

DOI: 10.11649/abs.2019.002

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The understanding of the concept LANGUAGE among young people in Lithuania and Lithuanians living abroad

Introduction

Language is one of the key values of a nation, it carries both the code of the nation's culture and identity, and what is called the national mentality, national psychology. "Deep down inside the human being lies the sense of the special value of language. The holy books of many different religions bear witness to the divine nature of language, approaching it as a fundamental power of the human being that separates it from the rest of inarticulate creations" (Zaborskaitė, 1992, p. 57). Philosophers argue that human beings cannot fulfil their special identity and culture unless they are self-aware with respect to their recognised homeland, language, customs and ethnicity. Lithuanian philosopher Vydūnas notes that language to a nation is the

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Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

[Wydawca: Instytut Słowistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk]

same as life to the human body; they are simply inseparable: “A nation becomes alive and dwindles with language. Language clearly shows the strength of a nation’s life. To revive a nation, its weakening language has to be revived first” (Vydūnas, 1990, p. 278). The character of a nation and of a language alike is defined by many features that may seem insignificant at a glance. Vanda Zaborskaitė observes as follows:

The character of a language is grounded in biological preconditions, an articulation base that has taken shape in a particular manner, but most importantly – in the historical experience of a nation. Historians of culture, like some sort of linguistic archaeologists, dig up the deep layers of words, find in them details of ancient mythologies, old habitats of peoples, their contacts with other nations. Words do not signify a nation’s view of the world and emotional attitude alone: the specific sounds of language do that too (there is the language of mountains and planes, activities and contemplation). Language captures (through synonyms, figures of speech and phraseological units) all that is specific about the world of senses, it describes the most subtle of the motions of the abstract mind (doing so through abstract vocabulary, philosophical or theological terminology). (Zaborskaitė, 1992, p. 57)

One of the annual reviews of applied linguistics, published in English, reads that a state can afford to be godless, but it cannot remain without a language (Grin & Vaillancourt, 1997, p. 44). That means that language is the fundamental value of every nation. In the words of Vida Rudaitienė, “language is more than just an expression of the unique character of a nation, its cornerstone; it is also one of the key components of culture, and ethnic culture in particular. As part of ethnic culture, language is unique in a way that it stores the vital properties of the cultural whole, conveys the system of values, anchors the relationship with the world in a social way” (Rudaitienė, 2012, p. 1121). What is more, “every language is a treasure-trove of the experience of a nation, a reflection of its life, history, material and spiritual values, a nation’s understanding of the world – an exceptional, one-of-the-kind phenomenon” (Gudavičius, 2009, p. 150). Language is related to all previous, present and future generations and binds them all into a whole, into a nation. The language has long been regarded by Lithuanians as a protector of the national culture: “There can be no doubt that the nation’s language is the most obvious creation of the nation’s spirit, which characterises the individuality of the nation best” (Šalkauskis, 1995, p. 334).

The attitude towards language as the most crucial sign of the nation’s vitality has not changed so far in Lithuania: “The language is the mind of the state – we should not forget this thought suggested by Mikalojus Daukša. Only the native language enables the mind of the state, that great metaphor, to unfold in the world and to function in it efficiently” (Daujotytė, 2013). A young representative of political

sciences claims that “the main ‘glue’ of the Lithuanian nation consists of the Lithuanian language and a sense of common historical destiny” (Sinica, 2017). The internet portal *apklauso.lt* asked the following question as early as 2002: “Is language fundamental to the survival of a nation? Why?” The latest considerations on the issue were recorded five years ago. The replies clearly reveal a conviction that nation and language are very closely related: *Language unites a nation; A nation without a language will perish ([e.g.] Prussia); It’s a common trait that binds all members of a nation together; Language, customs and territory are necessary for a nation to exist; After all, there is no nation without a language; A nation without its language is not a nation; etc.* (*apklauso.lt*, n.d.).

This study applies the methodology of linguistic worldview, which was developed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin and has already been used by the authors of this article in their work on several concepts (EUROPE, WORK, HONOUR, FREEDOM) for the axiological dictionary entitled *Leksykon aksjologiczny Słowian i ich sąsiadów* [The Axiological Lexicon of Slavs and their Neighbours], in separate articles as well as in the monograph *Vertybės lietuvių pasaulėvaizdyje* [The Values in the Worldview of a Lithuanian]. This article does not embrace the whole concept LANGUAGE; its full version will be published in the forthcoming monograph *Kalba. Tauta. Valstybė* [Language. Nation. State].

The aim of this article is to explain how the concept LANGUAGE is understood by native Lithuanian-speaking university students living in Lithuania, and what changes occur in the understanding of the concept when an individual finds him/herself living far away from their homeland for various reasons. It is not by chance that Jerzy Bartmiński refers to students as “young, aspiring intelligentsia” (Bartmiński, 2006, p. 9). The survey data presented here show how members of the young generation understand the meaning of this word, what changes its semantic nucleus has gone through and what new aspects have appeared. Their “configurations seem to be invisible but they can be described quantitatively and qualitatively” (Bartmiński, 2006, p. 25).

