohibit, the more likely they are to do this*” (Social pedagogue, 2014). As it can be seen from the research of 2010, the response to prohibitions and regulations is not necessarily a direct riot of school students. Rather on the contrary. The school students turn out to be living several separate lives. In one of them they tend to adapt to the requirements, whereas in the parallel one they ignore these requirements, manipulate them and play with them. Attempts to strengthen and standardise everything are likely to contribute to the emergence of such situation: “The longest lists of competences and abilities, which aim to shackle a teacher and a learner to make them honour obligations but prevent them from thinking, backfire on their devisers. The generation is growing up, and its members are able to change this confusion into a lifestyle which is convenient to them and which

cannot be controlled by anybody because the number of switching roles may be unlimited” (Duoblienė, 2012, p.15). In fact, the members of this generation are more frequently found having opened the second door.

The door is open: let’s play

The young people, who tend to coin new words and play with language, are most frequently found behind the second doors (Vaicekauskienė, 2012). One school student who took part in our research (2014–2015) presented a particularly comprehensive explanation about such “play” with language:

At least personally I like to manipulate the use of language. I am able to communicate with elderly and younger people as well as with my classmates. <...> I know the slang and I know how to speak nicely to please a person who does not understand the slang and who finds it disgusting.... not disgusting perhaps but to the person who does not appreciate it. Thus, I would say, the slang prevails in our school. Among young people, a lot have come from English and Russian. Swear words have come from Russian, I would say, and I apologize at once (School student, 12th former, 2014).

According to the informant, such “play”, just like any other games, has specific rules, and it can be “played” only by smart, “experienced” players but not by “primary school children, 5th or 6th formers”:

In my opinion, their (junior school learners’ – I.S) understanding of language is slightly distorted. They do not know the meaning of words or they learnt them from the internet. Their English language is not so well developed. They are not only inca-

pable to use this word correctly but also fail to understand its meaning. Let’s take into account swear words. They do not even understand their meaning. As well as the meanings of slightly more sophisticated words – they do not know their meanings (School student, 12th former, 2014).

However, it cannot be stated that younger school learners cannot play with language. One 8th former, who was accidentally been interviewed in the same school, pointed out that it was very helpful to have “the self-created language”, when *the inverted language (counterchanging syllables or adding new ones)* is used:

For example, you stand in a queue in a Maxima (supermarket – I.S.) and do not want others to understand you, I can easily talk to my class mate or neighbour in such a language which is not understandable to others but not to us.<...> There are two words and you make the switch of their first letters. For example, “you will be fined” “is changed into “ you fill be wined” (School student, 8th former, 2014).

Such specific language is very useful at school “because everybody has something to say but the teachers are around. When you have your own language, you can speak more freely and you are not afraid that a teacher may hear you, who will blab everything what she or he will hear to another teacher; and nonsense will occur”. However, according to the informants, school learners speak with a lot of figurative meanings, nicknames, etc. or they speak only during breaks. “During a lesson it is sometimes impossible to talk because the teacher is present, and she or he may understand something” (School student, 12th former, 2014).

It should be pointed out that apprehensions of the student that the teacher may

understand are quite reasoned and not only that encoding is most frequently rather primitive but due to the fact that teachers when being adolescents could have used the similar language. Such language is far from invention of the young generation. The examples of the inverted and “encoded” language may be found in the collections of folklore as well as in the studies by ethnologists, which describe the realities of the 19th c. – the beginning of the 20th c.

Actually, the research did not identify the cases that teachers used the slang of their “young days” while communicating with school learners. However, a big number of them pointed out that they are interested in contemporary language of adolescents and youth. Some of them are most probably interested in it only to be able to ask school students *“to translate it into the Lithuanian language”* (Social pedagogue). They would ask to translate not because they do not know what it means but to be able to correct and teach students. However, only partially we may agree with statements of sociolinguists that the tendency to emphasise the practice of correcting the language prevails in schools as well as to belittle varieties on non-standard language and youth language in particular (http://www.sociolingvistika.lt/failai/Rekomendacijos_politikos_formuotojams.pdf). The same number of teachers stated that making attempts to establish as close relation with school learners as possible, to create a more favourable microclimate in a classroom and to show that they are not “covered in lichen”, sometimes just willing to make a joke, they utter one or another phrase or word used by youth. According to one principal of school, *“you attract one (learner – S.) when he sees that you are not covered in lichen and know*

what it means” (2014), and not only know but also speak in a way your learner or his friends do. This was confirmed by the majority of school learners:

They (teachers – I. S.) are living among us and they have to know what something means. They cannot be some kind of squares in that sense.... <...> I do not think they feel old and ignorant. <...> They really know all our ...how should I put it ...strange words” (School student, 12th former, 2014).

