Lithuanian Language Ideology

A History of Ideas, Power and Standardisation

Summary

This book is the first work to result from the idea to look into the standardi-sation of the Lithuanian language as ideology. The research was inspired by *astonishment* at the peculiar way the Lithuanian language is treated in the contemporary democratic Lithuanian state and a *suspicion* that this treat-ment is based on ideas detached from the actual socio-cultural reality and similar to the ideas cultivated during the Soviet period of Lithuanian history.

In Lithuania, language (spoken and written communication) is conside-red to be first and foremost the space of the professional competence of lin-guists. *Kalbininkai*, as they are called, are those standardisation theorists and professional gatekeepers (editors, language inspectors) who correct mis-takes because they know what language forms are right or, more precisely, correct. They know language laws and use them to evaluate, to decide, to correct and to penalize. Lithuanian language has to match the conception held by the gatekeepers, i.e. it must correspond to the norms codified in nor-mative works. In Lithuania, such norm-setters have a degree in Lithuanian philology. The idea of language correctness is one of the subjects of this book.

Another ideological subject of the analysis is the belief that there is something wrong with the Lithuanian language; incorrect pronunciation or accentuation, an incorrectly constructed phrase, or use of borrowed items may harm the language, so the language must be guarded against them. In other words, the Lithuanian language must be protected and defended against incorrect usage related to outside contagion, as well as against the negligence and irresponsibility by language users themselves.

These features define the ideology of the Lithuanian language not only in neutral descriptive terms as a set of ideas and images, but also in the nor-mative sense. Following this ideological stance on how language should be, state institutions responsible for language regulation administer the whole publicly visible and audible reality. This knowledge is closely connected to

power. Its limits are not clearly defined and its application in practice takes on aggressive forms.

This book consists of three parts with two chapters each, comprising six chapters in total. The first part mostly analyses ideas of standardisation in the broader theoretical context of European linguistics and the socio-political and cultural settings. The second part is specifically focused on historical analysis of power-related situations in language institutions and different ideological discourses (about the authority of linguists in the period when the standard Lithuanian was established and later on, as well as about language correction practices). In this part, the history of ideas is subjected to reconstructionist and typological interpretation; it is mostly focused on the ideological and cultural policy contexts of Soviet Lithuania. The third part takes a look into the contemporary, post-1990 power structures of standardisation, from the legal regimentation to the practices of language engineering in schools. This part rests on a combination of discourse analysis and socio-cultural reconstruction, while keeping in focus the foundations, content and scope of the analysed ideology.

In the first chapter "Ideas and theories of language standardisation", Loreta Vaicekauskienė provides theoretical premises for the study based on the analysis of two fundamental moments in the (pre)history of linguistics: *prescriptivism* and the *language culture* of the Prague Linguistic Circle. She presents the contemporary linguistic approach to standard language ideology and shows how this ideology affects the standard language culture in contemporary European communities, i.e. the ideas of taking care of the language. The relationship with language is essentially defined and framed by two normative schemes: nostalgic cultural elitism and nation-state-related nationalism. During the 20th century, various European countries saw the disappearance of the prescriptivist attitudes from the realm of scientific inquiry and the development of a full awareness of the distinction between observing, describing, theorizing *research* and *intervention* into language as non-scientific activity, which remained the practice of the cultural and political elite. Therefore a distance grew between the attitude systems of a *professional* and a *naïve* language user – the former draws on the knowledge of structures, histories and usage of various languages and does not believe therefore that language must be regulated or that language change is possible to stop, while the latter believes that such change must be resisted and care must be taken so that everyone speaks "proper and good" correct language.

In Lithuania, the naïve attitude has remained prevalent even among some linguists and is presented as a scientific approach. Discussing the Prague Linguistic Circle founded in 1926, Vaicekauskienė emphasizes the importance of the Circle's ideas on language culture including their later transformation for understanding the history of the standardisation of Lithuanian. The Circle was probably the only school that had tried to include language improvement and regulation of language development into the field of scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, the representatives of the Prague Circle derived the norms of standard language from usage, i.e. regular facts observed in the (written, literary) language of the present. One of the most important criteria of standardisation for them was functional adequacy – assessment, how the concrete language form suits the concrete function and style required in the concrete communicative situation. The ideas of this school were adopted (or continued) mostly in the Eastern bloc; however, over time the scientific theories were replaced by language construction and its increasing control hidden under the cover of academic research; it happened in socialist Czechoslovakia as well. Linguists focusing on language culture became supervisors of language and its speakers.