Systemic data are of utmost importance for revealing the linguistic worldview. Bartmiński even considers them to be the most significant in concept analysis (Bartmiński, 2014a, 2014b) as they are used to present a concept under consideration and a word representing it throughout the whole lexical-semantic network. It is namely this network that builds up the conceptual system of a contemporary individual, which is disclosed in questionnaire surveys. Therefore, the article will first turn to the concept LANGUAGE in contemporary lexicographic sources.

Kalba 'language' in the main lexicographic sources

Following the methodology developed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin, we first examined the main lexicographic sources of the Lithuanian language, which are based on a broad variety of materials, ranging from dialectal examples and historical texts to literary works and living speech. It can thus be assumed that the material embraces the main spheres of language use. The Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language (*Lietuvių kalbos žodynas*, hereafter DLL) and the Dictionary of Modern Lithuanian Language (*Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas*, hereafter DMLL) provide different meanings for the word *kalba* 'language':

The DLL (n.d.):

- (1) a system of verbal expression of thoughts
- (2) speaking, sharing thoughts, conversation
- (3) verbal or spoken idea(s), a saying, a tale, an opinion
- (4) speech
- (5) the ability to speak, voice
- (6) tongue, voice (while speaking)
- (7) a particular distinguishing feature, type of language
- (8) a method, style of expressing thoughts
- (9) a dialect, subdialect
- (10) a phenomenon resembling language, something that is similar to language

The DMLL (n.d.):

- (1) a system of verbal expression of thoughts
- (2) a practical ability to express thoughts with words
- (3) a particular type of a system of expression of thoughts
- (4) a conversation
- (5) speaking to an audience in public
- (6) non-verbal expression of thoughts

The above lists indicate that both dictionaries tend to define language as a system and an act of communication (which is particularly evident in the case of the DMLL, n.d.), with the DLL (n.d.) illustrating its meanings (1), (5) and (8) with sentences from texts (txt), dictionaries (dict.) or language specialists (see the list of abbreviations): (1) **Language** is the key means of human interaction (txt); **Human language** is a basket for all kinds of knowledge (K. Būg.); **Grammar** is a science of **language** (J. Jabl.); **native language** (dict.); **national language** (dict.); (5) **Officialdom** begin to spout **speeches** at banquets (txt); **He** delivered a **speech** at the meeting (dict.); (8) **standard language** (A. Sal.); **written, spoken language** (dict.); **tabloid language** (dict.); **poetic language** (dict.).

Even though they may have elaborate wording, these dictionary meanings are very important for they shape modern speakers' understanding of language and their attitudes towards it, which will make investigating their current influence an interesting exercise. For the purposes of this study, live usage is highly relevant as well because the aim here is to reveal the image of the concept in speakers' consciousness. This makes only DLL meanings (2), (3), (6), and (10) relevant; these meanings are illustrated with the following dialectal examples:

- (1) *Su tavim kalbos galo nerasiu.* (Skr.)
'With you, there will be no end to **talk**.'
- (2) *Kalba mudviejū nėra kalba mažų vaikų.* (J. Bal-Ger.)
'Our **talk** is not the **talk** of small children.'
- (3) *Tik įsimink apie Antosę, ji ir užmeta kitą kalbą.* (Skr.)
'As soon as you mention Antosė, she begins to **talk** about something else.'
- (4) *Mokytas žmogus su kiekvienu turi kalbą.* (Srv.)
'An educated person will find something to **talk** about with anyone.'
- (5) *Iki pavalgo, turim su juo kalbos.* (Kt.)
'Until he's eaten, we have things to **talk** about.'
- (6) *Koks protas, tokia ir kalba.* (Ds.)
'As the mind, so the **language**.'
- (7) *Aš juk ne taip sakiau; norėdamas, teisybė, gali išverst kitaip kiekvieno kalbą.* (Vdžg.)
'It wasn't what I said; of course, if you want it, you can translate anyone's **words** any way you like.'
- (8) *Kalba yr: kas savo nežiūri, tas nieko neturi.* (Skr.)
'They **say**: he who doesn't tend to his own, has nothing.'
- (9) *Jo kalba lygiai vėjo švilpa: pro vieną ausį įėjo, pro kitą išėjo.* (Ds.)
'His **words** are like the wind: in one ear, out the other.'
- (10) *Man tos kalbos neįkalbėsi, kad arklys pasenė[ja].* (Šts.)
'You won't persuade me with those **talks** that the horse has grown old.'
- (11) *A teip tatai daug mano tos kalbos ir rašysi?* (Slnt.)
'So, are you going to write down a lot of what I'm **saying**?'
- (12) *Jo kalbos ir į vežimą nesukrausi.* (Nj.)
'His **talk** won't fit even into a waggon.'
- (13) *Gera kalba taiso, bloga gadina.* (Tr.)
'Good **talk** mends things, bad talk ruins them.'
- (14) *Didelis vyras kalbose, bet mažas darbuose.* (Al.)
'A big man to **talk**, a small one to walk.'
- (15) *Mano žmogus mirė su visa kalba.* (Skr.)
'My man died with all his **speech**.'

