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## Lithuanian in East Prussia

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## Abstract

The paper gives a brief survey of the history of the Lithuanian language in Lithuania Minor, special attention being paid to the consequences of the incorporation of former East Prussia into the Soviet Union.

The territories inhabited by Lithuanians and later conquered by the Teutonic Order were eventually called *Mazoji Lietuva* (Lithuania Minor). The term must have been used for the first time by Simon Grunau (died about 1530) in the chronicle of the beginning of the 16th century (*Kleinlitaw*). We also find it in the Prussian Chronicle by Luke David (1503-1583), and in the 18th century the term was used by A. Lucanus. In the newly formed state of Prussia the territory inhabited by Lithuanians was referred to as *Lietuvos provincija*, *lietuviškoji sritis*, *lietuviški valsčiai*, etc. It was also referred to simply as *Lietuva* (Germ. Litauen) or *Prūsų Lietuva* (Germ. Preußisch-Litauen).

Owing to forced Germanization carried out on a state scale from 1872 Lithuanian was declining rapidly at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th century. By order of the authorities its use was banned in schools, offices and, in general, in public life. An attempt was made to stop its use in the church as well. But the hardest blow was dealt to Lithuanian under Hitler. Nearly all Lithuanian settlements were given German names.

The least affected was Lithuanian in those areas of Lithuania Minor which in 1923 were incorporated into the Republic of Lithuania, i.e. in the region of Klaipėda (Germ. Memelgebiet). However, at the end of World War II a

large number of the inhabitants were driven to Germany by the Hitlerites. The vacated homesteads and villages were occupied by people from other places, Russia and other Soviet republics. To avoid Bolshevik terror, most indigenous inhabitants fled to Germany. The rest got mixed up with new settlers. The local dialect of Lithuanian in the former region of Klaipėda is falling into decline. It is being studied intensively by linguists now.

An even sadder fate befell Lithuanian in East Prussia, i.e. in that part of Lithuania Minor which after the First World War remained under German rule. It was persecuted and ravaged by the Hitlerites. With the war coming to an end, a great number of the inhabitants of East Prussia withdrew to Germany. Some Lithuanians stayed on in the hope that the region would be incorporated into Soviet Lithuania where they would not be persecuted. But their hopes were not destined to be realised. Stalin made no difference between the Lithuanians and Germans. A black night fell: the people were driven from their homes, killed without trial. The mass-murder of the people started. To save themselves, they fled to Soviet Lithuania. In the autumn of 1944 and in the spring of 1945 a great number of begging people from East Prussia accumulated in the western part of Soviet Lithuania, mostly women with small children and disabled old people. Most of them spoke Lithuanian; others had difficulty in understanding the language. And still others did not understand it at all. The people tried to help them, although the Bolsheviks forbade it. The Soviets would round them up and transport to Germany or exile them to Siberia where nearly all of them died. The mothers would leave their children in the care of Lithuanians. 40 years later the "Germans" started looking for their brothers, sisters, relatives.

Practically there are no indigenous inhabitants left in East Prussia. The country, except for the western part, which was turned over to Poland, became part of the Russian Federation, although it has nothing in common with Russia – they do not even have a common border. Thus, a large part of East Prussia was turned into a Russian colony. Lithuania was deprived of its 700 year-old neighbourhood with Germany and found itself encircled by the Slavs.

The rulers of the Kremlin began to settle Russians in East Prussia. People from Smolensk, Voronezh, Oriol and other regions went to live there. By 1946 about 12,000 families had settled there. In 1988 over 800,000 people (mostly Russians) lived in East Prussia. The absurd idea that East Prussia had always been the land of the Russians or at least the Slavs was being

hammered into the heads of the colonists. This idea can also be found in the Major Soviet Encyclopedia published in 1953. There appeared even dissertations whose authors tried to prove that old Prussians were akin to Russians.

