

“He *blet nachui* was in a shop”: Swearing Practices and Attitudes to Swearing among Vilnius Adolescents

“small children who have not yet learnt their prayers swear so perfectly as to outdo their elders in this terrible practice...”¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse swearing practices of Vilnius adolescents and the identities, associated with those practices from the attitudinal and interactional perspectives. The data, which the analysis is based on, consist of the questionnaire survey, completed by 79 adolescents, and two extracts of adolescents’ spontaneous conversations. In the questionnaire, adolescents were asked to evaluate their peer who uses a huge amount of Russian swearwords *blet* and *nachui* and their peer who uses the English swearword *fuck*, i.e. to examine if there are differences in attitudes towards the well-established and generally regarded as very obscene Russian swearwords and the recently appeared English swearwords. Swearing in Russian in the attitudinal questionnaire study was associated with the construction of the masculine streetwise identity. However, the interactional analysis of swearing in Russian shows that Russian swearwords can be employed in the construction of a female streetwise and a masculine non-streetwise identity. The English *fuck*, which was considered the mild swearing among Vilnius adolescents in the questionnaire study, does not invoke any specific youth social category.

Keywords: swearword, polylingual swearing practices, youth language, Vilnius speech, social identity, streetwise, sociolinguistics

¹ Saying from the sixteenth-century France, translated from French in Ljung 2011: 62, original in Vincent 1982: 29, Vincent D. 1982: *Pressions et impressions sur les sacres au Québec*. Montreal: Office de la Langue Française, Gouvernement du Québec.

Raktažodžiai: keiksmožodis, polingvalus keikimasis, jaunimo kalba, Vilniaus kalba, socialinė tapatybė, gatvės kultūra, sociolingvistika

1. Intro

Swearing is bad language. This is one of the first social lessons about language that parents (and teachers) give to small children. It is fascinating that small children, as they grow up, simultaneously are undergoing two contradictory processes: They learn both how to swear and that swearing is bad. However, one must admit that acquisition of these two processes is essential in any modern Western society. But why is swearing bad language, why is it regarded as offensive and obscene? There are two main overlapping reasons for such attitude to swearing.

Firstly, swearing is a violation of taboos, prevailing in a certain society (Hughes 1993 [1991]: 5, Ljung 2011: 5). In other words, swearing utterances contain certain taboo words, which one is not supposed to utter in public. These words refer to taboo themes such as (including but not restricted to)²: the scatological theme (*ass, crap*); the sexual intercourse theme (*fuck you, bugger*); sex organ theme (*cunt, suck my dick*); prostitution theme (*whore*); the mental illness and disabilities theme, including the stupidity theme (*twonk, retard*). In Lithuania, the violation of taboo is not only related to the aforementioned themes, but also to the linguistic choice. It is generally regarded that swearing in Russian is worse than swearing in Lithuanian, which makes Russian swearwords the worst language (this was also briefly mentioned in Tamaševičius 2014: 85). As swearing violates certain taboos, one might expect that swearing, especially in public, can put a strain on a swearer. Swearing in the Middle Ages, i.e. blasphemous language, as it is proposed in historical documents, was punishable by death (Ljung 2011: 59). The name of God, Holy Spirit, Jesus, also his death, his body parts, the cross, the crucifixion etc. were considered strictly sacred and incorrect use of the sacred notions was interpreted as heresy. In the United Kingdom, the offence was punishable by

² Classification of taboo themes is based on Ljung (Ljung 2011: 35–44). However, Ljung's classification was adopted to suit the object of this article – the swearing practices among Vilnius adolescents, which means that I only list the relevant themes, besides, I have added an extra theme which is not mentioned in Ljung's classification – the mental illness and disabilities theme.

burning at the stake up to 1677 (Hughes 1993 [1991]: 247). In modern and late modern times, the swearers are fortunately not sentenced to death; however, minor punishments and campaigns against swearing are still in practice. For instance, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia saw a couple of campaigns, initiated to discourage usage of vulgar vocabulary and to improve the Russian language (Smith 1998). As of the 1st of July 2014, it is forbidden to use swearing utterances in Russian arts – film, theatre, music, and books (The CNN online article, accessed the 17th of July³). Swearing at the public workplace can cost an employee the job position. Around a decade ago, a famous Lithuanian news presenter Vilma Čereškienė was fired after she accidentally⁴ had uttered the Russian swearword during the live broadcast. Swearing in school can result in report at the principal's office or a teacher's call to one's parents.

Secondly, swearing is traditionally associated with people from the lower social classes (Andersson & Trudgill 1990: 7, Ljung 2011: 7). This view is also expressed in utterances such as *swear like a trooper (sailor)*, *keikies kaip vežikas (swear like a coachman)*. If the first reason for calling swearing a bad language holds true – swearing really involves taboo words, the second reason is anything but true. Swearing practices are by no means restricted to the lower social classes. The historical study of swearing shows that at least in the English society the swearing practices dominate in the lower and upper classes while the middle class - the bourgeoisie – distances from them altogether (Hughes 1993 [1991]: 251, Hughes 2006: 80). In fact, “several medieval writers comment on swearing as being a feature of upper-class speech” (Hughes 1993 [1991]: 251). Besides, Queen Elizabeth I as well as American presidents Richard Nixon, Harry Truman⁵, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were known as great swearers. The quote in the article title *He blet nachui was in a shop (Šitas blet nachui buvo parduotuvėj)* has actually been said by one of the brightest boys in the school

³ The link to the online article: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/06/world/europe/russia-swearing-law/>.

⁴ She thought the microphone was already turned off when she uttered a phrase which contained the Russian swearword.

⁵ One of the most quoted Truman's swearing practices is his explanation for firing the general Douglas MacArthur: “I fired [General Douglas] MacArthur because he wouldn't respect the authority of the President. I didn't fire him because he was dumb son of a bitch, although he was” (Flexner 1976:233, quoted in Hughes 1993 [1991]: 33–34, Hughes 2006: 83). (Flexner, Stuart Berg, 1976. *I Hear America Talking*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.)

where I have worked as a researcher for 8 months, to another gifted boy, though I guess, stereotypically the utterance would be associated with the rowdy pupils who do nothing but cause trouble (more on the informants see section 4). Of course, tough pupils swear as well, there is no need to worry about that.