This shift is conceptualized by Nijolė Keršytė in the chapter "Language as the Target of Disciplinary Power and Knowledge". Based on the works of Foucault, she analyses the Lithuanian phenomenon of language cultivation and rethinks language control in the broader Western European historical and socio-political context as a part of *social control* that took shape in 19th century disciplinary Western societies and particularly prospered in 20th century totalitarian states. Foucault describes the disciplinary society through the mechanism of control of the human body but does not mention control of *language*. However, in totalitarian states – the most ideal examples of disciplinary societies – language control was undertaken with no less enthusiasm than the control of bodies. In no era of rationalism was such an extent of language control attained as in the Soviet era and under continuation of its traditions. It saw the implementation of the idea attributed to Cardinal Richelieu, the right hand of Louis XIII of France, that language and state control are intertwined. The permanent observation and control of language – both written and spoken, both public and private – consolidated in Lithuania in the Soviet period, but did not end with it. In independent Lithuania the policy of language control was not re-examined; instead, the power of those in control was strengthened even more. Analysis of theoretical discourse on language cultivation (works on the so called language

culture) reveals the language culture of the Lithuanian language as a practice of power grounded in certain *knowledge* (language theories and ideologies). Works on language culture reveal a difference between what is declared and what is actually put into practice. For example, it is claimed that language culture is based on linguistic theory – principles of structural linguistics, but in reality it uses the theory only as an alibi and instead prefers a pre-scientific approach to language prevailing in normative grammars and ideological imaginary of 19th century historical linguistics. Contemporary language planning gives preference to usage-based norms, while the Lithuanian language culture is still concerned with creating a prescriptive ideal of language and trying to subordinate the reality of language use to it. Here, it is not scientific knowledge that has power over practice, but, on the contrary, knowledge is constructed in order to justify the practices adopted before. Legitimisation of power through theory is a typical ideological use of science for control of society.

In the third chapter "Lithuanian normativists and practices of standardisation" the fight against reality is illustrated with examples of concrete discourses. In the beginning, the central figure in the field of Lithuanian language planning was the *authority of the linguist*. It was probably the only alternative; contrary to the cases of early standard languages which enjoyed long periods of more or less spontaneous development, the late standard languages, Lithuanian among them, required firm decisions by linguistic authority figures. At the turn of 19th to the 20th century, with the development of the Lithuanian national rebirth movement, the Lithuanian language became the fundamental integrating factor of the modernizing society.

Eligijus Raila reconstructs the transformation of the authority of linguists. In interwar Independent Lithuania linguistic authority was individual and naturally accepted in society; during the Soviet period it became collective, institutionalized. Linguists themselves started to perceive standardisation work as a group, instead of individual and preferably unanimous endeavour. Giedrius Subačius shows in the succeeding sections how the linguists of the Soviet period joined efforts to systematically try to implement a homogeneous linguistic reality; all people were thought to be able to and had to learn to write in the same ways, and had to use the standardized language everywhere and anytime in writing and even speaking. The requirement to speak correctly (correct pronunciation and accentuation) has severely undermined the already weak prestige of local dialects. Moreover, it was strongly directed against the urban dialect (including that of the capital city), which

was growing stronger because of urbanisation and was becoming the actual standard. The increasingly stronger fight against the linguistic reality was reinforced by shaming and a moralizing tone, most probably reflecting the attempt to compensate for the lack of authority once enjoyed by linguists.

The discontent of normativists particularly increased at the beginning of the Post-Soviet period, when the public sphere and public use of language became increasingly heterogeneous and complex. A natural culmination of such a long history of language standardisation was *Didžiųjų kalbos klaidų sąrašas* ("The list of major language errors"), which was compiled by the State Language Commission from 1992 to 1996 and entered into force in 1998. The list established *de facto* frames of language correctness. It comprises hundreds of corrections of language forms and the requirements of correct pronunciation. Being based more on imagination and personal taste than on knowledge derived from language history and usage, the List implies the principle of the ideal pure language and identifies language forms that in the eyes of language planners present the biggest threats to the Lithuanian language. Making language errors from the List in public language may incur a fine. This language standardisation tool exemplifies the illusion held by normativists that they are able to control language development.

