

LIETUVOS BANKAS
EUROSISTEMA



LITHUANIAN COMMEMORATIVE EURO COINS

2 euro coin dedicated to the Lithuanian language

Celtic languages

Germanic languages

Romance languages

Slavic languages

Old Prussian, Sudovian, Curonian, Semigallian and Selonian

LITHUANIAN

Latvian

Greek

Indo-Iranian languages

Baltic languages

Proto-Indo-European

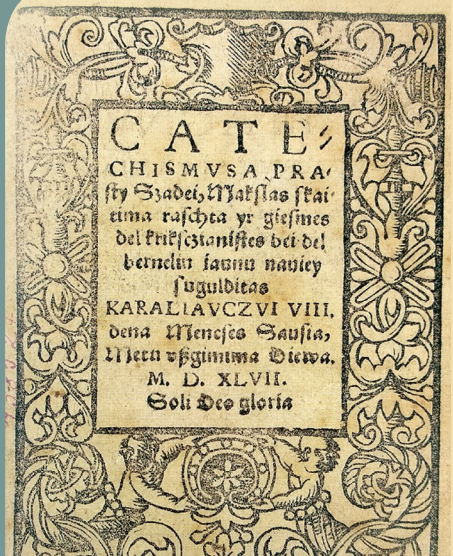
THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE

Introduction

The Lithuanian language is not only one of the 24 official languages of the European Union, but it is also one of the most archaic European languages, belonging to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family. Retaining many archaic features, Lithuanian is comparable to such dead languages as Sanskrit, Ancient Greek and Latin; hence sometimes it is even referred to as a living fossil. Not for nothing did Antoine Meillet, a well-known French linguist of the early 20th c., state that 'anyone wishing to hear how Indo-Europeans spoke should come and listen to a Lithuanian peasant'.

History and Research

According to data collected by historians, people speaking the Baltic languages settled in the Baltic region in the 2nd millennium BCE. In the 6th–7th c. CE, the Lithuanian and Latvian languages diverged, thus from this point in time we can begin talking about the history of the Lithuanian language. Lithuanian and Latvian are sister languages, stemming from the same branch; however, nowadays they are so far apart that Latvians and Lithuanians do not understand each other without specialised learning.


CATE=
CHISMVSA PRA=
ſty Szadei, Wakſſas ſtai=
tima raſchta yr gieſmes
del Krikſzczioniſtes bei del
bernelin ſawmi nauley
ſugulditas
KARALIAVCZVI VIII,
dena Menczes Sauſia,
Metu wßgimima Diewa.
M. D. XLVII.
Soli Deo gloria



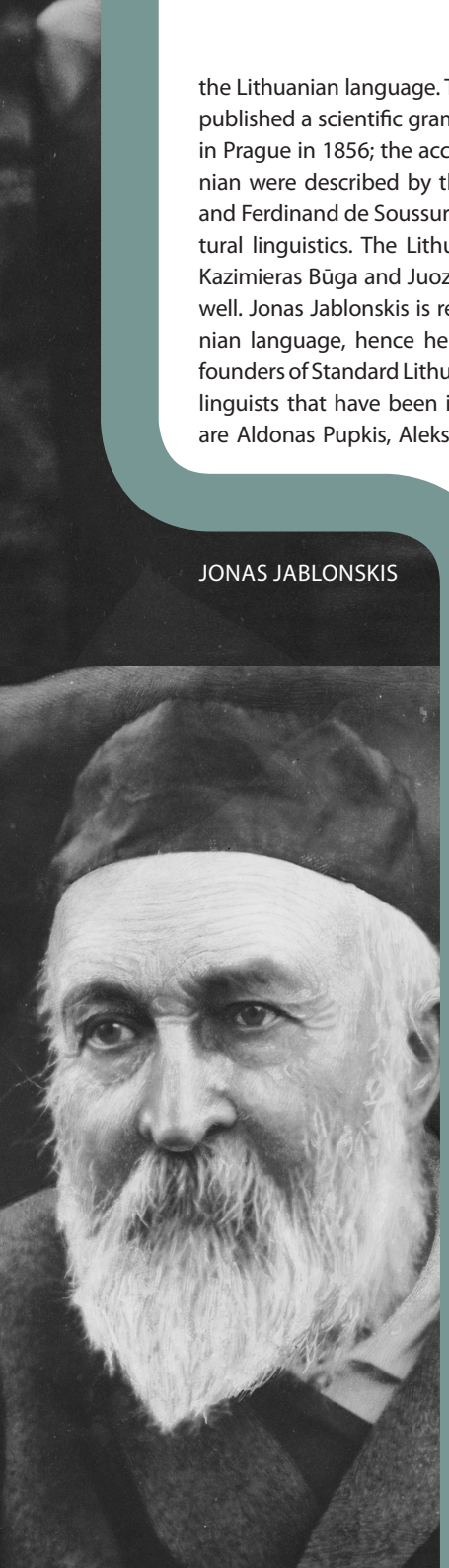
Even though in the Middle Ages the Lithuanian people had established the largest European state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the plight of the Lithuanian language throughout history was often in a situation that was neither simple nor easy, as the language did not become the official language of the state.