However, there must be something fascinating and irreplaceable about swearing that people still do it despite its negative evaluation (imagine that people also swore in the times when this practice could bring down a death sentence!). People usually swear because of anger, frustration, pain, surprise. People also swear to gain power and to scare others. And as surprisingly as it may seem, people swear to be liked, to be popular. Hughes (Hughes 1993 [1991]: 33, Hughes 2006: 83) notices that American presidents who have a good command of the so-called “low-register language” usually enjoy the greater popularity among their populace. The same can be applied to the celebrities and the hosts of the TV shows. Vytautas Šapranauškas, one of the leading personalities in Lithuanian TV entertainment branch, also attained his superstar status through the brilliant competence of colloquial and foul language (see Tamaševičius 2012 for the analysis of Šapranauškas’ linguistic repertoire). Consequently, swearing is not merely an expression of certain emotions; swearing can also index certain social identities – a person who you do not wish to mess with, a popular person, a celebrity, etc. Therefore, one of the objectives of the reported study is to analyse how adolescents employ swearing practices in construction of a certain identity and how this construction is perceived by their peers. But before moving on to my own research, I would like to present briefly other Lithuanian studies that dealt with swearing.

2. Studies on swearing in Lithuania. Objective of this article.

In the previous paragraph, I claimed that swearing is a natural linguistic practice which people of all social classes and occupations make use of. Despite this fact, this every day linguistic practice received a scant attention in Lithuanian linguistics. The few studies on swearing in Lithuanian linguistics covered such topics as swearing in Lithuanian dialects (mostly Samogitian dialect) (Grigas 1968⁶, Jasiūnaitė 1995, Jasiūnaitė 2007a, 2007b) and swearing

⁶ Grigas (1968) is a collection of Lithuanian folklore games and dances and traditional Lithuanian swearwords are listed among them.

practices on Lithuanian TV and radio in the past and present (Tamaševičius 2014). Examples of swearing in Lithuanian dialects were collected from dictionaries, various collections of texts, fiction and mostly elderly informants⁷ during the fieldwork conducted in rural parts of the country. The main purpose of the research in swearing practices in Lithuanian dialects, it seems, was to document swearing practices, to compile the comprehensive lists of swearwords rather than analyzing swearwords in interaction. These dialectological and folklore studies hardly ever give examples from the spontaneous conversations, therefore it is disputable how many of those collected swearwords were actually being used in daily speech.

The main objective of the study, presented in this article, is to analyse the *actual* use of the *actual* swearing among Vilnius adolescents: How swearing practices are being employed in the construction and negotiation of adolescents' social identities both in interaction and in perception. How Vilnius adolescents perceive their peers who use a huge amount of Russian swearwords and their peers who use English swearword *fuck*, i.e. to examine if there are differences in attitudes towards the well-established and generally regarded as very obscene Russian swearwords and the recently appeared English swearwords.

3. Definition of swearing

So far into the article I have successfully managed not to define the main object of it – swearing. Most of the people will not have any problems giving a few examples of swearing, and yet, researchers struggle to find a valid definition of swearing. Rathje even notices that sometimes researchers in their studies on swearing do not give any definition of this daily linguistic practice (Rathje 2011: 82). Andersson & Trudgill (1990: 53) define swearing as

- a type of language use in which the expression
- (a) refers to something that is taboo and / or stigmatized in the culture;
 - (b) should not be interpreted literally;
 - (c) can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes.

⁷ Fieldwork methodology is barely described in the articles, but it seems that the data was gathered in interviews with mostly elderly informants whom were asked to enumerate all the swearing practices that they knew / heard of.

Ljung (2011) gives a similar definition of swearing. Swearing contains taboo words which are used with non-literal meaning and whose main function is to reflect the speaker's feelings (swearing is an emotive language); though Ljung also adds to his definition that swearing is a formulaic language (Ljung 2011: 4). In Lithuanian linguistics, swearing is primarily defined as the expression of feelings – anger, disappointment, pain: “Suddenly arisen spite or moods of disappointment sometimes are expressed through curses. <...> When a person curses, he normally conveys his malicious wishes to another person, a person abuses and disdains another person. However, sometimes people curse without having another person in mind, for instance, if they experienced a failure or something unpleasant (Grigas 1968: 65, my translation; see also Zabarskaitė 2009: 93). The theme of taboo, which is the core of the definition of swearing in Western linguistics and the aspect that separates swearing from slang (Andersson & Trudgill 1990: 74), is excluded from the Lithuanian definition of swearing. It is hard to find a plausible explanation for the exclusion of taboo in the Lithuanian definition of swearing. Most probably it has to do with the fact that the Lithuanian research in swearing is rooted in dialectology and folklore studies, i.e. the objective of research was to collect the traditional Lithuanian utterances used to express anger, disappointment, insult etc.

It is not always easy to define if the utterance is a swearing or not. Ljung (2011), as mentioned above, claims that the taboo word in swearing shouldn't be used metaphorically, even though sometimes it is hard to evaluate if the taboo word is used metaphorically or not (Ljung 2011: 14–18). Rathje, unlike the other studies presented so far in this article, doesn't count as swearwords the pejorative (abusive) terms: “Swearwords are words and phrases that refer to something that is taboo in the culture of the language used (e.g. faeces, sex and use of religious denominations), the words should not be taken literally <...>, the words are used to expressed feelings and attitudes, but they are *not* used for people (Rathje 2014: 46, emphasis in the original, see also Rathje 2011: 87). The main difference between the Rathje's definition and the ones mentioned above is that according to Rathje, swearwords cannot be used for people, including the swearer himself / herself. There is no good reason for excluding the pejorative terms from the definition. If we look at the history of swearing, we can see that there was a major shift in swearing: People used mainly to swear *by* or *to* (do something), but nowadays people swear mostly *at* (somebody or something), which explains the increase and great variety of personal abuse (Hughes 1993 [1991]: 4, 237). So, there is no surprise that

quite a few young informants in Rathje's studies (2009, 2014) listed abusive terms when they were asked to give examples of swearing. Rathje herself admits this might be "the beginning of an attitude development where the abusive terms are beginning to replace swearwords" (Rathje 2014: 47, see also Rathje 2014: 58).

So should researchers take into account lay people's opinion of what it is a swearword and what it is not? I think they should. In the analysis of the utterance *I swear to God*, Ljung draws a conclusion that it corresponds to the definition of swearing and therefore should be considered swearing. At the same time, he notes that it is unclear if *I swear to God* would be regarded as swearing by the native speakers of English (Ljung 2011: 99). And most probably we could find more examples of swearing which satisfy the academic criteria of swearing, but would not be considered swearing in actual use. As one of the main objectives of my study is to analyse Vilnius adolescents' swearing practices as they are, including what they themselves regard as swearing, I have taken all the examples of swearing more or less for granted as long as they were indicated at least by two pupils (for the list of swearwords⁸, reported as frequently used by Vilnius adolescents, see Čekuolytė (forthcoming)). However, it should be noted that in listing the swearwords adolescents subconsciously must have followed the criteria of swearing, which was analysed above as their enumerated swearwords match the academic criteria of swearing.