Actually, it is even pleasant when a teacher tries to use our jargonism as a joke. <...> Teachers also emphasise “as you say” ... (School student, 12th former, 2014).

However, it should be pointed out that slang, loanwords and teenagers’ jokes used by teachers should be as if spice added but not the main dish. This was emphasised not only by the teachers but also by the school learners. One of them even tried to model the situation what would happen if teachers used slang and loanwords all the time:

Then our literacy would be “level” one (the school learner used an English word in the Lithuanian sentence – I.S.). The situation would be really bad. If teachers started speaking like that, it would stay in our minds like that. I think we would also write in the same way. It would be zero points (School student, 8th former, 2014).

Several school learners stated that even infrequent teenager jokes made by teachers are lame efforts to pretend that they are younger and more modern. *“Teachers have to be teachers and school students have to remain them as well. There should be certain limits”* – this was pointed out by one 12th former (2014) who particularly emphasised that these limits should not be erased. Does this mean that a school

learner has been growing up as a categorical follower of the prevailing ideology? (Duoblienė, 2012, p. 15). Perhaps. But it can be also concluded that a school learner may not want their teachers “to intrude into the territory strange to them”.

Following Marc Prensky (2001, 2001a), digital space is the so-called unknown territory for adults. We are not going to broadly analyse if the elder generation representatives are ascribed to *the Digital Immigrants* and the younger generation to *the Digital Natives*. During the research, we aimed to identify if communication between learners and teachers in social networks, via e-mail, text messages, etc. may be the space where tensions are fewer compared to the ones in the real school space. The obtained data have revealed that teachers and students rather rarely communicate in social networks, e.g., in Facebook which is the most popular social network in Lithuania. Official profiles of schools in Facebook make up rare exceptions. According to the teachers, the functions provided by the electronic grade book are sufficient for most common communication.

In cases of emergencies, school learners may call their teachers or send them text messages. Learners tend to write more frequently: it is cheaper and students feel braver to write. According to one of the teachers, students write in a number of different ways: “*There are children who write particularly correctly: with commas and full-stops*”, and there are also the ones who “*lisp*”, use abbreviations and the latter “*makes me horribly nervous*” (Teacher of geography, 2014). It should be also mentioned that other teachers are hardly likely to support the opinion of David Crystal

(2008) who does not refer to writing text messages in a jargonised style as to a catastrophe. On the contrary, he sees certain jocosity in it. Crystal thinks that children faster acquire skills to search for the most appropriate form to record their thoughts, and this contributes to better literacy and encourages creativity.

However, a big number of sociolinguists in Lithuania would support statements by Crystal (Vaicekauskienė, 2012), as well as some researchers on children and youth folklore (Krikščiūnas, 2004; Skabeikytė-Kazlauskienė, 2006; 2007, Racėnaitė, 2008) who agree that folklore, which spreads through modern communication technologies, does not pose threat to folk creation and its preservation. Rather on the contrary, it promotes the existence of what has been pushed out and marginalised by modernity (for more, see in Stonkuvienė, 2013).

During the research, it was revealed that if earlier young people found abbreviations, added letters, English alphabet and disregard of Lithuanian alphabet trendy, now writing emphatically correctly is in fashion:

We have recently started writing SMS among ourselves using the Lithuanian alphabet, actually this school year. Accidentally my phone corrected my SMS and I saw that I received a correctly written SMS as well. Then I saw that somebody else responded to me in the Lithuanian alphabet. I noticed that è, š, q, į, ū are also used in Facebook as well. All the letters are present, commas, exclamation marks and hyphens (School student, 8th former, 2014).

I have a lot of friends who write in the Lithuanian alphabet, for example, SMS. I myself also write my messages on the Internet and in SMS using the Lithuanian alpha-

bet. I started about two years ago. It was some a kind of fashion to write this way, and I caught it on (School student, 11th former, 2010)

Sometimes positive examples of peers are much more effective than a linguist's shaking fists or "sobbing" of teachers. It is obvious teachers as well as other adults should notice those examples instead of telling horrifying stories about youth who are ABSOLUTELY incapable of writing correctly.