- (16) *Rado jį aukštynką an lovos ir jau be kalbos.* (Brt.)
 ‘They found him lying on the bed, **speechless**.’
- (17) *Žiūrėk, Petronė visur buvo, o savo prigimtos kalbos nepakeitė.* (Klvr.)
 ‘Look, Petronė has been around a lot, but she hasn’t changed how she speaks her native **tongue**.’

The dialectal examples listed above show that Lithuanians understand language as their native dialect (17); a particular sign of mind, sense, life, an ability to talk (15), (16); a conversation and discourse, communication, a way of speaking (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (11); a thought expressed, spread (7), (12), (13); an opinion, persuasion (8), (9), (10), (14).

Different types of public discourse in Lithuania contain a considerable number of references to the significance of language, particularly this year, when the state is celebrating its centenary; a positive attitude prevails. Although this article does not aim to analyse those cases, we should mention some examples as current public discourse greatly affects young people’s understanding of the word:

- journalist discourse: “The end of my world is where my language ends” (Mindaugas Nastaravičius, a poet, playwright and journalist);
- political discourse: “It is a mirror of our statehood and the foundation of our identity. The Lithuanian language unites us and makes us stand out from the midst of other nations. Therefore, it is the personal duty of each and every one to preserve it and use it correctly” (President Dalia Grybauskaitė);
- replies in a survey conducted by apklausos.lt web portal: “Language: The foundation of the nation’s survival?": *A nation without a language will perish ([e.g.] Prussia); It’s a common trait that binds all members of a nation together; When the language is no more, we will speak another language, and the language that we speak will define us; Without the language, there will be no nation; Unfortunately, our native language is the kind of asset that we only begin to appreciate once we’ve lost it* (apklausos.lt, n.d.).

It is apparent, then, that language is considered the most important part of Lithuanian identity and hence something that needs to be preserved and treasured as a national value.

LANGUAGE in the consciousness of young people in Lithuania

As mentioned above, analysis of the data presented in this article rests on the methodology of the linguistic worldview that has been developed and perfected by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin. Investigation of the concept in question in the

worldview of young people is another case where this methodology has been applied. Surveys conducted among students show how the young generation understands the meaning of one word or another, to what extent the semantic core of a word has changed, what types of new senses have occurred. As a rule, surveys are also a source of new synonyms, antonyms and hypernyms. They also offer an excellent illustration of the claim about the open structure of meaning. In this type of survey, it is the frequency of identified descriptors that matters: the aim is not only to check the definitions provided in dictionaries, but also to establish the intensity of a particular attribute as revealed by the number of respondents who used it. This allows to identify predominant and peripheral attributes. Instead of imposing an opinion, cognitive surveys encourage the respondent to think independently and to provide their subjective opinion. Data derived from answers to survey questions are processed manually, identifying the descriptors and arranging the replies by percentages. The data are shown using the following symbols: N is the number of respondents; W is the number of all phrases used by the respondents; D is the number of the descriptors; W_s is the stereotypisation indicator. The stereotypisation indicator shows the ratio between the two most common descriptors and the rest of the descriptors that occurred less often, and is calculated under the following formula:¹

$$W_s = (D_1 + D_2) \div W \times 100$$

The survey discussed here was conducted in order to identify how young people in Lithuania perceive the concept LANGUAGE. The question asked to the respondents was: “What does language mean to you?”. The replies were collected among students (from bachelor to doctoral level) at various faculties of Vilnius University: the Faculty of Physics (36), the Philological Faculty (20), the Faculty of History (21), the Faculty of Law (2) and the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics (1). Humanities students accounted for 48 per cent of those polled. Females (62 humanities and 23 science students) made up 52 per cent of the respondents, and males (17 humanities and 61 science students) – 48 per cent. All those surveyed were native speakers of Lithuanian. The descriptors are presented below as percentages in a descending order:

N = 163; W = 298; D = 43; $W_s = 43.29$

- (1) **a means; a tool; an instrument (S)**; 83 / 27.85%
- (2) **a method (S)**; 46 / 15.44%
- (3) **the native language (N)**; 21 / 7.05%
- (4) **a feature (Psy)**; 11 / 3.69%
- (5) **a part (I)**; 11 / 3.69%
- (6) **an opportunity (D)**; 9 / 3.02%

¹ For more about survey methods, see Bartmiński, 2014b, pp. 232–332; Brzozowska, 2006, pp. 36–43.