4. Questionnaire about swearing practices: design, informants, and performance

As stated in the last paragraph of section 2, one of the objectives of this article is to study swearing practices from the attitudinal perspective, i.e. (1) how Vilnius adolescents perceive their peers who use a huge amount of Russian swearwords and (2) their peers who use the English swearword *fuck*. In order to find answers to these questions, I have asked a group of adolescents to evaluate two expressions: *Blet tu jam skambink, dalbajobas nachui. Jis blet visas užsigrūzinęs sėdi blet, nachui rašinėja blet nachui* (*Blet you call him, moron nachui. He blet sits all itchy (nervous), nachui he is writing (sms) blet nachui*) and *What a fuck, kas ten*

⁸ All the linguistic practices, identified as swearing in this article, are taken from this list of adolescents' answers, except *chuinia* (*crap*), which although has never occurred in the adolescents answers, is still considered a swearword due the fulfillment of the academic criteria of swearing.

darosi? (*What a fuck, what's going on?*). Both utterances were taken from the self-recordings of the spontaneous Vilnius youth speech. The informants had to describe briefly the adolescent who talk like that and to indicate the gender: girl, boy or both. An additional question was asked in relation to the utterance, heavily loaded with swearing in Russian: “How would you describe such a language. Does this type of language have any name among the youth?”. As the Russian swearwords are well-established in Lithuania and this way of talking, i.e. great usage of Russian swearwords, is stereotypically associated with poorer education and lower status in the society, I wanted to know if this way of talking had any specific name among Vilnius adolescents.

Informants of my research were 14–15 year old pupils (8th graders) in a school in one of socially unmarked dormitory neighborhoods in Vilnius. In total, 79 pupils (46 boys, 32 girls and 1 pupil who didn't indicate the name, so I do not know the gender of him / her) completed the questionnaire⁹.

5. A few notes regarding the fuzziness of the linguistic resources in Vilnius adolescents' speech

The utterances which I presented to adolescents for evaluation could be regarded as a polylingual behavior (Jørgensen 2008, see also Vyšniauskienė this volume). Polylingualism is a theoretical framework which focuses on linguistic features (resources) rather than separate languages (Jørgensen 2008: 145). Linguistic resources, which are easily available to Vilnius adolescents, are Lithuanian, Russian, and English. However, labelling certain linguistic resources as Lithuanian, Russian, or English is not as straightforward as it may seem (for fuzziness, surrounding certain Lithuanian linguistic resources, see note 12). English resources are a rather recent phenomenon, therefore their connection to the English language and culture still can be easily traced. Besides, it is namely adolescents, who through their

⁹ The pupils who participated in this research about swearing were the same pupils who also took part in my long-term ethnographic research on Vilnius youth language and culture. I have asked the pupils to indicate their names or nicknames in the hope to be able to make relations between their reported swearing practices (answers in this questionnaire) and the other material gathered through ethnographic fieldwork in the school (interviews, observation of pupils in school, self-recordings etc.).

engagement in the popular culture bring English resources to the Lithuanian context. So in regard to the resources, which can be identified as English, adolescents act both as users and creators.

Russian resources, however, existed in Lithuania for a very long time, which could imply that their connection to the Russian language could be rather fuzzy. Let us take one example – a discourse marker *tipo* (*so, like, you know*). While discussing the findings of my research with my colleague Inga Vyšniauskienė, I realized that we attributed *tipo* to different linguistic resources. Inga considered this word as belonging to Russian resources (personal communication). I, however, never thought of *tipo* as Russian, even more, I did not consider *tipo* as belonging to any national language – neither Russian nor Lithuanian. It is part of slang, street / youth language, language which is being constructed and maintained by various local practices. The reason why my colleague and I treated this word as belonging to different resources could rely on our different competence in Russian. However, it is not only the linguistic competence that plays a role in labelling linguistic resources. What is also very important is how these resources which can be associated with Russian, are acquired by contemporary adolescents. The answer is – mainly through the daily interaction, these resources are being learnt on the street and sometimes also at home. Therefore we cannot be sure how they are being perceived by adolescents in the acquirement process – as Russian words, slang words or both? So as the perception of these resources is a highly under-researched area, defining these resources de facto as Russian could act as invention (Makoni and Pennycook (2006)) and imaginification (Anderson 2006 [1983]) of Russian resources.

So should we still operate with such labels as Russian, Lithuanian, and English? As we will see from adolescents' responses, they do indeed use labels Russian and English in the evaluation of adolescents, who respectively use Russian and English swearing practices. English resources are not that problematic. Due to their freshness they haven't lost their ties to the English pop culture). Label "Russian", as stated above, is fuzzy in the context of the contemporary youth language. The only resources, which I have identified in my study as Russian, are two swearwords – *blet* and *nachui* – which are often referred to as Russian in the public discourse. All the other resources, which some speakers can regard as Russian and the others as street language, I identified as belonging to the resources of the street language

(youth language). To highlight swearwords in the extracts of spontaneous speech, I denoted them differently than non-swearing slang expressions (see table 1. for graphic denotations).

Table 1. Resources, available to Vilnius adolescents, and their denotations in the extracts of spontaneous speech and adolescents' responses

Resources	Denotation
Russian swearing	blet
English resources	<u>fuck</u>
Lithuanian swearing	<i>užpiso</i> (pisses off)
Swearing	<u>kurva</u> (whore)
Slang	<u>pasikačialinti</u> (to work out)

6. Adolescents' attitudes to swearing

Linguistic practice, as any other “act of semiosis is an act of identity in which we ‘give off’ information about ourselves” (Blommaert 2005: 203–204). Swearing is also a linguistic practice, so swearing is also a way of “giving off” information about us to the others. Though swearing is usually associated with the lower class, poorer education, however, a few examples I provided in the first section of this article leads to assumption that swearing practices might be associated with various social categories. One of the objectives of this research was to examine Vilnius adolescents' attitudes towards the great use of Russian swearing and the use of English swearing and what social categories Vilnius youth combines these two swearing practices with.

6.1. Adolescents' attitudes to swearing: The great use of Russian swearing

I asked the pupils to describe an adolescent who talks like that: ***Blet** tu jam skambink, dalbajobas **nachui**. Jis **blet** visas užsigrūžinęs sėdi **blet**, **nachui** rašinėja **blet nachui** (**Blet** you call him, moron **nachui**. He **blet** sits all itchy (nervous), **nachui** he is writing (sms) **blet nachui**). The informants had also to indicate the gender of the speaker. Additionally, they had*

to describe this type of language use and to provide a name if they thought such a language had one.