Institutional self-consciousness of normativists is as illusionary as their self-esteem, as Nerijus Šepetys shows in the fourth chapter "Ideological origins of standardisation institutions". Lithuanian language planners only acquired *political* power in contemporary Lithuania; however, they brought the understanding of how to implement and apply that power from the Soviet order and authority. At the end of the Soviet period, when ideological patronage, commission and control became weaker, the monopoly on linguistic power almost accidentally remained in the hands of linguists. Differently than the administrators of Soviet Lithuania, they had both clear interests and sufficient experience to independently shape Lithuanian language policy. Šepetys examines the concrete institutionalisation of Lithuanian standardisation in the Soviet period: establishment of the State Language Commission, as well as the launch of journals devoted to language standardisation and disagreements occurring in the process. These situations were framed by Soviet ideology: relevant interests of the Communist Party (everything must be like in Moscow), routine Union-wide campaigns (to engage scientists and researchers into the re-education of society) or simply long-term political calculations (to allow new national forms for dissemination of Soviet ideas). It appeared that in all

situations there were tensions (in public or internal discourse) between the "authorities" and "linguists", between the semi-official prescriptivism and defence of autonomous language use. Nevertheless, the study shows that before independence the concrete practices of language standardisation had already produced a type of representative of the firm scholarly prescriptivism who feels safe ideologically.

The fifth chapter "Post-Soviet language cultivation as a monopoly of power" analyses two specific forms of standardisation-related self-consciousness and practices applied in contemporary Lithuanian language planning: national legislation on state language and the functioning of the implementing institution, The State Language Inspectorate. Paulius Subačius' analysis of national legislation 1989–2013 (including draft legislation) shows how the original political ambition to maximally expand the domains of public use of Lithuanian as the state language and to encourage its use among ethnic minorities metamorphosed into a universal requirement of *correct* language use. The correctness itself is not precisely defined legally; its interpretation is trusted to the State Language Commission, which enjoys a specific autonomy and is bureaucratically isolated from the society. By transferring the political power to the Commission, the emerging independent state sanctioned the continuation of the ideological language regime from the Soviet period. The persistent constitutional commitment to *take care* of the state language means that the language, paradoxically, is perceived as weak and endangered.

In the next section Tomas Vaiseta analyses the functioning of the Language Inspectorate as a normalized practice, where he finds a disciplinary structure and a strictly formalized understanding of language. There is a notion that language can be "violated" as a legal norm, "violations" can be registered and counted, and the language user who becomes a "violator" can be subjected to sanctions. However, in its everyday functioning the Inspectorate does not limit itself to typical control, but also functions at more ephemeral but no less real aesthetic and moral levels. The Inspectorate decides what is appropriate and cultured in language use and tries to educate language users to avoid breaches in the future. However, some practical problems faced by the Inspectorate show that the attempted language normalisation inevitably leads to a conflict with the language reality and language users.

In the sixth chapter "Framework of contemporary Lithuanian language engineering" Loreta Vaicekauskienė presents a generalized picture of "language nationalisation". She shows how at the beginning of independence, when language regulation was formally legalized at the state level, the

sphere of influence of language gatekeepers was extended. After the restoration of independence, there were no discussions about the essentially changing sociolinguistic situation of the Lithuanian language, no attempts to approach and to understand it in scholarly terms, and no consideration for society's needs. The vast meta-linguistic discourse of professional linguists was simply constructing the issue of the "threat to the language", which was essentially grounded on two topics: the destructive influence of English and the degradation of the language caused by the supposedly overall illiteracy of the Lithuanian population. Appearance of public criticism towards the prescriptive ideas and practices, among other factors, also lead to the strengthening of the discourse of authority grounded in power and expert knowledge, and the use of appeals to obedience and faith. At the beginning of independence the firm belief of language ideologists became apparent that it is not society that shapes the styles and norms of the public sphere, but that linguists have to exercise a centralized control over language reality – as experts, teachers, and gatekeepers. In the discourse of Lithuanian language planners the quality of language is equated to language control and resulting conformity to the lists of provided language forms and corrected errors. Perhaps out of inertia, or consciously, the Soviet practice of treating language regulation as linguistic science and language planners as representatives of the scholarship continues.

Institutional interests are particularly clear in the analysis of language ideology in the educational system. Education is considered to be the most favourable environment for cleansing the language of undesirable elements, as well as for dissemination of the ideas of language engineering. Here it is possible to use curricula, textbooks, teacher and student assessments, and compulsory State examinations for a more systematic coordination of language regulation and a more comprehensive control than in other areas. Schools actively circulate the discourse of language threat and the authority of linguists, uphold the cult of the "mother tongue", and indoctrinate students into the practices of language correction.

Systematic analysis of control and propaganda of the Lithuanian language exposes the official language ideology as manipulative mass social engineering with a strong reproductive potential. In this respect Lithuania still retains a post-colonial mentality with rich layers of empirical data for cultural history and anthropology studies about the influence of (post)totalitarian social engineering on transformation of ideas and practices in societies susceptible to prescriptivism.

Lietuvių kalbos ideologija

Norminimo idėjų ir galios istorija

Sudarė Loreta Vaicekauskienė ir Nerijus Šepetys