- (7) **a value (PS)**; 9 / 3.02%
- (8) **words (D)**; 9 / 3.02%
- (9) **a system (D)**; 8 / 2.68%
- (10) **communication (S)**; 7 / 2.35%
- (11) **a subject (PS)**; 7 / 2.35%
- (12) **an identity (Psy)**; 6 / 2.01%
- (13) **the Lithuanian language (N)**; 6 / 2.01%
- (14) **a shape (S)**; 5 / 1.68%
- (15) **something that is exclusive, distinctive, unique (Psy)**; 5 / 1.68%
- (16) **a bond (PS)**; 4 / 1.34%
- (17) **the homeland (I)**; 4 / 1.34%
- (18) **unity (I)**; 4 / 1.34%

A total of 298 phrases were extracted from the questionnaires and categorised according to 43 identified descriptors. Based on the survey methodology, the descriptors with under four occurrences are not included along with the more frequent ones. Yet they also appeared in the replies and therefore need to be mentioned: **sounds; sign language; a method; heritage; an expression; a weapon; culture; body language; freedom; home; a symbol; traditions, customs; the language of the state, country; a door; an element; history; foundation; cognition; an attribute; a key; perception; a nation; parents; an asset; a calling card.** It should be noted that it is not only the descriptors as such, but also the level of their occurrence that is very important.

First of all, it needs to be mentioned that the respondents perceive language as more than just sounds, letters or grammatical forms: they write about *sounds, sounds and sound formations, sounds that produce images* along with *sign language, gestures and body language*. We can notice that there is more than just one idea of language here: we have also sign and body languages, which means that there is an understanding that the linguistic factor alone is not enough to be able to communicate and interact with others. Several survey forms point out that *the real language is not just your mother tongue, but the language of work as well*, where the language of work is understood in a much broader sense: not only English, German or any other foreign language, but also programming languages, which goes beyond the understanding of language in purely linguistic terms.

Another important observation is the awareness that language is *the heritage of the predecessors that has been maturing, growing, shifting for centuries and allows you to be a fully-fledged citizen of Lithuania*. This enables the respondents to feel a bond with the nation, the state, and even to note that the language is *the backbone of the nation or the greatest asset of every nation, a symbol of unity and a characteristic of a true nation*. In other words, a state and a nation cannot exist without

a language, which stands to convey the very idea of both identity and *culture, customs, traditions*, and finally *history*. Yet there is another side to this approach, one that leads to a purist stance on language: *a real language is one that has been fostered since ancient times and contains no foreign words; a real language is a means of communication rather than new coinages or loanwords*. This type of misconception may be attributed to several factors: first of all, blind patriotism; second, flaws in the development process, when focus is placed on grammatical correctness without explaining the origin of some specifics of language or words. We should also note that the presented replies suggest that a real language is exclusively one that is old, even though there are languages in the world that are quite young. However, the statement that *a real language is one that is able to change in line with changes of its usage, thus preserving a stable structure* found in one of the replies shows that some people do understand that language is in flux because the environment in which it is used changes, and so do language users in their own right. For all practical purposes, we could say that this dualistic approach has been born out of the discussion that is taking place in the media and social networks, where saviours of the language go head to head against the opponents of the standard language.

Interestingly, in the light of the recent escalation in the propaganda war, there were but a few people who remembered that language is *the sharpest and most dangerous weapon; a kind of a weapon to use against others*.

Equally important is the understanding of language as a person's calling card: *language is every person's calling card, if we refer to their native language*. This statement implies that with time you realise that how you speak affects how other people see you. Yet the second part of the statement is highly ethnocentric because it suggests that speaking nicely and correctly only applies when you use your native language and it does not when speaking other languages. Most likely, here we have the attitude that foreigners will be pleased with the very fact that people speak their language, and the way it is spoken will not matter to them at all. Of course, there is a grain of truth in this, yet there is a major difference between grammatical errors or syntactic variations and pure slang. One could guess that this kind of attitude has emerged thanks to characters portrayed in literature and films who often do not abide by any linguistic norms; neither do musical performers. Yet people fail to realise that this has nothing to do with speaking in public and self-representation.

So far, we have only mentioned the least frequent of the descriptors, yet the most frequent of them are **a means**, **a tool** and **an instrument**. The next one in line (**a method**) is closely related to the first one. All these descriptors describe language as a means of communication, understanding the world, conveying information. One of the replies featured this statement: *communication and transfer of information is the only purpose of language*. Of course, there is some truth in that, but it eliminates the function of language as an instrument of art.

Another large group of descriptors is best described by the following statement: *no other language can convey emotions and feelings like your native language can*. So, another group is the native language and everything it implies. Students perceive their native language as *one of the main defining features of the nation; the natural attribute of the human being that reveals their identity, describes their history; a defining feature of the state*. Furthermore, language is considered *one of the biggest values of the nation; one of the biggest values I could have received from my parents, grandparents and other ancestors*. Of course, people realise that the native language is *what sets us apart from other countries, people; a distinguishing feature of a country; a link with traditions and roots; finally, it is the identity of the nation or a citizen; a part of national awareness*. The replies weave a tight bond between language and the *homeland and love of it*.