The overall attitude towards adolescents, who use a lot of Russian swearing in their speech, is negative (see also table 2).

Table 2: The description of an adolescent who swears in Russian

Street culture	Toughness	Everybody talks like that	Negative evaluation	Positive evaluation	Too many swearwords	Impolite, rude	Other
18 ¹⁰	8	7	13	5	4	16	11

Out of 79 responses only in 5, all of them given by the boys, there was a positive description of such adolescents. Those 5 boys stated that adolescents who talk like that are *nice chaps* (*maladieć*) and that their speech is nice. The rest of the informants gave negative, or better said, what could be interpreted as negative, descriptions. The pupils described adolescents who use so much Russian swearing as impolite and rude. My informants also noticed that such adolescents use too many swearwords in the same utterance and a few added that this might mean that they have a poor vocabulary and *are not able to talk without these interjections* (*nemokantys kalbeti be siu istiktuku*¹¹).

Quite a few of my informants, especially the girls, gave a very concrete picture of an adolescent who swears in Russian: *I think that only forsai talk like that, the ones who mooch around in the neighbourhood with no reason, who smoke and are high* (*manau taip kalba tik forsai, kurie trainiojasi po rajona be priezasties girti ir prisiruke*), *Marozai, people who go in sportswear, who don't go to school, who smoke and drink, minors*, (*Marozai, zmones kurie vaiksto su treningais, nelanko mokyklos, rukoi, vartoja alkoholi, nepilnameciai*), *Most probably it will be hooligans, who don't go to school and who aren't able to talk normally*

¹⁰ The number indicates how many informants mentioned that aspect in their descriptions.

¹¹ Extracts from adolescents' answers are quoted as they were written in the questionnaire, i.e. the spelling and grammar was not corrected.

(*tikriausiai bus chuliganai, nelankantys mokyklosi ir nemokantys normaliai kalbėti*). These answers clearly link the great usage of Russian swearing with the street culture and its main social categories – *forsai* and *marozai*, the categories which were repeated in a number of answers. However, despite the relation of Russian swearwords with the street culture, quite a few of the informants also stated that many adolescents nowadays talk like this, which might imply that swearing in Russian is not restricted to the streetwise youth.

A lot of Russian swearwords in an utterance can also indicate coolness, toughness, and power: *I think they simply want to look cool, that everybody would be afraid of them with such words (Manau jie tiesiog nori pasirodyti kieti, kad ju visi bijotu su tokiais žodžiais)*. However, a few of my informants consider the coolness, constructed in such a way as fake and ridiculous: *He tries to pretend that he you know is so “cool” (bando primesti tipo kad jis toks “krūtas”)*.

I stated earlier that the male informants were the only ones who expressed positive attitudes to a great use of Russian swearing. It was also mainly the boys who gave the harshest descriptions. They called adolescents, who use a lot of Russian swearing, *vaikai* (*kids*), *kvailiai* (*fools*), *dūchai* (*jerks*), *lochai* (*losers*), and *degradai* (*down-and-outs*). Here I should note that almost all of those boys also used similar abusive terms while describing an adolescent who uses an English swearword which can indicate that they express negative attitude to any swearing and maybe the contemporary youth as a whole.

Although adolescents have quite a clear a picture of adolescents who use many Russian swearwords in their speech, the majority of the informants didn't indicate any specific denomination of such a speech. The description of the speech coincides with the description of the speaker: Speech, heavily loaded with Russian swearing is bad, ugly, impolite, vulgar, used by the rude adolescents and *marozai* / *forsai*. However, a few adolescents listed a couple of denominations of such speech: youth jargon, jail jargon, and *bazar*, which is the (Russian) slang word for talk.

The pupils were also asked to indicate the gender of the speaker of the given excerpt. The results are presented in table 3. The vast majority of the informants thought that the utterance could be said by a boy, and only 4 indicated that it could be said by a girl. The distribution of

the results is not unexpected. The streetwise identity – drinking, smoking, fights as well as features like toughness and impoliteness – is usually associated with masculinity.

Table 3. The great usage of Russian swearing and gender of a speaker who uses it

Boy	Girl	Both
56	4	19

To be fair I should add that the utterance, which I provided to my informants, was actually taken from the conversation of four rowdy boys. Their social identity, which they construct and perform – that of a streetwise adolescent – has been perceived as such by their peers solely from their swearing practices.

6.1.1. The great use of Russian swearing and female identity

Adolescents, who participated in my study, evaluated an utterance loaded with Russian swearing as streetwise and masculine. But street culture is not restricted only to the males; females are also part of it as it can be seen from the extract of the spontaneous youth speech below.

Extract 1. The mucous cigarettes

- 1*RUG: o ko tu ten pripylei pažiūrėk kaip atsuk
 %eng: what have you poured there look how turn
- 2*VIL: kur
 %eng: where
- 3*RUG: **blet** kažkokios **nachui** pelenai **nachui**
 %eng: **blet** sort of **nachui** ash **nachui**
- 4*GIN: **blet** sukibusios vapšę kažkokios
 %eng: **blet** (they are) stuck together sort of kinda
- 5*RUG: ką tu ten **blet** darei kurva
 %eng: what have you **blet** done whore

- 6*VIL: kur
 %eng: where
- 7*GIN: **blet** man saulė šviečia
 %eng: **blet** the sun is shining to me
- 8*KAR: xxx
 %com: silently in the background
- 9*GIN: fū **nachui** [kefyras]
 %eng: yuck **nachui** [kefir]
- 10*RUG: [gintare ką tu ten] matei aš ten nesupratau [xxx]
 %eng: [gintare what did you] see there I didn't like understand [xxx]
- 11*GIN: [fū] **blet** ten kažkokie
 12 yapše **nachui** [tepaluota **blet**]
 %eng: [yuck] **blet** like kinda
sort of **nachui** [unctuous **blet**]
- 13*RUG: [pelėšiai **nachui**]
 %eng: [must **nachui**]
- 14*GIN: [aliejuota kažkokia] tešluota plėvėta **blet** gleivėta **nachui**
 %eng: [oily sort of] pastryous viscous **blet** mucous **nachui**
- 15*RUG: kurva **blet** kažkokie ten blynai gal
 %eng: whore **blet** sort of like pancakes maybe
- 16*VIL: kur (.) pakeliuose tu durna ar kaip
 %eng: where (.) in the packs you are dumb or what
- 17*RUG: aš tau rimtai šneku
 %eng: listen I'm serious

