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**The Standard Lithuanian Language: Present and Future**

Man is rather an imperfect and strange animal. Yet, this imperfect maverick has managed to stand out - has created a perfect tool and can now perfectly use it. This tool – language – allows us to understand and – most importantly – change the surrounding world. And, to change not in a random way but in accordance with our needs, desires, and aspirations. We use this tool to understand and manage the actual and imaginary reality. But do we realise the importance and power of this tool? Do we know how to use it properly?

Have you ever wondered what the size, scope, and scale of language is? Let's consider just one example: Papua New Guinea has an area of 462,840 square kilometres, population of 7,933,841, density of 12.8 people/km², and English as the state language, and two widespread pigeon languages Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu that have the status of the state language. Papua New Guinea uses more than 830 languages (which stands for 15% of the world's languages). However, we are not only facing the diversity of different languages. The two key universals of language say: all languages are variant, and all languages are changing. Variation and change (along with complexity and functions) are the major givens of language as a phenomenon. Following Eugen Coșeriu’s concept of historical language and his model of linguistic variation, it can be argued that "the whole historical language" is not spoken, but actualised through the structure of varieties, and this structure consists of: 1) the diatopic level – geographical varieties ; 2) the diastratic level – sociocultural varieties; and 3) the diaphasic level – the varieties of the speaking situation.

The classic case of a linguistic variety is a standard (generic) language that differs from other varieties along these major characteristics: 1) its area of use is a public (not private!) space; 2) it is regulated (by means of norming and codification); and 3) a standard language has to be learned. The issues of a standard language are also closely linked to language policy. Its most prominent elements are: 1) the status of the language (concern for the position of the language, its status in the society) and 2) the language corpus (concern for the use of various specific forms).

A standard language is not merely a tool for learning about the world and organising it; it is a tool that unites a nation, a country, a state, and is integrated into the politics of the state. A perfect illustration of this phenomenon is the history of the emergence of European (and not only) standard languages. Every civilised and educated society has a clear perception of the purpose and importance of a standard language. Compared to other European standard languages, the path of the development of the Lithuanian standard language was neither easy nor very long. It may seem that enough time has passed for the users of the standard Lithuanian to start creating its new – elite – variety. However, we can observe unusual signs and not quite desirable parallels with the nineteenth century, the period of the development of the standard language: it is understandable that there are emerging debates over the language corpus– they have always been and will always take place, because it happens due to the above-mentioned universals, variation and change. Yet, it is strange that in the 21st century, there are questions and discussions related to the status of the standard language (concern about the position of the language, its position in the society) and even its prestige. To perceive the extent to which such questions are reasonable, or whether this type of discussion is needed, we need to answer the following key questions related to the standard language: What is the situation of the standard Lithuanian language today? Is there enough empirical data to answer this question? How and to what extent is this situation being dealt with, what is happening with individual variants of the standard language itself ("specialty languages"), for example, the language of the stage? What is the relationship between the standard language and the society, and does the society have sufficient linguistic education? Only having understood and analysed the current situation and form of our standard language, we can look into the future and plan, and make recommendations. Moreover, it is vital to involve as many specialists from various fields as possible in these discussions about language and the management of standard language, so that our society has not been left behind. Maybe at this stage of the life of our standard language, we do not need disagreement and disputes or division into extreme camps, but instead, we need argumentative and rational discussions – so, let us just have a quiet conversation about language.