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‘GOOD LANGUAGE’  
AND INSECURE SPEAKERS:  
A STUDY INTO METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS OF TV  
AND RADIO JOURNALISTS  
IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE  
MONITORING IN LITHUANIA  
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**Abstract**

The article discusses the notion of ‘good language’ in a highly codified Lithuanian speech community and argues that corrective practices and power-employing institutionalisation of standard language can have negative social consequences for the linguistic self-confidence of speakers and linguistic climate in the speech community in general. The research is based on structured qualitative interviews with a representative sample of Lithuanian broadcast journalists, who, as a professional group, are exposed to prescriptive state language policy and monitoring of their language by the official authorities in their daily work. The metalinguistic evaluations and self-assessment of language skills of the journalists are analyzed and interpreted with respect to the dominant overt language discourses and ideologies.

**Key words:** ‘good language’, language standardization ideologies, prescriptivism, language corrections, linguistic self-confidence, broadcast media

## 1. Introduction

The paper compares two sets of ideologies and ideals of ‘good’ public language in the Lithuanian speech community: the one of language planners (the official) and the one of language practitioners in broadcast media. The first is embedded in a highly-developed legislative framework of the state language and is meant to be followed by the media. The other was examined in this research and turned out to focus on a different system of language values. However, these values are abandoned in the self-ratings of the journalists, as being asked to assess their linguistic skills, the journalists start operating within the values of the dominant overt ideology. Subsequently, the self-rating of the journalists demonstrates a rather low degree of linguistic self-confidence.

The theoretical presumption for this study is that institutionalised and power-employing prescriptivism may have serious negative consequences for linguistic attitudes of the speech community and security of speakers. It is commonly accepted that the development of popular, folk-linguistic common sense about ‘good/right language’ must be a natural result of the influences from above; the research on metalinguistic awareness shows, too, that the speakers’ firm belief in correctness and ideas about what is ‘incorrect’ and stigmatising have a direct connection with the overt ideology and prescriptive language regulations (see, among many others, Milroy 2001, Fishman 2006, Davies & Langer 2006, Niedzielski 2010). In many speech communities, there is a greater or lesser consensus and acceptance of the rooted prescriptivism and norm making authorities, however – as it will be shown in this paper – in some severe cases, when language standardization ideology becomes too restrictive and controlling, it may negatively affect the general linguistic climate of the community. The relation between self-confidence of speakers and language policy (i.e. political embeddedness and institutionalization of language ideologies) has not received much attention so far.

In sociolinguistic research, observations have been made from experimental studies that apply the so-called *index of linguistic insecurity*, i.e. compare the number of forms the informant claims to be correct in terms of standardness and the number of the self-reported forms by the informant (the forms the informant indicates to use himself). The discrepancy between the proportions can be interpreted as a lack of linguistic confidence and a sign that the informant does not assess his own language as good enough (cf. Labov 1991). Yet the studies of this kind usually deal with speech communities that are prescriptive in a sense that they represent language standardization ideologies, historically developed

as a power ideology of political and cultural elites (see, among many others, Joseph 1987, Milroy & Milroy 1985, Honey 1997). The attempt of a linguistically insecure speaker to produce the ‘correct’ forms is thus governed by the (natural) wish to belong to that elite. These power relations can of course employ different degree of institutionalisation (via certain governmental bodies, educational system and mass media), but usually they are not governed by deliberate language planning from *the state* that intervenes as an *institution of power*. In this respect the research presented in this paper offers an original idea of the social consequences of the type of prescription, where the ideological construct ‘good’/‘bad’ language is ‘nationalised’ by the governmental authorities and systematically used as a legal instrument of regulation of language development.

As already mentioned, it has been argued that prescriptivism is a natural and universal phenomenon and a common approach to language, characteristic of all speech communities; the so-called naïve speakers develop an abstract folk-linguistic idea of what is good and what is bad in language and pass this value distinction over to others through the process of socialization (cf. Cameron 1995, Milroy 2001, Preston 2004, Agha 2007). Some of the speakers get inspired by the overt ideological and grammar-centered views towards language and start acting as language guardians driven by the shared presuppositions about the undesirable nature of language variation and the belief that they serve the ‘best’ language (cf. Fishman 2006, Davies & Langer 2006, Moschonas & Spitzmüller 2010). Their engagement in language correction practices and support to the mainstream ideological discourse is based on the idea that it is not the social relations and the social value of language that matters, but the ‘spirit’ of the given language. A spirit that is lying somewhere behind language structure and cannot (and should not) be assessed by material and instrumental measures. Yet behind this ideology and illusion that homogeneity is equal to social harmony often lie a hidden political agenda and a desire of ownership, authoritative domination and regimentation of language usage (cf. Blommaert & Verschueren 1998, Blommaert 2006).

For the last two decades, the critical language planning studies have emphasized the importance of overt ideology and have been increasingly preoccupied with its social consequences (cf. Milroy 2001, de Groof 2002: 119). Prescriptivism has been heavily criticized in sociolinguistic studies of language standardization, cf. “The system of beliefs that controls most popular thinking about language is conservative, traditional, authoritarian, and non-scientific” (Wardhaugh 1999: 181) and many standing scholars have dissociated from the gatekeeping activities as driven by amateur ideas of language. At the same time it was acknowledged that, being

rooted in the public discourse about language, the *Sprachkultur* ideology is becoming more and more powerful, cf.:

A basic component of the reasoning here arises from the belief that language is a *cultural* possession analogous to religion and legal systems, rather than part of human mental and cognitive faculties. [...] It is not merely the standard language that must be maintained: it is the language as a whole, and in the non-professional mind the idealized standard is the same thing as the language as a whole. It is a reified entity with a canonical form that is uniform throughout (Milroy 2001: 538-539).