Participants of the conversation are four girls – Rugilė, Gintarė, Vilma, and Karina (all names are changed). The conversation is taken from the 32 minutes long recording, conducted by these girls in the supermarket, where they checked prices of the alcohol, and the remote place, where they came to have a smoke afterwards. The extract is taken from the second part of the recording where the girls are about to smoke. However, as soon as they open a pack of cigarettes which Vilma has brought, they notice that there is something wrong with them – they are stuck together. The conversation that follows is loaded with mostly Russian

swearwords. Of course, one could argue that swearing in Russian is the expression of annoyance – the cigarettes have been damaged after all. Although I cannot deny that the girls are slightly disappointed, they are still talking relatively calmly with each other, they are not shouting. In this case, the swearing is not the expression of emotions, but of a certain social identity and style. When swearing occurs with such frequency – the girls swear in almost every sentence – it is used as a ‘style-giver’ (Andersson & Trudgill 1990: 54). (Besides, note that Gintarė in line 7 starts her statement about the sun in her eyes, which has nothing to do with the topic of the conversation, hence with the disappointment and annoyance, with *blet*). The style, which the girls make use of, is the street style. But they are not the passive users of this style. Through their engagement in different street practices, such as smoking and drinking, these girls give their speech, which is loaded with Russian swearing, a special social meaning, that of a street style. So even though perceived as an indication of masculinity (and street culture), in reality great usage of swearing in Russian is an indication of streetwiseness and any adolescent – male or female – who performs a streetwise identity, has to engage in such a practice (among other street practices). (For an extensive analysis of the construction of streetwiseness among Vilnius adolescents, see Čekuolytė (forthcoming)).

6.1.2. The usage of Russian swearing and a non-streetwise adolescent identity

Even though Russian swearing, or more precise, the great usage of Russian swearing, is both perceived as an identity marker of streetwiseness and is one of the practices incorporated in the construction of the streetwise adolescent identity, it is by no means restricted to the streetwise adolescents and to the creation of the streetwise identity (as it has also been stated in a few adolescents’ answers in the questionnaire – *The majority talks like that (Dauguma taip šneka)*). Russian swearwords are undoubtedly the most popular swearwords among Vilnius adolescents (Čekuolytė forthcoming) which entails that they are used by the majority of adolescents and are not limited to a certain youth group. Therefore before moving on to the analysis of the perception of the English *fuck*, it is necessary to have a look how Russian swearwords are being used by non-streetwise adolescents.

Extract 2. I quit wrestling

- 1*KIP: kodėl tu mesi
 %eng: why will you quit wrestling
- 2*ŽYG: atsibodo **blet**
 %eng: I've got tired of it **blet**
- 3*KAM: wi[iiiii] (shouts happily, high pitch)
- 4*EIM: [tai **blet**]
 %eng: [so **blet**]
- 5*ŽYG: į ozą neisiu gi sakė treneris į mane dėmesio nekreips jeigu aš į ozą neisiu
 %eng: I won't go to ozas so the coach told he won't pay any attention to me if I don't go to ozas
- 6*PIJ: [pyzda¹² jeigu tu visai]
 %eng: [fuck if you totally]
- 7*ŽYG: [xxx]
- 8*PIJ: hmm tinki
 %eng: hmm fit
- 9*ŽYG: ką
 %eng: what
- 10*PIJ: visai tinka tie kažkoks swag atrodai toks moksluikas
 %eng: it fits you those you look kinda swag kinda little nerd
- 11*KIP: bet tai kodėl [xxx]
 %eng: but so why [xxx]
- 12*ŽYG: [nu]
 %eng: [well]
- 13*KIP: nekreips dėmesio ką jis čia kimba [prie xxx]
 %eng: he won't pay attention why is he [carping at xxx]

¹² Sweaword *pyzda* might by some speakers of Lithuanian be associated with Lithuanian resources. However, in its form, *pyzda* is very similar to a slang word *pyzda* (*cunt*) and a swearword *pyzdiec* (*fucked up*) which in turn by some speakers of Lithuanian might be perceived as Russian. Having this in mind, I cannot be sure if Vilnius adolescents perceive *pyzda* as Lithuanian or Russian, therefore I have marked *pyzda* as a swearword with a fuzzy linguistic association.

- 14*ŽYG: [nes trenerio pavardė?] oi man Mykolas sakė
 %eng: [because coach's surname?] oh Mykolas told
 me
- 15*PIJ: ką maždaug nuo to kad tu nebeeisi į ozą tu jau [būsi blogiausias]
 %eng: what so if you are not going to ozas you will be [the worst]
- 16*ŽYG: [nes karočia kasdieną] jeigu į ozą
 17 neini ten **blet** dvi treniruotės būna
 %eng: [because I mean every day] if you
 don't go to ozas **blet** they have two training sessions there
- 18*KAM: nu
 %eng: well
- 19*PIJ: so nu tai tu vis tiek gali labiau labiau stengtis negu dabar būt vis tiek geresn
 %eng: so so kinda you can nonetheless try harder harder than now to be bett¹³
 nonetheless
- 20*ŽYG: bet aš noriu gyvenimo laisvesnio **blet** man penkis kartus per savaitę
 treniruotė
 %eng: but I want the more relaxed life **blet** I have training session five times a week
- 21*EIM: [čia pyzda čia **blet**]
 %eng: [it's fuck it's **blet**]
- 22*KIP: [xxx]
- 23*EIM: chuinia ne treni tris kartai maksimum bent jau aš pripažįstu
 %eng: crap it's not a train¹⁴ three times maximum at least it's what I accept
- 24*ŽYG: [jis mane užpiso]
 %eng: [he pisses me *off*]
- 25*KIP: [kurva susipainiojai]
 %eng: [whore you've got confused]
- 26*ŽYG: norėčiau savo malonumui pasikačialint [man kačialintis patinka]
 %eng: I would like to work out for my own pleasure [I like to work out]
- 27*EIM: [nu bent kada nori]
 %eng: [yea at least when you want to]

¹³ The unfinished utterance of *geresnis* (*better*).

¹⁴ The unfinished utterance of *treniruotė* (*training session*).