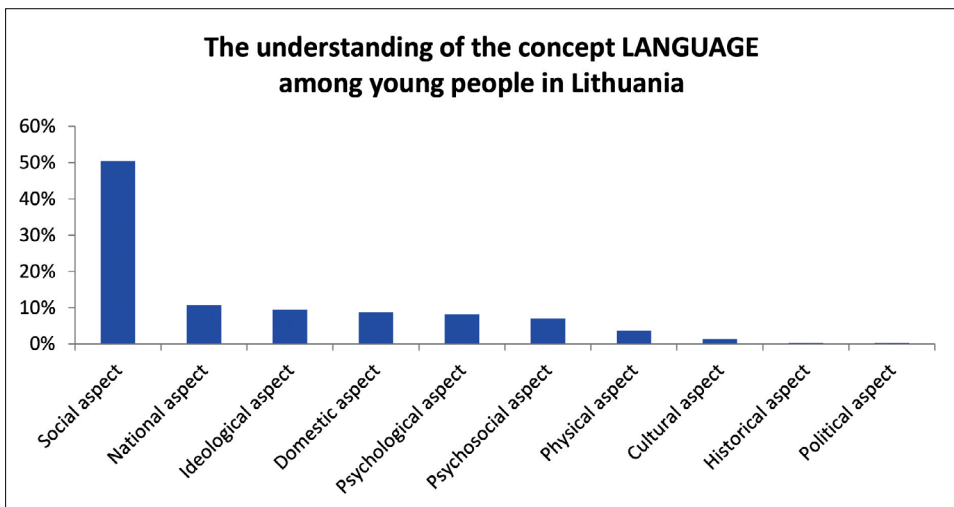
Statements found in two replies require a separate discussion. The first one indicates concern that language masks identity, and raises the question of the importance of this kind of identity: *it carries a part of our identity hidden in the fine points of usage, yet the importance and extent of this identity are highly disputable*. This statement is very important for the purposes of the study, as it aims to show that language nonetheless is vital to the formation of identity. The other statement merely reflects on the idea of a reply: *to me, language is not a characteristic of communication of the nation, because as a member of the young maximalist generation I tend to consider the world as my nation more and more*. The very reply suggests that the world should only have one language to eliminate all differences, or at least make languages equal, for language is a creation that artificially divides us into separate nations. This leads to the question whether this is a new attitude that is indicative of a tendency that is soon to spread, or, conversely, a rather old one, which still manages to find its way into people's consciousness.

All of the above shows that most of the respondents consider language to be a tool or instrument of communication and work, yet they also think that it builds a connection between us and the past, culture, traditions and nation no matter where we are. Furthermore, we can clearly see an understanding that language is a system and that its systemic nature is rather necessary, although people do fail to fully understand how it should be brought to life. There is evidence of a fear of foreign words as well, which shows that how they make their way into the language and why some of them are appropriate while others are not needs more explaining.

We should close our description of student replies with aspects that basically help connecting different descriptors bearing a similar sense into one whole. The biggest aspect that covers senses relating to interaction and communication is the social one (S). This indicates that young people consider language to be a way, method, form or means of communication that they usually view as a tool or an instrument, some kind of a key to the door of communication, work, getting to

learn about the world. Language is also understood as a link connecting language users and family members. Yet this instrument of communication carries a considerably interrelated national (N) and ideological (I) (and possibly historical (H) and political (P)) aspect as well. These aspects reveal that to young people language is a communication tool, a certain part of identity and homeland, an element of unity with fellow compatriots, of freedom and even of history, and possibly a certain type of a symbol or even a legacy of past generations. This heritage is perceived as an attribute of a state or a country, or a personal or national asset, which sometimes can even be used as a weapon. Young people see the real language as the Lithuanian language, or native language, which does not necessarily have to be Lithuanian.

We should connect the four latter aspects with yet another one – the cultural aspect (C), which indicates that, apart from being part of the national spirit, language is also part of culture, one that helps convey customs and traditions. The domestic aspect (D) indicates that language is a system, while the descriptors of the physical aspect (Ph) enhance this understanding, suggesting that it is not just a system of words, but also the expression of sounds and body or sign language. The last aspects to be covered here are the psychological (Psy) and the psychosocial (PS) aspects, which help understand language both as an internal state of a person and as a psychological and moral link with other members of society. With these aspects, young people want to convey the idea that language is a distinctive, individual, unique, cognition- and understanding-critical attribute of the identity of the individual and nation. The most interesting seme of the last few descriptors is that language is a characteristic of a person’s culture and social status, that is, some kind of a calling card.



LANGUAGE in the consciousness of Lithuanian emigrants

They say that we can best understand how important something is to us when we lose it for some reason or other. This observation also applies to the language environment in which we grow up and function. Restriction of communication in one's native tongue could break down the established connections with the nation and homeland:

The native language connects the person both to their own existence and their nation. Therefore, growing up in a language is experienced as an immensely personal and usual thing. We live submersed in it, often without even feeling it or thinking about it; just like the air that we breathe. We only begin to feel it when we are faced with a different, alien language that we do not understand or are just beginning to learn. It is then that we experience the joy of coming across someone who speaks our native tongue. We establish a closeness with them straight away, a kind of kinship through language. (Zaborskaitė, 1992, p. 57)