The main criticism of the prescriptive folk linguistic ideologies is thus directed towards the lack of understanding of language as a socially bounded semiotic resource and ignoring the existence of alternative systems of normativity which are not based on correctness and incorrectness in the prescriptive sense, i.e. other just as functional registers that coexists as open cultural systems and are exposed to a constant reanalysis, value assigning and change, cf.:

A Standard Language is contextually appropriate only to certain occasions and types of interactions; yet the institutions which maintain its existence link the register to socioeconomic (and other) entitlements, to images of national unity, to ideals of rationality, beauty and other types of social essence, and promote it from early on in the life cycle (e.g., through primary schooling) as a normative criterion for judging all other uses of language. The entitlements and ideals linked to the Standard are often matters of pre-eminent interest to members of society, a feature which tends to naturalize perceptions of the register as a baseline against which other registers appear as deviant, defective varieties of the language (Agha 2007: 147).

However, in speech communities where due to historical circumstances nationalist language standardization ideologies revive and become dominating again (among them are many Eastern European communities)<sup>1</sup>, the folk linguistic ideas are predominant even in the metalinguistic discourse of *professional* linguists, while the use of the above mentioned sociolinguistic concept of language is seldom and rather marginalised. The overt purist ideologies thus incorporate support from academic gatekeepers, get politically embedded and – in this way – formally legitimise the political valorisation of the idealised language standard and

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted though that in 1990'ies, due to the growing dominance of English, the revival of language protection and *Sprachpflege* ideologies became noticeable as a general (at least) pan-European tendency.

promotion of it as a superior variety. In a post-modern heterogeneous speech community, such institutionalisation of language, when used as a tool for exercising the power and claiming the rights of language possession, can give rise to ideological tensions and value conflicts (cf. Milroy 2001, Subačius 2003, Spitzmüller 2007). Cf.:

The ideology requires us to accept that **language (or a language) is not the possession of the native speakers**: they are not pre-programmed with a language faculty that enables them to acquire (or develop) ‘competence’ in language without being formally taught. [...] The (usually unnamed) authorities on whom speakers (and their teachers) depend have privileged access to the mysteries of language and have something of the status of high priests (Milroy 2001: 537).

The conflict between overt and covert language values can have different manifestations. It can arise when the official ideologies of language do not match the values of the speakers or when they focus on different values or weight them differently than the speakers. It can arise, too, when the speakers are either forced to reject or subconsciously reject their own (covert) values in order to adhere to the official ideals and when they do not apply their own criteria but use the official ones to evaluating their speech. It can be also noticed when the speakers are not able or not willing to conform to the set prescriptive requirements (especially in cases when it goes against the intuition of a native speaker) and a gap appears between actual language development and the ideal standard pursued by the gatekeepers. Though the metalinguistic values are seldom a matter of a regular and sociologically symmetric typification in a given speech community (i.e. it is unlikely that all groups of speakers would share the same system of values) (cf. Agha 2007: 154), in case of a power-based system of top-down regulations, which include not just codification of forms, but also the formal requirements of their command and use in public domains, the degree of “value sharedness” may exceed the boundaries of traditional social grouping and thus lead to a wider social conflict.

In Lithuania, tentative research has confirmed the presumptions that prescriptive language policy and systematic language corrections can have an impact on linguistic self-confidence of speakers. An analysis of self-reporting of high school and university students and working class adults without higher education revealed a correlation between the extent of language correction and the assessment of language skills; informants who claim that they have been corrected rather often score their language skills worse than those who supposedly have not been exposed to plenty of corrections or who do not recall being corrected at all. Thus, the high

school students evaluated their written and oral skills worse than the university students and the university students worse than the workers (Vaicekauskienė & Švežaitė 2009). It is interesting to observe that the concept of ‘good language’ of the least corrected and most linguistically confident workers was most differing from that of the overt ideologies. The working adults do not lay so much weight on correctness, while the overt ideologies of the general discourse emphasizes adherence to very specific ‘correct’ forms and avoidance of other specific ‘incorrect’ forms. The workers turned out to have a common folk linguistic notion that good language in the first instance should be fluent and clear (cf. Niedzielski & Preston 2003: 18-19). As will be shown further in the paper, the Lithuanian journalists (TV and radio hosts), who are exposed to a high degree of correction from the gatekeepers, almost without exception apply the *prescriptive* notion of ‘good language’ in their self-assessment and demonstrate the lowest linguistic confidence of all the mentioned social/professional groups.

These observations are supported by other research in typologically comparable speech communities. For example in the Faroe Islands, which has been marked by rather puristic language planning since the time of nation-state formation, the speakers are said to claim that they do not know their mother tongue well enough. The Faroese dissociate themselves from their ordinary language, because they have learned that the grammar and vocabulary of the Faroese language they use is not ‘pure’ and ‘correct’ due to the influence of Danish. The speakers assume that the ‘right’ (or the ‘good’) language is not the one people use, but a pure and ideal construct (Petersen 2007). These attitudes might be regarded as an indication of low linguistic security, developed as a consequence of systematic linguistic prescriptions which force the speakers to apply the official concept of ‘good language’ in their self-assessment and thus to downgrade their linguistic competencies.

In extreme cases the prescriptive wish to make purity one of the main criteria of the codification can lead to such functional and structural divergence of the standard variety from all other varieties used in the speech community that it forms a kind of diglossia and thus confusion (cf. the development of high standard Czech, where many native speakers are said to have a feeling of not being able to express themselves correctly in certain situations, and being uncertain which forms are the ‘correct’ ones (Hedin 2005); also see Thomas 1991 on the purist planning of the ideal standard). On the whole, the idea that standard language *must* develop towards an imagined linguistic ideal, that is, ‘the most authentic language’ that is said to have existed, involves the risk of the formation of a climate

of low linguistic security. Even if the speakers would agree that the goal of language production must be a pure linguistic variety containing features of one origin and eliminating all the other, ‘impure’ and ‘incorrect’, elements, they would feel unsafe because of the disability to live up to the ideal which is hardly possible to implement in practice (cf. Brunstad 2003: 68, see Jørgensen et al. 2011 criticism of traditional structural concept of languages). This is especially true when the idea is adopted and pursued by powerful state authorities. In such speech communities most of the speakers would develop an attitude that they do not master standard language “well enough”.