Due to complicated political and social conditions, Old Slavic, Latin and Polish had been used in the official life of the state up until the 20th c., while Polish, Russian and German were used during the occupations in the 19th and 20th c. The Lithuanian language was mostly spoken by peasants. It is believed that only in the boom time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania did the Lithuanian elite speak Lithuanian. This might be the reason why nowadays Lithuanians are keen on romanticising their medieval dukes. Still, people had to be taught the Word of God and introduced to government circulars; therefore, since the appearance of the first book, three variations of the common language started to evolve.

In the 19th c., the Spring of Nations swept across Lithuania as well. Bishop Motiejus Valančius played a prominent role in the national awakening and language teaching. In the second half of the century, the common Lithuanian language began to form on the basis of the Western Highland (*Aukštaitija*) dialects, spreading across the entire country, whereas all-level education in the Lithuanian language and the expansion of the language into all areas of life in the first half the 20th c. allow us to start talking about Standard Lithuanian.

Short texts in Lithuanian emerged in the 16th c. The first book in the Lithuanian language — the *Catechism* by Martynas Mažvydas — was published in 1547, the first dictionary — *Dictionarium Trium Linguarum* by Konstantinas Sirvydas — in 1620, the first grammar book — *Grammatica Litvanica* by Daniel Klein — in 1653. The growing interest in comparative linguistics in the 19th c. forced researchers across all of Europe to turn to

the Lithuanian language. The German linguist August Schleicher published a scientific grammar book of the Lithuanian language in Prague in 1856; the accentuation system and tones in Lithuanian were described by the German linguist Friedrich Kurschat and Ferdinand de Soussure, a Swiss linguist and pioneer in structural linguistics. The Lithuanian linguists Antanas Baranauskas, Kazimieras Būga and Juozas Balčikonis are worth mentioning as well. Jonas Jablonskis is renowned for standardising the Lithuanian language, hence he is now considered to be one of the founders of Standard Lithuanian. Contemporary world-renowned linguists that have been investigating the Lithuanian language are Aldonas Pupkis, Aleksas Girdenis, Vytautas Mažiulis, Zigmas Zinkevičius, Vincas Urbutis, Vytautas Ambrazas, Albertas Rosinas, Pietro Umberto Dini, Guido Michelini and Wojciech Smoczyński.



JONAS JABLONSKIS

During the complex history of Lithuania, the Lithuanian language was repeatedly on the verge of extinction, thus Lithuanians are extremely proud of their language and cherish it. It is believed that the Lithuanian national identity is primarily based on linguistic self-consciousness.

