

XX. THE STORY OF A BOOK

There are books that have a unique history. One of them is the *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian*. Such a voluminous manual (457 pp.) of the Lithuanian language had not been published before. Its first edition appeared in 1966; four more editions followed in 1970, 1975, 1982 and 1990.

The authors of the book were three linguists: Leonardas Dambriūnas, Antanas Klimas and William R. Schmalstieg.

I remember very well the entire process of producing this grammar. About the year 1950, I was still a student at the University of Pennsylvania; an old American university, established by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 (it is often mistaken for Pennsylvania State University, which is in the geographic center of the state). At that time, there appeared on campus a very gifted student, William R. Schmalstieg, whom we simply called Bill.

Two more Lithuanians worked at the university library. At that time, Bill was studying Lithuanian intensively; and while drinking Coca-Cola, we often talked about the necessity of having a good textbook of Lithuanian in English.

In the autumn of 1957, I moved to the University of Rochester near the Great Lakes and Niagara Falls. There too, I often thought about a Lithuanian grammar in English. In a special folder, I kept the materials for the first lessons. In the meantime, my colleague Schmalstieg had worked at several universities. By that time, his command of Lithuanian was good and we corresponded occasionally. About 1957, it turned out that he, too, had started writing a grammar of Lithuanian. Being old friends and colleagues, we got along well and decided to write the grammar together.

It was to be a handbook of forty lessons; with every fifth lesson a review. We were planning to add reading materials, a full grammar text and Lithuanian-English and English-Lithuanian vocabularies in appendices.

Our work proceeded approximately like this: I usually prepared the reading material and a Lithuanian-English vocabulary for each lesson. Bill would write a grammar text and notes, and then I added the exercises and dialogues of ten sentences, which Bill translated into English.

Professor Schmalstieg wrote the whole grammar appendix, which contained everything from the morphology of nouns, adjectives and verbs to some information on accentuation and the twelve verbal prefixes. By the way, at that time, no other grammar, including those published in Lithuania, contained such exhaustive information on the declension of the simple and adverbial forms of participles.

It is understandable that we could work on the grammar only by fits and starts, since we were also teaching a number of courses and writing articles and reviews. When the work was coming to an end, we applied to Leonardas Dambriūnas, my former teacher at the University of Vytautas Magnus in Kaunas, for help. Schmalstieg was a Slavist by education, but was greatly interested in Old Prussian and Lithuanian. I qualified as a specialist of Indo-European and Germanic philology. Besides, in Kaunas, I had attended the lectures on Lithuanian philology delivered by Professor Pranas Skardžius, Petras Jonikas, Kazys Ulvydas and Dambrauskas; and, of course, I was born and bred in Lithuania. Dambriūnas was a well-known scholar of Lithuanian, and his aid was particularly valuable in accentuation. At that time, Schmalstieg was already teaching at Pennsylvania State University.*

In the course of the work on the textbook, thick manila envelopes were shuttled between Rochester, New York, State

* In 1995, Professor Dr. William R. Schmalstieg was awarded a well-deserved honorary doctorate by the University of Vilnius. He was the first American to receive an honorary degree from Vilnius.

College, Pennsylvania and Baltimore, Maryland, where the late Leonardas Dambriūnas lived.

Thank God, the University of Rochester supported the work with a substantial grant, because the number of those thick envelopes was great. Again—luck was with us—Mrs. T., a gifted Czech woman, worked in the office of our University. She did not know Lithuanian, but she knew Latin, Czech, German and English. The most important thing was that Mrs. T. perceived the significance of such letters as š, č and ž, since Lithuanian had borrowed these letters from Czech. Mrs. T. typed our voluminous manuscript twice on her electric typewriter, and the three of us kept correcting and correcting it. My two co-authors would send their proofs to me, I inserted their corrections into my copy and gave it to Mrs. T. for retyping.

By about the end of 1965, we had the entire manuscript corrected and retyped and sent it off to our publishers—Darbininkas, owned by the Franciscan Fathers in Brooklyn, NY.

The publishing story, we might say, is also long. The actual publisher of the first edition was the late Monsignor A. Juozas Karalius, pastor-emeritus in St. George's Church, Shenandoah, an enthusiastic supporter of the Lithuanian press in the United States.

When I came to the USA from Great Britain in 1948, for the first two summers I stayed with my uncle, the late Jurgis (George) Klimas, in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, not far from several Lithuanian parishes. My uncle knew the Reverend Karalius very well, since he was previously my uncle's rector in Minersville, Pennsylvania, where my uncle had lived. I also happened to meet the Monsignor several times—he always touched upon the urgent need for a good grammar of Lithuanian.

On one occasion, Monsignor Karalius had sent the Franciscan Fathers one thousand dollars for the preparation

of a Lithuanian grammar. When some twenty lessons were written, I sent the Monsignor a copy of the two of them. He liked the work and again wrote the Franciscan Fathers several checks for quite large sums.

At that time, the Franciscan Provincial was the Reverend Dr. Leonardas Andriekus, OFM, and the director of the Brooklyn printing house (still in operation!) was Father Pranciškus Gedgaudas, OFM. They both were great supporters of our grammar project.

