

BEFORE THERE WAS *PALEMONAS*: COMPUTERS, LITHUANIAN GRAPHEMES, AND FONTS

Summary

The article is an account of the difficulties that had to be overcome in preparing philological publications on Lithuanian linguistics, containing special graphemes (beyond the standard Lithuanian alphabet) in the last decade of the 20th century, when the typesetting technologies underwent radical changes with the advent of computer typesetting. An emphasis is placed on the importance and possibilities opened by the graphical interface in the IBM PC-type computers and the vector fonts that came with it. The topics discussed include character encoding schemes current at the time and the situation of the Lithuanian alphabet therein. The main focus of the article however is on the special linguistic characters used in Lithuanian philology (beyond the standard Lithuanian alphabet letters) and the technical challenges associated with them. The topics discussed include in-house-made special computer fonts and collections of fonts, used at the University of Vilnius Faculty of Philology at the time, for the publication of the periodicals *Baltistica* and *Kalbotyra* as well as linguistic books containing phonetically transcribed texts in Lithuanian dialects, with Lithuanian accentuation (syllable tone) marks, the so-called 'Gerulian' phonetic alphabet (i. e. phonetic transcription system based on the so-called Copenhagen Scheme of Transliteration and Phonetic Transcription and introduced into the study of Lithuanian dialects by a prominent scholar Jurgis Gerulis) as well as other characters necessary for this type of publications that were not available in the standard computer fonts of the time. It must be admitted that the sphere of usage of these in-house-made fonts was rather narrow and confined to publishing of linguistic texts on paper; thus, these sets of fonts were not a universal instrument of information exchange and this circumstance rendered them inferior to other, standard fonts. Difficulties arising from this non-universality and the proliferation of varieties of these privately made fonts are also discussed; the issue especially came into prominence when the time had come to publish linguistic texts on the internet and to

assemble them into sortable and searchable databases. These difficulties and the new demands arising thereof are the main reason for creating a modern, universal computer font that should encompass all graphemes necessary for linguistics texts, especially those of Lithuanian linguistics.

KEYWORDS: font, special characters for linguistics, encoding, character set, code page, encoding standards, ASCII, ANSI, Unicode, accent notation in writing, phonetic transcription.

PETRAS SKIRMANTAS
The Institute of the Lithuanian Language
Petro Vileišio g. 5, LT-10308 Vilnius
petras.skirmantas@gmail.com