Language Peculiarities

Comparative-historical linguistics dates back to the beginning of the 19th c. Researchers in this field were greatly surprised: somewhere on the outskirts of Europe, in the provincial backwater of Russia, there existed a peasant Lithuanian language, retaining an abundance of characteristics of Proto-Indo-European phonetics and morphology.

Firstly, Lithuanian has a complex declension system of nouns, adjectives and numerals. The noun in the Lithuanian

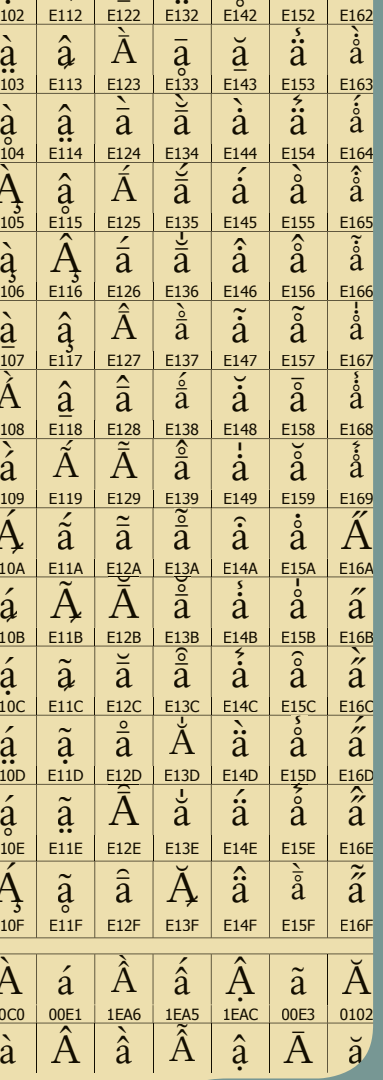
Lithuanian	Sanskrit	English
aš esmi	**asmi**	**I am**
tu esi	**asi**	**you are**
jis, ji esti	**asti**	**he, she is**

language has seven cases for both singular and plural forms and five declensions as well as twelve paradigms. Lithuanian native speakers easily recognise three additional cases, which in standard Lithuanian are considered to be outdated: all of them are offshoots of the locative case. For many people speaking modern European languages the concept of the case itself is not easy to grasp, unless they have been taught classical languages, such as Latin or Greek, or Sanskrit.

The tonality of the language, which resembles that of Sanskrit, might also be mentioned among the primeval features of the language: vowels have two lengths, two pitches and a shifting stress. This means that in various forms of the word the stress might shift to the next syllable, that both stressed and unstressed vowels might be long and short, and that a long stressed vowel might be pronounced using two or even three different tones, which change the meaning of the word.

The verb in Lithuanian is distinguished by an abundance of its forms. Even though the system of tenses is now simpler and includes only four tenses (the present, the future and two past tenses), apart from conjugative forms, the verb also has several hundred different participle forms.

The archaic character of the language did not stop the Lithuanian people from creating a modern and highly advanced spelling system. Since the spelling system in Lithuanian is fairly new and was standardised only in the 20th c., it is very user-friendly and logical since it is essentially based on phonetics. In other words,



one sound corresponds to one letter; therefore, reading in Lithuanian is much handier than in other languages that have an old and rather rigid spelling system, which is far removed from the spoken language.

The Present Times

For many centuries having been confined within the cottages of Lithuanian peasants, today the Lithuanian language is as modern as it is archaic. Now the Lithuanian language is experiencing its renaissance and meets all the needs of the society. It is recorded in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania that Lithuanian is the state language. The language is used in all realms of the state and its citizens' life as well as in literature; it has its proper place on the Internet and cyberspace in general, and being one of the official languages of the European Union, it also has equal footing internationally.

The Lithuanian language is protected by the State, and a fully-fledged language policy is being implemented, the main aspects of which are the status, usage and teaching. The language policy includes constitutional protection of the Lithuanian language and public regulation in terms of standardisation (the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language and the State Language Inspectorate have been established and are still operating); the language is researched and studied at state and private research institutes and universities. Since the Lithuanian language is key to understanding the Proto-Indo-European language and historical-comparative language research, it is also studied abroad, e.g. in Estonia, Italy, Japan, the US, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Germany, etc.

