

THE AMBIGUITY OF EXPRESSION *SIMPLE LANGUAGE*  
IN THE BALTO-SLAVIC BORDER REGION FROM  
THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE

*Summary*

This paper deals with the so-called *język prosty* which has been used for ages by various national groups living in the Balto-Slavic border region. This homely and unofficial language functions among the lower social classes only as a vehicle for verbal communication within multilingual communities.

The author also mentions the fact that in the past there existed a language called by a similar name. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania there functioned a written language referred to as *prosta mova*. It was then the official literary language, apart from Old Church Slavonic. It also served as a communication tool for the upper social classes in the multilingual country.

The main goal of this paper is to highlight the ambiguity of expression *simple language* in the Balto-Slavic border region, paying more attention to the interpretation of the meaning from the perspective of the Lithuanian language.

There are actually two different languages, while the circumstances of their creation are similar. The author enumerates the similarities between *język prosty* and *prosta mova*:

1. They can be contrasted with languages of higher status in the linguistic hierarchy: in the past it was Old Church Slavonic, whereas nowadays these are the Polish, the Russian, the Belarusian and the Lithuanian literary languages. At the same time, they indicate the position in the social hierarchy of their users;
2. They are hybrids created so as to enable communication within multilingual

communities, in the past as a written language, and today as a spoken language;

3. Without being directly related to any nationality, they allow for the maintenance of the ambiguity of linguistic and identity boundaries in disputes between different nationalities.

The communicative group using numerous languages which developed out of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania exists till today and is continued in the Balto-Slavic border region by the still used expression *prosty*. In the conditions of the multilingualism and multiculturalism, the ambiguity of language and identity boundaries plays an extremely important role.

KEYWORDS: Balto-Slavic border region, multilingualism, multiculturalism, język prosty, prosta mova, Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

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