- 28*ŽYG: **blet užpiso**
 %eng: **blet** it *pisses* me *off*
- 29*EIM: kada nori kaip nori kiek nori
 %eng: when you want to how you want to how long you want to
- 30*ŽYG: eisiu į impulsą eisit kas nors su manim į impulsą
 %eng: I will go to impuls will any of you go with me to impuls
- 31*EIM: kiek **blet** šiaip **nachui** (slightly stresses every word, a light singing tone)
 %eng: who much **blet** so **nachui**
- 32*ŽYG: šimtas dvidešimt litų
 %eng: one hundred and twenty litas
- 33*KAM: xxx
- 34*ŽYG: aš galiu programą už dyką sudaryt jeigu reikia
 %eng: I can make a program for free if needed
- 35*KAM: [aš aš su rūta]
 %eng: [I I with rūta]
- 36*EIM: [taigi va su rūta]
 %eng: [so yea with rūta]
- 37*KAM: paskutinį mėnesį du paskutinius mėnesius va atlankëm ir viskas
 %eng: the last month the last two months yea we attended and that's it
- 38*EIM: eik su rūta
 %eng: go with rūta

Extract 2 is taken from a conversation between five friends – Kamilė, Pijus, Žygimantas, Eimantas and Kipras. They all gathered at Kamilė's to spend some time together after school. Kamilė is one of the popular 8th-grader girls and the core leader in the active, school-wise cluster of adolescents. (However, Kamilė hardly participates in this part of the conversation.) Eimantas, Žygimantas and Pijus are good friends, especially the latter two, they are truly the best friends. Those three boys construct an identity which I call cool school-wise identity. They show quite great interest in class activities, but at the same time they allow themselves sometimes to make loud remarks during a lesson and engage in other activities which might irritate a teacher, but as those activities don't occur very often and are not very harsh, they are not perceived by the teachers and their classmates as troublemakers. Their place in the social

order of the school as cool school-wise pupils is also ratified by the fact that the popular, active, school-wise girls spend time together with them both in school and (I would say even more) after school, as this extract illustrates. Besides, Žygimantas is one of the most popular boys among 8th-graders. Kipras is more Žygimantas' friend, they go to wrestling together. However, as Žygimantas spends a lot of his time with Kamilė, Pijus and Eimantas, Kipras also gets to be around them quite often.

The extract is taken from the part in the conversation where Žygimantas' announces that he is planning to quit wrestling. He is not planning to attend Ozas, the special school in Vilnius which has a special program for pupils who would like to train professionally – its ordinary curriculum program is combined with training sessions. Žygimantas understands that if he wants to pursue a professional career in wrestling, he has to go to that school. Kipras and Pijus are surprised by his decision and try to persuade him not to leave wrestling (lines 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15 and 19). Wrestling really suits him (line 10 *it fits you those you look kinda swag*¹⁵ *kinda little nerd*). They claim that he doesn't have to quit just because he is not going to sport school. Žygimantas, however, explains to them that if he is not taking wrestling seriously, his coach won't pay any attention to him. Besides, he also would like to have more free time, currently he is practicing five times a week. At this point in the conversation, Eimantas, who was relatively silent until now, steps in. He agrees that training five times a week can be really constraining (lines 21 and 23), therefore he supports Žygimantas' intention to leave the professional sport career and only to engage with it in the leisure time. The sequence ends with Žygimantas' proposal to go to Impuls, a popular gym center in Vilnius.

The sequence is interspersed with quite a few instances of swearing (the number in brackets indicates how many times a swearword occurred in the sequence): *blet* (7), *nachui* (1), *pyzda* (2), *užpiso* (*pissed off*) (2), *chuinia* (1), and *kurva* (1). Russian swearing is dominating, which confirms the statement that it not is confined to streetwise adolescents. Pijus produces only one swearing utterance – *pyzda* in line 6. Kipras swears also only once – *kurva* in line 25. So the greatest swearers in this sequence are Žygimantas and Eimantas who utter 6 swearwords each. However, Eimantas joins the conversation just in the middle – line 21, right after

¹⁵ Swag is a specific urban adolescent social category. The prototypical category members would be the American singer Justin Bieber and the English-Irish boy band One Direction.

Žygimantas' explanation that he goes to wrestling five times, until then his only utterance was *so blet* in line 4. His remaining 5 sweawords are spread just between 10 lines – from line 21 to line 31, whereas Žygimantas' swearwords are spread between line 2 and line 28, which makes Eimantas even a greater swearer. Besides, he two times in the sequence uses a cluster of swearwords, – in line 23 *it's pyzda it's blet chuinia* and in line 31 *how much blet so nachui*. Such linguistic behavior would be stereotypically associated and practices by the streetwise adolescents (see 6.1. and 6.1.1. above). However, Eimantas is neither constructing a streetwise persona nor he is perceived by the others as such. But why then is he swearing a lot?

Unlike the other male participants in the conversation, Eimantas is not associated with the sport, despite the fact that he recently started going to volleyball, but hardly anyone knows it. This might also explain why he joins the conversation at the point where he could give support to Žygimantas' decision to leave the professional sport (line 21). Eimantas elaborates on the idea that sport should only be exercised *three times (a week) maximum* and only for one's pleasure: line 29: *when you want to how you want to how long you want to*. Žygimantas is very well known for his achievements in wrestling in the cohort and beyond. Kipras, although he is an unpopular kid, is a good friend of Žygimantas and I assume that a lot of the 8th-graders know that he and Žygimantas go to wrestling together. Pijus used to play basketball, but after he had got seriously injured, he had to quit. Unlike volleyball, basketball and combat sport (wrestling, boxing, karate and alike) are the key sport activities among the 8th-grader boys in the school. Participating in them and especially priding (or being praised by the others) on the achievements helps to maintain one's masculinity. In the individual interview, Eimantas has told me that he is not good at basketball. He is not even playing in the 8th-graders' tournament in school. Even more, he used to spend more time with girls in school, and, as a result, other pupils used to tease him. Luckily, as he told me in the interview, in the 8th-grade it is cool to be around with the girls: *Oh, you are a cool chap, you walk with a girl (o šaunuolis tu vaikštai su pana)*. If we also add to this picture of Eimantas (non-association with sport, girl circles), his appearance – a tall slim boy with longish blonde hair, we get the construction of masculinity which is a bit remote from the stereotypical masculinity. Hence, Eimantas' quite extensive swearing practices help him to restore the image of masculinity.

This extract also illustrates that swearing does not hinder communication. In line 31, Eimantas would like to ask Žygimantas, how much it costs a month to go to the gym center Impuls: *who much blet kinda nachui*. However, his question is filled with Russian swearwords and only the initial ‘who much’ indicates that he inquires about the price. But the quite heavy loading of Russian swearwords does not impede Žygimantas to comprehend the question and to give the answer right away: *one hundred and twenty litas* (line 32).

6.2. Adolescents’ attitudes to swearing: The English fuck

I have also asked my informants to evaluate the adolescent who uses the English swearword fuck (the utterance What a fuck, kas ten darosi? (What a fuck, what’s going on?)) and to indicate the gender of that adolescent.

The descriptions of an adolescent, who respectively uses many Russian swearwords and an English swearword, differ rather significantly (see table 4).