It has been noticed that parodies and caricatures of one’s speech also have a negative impact on linguistic self-confidence (Niedzielski & Preston 2003: 17). This phenomenon is more characteristic of interpersonal or intergroup level relations, not the institutional (top-down) ones, but in linguistic communities with a high degree of nationalised prescription, the corrective reports may take a rather offensive and derogative tone. Herby they reinforce the metalinguistic awareness of being a linguistically incompetent speaker/community – not in respect of social hierarchies (high vs. low status speaker), but in respect of speaker vs. ideological language construct relation and thus influence linguistic climate as such.

The aim of the research is thus to study how the institutionalised prescriptivism and official ideologies of ‘good language’ influence the self-rating and linguistic self-confidence of one specific group of speakers in Lithuanian speech community – TV and radio journalists.

## 2. Method

The research was carried out in 2009 as a part of one sociolinguistic project<sup>2</sup>. The sample of the informants was formed as representative of Lithuanian TV and radio program hosts, according to an analysis of age, gender and education of the practitioners. Ratings of programs on the main public and commercial TV channels and radio stations were taken into account in order to cover the most popular programs. Twenty-four structured qualitative interviews were conducted with *typical* TV and radio program hosts, 32 to 42-year-old<sup>3</sup> males<sup>4</sup>, 12 of them working on popular entertainment programs for young or broader audience (later in the paper

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<sup>2</sup> *Baltic Sociolinguistics (BalSoc): language awareness in Lithuania and Latvia 2009*, supported by the State Science and Study Foundation of Lithuania, lead by the Institute of Lithuanian Language (project manager Loreta Vaicekauskienė).

<sup>3</sup> There is one exception in the sample as one of the informants is 43 years old.

referred to as group I) and 12 on political debates and culture programs for a well-educated audience (later in the paper referred to as group II). In both types of programs 6 journalists are trained professionals with educational background in journalism (*trained* will be used for reference) and 6 have no specific training in journalism (referred to as *non-trained*). The latter division of informants was made taking into consideration that journalist education in Lithuania includes compulsory courses in standard language norms in order to achieve both a better representation of the studied professional group and to examine if the background in journalism would influence the attitudes of the informants. On average, the interviews lasted 54 minutes; they were recorded and later transcribed. The corpus was compiled over the period from June to November 2009.

The ‘typical’ practitioners in the chosen types of programs turned out to be experienced and in several cases even leading personalities of Lithuanian broadcast mass media, having 15 years of working experience on average. In contrast to the so-called naïve speakers of language, this group of informants was regarded as a professional group of skilled language users who may have certain language ideals and may make attempts to consciously apply them (cf. a similar observation: “Journalists have a very self-conscious relationship to language, meta-talk about which is part of everyday practice” (Cotter 2010: 187)). Supposedly, their answers during the interview must be well-reasoned and based on the experience and frequent reflections on language issues.

The research questionnaire included nineteen general and twenty four additional, specific questions about the notion of good language, language prestige and language models, one’s own linguistic skills, competencies, habits of usage, and evaluation of language development and language policy.

In the actual study the questions relevant to the analysis were those about the features characteristic of good language (in the questionnaire the formulations were the following: *Could you please tell what features of speech you value most of all? And what features you don’t like?*), and questions which asked the journalists to assess their own linguistic skills and explain why they think so later on in the interview (*What do you think of your own language skills? Please evaluate your speech: excellent, good, average, poor? Why do you think so? If needed: Why didn’t you evaluate your speech as excellent?*).

The analysis of the metalinguistic attitudes and the self-ratings of the journalists is presented in section 4 of the paper and section 3 is devoted to

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<sup>4</sup> Male journalists is not a peculiarity of Lithuania. Male is said to be a typical sex of the journalism in many Western societies (see Krøløkke & Sørensen 2006: 91).

the ideological context of language planning in Lithuania, which is crucial for understanding and interpretation of the results.

### **3. Official language ideologies and policy of ‘good language’ in Lithuania**

The standardization ideologies for the Lithuanian language share some common characteristics with linguistic communities that have taken root in the nation building period, especially those of *late language standards*, which were established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. the typological division of early and late language standards in Subačius 2002). The understanding of the role of standardized language here is marked not by communicational needs alone, but relies heavily on the romantic concept of nation-state where one nation, one people, and one language are indivisible. Therefore it is typical to declare the superiority of the *correct language ideal* as a guarantee of the *survival of the nation*.

Most of those late standard language communities were dominated by other languages and cultures before (and some once more after) the establishment of the national state. This has marked the standardization ideologies with the expressed need for constant institutionalised protection of the authenticity and purity of the established state language from any external influence, cf:

Every late modernization movement (and every language movement that is or has been “late” relative to certain others in its vicinity), every contextually weak language movement (and every language movement that is or has been “weak” relative to certain others in its environment), every corpus planning movement that co-exists with other collective efforts that are marked by elements of nationalism or ethnocentrism, have or have had a strong dose of “independence” stress in their corpus-planning dynamics (Fishman 2006: 108).

Besides, the late standard languages share one more specific quality. They were created by the deliberate efforts of cultural activists and fixed in the normative grammars by language practitioners. These historical circumstances can be traced even in today’s official ideological discourse, in which claims of institutionalised authority and a necessity of authoritative expertise for language development is strongly emphasized (see Vaicekauskienė 2011a), thus excluding any ordinary native speaker and even the traditional standard language domain, the media, from the participation in the defining process of, as it was put by Heller, “what

counts as legitimate language and who counts as legitimate speakers” (cf. Heller 2010: 278)<sup>5</sup>.