School culture, language, and nationality

Attempts were made to select typical schools of general education or gymnasiums in Lithuania for both surveys taking into account only the factor of location⁶. During the first research (2010), no considerable differences among schools were observed. Analysing separate cases during the second research (2014–2015), the uniqueness of each school and a variety of school cultures were highlighted. The specifics of two gymnasiums was particularly clear: a Lithuanian gymnasium in a small town of the elderly where Lithuanians make up the minority, and a city gymnasium where German language is acknowledged as a mother tongue (the majority of study subjects are taught in Lithuanian). The history of both schools is comparatively recent and started in 1992.

While presenting itself, the city gymnasium states that it is "*a modern educational institution which provides quality education considering the European policy on languages, developing multicultural environment*". The gymnasium in a small

town emphasises that the school is "*a continuously learning, democratic gymnasium which is attractive by its curriculum and work methods, strengthening the nationality and citizenship in the multicultural environment*"⁷. Although both schools emphasise multiculturalism, it serves only as a medium for nurturance of nationality and public spirit in the gymnasium in a small town.

This gymnasium is attended not only by children from Lithuanian but also from mixed families as well as by children from Russian families. There are fewer children from the families where both parents are Polish⁸, because there is another gymnasium in the small town where Polish is the language of instruction⁹. The administration of the school has pointed out that they cannot present the ethnic composition of the school in the research because the nationality is not the most important aspect there. The school focuses on the citizenship and patriotism.

⁷ From the official internet websites where gymnasiums have to present their mission and vision.

⁸ Informal talks carried out during the research revealed that Polish families who decide to send their children to Lithuanian schools face pressure from the surrounding. And this is not characteristic only of this small town. The surveys show that this problem exists in the whole region of Vilnius where "Lithuanians themselves are the national majority". Sometimes not only the pressure from the community but also from the local government is encountered: Polish families which send their children to Lithuanian schools are not only labelled but are also exposed to other sanctions, "restrictions of various services received from local governments or elderlies, unwillingness to deal with their requests, etc." (Kazėnas and others, 2014).

⁹ This gymnasium has emphasised that it "*provides high-quality secondary education in Polish, organises children's extracurricular activities and ensures children's security. It is a cultural, civic and educational centre in the small town*". The belonging to the local community is emphasised as well as links with Poland, whereas the connections with the Republic of Lithuania are not indicated even on the first page.

⁶ The urban and rural schools were chosen in different regions.

The importance of the latter was reflected by a number of indicators. The Organisation of Young Riflemen, which belongs to the Union of Lithuanian Riflemen¹⁰, is very active and popular among students of this school. Different national symbols are abundant not only inside the school but also outside it. There are at least three monumental stones related to the history of Lithuania and dissemination of the Lithuanian spirit¹¹ erected in the territory of the school. The state festivals are really celebrated in this school, and the school students, when asked to tell about the school festivals and events, first of all point out the official state festivals (e.g., February 16 – the Day of Restoration of the State of Lithuania (1918); March 11 – Day of Restoration of Independence of Lithuania (from the Soviet Union, 1990)) and highly evaluated them:

It is usually very nice. We sing all patriotic songs or go to some monuments which were erected for a duke or somebody else... Well, school learners like this. And in my previous school there were no such things. Our attitude towards such events is very... very good. It is really like this. (School student, 11th former, 2014).

Whereas in other schools, which took part in the research, these festivals were frequently mentioned as boring events organised by teachers and frequently confused one with others (e.g., February 16

confused with January 13 – Day of Lithuania’s Freedom Fighters) or are even forgotten.

The students of the gymnasium in a small town demonstrated a particularly strict attitude towards the Standard Lithuanian¹². If an example of school learners affected by unquestioned official ideological principles is needed, the learners of this gymnasium serve as a particularly good one, including the teachers of the same school.