To make it look more Russian, the Kremlin replaced the place-names with Russian place-names. Towns, townships and small settlements were given Russian names, usually derived from the names of Bolshevik leaders, military people or even Czar generals. The place-names of East Prussia were struck a heavy blow. Lithuanian place-names such as *Būdviečiai*, *Gavaičiai*, *Girėnai*, *Kalniniškai*, *Kraupiškas*, *Lazdynai* (*Lazdenai*), *Miėlaukiai*, *Miėlkiemis*, *Papėlkiai*, *Pilkalnis*, *Pilupėnai*, *Skaisgiriai*, *Stālupėnai*, which were germanized into *Budwehten*, *Gawaiten*, *Girrehnen*, *Kalninghen*, *Kraupischken*, *Lasdehnen*, *Mehlauken*, *Mehlkehmen*, *Popelken*, *Pillkallen*, *Pillupönen*, *Gr. Skaisgirren*, *Stallupönen* and which only in 1938 were replaced with the German names *Altenkirch*, *Herzogsrode*, *Guldengrund*, *Herdenau*, *Breitenstern*, *Haselberg*, *Liebfelde*, *Birkenmühle*, *Marthausen*, *Schloßberg*, *Schloßbach*, *Kreuzingen*, *Ebenrode* have been turned into Russian names: *Malomožajskoje*, *Gavrilovo*, *Grivino*, *Prochladnoje*, *Ul'janovo*, *Krasnoznamensk*, *Zales'e*, *Kalinino*, *Vysokoje*, *Dobrovol'sk*, *Nevskoje*, *Bol'sakovo*, *Nesterov*, etc. The Stalinists did not leave a single Lithuanian or Baltic name in the old Baltic land, although close to it was a Soviet Baltic Republic — Lithuania. They behaved as if they had discovered an uninhabited land, a land without its history and, consequently, it had had to be named after the 'discoverers'. No consideration was given to the cultural heritage. All Baltists well know the place-name *Pabėtai* (*Pobethen*), a place where Abel Will, the translator of the Third Prussian Catechism, worked. Now this place is called *Romanovo*. And *Tolminkiemis*, a place associated with the great Lithuanian writer Kristijonas Donelaitis, the author of *The Seasons*, is now *Čistye Prudy*. Even hydronyms have been Russified — a rare case in world history: *Áismarės* (*Frisches Haff*) has been turned into *Vislinskij zaliv*, *Alna* → *Lava*, *Ametà* → *Strogovka*, *Gilijà* → *Matrosovka*, *Nemunynas* → *Zlaja*, *Romintà* → *Krasnaja*, *Skirvjtė* → *Severnaja*, etc. Thus were destroyed the traces of the people who lived here for centuries. And this was done not by the Crusaders or by some other plunderers, but the 'senior brothers', who surpassed even the Hitlerites in doing evil (by 1938 the latter had changed only 56.7% of all the place-names). Unfortunately, even the Poles have followed the example set by the 'senior brothers' – they have modified the Lithuanian (Baltic) place-names, too. Cf.: *Degučiai* →

*Degucie* → *Maków*, *Galviečiai* → *Galviece* → *Duża Wieś*, *Kiekskiemiai* → *Kiekskiejmy* → *Zielonka*, *Pluškiemiai* → *Pluszkiejmy* → *Placka...*

Old Lithuanian dialects have also disappeared. The speakers of the dialects have found themselves in the West. A large number of East Prussia Lithuanians who fled to Germany later moved to the U.S.A., Argentina or other countries. Scattered all over the world, they do not make up a compact unit. Some people from East Prussia live in the Republic of Lithuania. Yet, their offspring do not speak the language of their ancestors or speak it badly. The language of the Lithuanians who came from East Prussia a century ago or even earlier and who formed compact settlements around Žemaičių Naūmiestis and in other areas has changed considerably (i.e. it has been affected by the Samogitian dialect), although one can still observe some of the language elements described in Kurschat's grammar. These elements come to the fore when the people speak on religion, for they still use religious books published a century ago.

From this it follows that a detailed reconstruction of the former Lithuanian dialects of East Prussia is impossible today. We can only point out their general characteristics. In doing this, linguists mostly rely on the works of A. Bezzenberger, A. Doritsch, G. Gerullis, Chr. S. Stang, A. Salys, W. Fenzlau as well as on East Prussia Lithuanian dialectal texts, e.g. K. Jurkschat's and K. Cappeller's recorded fragments of the language.