As was mentioned before, in linguistic communities with late language standards the prescriptive language planning ideology initially has not been an issue of power and social class dominance as in most Western countries. The linguistic ideal here has been rather a romantic and structuralist construct, abstracted from any given time and any given speaker. Nevertheless, as will be shown later in this section it can be applied as a symbolic instrument of a powerful institutional system of language regulation – a system which is ideologically justified by the mentioned nationalist ideas but at least in some post-Soviet countries has inherited totalitarian traits.

The ideological base for language planning in present-day Lithuania was laid down during the first years of the restoration of independence in 1991. This was a time of national rebirth and the methods undertaken for language planning were driven by the wish to rebuild a national state with a state language. Therefore, efforts were made to establish political and legal protection of language, i.e. to strengthen the status and to purify the corpus of standard Lithuanian, as it was claimed – going back and following the tradition from the 19<sup>th</sup> century – that only this ideal variety could serve the symbolic function of the consolidation of the nation (cf. similar processes of the rebirth of *das gute Deutsch* ideologies in reunited German in 1990, Spitzmüller 2007). This ideology and its argumentation in the official ideological discourse have remained essentially unchanged to the present day. The typical arguments provided are that Lithuanian is a small language and therefore exposed to the risk of, if not death, then at least malformation due to the negative influences of other, dominating, languages or other, especially urban, varieties. This is said to justify deliberate attempts to prevent an undesired development of standard Lithuanian and to maintain the set standards of ‘proper’ language, first and foremost in the traditional standard (conservative) language domains as media, which undergo the same democratisation processes in Lithuania as elsewhere (cf. Coupland 2010) and where the use of the so-called ordinary language is gaining in scope. Consequently, one can trace a slight nostalgia in the references to language planning in Soviet times (see for

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. also the German attempts during the time of nation-state-building to put the cultivated standard language on the same footing as art, religion and state institution. Ironically, this made the democratic notion of German superficial and not supportive of language as common property: “Something as valuable as a work of art could apparently not be entrusted to the masses, but needed its appropriately qualified guardians and gatekeepers” (Davies & Langer 2006: 41).

example Pupkis 2005: 335), when it was much easier to control the correctness of broadcast language as most of the broadcast texts were pre-edited (because of well-known reasons) and then read aloud by some trained journalists<sup>6</sup>.

Having in mind the purposeful Soviet policy of artificial promotion of important national symbols to hide the goals of sovietization, continuing dominance of nationalistic standard language ideology is not so surprising. Neither should one wonder from where the model of administrating relations between the authorities and the citizens in independent Lithuania has been inherited. Since the beginning of the 1990s a powerful system of language control in public space has been developed; several means of status and corpus planning of Lithuanian were issued and are currently in force (some of them in revised editions) as obligations imposed on speakers by law.

The principal document, which determines the quality demands for public language in Lithuania, is The Law of State language (Language Law, 2002 [1995]). One chapter of the Law is named *Correctness of State Language* and it declares, that “in Lithuania all mass media (press, TV, radio and others) and all publishing houses *must* follow the norms of *correct* Lithuanian” [emphases added]. By the Language Law the State Language Commission (Language Commission) is fully authorised to approve compulsory norms of ‘correct language’ and to lay down language regulations. One of the most known means of corpus planning passed by the Language Commission is the *List of Major Language Errors* (1997), which includes hundreds of grammar and lexical ‘errors’ together with *Indispensable Requirements for Standard Pronunciation*.

The principles of the Language Law have been adapted into the Law of the Provision of Information to the Public (last edition from 2006 [1996]), which requires adherence to the Language Law and regulations from the Language Commission when issuing all public information. The demand of language ‘correctness’ was also laid down in the revised edition of the Code of Ethics of Journalists and Publishers (2005) and in job descriptions by some of the radio and TV broadcasting companies.

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<sup>6</sup> The Soviets made the active promotion of standard language serve several purposes; among them was the possibility to control the content through the control of linguistic forms and to fight against particularism (non-standard varieties were seen as manifestations of it). (Cf. the situation in the former GDR, where „individual and official acts of *Sprachpflege* and *Sprachkultur* were considered necessary in order to maintain the standard variety“ (Davies & Langer 2006: 46, see also Gessinger 1986, cited in Davies & Langer 2006: 37).

The State Language Inspectorate was set up in 1990 and has the function of controlling language usage. It acts in accordance with the program of *Control of Use and Correctness of the State language*, which was approved by the Government and incorporated into the Law of Municipal Autonomy (2004 [1994]). The Language Inspectorate, together with municipal language inspectors, should thus “control how state and municipal institutions and all other companies, organisations and institutions of the Lithuanian Republic follow Language Law, the regulations of the Language Commission and other legislation which set up the requirements for language use and correctness” (Statute of Language Inspectorate, 2006 [2002]).

The Language Inspectorate has developed *Principles, Criteria and Methodology for Monitoring Use and Correctness of the State Language* (Principles of monitoring 2005) and in its everyday work operates with the following terms, determining the measures of language policy: ‘official letter’ (this measure is used to inform the broadcasting company about the completed language inspection and to inform it of what must be corrected); ‘order’ (non-adherence to this document imposes legal liability); ‘monitoring report’ (serves as an informational document about the results of the inspection); ‘inspection statement’ (is drawn up when infringements of the norms are detected) and ‘administrative penalty’. The definition of the latter means is worth quoting: “An administrative penalty is the means of answerability which is applied in order to punish those persons who committed an offence under the administrative law, and which has the purpose of raising an adherence to the laws and serves as a prevention that neither the offender nor other persons would commit new language violations”. This is a good illustration of how the grounded idea of *Sprachkultur* and protection of national standard language can be misused by a powerful system of institutional intervention developed in a post-totalitarian country.

Thus penalties are imposed for non-compliance to the regulations of the Language Commission and to the directions of language inspectors – warnings and fines up to almost 450 Euro (the maximum fine is given to those speakers/institutions, whose infringements of the norms have been detected repeatedly).