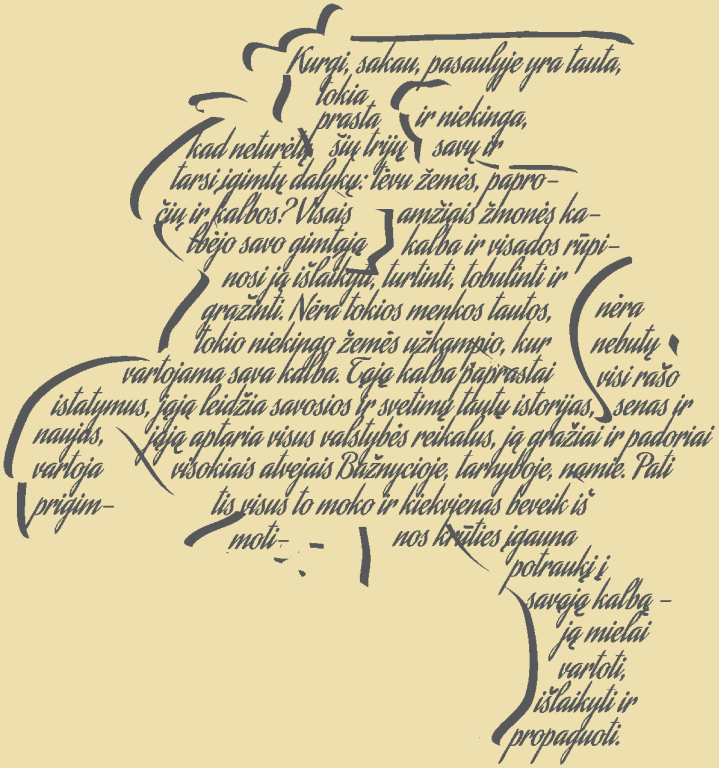
Lithuanian, of course, cannot compare to the major languages of the world in terms of the number of its users; still, it is not among the smallest languages — it is a medium-sized language. Nowadays almost 4.5 million people across the world speak it.

The majority — approximately 3 million — live in Lithuania. The largest Lithuanian diasporas are located in the US, the UK and Germany, whereas Lithuanian communities can be found in 41 nations worldwide. There are approximately 200 institutions abroad, concentrating on Lithuanian studies: they act as a beacon of the Lithuanian language.

Final Remarks

The Lithuanian language is truly melodious and rich. It is no coincidence that one of the most important and most popular Lithuanian words — *Ačiū* — is on the national side (obverse) of this coin. Hence the coin pays tribute to both Mercury, the Roman god of commerce, and human relations. Let each payment made with this coin be a symbolic way of expressing gratitude — a way of saying *Ačiū* ('Thank you').

Dr Antanas Smetona



2 EURO COMMEMORATIVE COIN DEDICATED TO THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE

CuNi/CuZnNi alloy
Diameter 25.75 mm
Weight 8.50 g

*On the edge of the coin: FREEDOM*UNITY* WELL-BEING**

National side of the coin designed by Liudas Parulskis and Giedrius Paulauskis
Common side of the coin designed by Luc Luycx

10,000 pcs of BU quality in numismatic package out of total mintage of 1 million pcs





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LIETUVOS MONETŲ KALYKLA

The coin was minted at the UAB Lithuanian Mint
www.lithuanian-mint.lt

Lithuanian Collectors Coins
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Coins photographed by Arūnas Baltėnas
Designed by Liudas Parulskis
The publication uses illustrations from the book *Tautos kilmė* ("The Origin of the Nation") by A. Vanagas, Z. Zinkevičius and A. Luchtanas, the designer's personal archive and the collections of the Bank of Lithuania Money Museum.

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