Therefore, this study also considers a survey of Lithuanian emigrants. We are interested in the extent of understanding language as a value, in connection with the nation that has been preserved in the consciousness of emigrants, and in new elements that have emerged in their understanding of the concept while living away from their homeland. A total of 134 survey forms were collected, of which 92 had been completed by women and 42 by men. Those polled currently reside in 29 countries: Great Britain (20), Belgium (17), Canada (11), the United States (11), Germany (10), Denmark (8), Ireland (6), Norway (6), Australia (5), Latvia (5), Russia (5), Italy (4), the Netherlands (4), Poland (4), Spain (3), Sweden (2), Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Portugal, Switzerland, Thailand, Uruguay. The respondents' age varied between 11 and 84; the average was 22 years. Contrary to young people in Lithuania, Lithuanian emigrants are a highly diverse group, which can be categorised into those who were born abroad or migrated to countries with strong Lithuanian communities before 1995, and those who emigrated after 1995, having received their education in independent Lithuania. Yet the difference between the two groups is small, with the former inclined to see things in a slightly more beautiful light and to consider language from a nostalgic and emotional perspective.

N = 134; W = 149; D = 36; Ws = 48.51

- (1) **a means; a tool (S)**; 44 / 32.84%
- (2) **a method (S)**; 21 / 15.67%
- (3) **native language (N)**; 10 / 7.46%

- (4) **a value (PS)**; 7 / 5.22%
- (5) **a bond (PS)**; 6 / 4.48%
- (6) **home (S)**; 5 / 3.73%
- (7) **heritage; legacy (C)**; 5 / 3.73%
- (8) **roots (C)**; 5 / 3.73%
- (9) **identity (Psy)**; 4 / 2.99%
- (10) **something unique, individual (Psy)**; 4 / 2.99%

There are some less frequent descriptors that also need to be mentioned here, such as **an opportunity; memory; a part; a subject; origin; culture; body language; a foundation; identity; traditions; an asset; a community language; treasure; a feature; a door; a form; sign language; a connection; Lithuania; the Lithuanian language; art; a phenomenon; a vault; a symbol; family language; the national spirit**. The very essence of the replies in this group is reflected by the following statement: *If a person cannot speak their language and write in it, what makes them different from a monkey?*

Comparing the results of the surveys of Lithuanian students and Lithuanians abroad, the first thing that can be noticed is the similarity of the first three descriptors in both groups of the respondents: **a means, a tool, an instrument, a method, the native language**. Apart from those key descriptors, less frequent ones overlap as well, e.g. **a value, a bond, home, heritage, identity, an opportunity, a part, culture, sign language, body language, the Lithuanian language, family language**, and so on. For all practical purposes, this shows that Lithuanians share a similar attitude towards language regardless of how old they are and the country they were born or live in. Of course, some differences do exist, for instance, Lithuanians living abroad did not mention things like **a weapon** or **a person's calling card** at all. Interestingly, the sense of systemic character, or the system, sounds, grammar of language, did not appear in their replies either. The possible reason behind this could be that, especially when it comes to those who were born abroad, the system of the Lithuanian language is not as important as the idea of speaking it as such, regardless of form. This idea probably has the most accurate illustration in the following statements found in one of the replies: *To me, language means that you can communicate freely with others in Lithuanian. That you have preserved the roots, that you can continue to form an image of your homeland to your children at home.*

The biggest difference between the two groups is that in the replies of the people living abroad it is the symbol of language as something unique, something personal that takes the spotlight. What is also important is the sense of association with a particular group (*Language to me means an opportunity to speak to people from Lithuania and other Lithuanian communities worldwide. Language is an important element for you to be able to consider yourself part of the nation, but when*

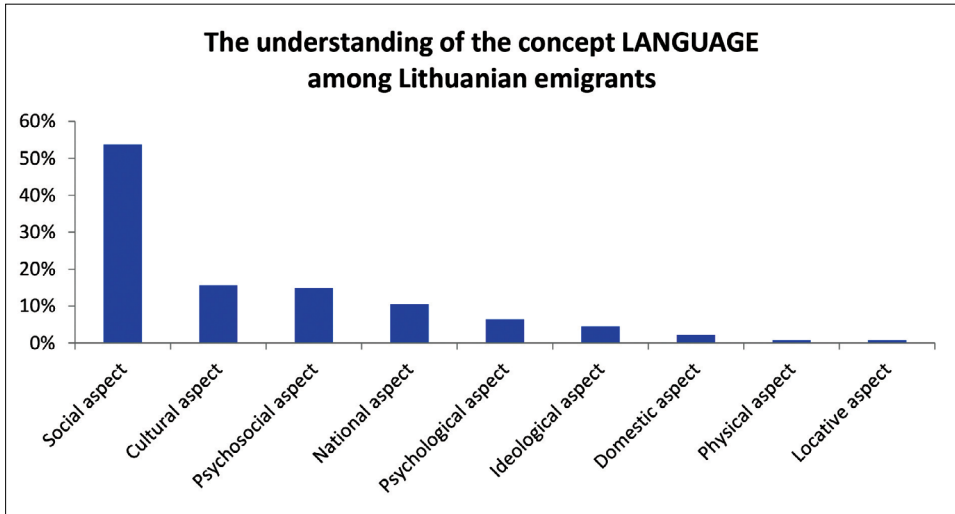
the language is gone, what matters is how you understand yourself, how you define your identity.), its past and its land (*Language is a heritage that connects us to the land where our parents come from.*), or its roots, origins (*To me personally, language is important so that my children and grandchildren can understand the origin of our family.*).