The Language Inspectorate carries out the control according to its plans, periodically and systematically. In the above-mentioned Principles of Monitoring one chapter is dedicated to the monitoring of television and radio. It describes how the programs are selected for inspection and how the list of the detected errors is made. The inspectors look for errors defined by the regulations of Language Commission and evaluate

journalists' pronunciation (on the basis of the approved requirements of standard pronunciation). Finally this chapter gives an exhaustive description of the methodology of applying sanctions: what kind of sanctions for what kind and number of errors in what type of TV and radio programs must be applied. E.g., if in one hour of live broadcasting no or only a few (up to four) errors are detected, the Inspectorate issues an official letter. If more than seven errors are detected, an administrative penalty is applied.

One should stress that adherence to the approved norms is not an easy issue for journalists, especially for those who speak spontaneously and without a written manuscript. As mentioned above, the codification of standard Lithuanian is not always based on descriptive norms. Real language usage is regarded as moving in the wrong direction by the gatekeepers and therefore not accepted as a decisive criterion of codification (some of the 'errors' have already been corrected for dozens of years (for more see Vaicekauskienė 2008)). As a result the prescriptive norms go often against the internalised norms of the speaker (standard pronunciation and accentuation raise the most difficulties<sup>7</sup>) and monitoring habitual expressions in the process of speech production in order to produce pure and correct language becomes rather difficult. Therefore, quite a few TV and radio broadcasting companies have a permanent position for a language expert (editor).

The journalists in TV and radio are of course well aware that their speech is closely watched. The Language Inspectorate regularly brings the reports with the lists of lexical, grammatical, and accentuation errors out in the press and on its Internet homepage. In addition to the Language Inspectorate the broadcast mass media are monitored by a public organisation called the Lithuanian Language Society. Though this organisation has no legal right to issue any penalty, it communicates its dissatisfaction with the state of affairs of TV and radio speech using derogative expressions and calls for action (e.g. it issues requests to check the language competence of journalists before employing them). Both the Lithuanian Language Society and the Language Inspectorate make the 'transgressors' public, including full names of the journalists in their thorough reports.

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<sup>7</sup> Standard Lithuanian is based on the accentuation patterns and phonology of the West Highland dialect. The accentual system of Lithuanian is characterized by a mobile accent and regular shifts of the place of accent in word conjugation and declension paradigms. For speakers with another dialectal background or influenced by dialectal contacts it is often rather difficult to abandon the pattern of their own vernacular.

Thus, Lithuanian language policy is based on an institutional system of language supervision. Of course, in the texts of norm makers other traits of good language (for example, stylistic and rhetorical traits) are also mentioned, but on the whole the official discourse and the extensive legislation are dominated by the demand of correctness and adherence to the regulations of the Language Commission and law.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Journalists' notion of 'good language'

During the interviews the journalists were asked to consider the features of good language and to tell what features they value most of all. The question for this investigation is whether the journalists will tend to adopt the qualities of the prescriptive ideologies (by emphasizing correctness) or whether their answers will form an independent system of values.

In total the informants mentioned 15 features of good language and preferable ways of speaking, or more exactly, 15 groups of features. Those features are connected with conative, poetic, and emotive functions of language and effective communication, and illustrate the value of mastering the canons of classical rhetoric. The style qualities could be classified as good style of speaking (lat. *elocutio*), delivery of speech (lat. *actio*, *pronuntiatio*) and the main virtues of speech (lat. *virtutes dicendi*), such as purity of words, i.e. proper and understandable vocabulary (lat. *puritas*, *latinitas*), clarity of speech (lat. *perspicuitas*), suitability of form to the communicative context (lat. *aptum*), figurativeness, aesthetics (lat. *ornatus*), and shortness of the expression (lat. *brevitas*). A couple of journalists mentioned that following rules of ethics also must be regarded an important feature of good language. This may have reference to a classical demand on the speaker to be moral and fair (cf. lat. *vir bonus dicendi peritus* 'a good man skilled in the art of speaking'). Most of the informants mentioned three to four features each, but some as many as eight.

The notion of 'good language' according to the Lithuanian journalists may thus include the following features (the numbers in the brackets mark how many informants mentioned the features in a particular feature group):

*clarity/coherence/logic* (13), *fluency* (4);  
*richness/synonymy* (11), *figurativeness/picturesqueness* (5);  
*correctness* (7 + 3?);

*expressiveness/emotiveness (5), liveliness/naturalness, natural intonations (4);*  
*diction, clearness of articulation (5);*  
*convincingness (5);*  
*precision/laconicism/concreteness (4);*  
*humour/wittiness (4);*  
*purity/cleanness (4);*  
*being nice to listen to/pleasant voiced (3);*  
*being interesting (2);*  
*being ethical (vs manipulating the audience) (2).*

Numerous and close designations mean that the notion ‘good language’ for the journalists is not a stable structural entity containing a fixed number of certain well defined features. However some of the feature groups have been mentioned by the majority of the informants and they seem to be more prototypical and central than the others, that is, the speaker should employ them in order to produce good language. These are *clarity/coherence/logic* together with *fluency* and *richness/synonymy* together with *figurativeness/picturesqueness*.

The research has shown that the journalists have developed a sensitive metalinguistic awareness, but they do not have an established conceptual apparatus at their disposal. Of course, a few linguistic features have a rather fixed and commonly used semantics and there was no need for any further reasoning. But in many cases the informants provided free descriptions of features, sometimes including metaphorical attributes, cf.

- (1) *I like language that is full of expression, similes and metaphors, which is sarcastic, witty and picturesque. That is language that paints scenes with words, which isn't dry [...] Language with spices, so to say [39, trained, II-4]<sup>8</sup>.*
- (2) *Good language is language that is lively. And lively language is language that engages the listener, which creates a lively atmosphere around [33, non-trained, I-5].*
- (3) *Every speaker's language is good if only it is authentic, if he doesn't pretend, if he uses his own vernacular; let it be city language [...] his own natural way of speaking he is used to.*

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<sup>8</sup> In the references to the informants the first number refers to the age of the informant, trained/non-trained stands for ‘professional education in journalism/no education in journalism’, I refers to popular and entertainment programs and II to political debates and culture programs for academic audience. The last number is the reference code of the informant.