The administration and teachers of this school have mentioned that they control their students to ensure that the latter speak correct Lithuanian or at least Lithuanian during lessons or even during the breaks. However, some of them acknowledged that this control is not always efficient:

In fact, during breaks you can really hear that school learners speak not only Polish but also Russian. <...>I do not hear this very frequently. <...> Perhaps, they avoid doing that in the presence of adults or teachers, although they speak this language with each other. Sometimes you only remind them of the fact that Lithuanian is the national language. Let’s speak Lithuanian in our school. This is a Lithuanian school! (Deputy Principal, 2014).

This informant agreed that school students “*feel the need to communicate in the*

¹⁰ The Union of Lithuanian Riflemen is a public paramilitary organisation which functions under the law. The main goal of the organisation is enhancement of national security. A considerable attention is allocated to the development of nationality and patriotism. The Young Riflemen unite children of 12 years old and older. (<http://sauliusajunga.lt/index.php/d-u-k>)

¹¹ It is interesting that these monuments are for the town but not for the school community. Two of them are located in the places where neither school learners nor teachers walk.

¹² It should be pointed out that the interviewed learners came from mixed families, one girl pointed out being of Russian nationality. The teachers also noticed that children from mixed or ethnic minority families made attempts to emphasise the Lithuanian identity: “*I do not know if this is for recoding, but Polish people who come to us become more patriotic Lithuanians than Lithuanians themselves. In fact (the informant is laughing), they are even dissatisfied with their own Polish family names. Though I say to them that there is “nothing wrong with that”. <...> Well, perhaps they do not want to hide it (their origin – I.S.), but their patriotic feeling is particularly strong (Teacher of geography, 2014).*

language which they consider to be their mother tongue". However, then teaching and learning of the Standard Lithuanian becomes more complicated, and the results of examinations are worse. In fact, there are some exceptions, because a successfully passed examination is usually an outcome of not only the environment but also of individual efforts:

If they are gifted children and work hard during the lessons, the results of the Lithuanian state examination are excellent. A girl from a Polish family (a very hard working student) learnt Lithuanian. She got 96 (percent – I.S.) from the Lithuanian language examination. We take the examination of Lithuanian as a mother tongue, not as the national language like children from ethnic minority schools. This girl is a student of the Lithuania language. She has acquired degrees of Bachelor and Master and now is a doctoral student of Lithuanian philology! (Deputy Principal, 2014).

The examination was not mentioned accidentally. Analysing the research material, it can be concluded that evaluation, collections of regulations, official instructions are very important to this school and are used not only to control school learners, but also serve as a certain shield which protects from a not particularly friendly environment. The competition with the Polish school functioning in the same school is likely to create strong tensions as well. Namely the fight for “the student’s basket” (state financing) rather than the national aspect is the reason for relatively cold relations. The relations between Lithuanian and Polish gymnasiums are determined as “*there is no anger between us but we are not friends, either*”. These are only assumptions which have to be validated during a more comprehensive research.

However, the impression that a big number of tension fields emerge is getting stronger when compared to the aforesaid German gymnasium.

We did not target at the comparison of schools, but it usually occurs unwillingly. The difference from the other researched schools was felt immediately after entering the school. The researchers there were not approached as some kind of inspectors¹³. All the members of the school community (not only administration, teachers and school learners, but also technical staff) were eager to communicate and even initiated conversation in the corridors, the canteen, etc. None of the informants was selected in advance, and a considerable difference from the other schools was already observed even in the school space. If other schools mainly focused on nurturance of the representative zones, where the most significant achievements of the school were exhibited, this school mainly focused on the so-called nooks. “*This is school’s philosophy*”, one of the teachers joked. “The Germanness” of the school was revealed namely in the “nooks” and in small things rather than through an emphasised and artificial declaration. For example, in the classroom of technologies, one may notice as if accidentally forgotten a Lithuanian–German dictionary or may see grammar rules hanging on the wall “without any intentions”¹⁴. Or one may really by accident overhear how a teacher says that

¹³ The external audit was carried out in a number of schools, therefore the communication with the researchers was similar to the communication with the auditors following the scheme prepared in advance. Some schools insisted on our communication with the informants selected by the administration.

¹⁴ This word was used by the teacher of technologies when she was showing around.

she is not going to punish a school learner who is late for a class, if the latter thinks of as a sophisticated excuse in German as possible.