Even though the respondents understand that *the self-expression of a nation is secured best by the language that helped unite the nation so it could establish a state*, the answers often reflect the idea that *the language does not need to be the very same for you to be a resident of the state*. Roughly one in five survey forms features an attitude that belonging to a nation or a state has nothing to do with the usage of language; it is who you feel you are that matters. The very idea is not new and can be found in Lithuanian history. As often as not, respondents support such ideas with the fact that they live in multilingual states, or with facts from other countries. Yet even this kind of mulling usually ends in statements like *language is part of my identity*.

One female respondent disclosed a rather sore and interesting issue: early teaching of a second language. A lot can be written about this issue, but it is all summed up perfectly by these thoughts: *I started learning English when I was seven, and have been using it as my primary (writing, reading, speaking, thinking) language for almost eight years. Actually, today I feel I am bilingual*.

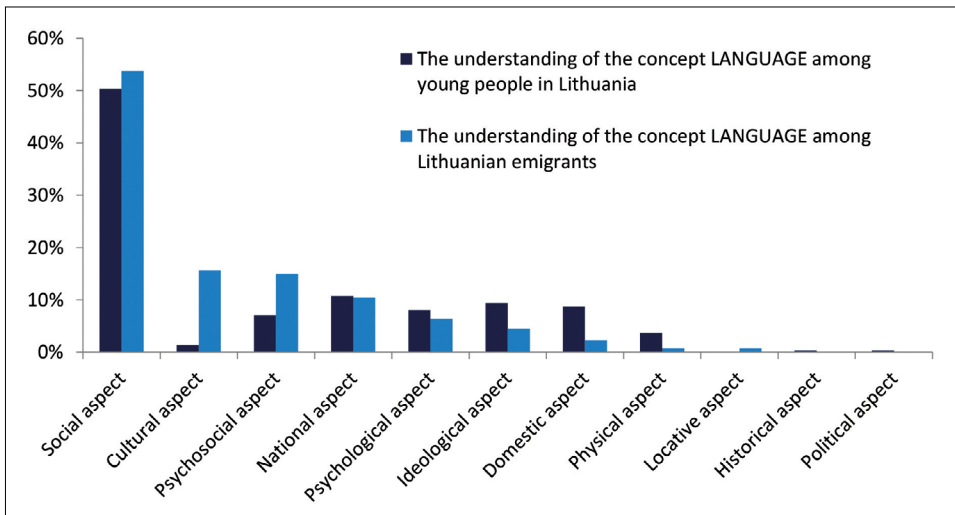
It should be noted that the replies from this group did not voice the negative attitudes towards language that were present in the answers from the young people in Lithuania. However, we came across this proposition: *I have been disappointed with the Lithuanian language for years, because there is not one Lithuanian who can speak it correctly and I would not bother teaching my children who were born outside Lithuania this unpopular and grammatically deprived language*. The first thing that catches one's eye is that Lithuanians lean towards self-scorn a lot, and in this case the frequently occurring Lithuanian syndrome of smallness and provinciality also affects the perception of their language, which is described as unpopular.

In the replies from Lithuanians living abroad, the biggest aspect is the social one (S); we could tie it with the psychosocial aspect (PS), which clearly shows that what matters to people the most is the opportunity to talk and be understood, to communicate, get to know other cultures and people. The cultural (C), national (N), ideological (I), and most probably locative (L) aspects are very clear here, which indicates that language helps maintain identity, a connection with the nation, its culture and history. The remaining (domestic (D) and physical (Ph)) aspects show that language is perceived as a font of opportunities, without forgetting that it is more than just sounds or rules and comes in other shapes as well, such as body language.



Conclusions

(1) In order to show the gaps and similar points in the attitudes of young people living in Lithuania and emigrants towards language as a value more clearly, we present the following comparative diagram:



A comparison of replies from the two groups indicates that the social aspect is the biggest in both of them, with the percentage difference in the mentions of this aspect between them quite small. One noticeable observation is that Lithuanians living abroad tend to distinguish the cultural and the psychosocial aspects rather more often, which is most likely because they consider it important to find a connection with other Lithuanians, with a common past and culture. Interestingly, even though this connection is very important to emigrants, it matters to young people in Lithuania as well, especially if we are to consider the national aspect, where the percentage of mentions between the two groups nearly overlaps. In the replies of Lithuanian young people, the ideological aspect of LANGUAGE is expressed rather more clearly, and the historical and the political aspects (even though they occur rarely) are still there, while the replies from the group of Lithuanian emigrants certainly lack those latter two. However, replies of Lithuanians living abroad have uncovered a locative aspect, which is not present in the replies of young people in Lithuania. In the latter group, the physical and the domestic aspects are much more distinct, which probably shows that when it comes to language, young Lithuanian people are already beginning to look for other possibilities of linguistic expression, noting that language is more than just sounds or words, but also includes gestures; finally there are programming languages. To be more precise, young people in Lithuania have adopted a rather broader approach to language.