*And I want to stress it – we must accept that city language is good too* [40, non-trained, II-1].

Quotation 3 refers to a widespread belief in the normative tradition of Lithuania that, contrary to rural varieties, urban language is ‘vulgar’, ‘spoiled’ and nothing of worth.

The informants did not always find clear designations to describe what they feel about good language, cf. following description of the language of the well-known Russian writer Solzhenicyn, which one informant provided as an illustration of perfect style (this answer was classified in the feature group *rich*):

- (4) *I adore it* [the language of Solzhenicyn], *it is like – can’t find a word in Lithuanian – maybe dense or saturated, let’s say that* [36, trained, I-5].

The features dominating the prescriptive discourse *correctness* (7 + 3?) and *purity* (4) were considered to be important for good language too, but it appeared that the journalists have rather different perceptions of the notion ‘correctness’ and their understanding do not always correspond to that of the Language Inspectorate. Seven of the informants presented correctness as a positive feature. Some of them did not provide any further comment at all, while in case of the others emphasis was laid on slightly different things than the gatekeepers, e.g. avoidance of swear-words and slang, clear articulation, no dialectal features in order to insure intelligibility of the message for a broad audience, etc. These traits of correctness are reminiscent of lay perceptions within public discourses, where distinction is made between ‘appropriate-inappropriate’ way of speaking. Additionally, they resemble the classical notion of *latinitas*, meaning that pure style should contain words that belong to and are common in the vocabulary of (educated speakers of) that particular speech community so that listeners would understand them. A similar interpretation of journalistic prescription in printed media has been presented by Cotter (2010: 197), who claims that journalists are driven by the prescriptive requirements of accuracy and precision (particularly with respect to grammar and sentence structure) in order to reach clarity of meaning.

Three informants pointed out that “correct” should not mean “too correct”, for this can have a negative effect, contradicting the criteria lively, natural, rich, i.e. with the norms of free and live communication. In

this case the reference was made to the official notion of correctness. Exaggerated following of rules was criticized, cf.

- (5) *I value good ordinary Lithuanian. But not [language] which goes too far, because sometimes, really, they [the gatekeepers] go too far with all those rules [43, non-trained, II-4].*

Among other things, reference was made to hypercorrect pronunciation and an endeavour to speak “sterile”. According to those informants, they get irritated at exaggerated correctness, especially characteristic of the speech of the gatekeepers. For them this kind of speech is ridiculous (they made reference to the new coined replacement-words) and gives the impression that correctness is the only criterion that matter. Cf. following metalinguistic commentary:

- (6) *I hate to listen to the gatekeepers, who are munching on a thought for a long time, make long pauses, because they probably need to consider each word and are afraid of making an error, for they think ‘if even I’m making errors then the whole world must do so’. [...] It reminds me of the time when Germans were looking for the pure and right race. As if they were a group of people who belong to that race. [...] I don’t like it, it irritates me, because I still live among thousands of people from different social groups with different education and I know that standard language has many more sides and is much more interesting than they sometimes portray for us as superior and official [38, trained, I-2].*

Thus, a closer look into the Lithuanian journalists’ notion of good language has shown that their value judgments are based rather on good style than on correct usage. According to the journalists, the most important and preferable general features of good language must be clear, well-articulated content (the informative part of the message), a rich inventory of forms (good style) and lively, natural expression. The analysis revealed that the prescriptive tradition in Lithuania created confusion concerning evaluation of its own core criterion of good public language; together with other values ‘correctness’ proved to be an important feature of good public language, yet the journalists proposed rather discrepant interpretations of it.

These results correlate quite well with other research on contemporary journalism. It has been argued that orientation towards aesthetics, functionality, and context, the conversational and personal models of address, together with speech qualities such as liveliness, playfulness, humour, being interesting and mastering rhetorical skills, are gaining in value for today's journalists (see Cameron 1995, Lunt & Livingstone 2001). As it was shown, the prescriptive demands of Lithuanian language policy do not take this much into account.

#### 4.2. Self-assessment of journalists

Later in the interview, the journalists were asked to assess their own linguistic competence and skills. In this part of the study the idea was to examine how the journalists as a professional group rate their skills and to look at what they base the scores on, it is to investigate if they apply their own concept of 'good language'.

The analysis of the answers revealed a rather clear pattern. With few exceptions the journalists tended to assess their own linguistic behaviour only in terms of the prescriptive criteria, first of all the criterion of 'correctness', that is, they did not apply their own set of criteria of 'good language' that they had provided at the beginning of the interview to score their own language competence. In this case no difficulty of metalinguistic expression was noticed and there were no misinterpretations of the notion 'correct speech'. The answers and the explanations of the informants corresponded completely with that of the Language Inspectorate and official language discourse. While explaining what was lacking in their speech to be assessed as very good, the journalists referred to 'terrible', 'rough', and 'awful' errors they cannot 'get rid of'. Accentuation errors were mentioned most often, but also lacking knowledge of 'grammar rules' and dialectal interference.

The informants claimed that the quality of their speech suffered from the use of habitual grammatical constructions, slang and other colloquialisms, and that this was rooted in and reinforced by their 'wrong' social environment and social networks: contact with different vernaculars and varieties of Lithuanian, other languages (Russian and English) and urban surroundings *per se*. All this was provided as an excuse for not being able to cultivate 'correct language', sometimes with a little irony (quotation 7), cf.