Table 4. The description of an adolescent who swears in English

Everybody talks like that, ordinary adolescent	Positive evaluation	Negative evaluation	Russian vs English	English	Translation	Other
14 ¹⁶	15	12	10	12	5	11

None of my informants described an adolescent who swears in English as a representative of the street culture. No one thought of this adolescent as the one who could drink alcohol, smoke, skip classes, in general, who performs the previously mentioned *marozas* or *forsas* identity. The minority of the informants (just 4 girls and 7 boys) expressed negative or very

¹⁶ The number indicates how many informants mentioned that aspect in their descriptions. 4 pupils haven’t answered this question.

negative attitudes to an adolescent who uses *fuck*. They called this adolescent impolite, rude, *dūchas* (*jerk*), arrogant *lochas* (*loser*), *lašara* (*asshole*) and alike. (But, as noted above, most of the boys, who expressed negative attitudes towards an adolescent who swears in English, also used similar derogatory terms about an adolescent who swears in Russian). 2 girls evaluated the use of an English swearword as disrespect to the Lithuanian language and that adolescents who talk like that should learn Lithuanian better. The rest of the informants were inclined to evaluate both the adolescent and the speech positively. A number of the pupils indicated that everybody talks like that and that *fuck* is frequently used word. However, this perception of *fuck* does not fully correspond to adolescents' daily swearing practices. *Fuck* is not that frequent as the Russian swearwords. (It also occurs quite seldom in my corpus of recordings of adolescents' spontaneous speech (see also Čekuolytė (forthcoming), cf. also Table 6 and Table 7 in Vyšniauskienė this volume.)

Quite a few informants described adolescents who use *fuck* as *normal teenagers*: (*He is normal, there's nothing wrong with them (normalus nieko su jais nėra blogo)*). A couple informants also added that these adolescents are self-confident, *nice chaps* (*maladieci*), and better educated because they do not swear so strongly. This latter aspect – that swearing in English is not so rude, has been repeated in a number of answers: *I don't think it's bad, because these swearwords don't rash that much (Manau, kad tai nėra blogai, nes šie keiksmazodžiai ne taip rėžia ausį)*. A few adolescents compared English swearwords to the Russian ones and all of those informants drew the same conclusion: Swearing in English is milder and more polite: *Adolescents who don't use Russian swearwords, usually talk like that and I think that English swearwords don't sound so harsh as Russian :D WTF – what a shit and alike is really nicer than **na*ui** (Taip dažniausiai kalba paaugliai, kurie nevartoja rusišku keiksmazodžių ir manau, kad angliški keiksmazodžiai skamba ne taip žiauriai kaip rusiški :D WTF - kas per šūdas ir panašiai, tikrai gražiau nei **na*ui**), It's better to talk like that than in Russian, most probably many say so, and that's definitely not a big offense (Geriau jau sakyti taip nei rusiškai, taip tikriausiai sako daug kas, ir tai tikrai nėra jau didelis įžeidimas)*. However, I cannot deny that the comparison of swearing in English and Russian could have been provoked by the previous question where the informants had to depict an adolescent who uses a lot of swearing in Russian.

English in an utterance really caught the informants' attention. A couple of the pupils wrote that these adolescents should have a good command of English and they prefer to speak in English. None of the adolescents associated swearing in Russian with a proficiency in Russian. Swearing in English is also associated with the contemporary pop culture. One boy treated swearing in English as the outcome of Hollywood films: *Adolescents, who watch a lot of American movies, usually say such words (Dažniausiai žodžius sako amerūkietiško kino prisiziūrėję paaugliai)*. A few of my informants even provided the translation of the utterance: *Adolescent wants to know what it is going on (Paauglys nori sužinoti kas ten daros)* or *What is **blet** going on, if you translate from English (Kas ten **blet** darosi išvertus iš anglų kalbos)*. None of the pupils translated the utterance with Russian swearwords to Lithuanian (or English), because they are so established in Lithuanian that no translation is needed. I do not know if the translations from English were made for me, but a few informants wrote that older people might not be able to understand English slang: *English slang which uncles and aunts won't understand :DD (angliskas žargonas kurio dėdės ir tetos nesupras: DD)*. All of this might point out that swearing in English is still a fresh and new mode of swearing.

Likewise in the previous question, the informants also had to indicate the gender of a speaker. The results are presented in table 5.

Table 5. The English fuck and gender of a speaker who uses it

Boy	Girl	Both
9	40	30

The majority of the informants thought that it should be a girl. Also, almost half of the pupils indicated that it could be either a girl or a boy. Compared to the results presented in table 3, the distribution of the results in table 5 is completely different. But it is not surprising. The English swearword fuck is considered as a rather mild swearword by the adolescents, and therefore stereotypically is associated with the female linguistic practice. Actually, one boy even indicated the gender of the speaker in the description of an adolescent: *Maybe it's girls because boys swear more ingeniously (galbut tai merginos nes vaikinai keikiasi isradingiau)*. Lakoff also arrives at a similar conclusion in the analysis of two utterances – *Oh dear, you've*

put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again and *Shit, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again* (Lakoff 1975: 10)¹⁷. The first utterance, as it is more accepted in the society, would be stereotypically classified as 'women's language'. Though, of course, *fuck* is by no means restricted to the female usage.

All in all, the English four-letter word, which is considered mild swearing among Vilnius adolescents, does not invoke any specific youth social category.

9. Outro: concluding remarks

The results of the perception study of swearing in English among Vilnius youth showed, that swearing in English, which is a new mode of swearing, hasn't attained any specific indexical value yet (as opposed to the swearing in Russian) among the contemporary youth, at least not in the Vilnius dormitory neighborhoods where the participants of this study come from. Besides, swearing in English is considered as mild by Vilnius adolescents, which makes the English swearwords not that suitable for the *real* swearing. These two factors – (1) undefined social meaning and (2) mild swearing – could explain quite low popularity of swearing in English among Vilnius adolescents.

Swearing in Russian, in the concrete a great usage of Russian swearwords *blet* and *nachui*, has a rather clear social meaning among Vilnius adolescents. Speech, heavily loaded with Russian swearing, indexes street culture to Vilnius adolescents. Adolescent who uses a lot of Russian swearwords in one utterance, the informants of this study depicted as an impolite and rude boy who drinks alcohol, smokes cigarettes and don't go to school, in short, as a representative of the street social category – *forsas / marozas*. Adolescents' perception of the heavy swearing in Russian corresponds to reality. Russian swearing is used as one of the means to construct a streetwise identity, i.e. adolescents, both girls and boys, who smoke, drink alcohol, show little interest in class activities, use a lot of Russian swearwords. In fact, it is through these adolescents' engagement in different street practices, such as smoking and drinking, that the speech, which is loaded with Russian swearing, get its special social

¹⁷ Lakoff's analysis is based on by introspection. She has examined her own speech and that of her acquaintances (Lakoff 1975: 4).

meaning, that of a street style. However, as the interactional analysis has shown, the same Russian swearwords *blet* and *nachui* (and swearing in general) can be employed to construct an identity which has nothing to do with the street culture. Russian swearwords, loaded with their street cultural social meaning can be used by the rather good boys to index a cool masculine identity when a cool masculinity cannot be performed through any other resources, available to them.