(2) This study suggests that there are three main dictionary meanings of LANGUAGE embedded in the consciousness of young people: they consider language a means, a method or a tool to speak and be understood, to express thoughts. Yet they bring more colours to the concept in question, especially accentuating language as a value, a connection with home, homeland, other Lithuanians, an expression of the national spirit. To them, language is an asset, memory, culture, it is the language that distinguishes Lithuanians from the midst of other nations. A modern young person already finds not only verbal language, but also its other variations, such as body or sign language, equally important. However, dictionary meanings like 'speech', 'dialect', 'the ability to speak' no longer hold any relevance to young people.

Abbreviations

Al. – Alytus town

A. Sal. – Antanas Salys

Br. – Bartninkai, Vilkaiviškis district

DLL – Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language

DMLL – Dictionary of Modern Lithuanian Language

Ds. – Dusetos, Zarasai district
 J. Bal-Ger. – Jonas Balvočius-Gerutis
 J. Jabl. – Jonas Jablonskis
 K. Būg. – Kazimieras Būga
 Klvr. – Kalvarija, Marijampolė district
 Kt. – Keturvalakiai, Vilkaviškis district
 Nj. – Naujamiestis, Panevėžys district
 Skr. – Skirsnemunė, Jurbarkas district
 Slnt. – Salantai, Kretinga district
 Srv. – Surviliškis, Kėdainiai district
 Šts. – Šatės, Skuodas district
 Tr. – Traupis, Anykščiai district
 Vdžg. – Vadžgirys, Jurbarkas district

Aspects of language

PS – psychosocial
 D – domestic
 Ph – physical
 H – historical
 I – ideological
 C – cultural
 L – locative
 Psy – psychological
 S – social
 P – political
 N – national

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The understanding of the concept LANGUAGE among young people in Lithuania and Lithuanians living abroad

Abstract

This article applies the methodology developed by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin to analyse how the concept LANGUAGE (Lith. *KALBA*) is understood by young people in Lithuania and how its understanding changes when a person lives far away from their homeland. A comparison of replies from the two groups indicates that the social aspect has the most weight in both of them, as the difference

in the percentage of mentions of this aspect was quite small. Lithuanians living abroad tend to stress the cultural and the psychosocial aspects much more; they find the connection with other Lithuanians very important. The survey of young people in Lithuania reveals a more distinct ideological aspect of LANGUAGE, and the historical and political aspects, even though they occur rarely, are still present, while the replies from the respondents living abroad lack the latter two. However, the survey of Lithuanian emigrants has uncovered a locative aspect, which is not present among the respondents living in the country. Young people in Lithuania have a somewhat broader understanding of the concept: when they think about language, they are already beginning to look for other possibilities of linguistic expression, noting that language is more than just sounds or words, but also includes gestures; they also mention programming languages.

Keywords: language; descriptor; ethnolinguistics; concept; key values of a nation

Rozumienie pojęcia JĘZYK wśród litewskiej młodzieży i Litwinów za granicą

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł, oparty na metodologii lubelskiej szkoły etnolingwistycznej, ukazuje, jak pojęcie JĘZYK (lit. KALBA) jest rozumiane przez współczesnych młodych mieszkańców Litwy i jak zmienia się jego konceptualizacja, gdy osoby przebywają przez dłuższy czas z dala od ojczyzny. Porównanie odpowiedzi obu grup respondentów uwidocznilo, że badani najliczniej przypisują językowi aspekt społeczny i różnica procentowa w wyborze tego kryterium w obu grupach nie jest duża. Emigranci litewscy mocniej natomiast wyróżniają aspekt kulturowy i psychospołeczny języka, dla nich relacje z innymi Litwinami są bardzo ważne. W odpowiedziach studentów mieszkających na Litwie często występuje aspekt ideologiczny języka, rzadziej – historyczny i polityczny, a w odpowiedziach emigrantów takich aspektów nie ma, chociaż można tu z kolei wyróżnić aspekt lokatywny, który nie zaznaczył się w ankietach respondentów z Litwy. Młodzież z Litwy język rozumie nieco szerzej: stara się szukać innych możliwości ekspresji językowej, uważa, że pojęcie JĘZYK obejmuje nie tylko dźwięki lub słowa, ale i gesty, a nawet języki programowania.

Słowa kluczowe: język; deskryptor; etnolingwistyka; pojęcie; podstawowe wartości narodowe

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Support of the work: The study was conducted at the authors' own expense.

Authors' contribution: MS is responsible for the concept of the study; IS collected the examples. Both authors participated in drafting the manuscript.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.