All dialectal evidence shows that in the small area of the North-West corner of East Prussia along the coast of the Courland Lagoon, almost up to the line Labguvà – Kaukėnai (Polessk–Jasnoje) the people spoke Samogitian; they differed from Aukštaičiai (i.e. representatives of High Lithuanian) at least in the pronunciation of the affricates. So, for instance, they pronounced *trėts*, *stātei*, *su jāuteis*, *keñt*, *gaidei*, *širdėi*, *meldù*, *kentù* instead of *trėčias*, *stāčiai*, *su jāučiais*, *keñčia*, *gaidžiai*, *širdžiai*, *meldživù*, *kenčivù*. The presence of 'Samogitianisms' should be accounted for by a Couronian substratum.

In the rest of East Prussia the Lithuanians spoke a West High Lithuanian dialect akin to the Southwest dialect of High Lithuanian. This dialect is characterized by the presence of archaic forms which resulted from its long-standing neighbourhood with western Balts, viz. Prussians, who spoke a Baltic language more archaic than Lithuanian. The said dialect must have been also affected by a Prussian substratum, the evidence of which could be the concurrence of *o* and *uo* (resp. the correlating *ė* and *ie*), the optional reduction of the singular nominative inflection *-as* (*výrs* // *výras*), which could

be found even in the south of the area. There are lexical Prussianisms there as well. This dialect was later to play an important role in the history of the Lithuanian language. This dialect was spoken by the old writers Jonas Bretkūnas, Jonas Rėza, the author of the first Lithuanian grammar Danielius Kleinas, the classic of Lithuanian literature Kristijonas Donelaitis and the great scholar of the Lithuanian language Friedrich Kursaitis (Kurschat). This is the dialect from which Standard Lithuanian takes its source. It was in East Prussia that the first Lithuanian book (1547), the first Lithuanian grammar (1653), the first Lithuanian translation of the Bible (1590), the first Lithuanian book of fiction (*Ezopo pasakėcios*, 1706) were published. Here also the first university seminar (i.e. the chair of Lithuanian, 1718) on Lithuanian was established; the first scientific work on Lithuanian (1747) was published; the first poems in Lithuanian, the immortal work by K. Donelaitis "The Seasons" (1818), the first Lithuanian periodical (1822) came out. The earliest studies of Lithuanian folk-lore were also made here. Here walked the people well-known to all Baltists: Martynas Mažvydas, Jonas Bretkūnas, Danielius Kleinas, Liudvikas Rėza, Kristijonas Donelaitis, August Schleicher, Friedrich Kurschat ... But for Lithuania Minor, there would not be Lithuania Major.

The West High Lithuanian dialect of East Prussia (the most archaic of all Lithuanian dialects) is composed of two subdialects: northern and southern. The dividing line between them passes roughly by the localities Vėluva – Įsrutis – Nybudžiaĩ – Katniavà – Širvintà (now Znamensk – Černjachovskoe – Krasnogorskoe – Zavety – Kutuzovo). The characteristic feature of the first subdialect is the omission of the short vowels and reduction of the long vowels in unstressed inflections; the second subdialect is very archaic – it has preserved the ancient inflection vocalism inherited by Standard Lithuanian. Thus the forms *vīlkas*, *dīrba*, *mýli* have remained unchanged in the southern subdialect, and in the northern subdialect they have turned into *vīlks*, *dīrb*, *mýl*. Respectively, the Proto-Lithuanian gen. sg. *\*vīlkā*, *\*dúonās*, *\*sáulės*, 3rd pers. past t. *\*dīrbā*, *\*mīrē* have changed to *vīlko*, *dúonos*, *sáulės*, *dīrbo*, *mīrė* in the southern subdialect; in the northern subdialect the said forms have changed to *vīlka*, *dúonas*, *sáules*, *dīrba*, *mīre*. Because of the reduction of the endings (the speakers called it "striukinimas"; Eng. 'shortening') the representatives of the dialect were nicknamed "striūkiai" (Eng. 'those reducing endings'), and the representatives of the southern subdialect are called "baltsermėgiai" (Eng. 'people wearing light-coloured overcoats'). This is not a linguistic, but an ethnographic term. The point is that in the 19th century

people living in the region used to wear light-coloured woolen overcoats.