- (7) *Even if I find time for improving my speech, the people with whom I communicate set obstacles for my efforts [laughs], because I'm like all other people – I largely accommodate to my audience, I want to please them, I want to communicate with them [32, trained, II-1].*
- (8) *What are the obstacles for me? You see, I was born in Vilnius. There were Russians in the yard in my childhood, besides I studied at school with more hours of English than in other schools. [...] When I got a job here at the National Radio, they said 'Where are you from? From Vilnius? Okay, then, we must begin to learn to speak from zero' [43, non-trained, II-4].*
- (9) *I read much in foreign languages, especially in Russian. [...] And I use English rather often in my life. All this of course has an impact [38, trained, II-6].*

The analysis of the explanations that the journalists provided to the question as to why they do not assess their language competence as very good revealed that being good in one's mother tongue for a speaker of Lithuanian is primarily an ideological issue. The answers reflected the ideological climate of language corrections in Lithuania in a way that was absolutely stereotypical. As shown above, the official ideology of Lithuanian language nourishes the view that correctness is a fundamental feature of good language. In normative reports on the language of TV and radio the journalists are accused of not mastering the prescriptive rules of standard Lithuanian. Even taking into consideration that downgrading of one's own skills could be influenced by cultural and ethical canons (saying that you are good may be considered boasting), the fact that the journalists rejected their own criteria in self-reporting but applied the official ones is evident and can be interpreted as a sign of low linguistic self-confidence and a value conflict.

The answers of the journalists were also influenced by a common belief that the most competent speakers of Lithuanian are those with a university degree in Lithuanian philology or whose vernacular originates from the West Highland dialect, on which standard Lithuanian accentuation and phonology is based. Several informants claimed that they could not consider themselves good speakers of Lithuanian because they do not have a professional background in Lithuanian linguistics. One of the journalists [32, trained, II-5] argued that his speech was much better when he worked as a newsreader under the supervision of language editors, than currently, when he must speak spontaneously, without a pre-edited written text.

Even those informants who could provide at least some positive comments on their language referred to the normative practices and values of the prescriptive ideology, cf.

- (10) *I don't think, really, that I speak badly and that my accentuation is very bad* [33, trained, I-6].
- (11) *I know I make errors when I speak, but I must say that these are not those terrible errors. Not those from the list of the major errors* [33, non-trained, I-1].
- (12) *I don't get many comments. Maybe they don't forward all the letters to me, maybe the letters get lost in the offices. [...] I don't use infinitive for denoting of purpose. I never make such rough errors* [37, trained, II-3].

In quotation 12 reference is made to the mentioned official reprimands with lists of the observed errors, which the Language Inspectorate from time to time sends out to the heads of the broadcasting companies.

In a few cases one could notice conflicting value systems and a slight opposition towards the prescriptive rating of language qualities. Like the others, those particular journalists evaluated their own language skills in terms of the normative criteria but at the same time their considerations implied that the required quality is not what is to be valued highest, cf.

- (13) *I've never had such aspirations to speak excellently. [...] Of course, I think I need to correct my language in some cases, to correct accentuation, some forms [...]. But on the other hand I'm not sure I know what's excellent in language. And I really don't want to be among those who speak excellently and are bothered by their own language* [38, trained, I-2].
- (14) *I use many slang words, which you ostensibly shouldn't use, but which are easily understood by everybody. And I don't know why we must avoid them* [33, trained, I-6].

In general an opposition towards the dominant correction practice was noticeable in the interviews and several informants expressed their attitude towards the official language policy using sarcastic metaphors and labels as “cultural terrorism”, “dictatorship”, “concentration camp”, “prison” and similar. In their critical opinion, the strict requirement for the standard language to conform to the prescriptive rules hinders natural development and vitality of language and live communication. One of the informants reported (see quotation 15) that he was encouraging his interlocutors to

Speak freely without thinking about making a mistake and getting a fine. Cf.

- (15) *I always tell my guest speakers: Don't think how to put it. The gatekeepers give fines to us, not you* [39, trained, II-4].
- (16) *[...] Lets make such conditions which could not allow any [language] changes for hundreds of years. Let's preserve it [the ideal standard] in such a herbarium. [...] There could be a couple of TV programs in which it could be used, preserved like Latin* [40, non-trained, II-1].
- (17) *If there was more freedom and journalists could not necessarily speak this so-called 'prestigious' language and absolutely fit into the limits of the standard, the language would benefit and in general life would be more fun, to my mind* [35, non-trained, II-5].
- (18) *It's abnormal that every broadcasting company must have a language expert, which corrects every text because people don't speak like that. It means that the official language is a dead language* [36, trained, I-5].

One of the informants even refused to comment on his language skills and expressed a rather severe protest against the official ideological claims that 'good language' is achieved only by hard training:

- (19) *I don't assess my language. I speak the way I want* [laughs]. *I don't record my speech beforehand and I don't make myself remember which stress paradigm the particular word is ascribed to before I utter it. And I do indeed use slang. [...] I have my social network and I feel free about living my style* [laughs]. *[...] I don't make efforts to do language training. [...] No speaker trains in his mother tongue and I will never do so. We know Lithuanian* [laughs] [35, non-trained, I-6].

As with most of the informants he could not assume that the assessment could also be carried out without basing it on correctness and in accordance with his own criteria of good language.

This subconscious belief that one's language skills can be assessed only in terms of 'correctness' is not surprising in the context of prescriptive language planning in Lithuania. The Language Inspectorate carries out surveys of journalists in order to study their self-assessment in terms of correctness and finds (not surprisingly) the absolute majority of

the journalists confessing that they do not master ‘correct’ Lithuanian (Journalist survey<sup>9</sup>).

Only two of the twenty-four Lithuanian journalists interviewed assessed their language competence without making reference to the prescriptive criteria. Both of them based their evaluation on their own ideas of good language and claimed that they can not regard themselves as very good speakers because of ‘poor vocabulary’ [40, non-trained, II-1] or awareness of existence of other speakers, who ‘speak better, more coherent, more fluently, more picturesque and interesting’ [39, trained, II-4].

In four additional cases, the assessment was based on the prescriptive criteria, but unlike all others, the informants also applied some of their own criteria: ‘coherence’ (3 inf.) and ‘insufficiency of the vocabulary’ (1 inf.).