In fact, the German language contributes to the nurturance of exceptional traditions of the school; for example, every Monday during the Advent German Christmas carols are sung. This language is used communicating with guests from Germany or during visits to Germany. One must have a good command of this language to successfully pass the examination of the German language. It is important to mention that one of the aspects of the school's mission is *"to prepare school learners for the international examination of the German Language Certificate of the Education Ministers Conference II (DSD I and DSD II Prüfung)"*. However, passing of the examination was overestimated neither by teachers nor by the students. The broader reference to the examination was made only once: the deputy principal pointed out that she was tired of calling the National Examination Centre every year reminding them of the existence of the school in Lithuania where the mother tongue is German.

Admitting students to this school, priority is given to children from families of German origin or to children from the families who belong to the German community. But the school students who took part in the research did not feel being exceptional due to their German origin:

I myself have very little of German blood, practically none. My great-great grandmother had something in common with that. But in the family, from the living ones, only my mother knows German. She used to study German in another school earlier, then worked for a short period of time. Generally speaking, I don't feel something special about that this is "Germany!"

Germany!" – really nothing special <...> just an ordinary school, only we study German. We do not think that we are not Lithuanians...no, it isn't so (School student, 11 former) .

The school becomes exceptional, according to the students and teachers, not because of language or nationality but because of a small (about 300 members) community which is based on collegiality, trust, care, open and courteous communication. The school is also distinguished by creativity and school traditions. Moreover, administration emphasised that the school can allow itself to be a free and creating society also due to absence of competition¹⁵.

For discussion

Constantly hearing about the gradually decreasing literacy and about the growing generation of illiterate people, the question "What is the reference point for comparison?" naturally arises. Is this the 19th century? Or perhaps the period between 1918 and 1940, which was considered by the Lithuanian education community to be the golden age in education? Moreover, now, when the nostalgia for the soviet times is more and more frequently observed, this myth was replaced by the myth of strict but efficient education in a soviet school. Was the generation of grandparents and parents were more literate than contemporary young people? Who knows – nobody has ever measured them if not according to the same then at least according to the similar methodology. Therefore, the majority of

¹⁵ The school does not take part in hunting for "a student's basket" (state financing). The regulations of the school do not provide for the expansion of the school as it is considered to be prestigious and the number of willing to study there is bigger than that of places in the school.

comparisons of abilities of different generations start with a standard phrase which is as old as hill: “When I was your age...” Even the comparison of the results of the state examinations of the Lithuanian language in 1995 and, for example, in 2014 is hardly informative. Just in 1995 much fewer school learners (and most probably fewer smartest ones) took this examination. When an examination becomes more and more massive, it is taken by more and more children of various capabilities. Hence, the results of examination change as well (Vaicekauskienė, 2013).

Perhaps one of the reasons for the “decreasing level of literacy” is evaluation criteria which are gradually becoming stricter and stricter. For example, the Order of 14 November, 2014, approved by the Director of National Examination Centre which regulates “criteria for the evaluation of the school maturity examination of the Lithuanian language and literature”, provides for the following: “Considering the expectations of society and state interest to ensure the literacy of graduates from schools, the norms of literacy evaluation shall be reinforced every year”. Whether reinforcement of norms is the most appropriate way to improve the level of literacy is a heatedly debatable issue. Moreover, a more comprehensive analysis of the Lithuanian examination evaluation reveals that the evaluation instrument should be improved rather than reinforced. Currently, the Evaluation Instruction of the Lithuanian language and literature examination only partially complies with the main objectives of the Lithuanian language and literature secondary education, i.e. the development of social civic, communication and creativity competences. These objectives in the Instructions of Evaluation, which serve

as guidelines for teachers and learners, are unreasonably narrowed or even perverted. Too many minor requirements are imposed on one task of examination (composition) without considering the essence of the objectives. Therefore, according to Zita Nauckūnaitė (2014, p. 30), there is a danger that in future the composition may become a certain template rather than the expression of personal relation based on creativity with the tradition of culture. Moreover, literacy is evaluated according to the norms of the standard Lithuanian language, whereas the norms, according to some socio-linguists, are perceived in a rather narrow and stagnant way. And still there are plans and suggestions to even reinforce them.