Most "striūkiai" people, except for the northern part situated nearer the Nemunas, i.e. roughly up to the line Labgavà - Gāstos - Žiliai- Trapėnai (now Polesk - Slavsk - Žilino - Nemanskoje), have turned the acute diphthongs *áu, ai, éi* into respective monophthongs. Instead of the diphthongs they use the long vowels *ā, ē*, e.g. *šākštai, dākts, pavėkslai* instead of *šaukštai, dāktas, pavėkslai*. The monophthongization of the diphthong *ai* in the suffix *-aitis* (pronounced *-ātis*) occurred even in a larger area, e.g. *Kursāitis* instead of *Kursāitis* (hence Germ. *Kurschat*).

"Striūkiai" people who live closer to Samogitians diphthongized the long vowels *o, é* and changed them to *uo, ie*, e.g. instead of *pōnas, tévas* they pronounced *puōns, tieus*. Here *o, é > uo, ie* fully coincided with the old diphthongs *uo, ie*, e.g. *dūona, piēn(a)s*. Such "striūkiai" people were usually referred to as "tilžėnai" people (after the town of Tilžė), and those who made a distinction between *o, é* and *uo, ie* were referred to as "ragainėnai" people (after Ragainė).

All the said dialects (both in the areas of "striūkiai" and "baltsermėgiai" dialects) had a lot of other minor peculiarities: phonetic, grammatical and lexical. However, due to insufficient evidence, concerning their distribution in particular, a detailed analysis of the dialects is not possible at present.

In former East Prussia (the Kaliningrad district) there live tens of thousands of Lithuanians, mostly post-war settlers. Their number fluctuates between 20,000 and 30,000 (some sources indicate the number 40,000). According to the official statistics there were 3,475 Lithuanians in Karaliaučius (now Kaliningrad) in 1979 (in 1990 - 3,537); 2,132 (2,326) - in Tilžė (now Sovetskoe); 2,099 (1940) in Ragainė (now Neman); 1,348 - in Įsrutis (now Černjakovsk); 1,464 (2,316) - in the district of Gāstos (now Slavsk); 864 (1,504) in the district of Lazdynai (now Krasnoznamensk); 651 (1,154) in the district of Stālupėnai (now Nesterov). In areas bordering on Lithuania the Lithuanians make up 1/3 of all the inhabitants. They are mostly former deportees who were not allowed by the Bolsheviks to return to Lithuania and who tried to settle closer to their native land. Among them there are a large number of post-war resistants who led armed struggle against Bolshevik power. A certain part of the Lithuanians living in East Prussia were former Soviet activists who, having committed a crime in Soviet Lithuania, fled to East Prussia or simply those who came here to seek their fortune. This category of settlers was Russified before long. The collaborationist gov-

ernment of Soviet Lithuania did not take care of the Lithuanians living in East Prussia - they were abandoned to their fate. Lithuanian schools have never existed there; nor have there been Lithuanian kindergartens or Lithuanian press. Everything was in Russian. The local authorities did not allow to carry on any cultural work; instead they were spreading demagoguery about „the friendship of nations". Despite all the efforts made the Lithuanians were not able to introduce Lithuanian into the schools. About a thousand Lithuanian children from Tilžė (Sovetsk) and other places situated closer to the Lithuanian border had to drive to schools on the other side of the Nemunas in Soviet Lithuania or were forced to go to boarding-schools there. On Sunday and during religious celebrations the Lithuanians would drive to the other side of the Nemunas to pray, for there were no Lithuanian churches left in East Prussia.

Lithuanian as spoken today in East Prussia has never been the object of special study. It is not easy for linguists to do it, since the Lithuanians do not present a compact community there; they are intermingled with the Russians. They are forced to communicate with them in Russian. As a result, their Lithuanian is under a strong influence of Russian. From the point of view of dialectology, the Lithuanian in East Prussia presents a collection of all the dialects of Lithuania Major, as people living there come from various dialectal areas. Conditions for linguistic consolidation do not exist there. It is to be hoped that the situation will improve after the relations between the Republic of Lithuania and The Russian Federation are normalized, and Lithuanian will continue to live in this old Baltic land.

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