This article has dealt with swearing, a linguistic practice which can be perceived by some speakers as extremely harsh. I would like to conclude this article by pinpointing that adolescents, especially the great users of swearing – streetwise adolescents, are aware of this societal attitude. They swear because they want to be perceived as tough, offensive, and rude, swearing is part of the construction of their identity. And whenever you make a comment about their bad language, you just confirm that they are on the right track.

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“Šitas *blet nachui* buvo parduotuvėj”: Vilniaus paauglių keikimosi įpročiai ir požiūris į keikimąsi

Aurelija Čekuolytė

Santrauka

Lietuvių kalbotyroje keiksmažodžių tyrimų yra atlikta ganėtinai nedaug. Dažniausiai keikimasis buvo tirtas dialektologiniu aspektu – sudaromi tarmėse vartojami (ar vartoti) keiksmažodžių sąrašai. Nesunku nuspėti, kad šie sąrašai atspindi tik nedidelę dalį kasdien vartojamų keiksmažodžių. Taip pat galima daryti prielaidą, kad tai ne tie keiksmažodžiai, kuriuos galima išgirsti didmiesčiuose, ir tai tikriausiai ne tie keiksmažodžiai, kuriuos renkasi šiuolaikinis didmiesčio jaunimas. Tad straipsniu siekiama užpildyti šią keiksmažodžių tyrimų spragą – analizuojama, kaip keiksmažodžiai yra panaudojami paauglių socialinėms tapatybėms kurti, t.y. straipsnio tikslas yra ne keiksmažodžius dokumentuoti, bet parodyti, kaip jie funkcionuoja realioje vartosenoje.

Straipsnio medžiagą sudaro anketinio tyrimo duomenys – 79 Vilniaus paauglių užpildytos anketos, kuriose paauglių buvo prašoma apibūdinti paauglius, kurie savo kalboje vartoja daug rusiškų keiksmažodžių *blet* ir *nachui*, ir paauglius, kurie savo kalboje vartoja anglų kalbos keiksmažodį *fuck*, bei dvi paauglių spontaniškos kalbos analizės.

Anketinis nuostatų tyrimas atskleidė, kad šiuolaikiniai Vilniaus paaugliai angliško keiksmažodžio *fuck* nelaiko vulgariu ir stipriu. Dėl savo naujumo keikimasis anglų kalba neturi aiškios socialinės reikšmės miegamuosiuose Vilniaus mikrorajonuose, kur gyvena tyrime dalyvavę paaugliai. Angliškų keiksmažodžių naujumas, švelnumas ir neturėjimas aiškios socialinės vertės gali būti jų nepopuliarumo priežastis.

Tuo tarpu rusų kalbos keiksmažodžiai, tiksliau jų gausa, visų pirma indeksuoja gatvės kultūrą. Tiek anketinis nuostatų tyrimas, tiek spotaniško paauglių pokalbos analizė atskleidė, kad rusiškų keiksmažodžių gausa yra viena iš priemonių kurti gatvės paauglio / paauglės tapatybei. Paprašyti apibūdinti savo bendraamžį, vartojantį daug rusiškų keiksmažodžių, absoliuti dauguma informantų įvardijo jį kaip gatvės kultūros atstovą ar tiesiog neišauklėtą paauglį. Tačiau tie patys rusiški keiksmažodžiai, turintys gatvės kultūros socialinę reikšmę, gali būti panaudoti kurti socialinę tapatybę, kuri neturi nieko bendro su gatvės kultūra. Šie keiksmažodžiai tampa vienu iš būdų geriems vaikinams demonstruoti vyriškumą, kai to padaryti negalima kitomis tapatybės kūrimo priemonėmis.

“He *blet nachui* was in a shop”: Swearing Practices and Attitudes to Swearing among Vilnius Adolescents

Aurelija Čekuolytė

Summary

In the Lithuanian linguistics, swearing is still a very under-researched field. The Lithuanian research in swearing is mostly rooted in dialectology and folklore studies, i.e. the objective of such research was to collect the traditional Lithuanian utterances used to express anger, disappointment, insult etc. These dialectological and folklore studies hardly ever give examples from the spontaneous conversations, therefore it is disputable how many of those collected swearwords were actually being used in daily speech. It is also easy to assume that those collected swearwords might be not the same ones which Vilnius adolescents use in their daily interactions. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to fill in this gap in the

Lithuanian linguistics. In the article, swearing practices and the identities, associated with those practices, are analysed from the attitudinal and interactional perspectives.

The data, which the analysis is based on, consist of the questionnaire survey, completed by 79 adolescents, and two extracts of adolescents' spontaneous conversations. In the questionnaire, adolescents were asked to evaluate their peers who use a huge amount of Russian swearwords *blet* and *nachui* and their peers who use the English swearword *fuck*, i.e. to examine if there are differences in attitudes towards the well-established and generally regarded as very obscene Russian swearwords and the recently appeared English swearwords.

The results of the perception study of swearing in English among Vilnius youth showed, that swearing in English, which is a new mode of swearing, hasn't attained any specific indexical value yet among the contemporary youth, at least not in the Vilnius dormitory neighborhoods where the participants of this study come from. Besides, swearing in English is considered as mild by Vilnius adolescents. These two factors – (1) undefined social meaning and (2) mild swearing – could explain quite low popularity of swearing in English among Vilnius adolescents.

Swearing in Russian, in the concrete a great usage of Russian swearwords *blet* and *nachui*, on the contrary, has a rather clear social meaning among Vilnius adolescents. Both, the perception study and interactional analysis showed that speech, heavily loaded with Russian swearing, is used as one of the resources to construct a streetwise identity. The informants of this study depicted adolescent who uses a lot of Russian swearwords in one utterance, as a male representative of the street social category or simply a an impolite and rude boy. However, as the interactional analysis has shown, the same Russian swearwords *blet* and *nachui* (and swearing in general) can be employed to construct an identity which has nothing to do with the street culture. Russian swearwords, loaded with their street cultural social meaning can be used by the rather good boys to index a cool masculine identity when a cool masculinity cannot be performed through any other resources, available to them.