As can be seen from the educational research (as well as our research of 2014–2015), the majority of schools, making attempts to stand up to the competition for a student’s basket, tend to introduce strict rules, specific instructions which, instead of providing with virtual safety, only strengthen the atmosphere of distrust. It penetrates into the relations of school community members. Administration does not rely on teachers, teachers do not rely on their learners, and the latter lose self-confidence and trust in others, and it is natural that they are called “clueless”, “illiterate”, who are hardly able to learn the ideal Lithuanian language. We should also add an emotional discourse about the dying language and Lithuanian culture, western and eastern threats presented not only in the press but also in the scientific articles, as well as inclination to get stuck in “in the position of general defence” (Kavolis, 1996; Putinaitė, 2014).

Hence, we have a classical scenario of the moral panic: 1) something or someone

is defined as a threat to values of Interests; 2) this threat is depicted in an easily recognizable form by the Media; 3) there is a rapid build-up of public concern; 4) there is a response from authorities or opinion-makers (Thompson, 1998, p. 8). Moreover, in our case the main character of this scenario is youth who may be regarded as both at risk, and the source of risk be the “script writers” and “stage directors” of moral panic” (ibidem, p. 43).

Does this mean an absence of danger or is it seriously exaggerated? Not neces-

sarily. However, creating panic, pointing a finger of blame, stricter standards and regulations or enhanced competition among schools only create new fields of tension. Moreover, both the position of cultural defence and “a state of preparedness” when the language and its teaching serve as a weapon distract us from addressing the real cultural and educational challenges, especially when the fight against somebody (the young “illiterate”) rather than for something (language and culture) emerges.

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KULTŪRINIS TAPATUMAS, KALBA IR MOKYKLA: LIETUVOS ATVEJIS

Irena Stonkuvienė

S a n t r a u k a

Nenuostabu, kad kalbą vertinant kaip kultūrinio tapatumo pagrindą, į jos mokymą žiūrima kur kas atidžiau nei į daugelio kitų mokomųjų dalykų. Ypač šis susirūpinimas padidėja po brandos egzaminų, bemaž kasmet viešajame diskurse konstatuojant, kad „auga beraščių karta“. Straipsnyje, siekiant atsakyti, ar tokie nuogaštavimai pagrįsti, o gal dauguma jų tėra moralinės panikos, dažnai fiksuojamos kalbant apie jaunimą ir skirtingų kartų santykius, išraiška, remiamasi dviejų tyrimų – „Tapatumas, kultūrinė transmisija ir nacionalinis švietimas“ (2010) ir „Oficialioji ir demotinė mokyklos kultūra: įtampos laukų analizė“ (2014–2015) – duomenimis. Pirmajame tyrime analizuotas bendras mokytojų, mokinių, jų tėvų ir senelių požiūris į lietuvių kalbą, tarmes, kitų kalbų mokymą(-si). Antrajame tyrime kalba traktuojama kaip vienas iš galimų įtampos laukų ir į kalbą, jos vartojimą, mokymą ir mokymąsi siekiama pažvelgti per mokyklos kultūros (tiksliau kultūrų) prizmę.

Straipsnyje skiriami du požiūriai į lietuvių kalbą ir jos vartojimą. Vieną iš jų galima apibūdinti „ko-

vos“ metafora. Besilaikantieji tokio požiūrio pasitelkia net ir moksliniuose straipsniuose aptinkamą emocingą diskursą apie mirštančią kalbą ir lietuvišką kultūrą, kaip didžiausias grėsmes įvardydami anglų kalbos ir informacinių technologijų invaziją, kuriai jaunoji karta esą ypač neatspari. Besilaikantieji antrojo požiūrio pažymi, kad situacijos neverta dramatiuoti: visais laikais jaunimas laužė taisykles ir tai reikėtų vertinti ne tiek kaip grėsmę, kiek kaip žaidimą. Įdomu, kad kokio požiūrio besilaikančiųjų yra daugiau priklauso ne tik nuo amžiaus (vyresnioji karta į kalbą ir jos vartojimą dažniausiai žiūri griežčiau), bet ir nuo bendros mokyklos kultūrinės situacijos. Jei ši yra įtempta, pasitelkiamos griežtesnės taisyklės ir instrukcijos. Jų laikymasis ir tam tikras maištas prieš jas turi įtakos ne tik mokyklos bendruomenės narių santykiams, bet ir požiūriui į daugelį mokyklos kultūros aspektų (pvz., ritualus, tradicijas, laiko ir erdvės kūrimą), taip pat į kalbą.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: kalba, kalbos mokymas, tapatumas, mokyklos bendruomenė, mokyklos kultūra.

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