Then the hard task of linotyping began—the stress marks had to be placed by hand on vowels, diphthongs and the consonants *l*, *m̃*, *ñ*, *r̃* (computers had not yet been invented). The Darbininkas compositor Mr. V.A. and the designer Mr. P.B. nearly went crazy. The compositor once told me that he even began seeing some characters(\, /, ~) in his dreams.

And we—the three co-authors—read the proofs, nine times in all, since each of us read the whole book (457 pages) three times. Once again, thick envelopes traveled from Brooklyn to Rochester and from there to Pennsylvania and Maryland. And then again to me and back to Brooklyn.

Father Gedgaudas and his printers must be given their due—they were really patient. Before printing the book, they asked us how many copies could be sold in ten years' time. We did various counts and, finally, we indicated a print run of 2,000 (We were wrong: in the course of 34 years, there have been five editions; and the total number of copies was over 10,000). I read the last (tenth) proofs in the apartment of the Provincial Father in Brooklyn.

The book was published around Christmas in 1966 on good paper, with fine print quality, hard covers, and a nice dust jacket. We had not signed any contract with the publishers. We only asked them to produce a good book. The Provincial Father, then Dr. Andriekus, approved it.

A word about the illustrations. The maps and tables were drawn by a student of mine, Dr. William Babcock. Other illustrations were rendered by the artist Paulius Jurkus, and the photographs were by the renowned photographer Vytautas Augustinas; they were generously put at the disposal of the Franciscan printing house.

The Franciscan Fathers sent the first copy of the book to Monsignor Karalius. He was satisfied with the job.

In 1999, the sixth edition, renamed *Beginner's Lithuanian*, was published by Barnes & Noble.

Thus, our grammar of Lithuanian spread throughout the world—in the USA, Canada, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. On its pages, it carried the 1920 map of Lithuania, the Statue of Liberty, the Lithuanian tricolor, and the mention of February 16, proclaiming the independence of Lithuania.

The first reviews started to appear. Its publication was greeted by Prof. Skardžius in *Draugas* newspaper. German linguists were glad to have a comprehensive grammar of the Lithuanian language at long last. By the way, two young associate professors at the University of Hamburg had started its translation into German. Unfortunately, they were too late—another textbook of Lithuanian appeared in German.

The phonetics laboratory of the University of Rochester hurriedly produced oral exercise tapes. I myself wrote two keys—one for the exercises, the other for the translation of Lithuanian texts into English.

Orders began to arrive from the whole world: students of linguistics wanted to learn Lithuanian. The tapes and keys were sold by the laboratory at cost. The book itself, on the instructions of Monsignor Karalius, cost only \$7, subsequently \$10, \$15, and \$20. I saw the book in a big Chicago bookstore selling for \$48! Similarly, several book shops in Great Britain, Germany and France made a handsome profit on our book.

Later, the Franciscan Fathers produced audiocassettes recorded by the late actor Vitalis Žukauskas. Thus, hundreds of audio tapes (subsequently cassettes) and lesson keys spread throughout the world.

It was impossible to establish when and in how many copies our work reached Lithuania, the homeland of the language. I have heard that several copies managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain through Poland, and I know for sure that one was in the library of renowned linguist Professor Juozas Balčikonis.

Many authors, writing on the Lithuanian language after 1966, made use of our grammar. Even in publications, issued after 2000, I find sentences and phrases, taken from our book. Some writers make reference to it, others do not. It does not matter, after all.

Finally, I am going to mention some episodes related to the book. Perhaps the most diligent learner of Lithuanian was a student of mine, Mo Chien Chin (now Professor Dr. Mo). I believe that he is the first Chinese scholar to have learned Lithuanian. When a doctoral student in our department, he worked at night in a hotel, where he could read. A former pilot of the Taiwanese air force and a terrific Chinese cook, according to his friends, he was tenacious in pursuit of his goals. He studied so intensively that the pages of the well-bound textbook disintegrated, and I had to present him with a new copy.

Our grammar was studied most thoroughly perhaps by Professor Dr. Dominico Valenti, an Italian-American from Brooklyn, N.Y. Now he speaks perfect Lithuanian without the slightest accent. He used to send us his critical remarks and helpful suggestions, and we made respective revisions in the new editions.

Because the first edition of the textbook contained a reference to forthcoming lesson tapes and keys, since 1967 I

have received a lot of letters about them and other matters related to the Lithuanian language. Here are some examples.

A fourth-generation Lithuanian wanted to buy a Lithuanian Bible for her grandmother. I advised her to apply to the *Draugas* bookstore, and she was grateful for that.

A lady of Lithuanian descent, living in Alaska, made a trip to Vilnius and was glad to have found the city (the Cathedral, Gediminas' Castle, etc.) just as it was described in our book.

Several scores of people applied to me for an explanation of the origin of their surnames. I still remember some of them. Mr. E. thought that his name was German. I told him that most probably it was Lithuanian, since it contained the root *eid-*, and the stem *-un-*, which are Lithuanian.

I believe that no other book on the Lithuanian language, Lithuania and the Lithuanians is so widespread as our *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian*. Now, renamed *Beginner's Lithuanian*, it is accessible all over the world on the Internet through Amazon.com and other book dealers.