The rate of linguistic security among Lithuanian journalists was not very high. The distribution of the scores was practically the same in all groups of the informants and the 23 assessments formed a following continuum ranging from ‘excellent’ to ‘poor’ on the evaluation scale (see Table 1) (as mentioned above one of the informants refused to reflect on his language competence, protesting against assessing language in terms of correctness).

<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Excellent -good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good -average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
1 inf.	1 inf.	8 inf.	2 inf.	10 inf.	1 inf.

**Table 1. The journalists’ self-rating of language skills**

Compared with the above-mentioned research of other professional or social groups of speakers in Lithuania (Vaicekauskienė & Švežaitė 2009), the linguistic self-confidence of the journalists is the lowest: oral language skills were assessed as excellent or good by 87 percent of working class adults, 75 percent of university students, 70 percent of high school students, and, as this research demonstrates, just slightly above 40 percent of journalists. It should be emphasized though that these figures have to be considered only as a general tendency as they have been received from different studies and were not designed for comparison.

<sup>9</sup> On the web page of the Language Inspectorate the report of the survey has no reference to date, but it might have been carried out in 2008 or 2009.

On the whole the self-rating of the journalists is not easy to evaluate unequivocally because of the possible social, cultural and professional pressure in the interview situation, which may make the informants to downgrade their ratings. However, even made with reservation the results of the self-assessment are not decisive for the interpretation of the overall results in this research. More important is what underlies the journalists' downgrading of their language skills. Almost without exception the informants rejected their own criteria of 'good language' in favour of the official ones, which are promoted by standardization ideology. This is the most striking finding of the research and the most important support for the presumption that restrictive ideological climate and monitoring of the uses of language in the community may have negative impact on linguistic security of speakers.

## **5. Conclusions and discussion**

The presented research has provided some evidence that a connection exists between the type of standardization ideology and the linguistic self-confidence of language users. When overt ideology is institutionalised by the state and propagated by powerful means of language monitoring it may have serious social consequences for linguistic attitudes of the speech community and influence the linguistic identity of speakers. This is especially true for those speakers who are professional language users and are therefore exposed to the official language control more than any other group of speakers.

The comparison of the attitudes of the broadcast media and the official metalinguistic discourse of 'good' public language in Lithuania has shown that the focus is laid on different systems of language values. The official ideology focuses on 'pure' and 'correct' standard language. An extensive legislative support has been developed to ensure the obedience to the set standard by monitoring of public language and by punitive measures. The policy is justified as serving the interests of 'the nation' and 'the language' itself. Meantime the journalists in TV and radio base their notion of good language on a more elaborated system of values than the system prescribed by the authorities. For the journalists good broadcast language must first and foremost obey the classical rhetorical canons and serve the needs of effective communication; the content of the message must be produced in a clear and well-articulated manner while the richness of linguistic forms and liveliness of the performance must attract and maintain the attention of the audience. The feature 'correctness' is also present in the journalists' concept of good public language, but the

interpretation of it not always corresponds to that of the authorities. In any case, according to Lithuanian journalists, ‘correctness’ must not go against the communicative norms.

However, the journalists abandon their own values in the self-ratings. With just few exceptions they tend to assess their own linguistic behaviour only in terms of prescriptive criteria and with no reference to their own system of values, which they had presented for the interviewer just before. Moreover, having 15 years of working experience and being trained and conscientious (and relatively young) speakers, they demonstrate a rather low degree of linguistic self-confidence. The self-assessment shows that more than a half of the informants rate their skills as average and poor.

Of course, the latter finding should not be exaggerated, as we can’t exclude possible social and cultural pressures (and individual factors, too) and should keep in mind that being asked to assess one’s own competence, especially in case of a professional language user, may involve a higher degree of criticism and underestimation (see Macaulay 1997 for more methodological criticism when determining linguistic insecurity). The fact that the journalists did not use own criteria in their self-assessment and argumentation in favour of the official ideology thus is much more worth noting for this research than the results of the self-rating itself. However, compared to corresponding research of Latvian journalists<sup>10</sup>, where an absolute majority of informants claimed that their language skills were excellent or good, the Lithuanian results of the self-assessment *are* conspicuous. In opposition to the situation in Lithuania the observation of language norms or language correctness is seldom a matter for intervention by the Latvian State.

Thus it turns out that restrictive and controlling language policy may lead to opposite result than intended – instead of serving ‘the nation’ and ‘the language’ it can provoke a conflict of values and develop a feeling of not mastering the mother tongue well enough and being not fully competent speakers.

Besides the discussed controversy of the concept ‘good’ language, some other serious effects of the dominance by linguistic authorities can be traced in Lithuania. It is rather common to say “I apologize to the language planners” before uttering a norm-violating (usually colloquial) form in more or less public and formal setting. It is meant to show that the speaker is aware of the ‘correct’ form, but needs the ‘incorrect’ one for some purposes. Moreover it becomes more and more common among ordinary (young) Lithuanian speakers to state a higher linguistic

<sup>10</sup> See note 1. The results referred to come from an unpublished report of the Latvian part of the project.

competence of English than of Lithuanian, because the latter is asserted to be too difficult to speak well and correctly (sic!). These symptoms were also noticed in the interviews with the journalists in the presented research.

Interventions in language processes using powerful ideological and legislative arguments make Lithuania a good example of what consequences institutionalisation of standard language can bring in the long term. An institutionalised and controlling model of prescription can distort ownership relations of standard language and make speakers feel that they can merely produce a restricted standard code, which must be corrected by the experts. In some cases a conflict of values and an open resistance can be detected (for more see Vaicekauskienė 2011b) and in the worst case an indication of linguistic insecurity can develop even among well-educated, professional and experienced members of the speech community.

The presented study can serve as a basis for comparative research in other speech communities with different degree of institutionalisation of language ideologies and language monitoring. A wider context of language policies in other countries would verify the theoretical argument that language restrictions from above may have negative impact on the linguistic climate and linguistic self-confidence of speakers.

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