Speaking Lithuanian

Pronunciation of consonants d, t, and n.

JONAS DAUGIRDAS

Many children of Lithuanian families who were raised in America pronounce certain consonants when speaking Lithuanian in a way that makes their spoken Lithuanian quickly identifiable as non-native. One little discussed problem that can cause American Lithuanian to sound markedly different from native Lithuanian is the Americanized way that certain consonants are pronounced, especially the letters "d", "t", and "n".

How the consonant “d” is pronounced in Spanish, which is similar to how it is pronounced in Lithuanian, in a “dental” fashion.

How the consonant “d” is pronounced in American English, in a “lingua-alveolar” fashion.

Reproduced with permission from: http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/spanish/frameset.html

W hat are the differences between how Americans and Lithuanians pronounce these three consonants? In American English, the consonants are pronounced by the “lingua-alveolar” method. What does this mean? The University of Iowa phonology website shows a comparison of how consonants are pronounced in American English, German, and Spanish. Under the American English section, one can see how the tongue is placed to make an American English “t” or “d” or “n” sound here: http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/english/frameset.html. Click on the tabs labeled “manner” and “place”, and then on the consonants desired. Basically, for each of these consonants, the tongue comes forward and touches the upper right palate, behind the front teeth, but not the front teeth. In contrast, in Lithuanian these three consonants are pronounced in a “dental” fashion. The sound is made with the tongue pressed against the back of the front teeth. Then, in forming the vowel that follows, the lips also participate, bringing the sound to the very front of the mouth. This is similar to how these consonants are pronounced in Spanish. You can see an animation of how the Spanish pronounce “d”, “t”, and “n” as “dental” consonants, here: http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/spanish/frameset.html.

Follow “modo” and “oclusivas” for the “d” and “t” sounds, and “nasales” for the “n” sound. One observation: these animations for Spanish pronunciation show the tongue against the back of the front teeth, with the tip of my tongue against the backs of the lower front teeth.

Also, Americans aspire the sounds “t” and to a lesser extent “d”. This means that they use more air than necessary to pronounce the consonant. As described in Russian for Dummies by Kaufman and Gettys, linguists define aspiration as “a burst of air that comes out of your mouth as you say these sounds. To see what we’re talking about, put your hand in front of your mouth and say the word ‘top.’ You should feel air against your hand as you pronounce the word.” In Lithuanian, as in Russian, consonants (this also applies to “p” and “k”) are pronounced without aspiration. What one needs to do when pronouncing “t” is to relax one’s tongue and lips, and use only the amount of air needed to pronounce the consonant, not letting any air slip by the tongue. There should be no puff of air when you say your “t” sounds in Lithuanian. In other words, “say it, don’t spray it.”

I do believe that in our Lithuanian Saturday schools, where Lithuanian is being taught to American-born children, more attention needs to be paid to pronunciation. Americanized pronunciation of Lithuanian consonants can be easily fixed, but it must first be recognized as correctable.

References and links:
2) University of Iowa Phonology Website:

This petition ended up in President Harding’s White House

T he road to Lithuania’s independence was a long and arduous one. Since the initial declaration of independence on February 16, 1918 it has been a struggle which has seen its victories and disappointments. One of the initial hurdles that had to be overcome was obtaining de jure recognition of its statehood from the United States government. Lithuanian American organizations across America collected one million signatures which were presented to President Harding in the White House, requesting that he and the Secretary of State recognize the newly formed Lithuanian government. Recognition came almost four years after Lithuania declared its independence. Draugas News obtained a copy of one page from this historic petition. The page contains signatures of 15 prominent Lithuanian Americans of that time. How many of them can you identify? In future issues of Draugas News will attempt to discern who these historic personages were.

Lithuania Post issued two new postage stamps to commemorate the XXI Winter Olympic Games beginning on February 7 in Sochi. They feature a bobsleders and ice-hockey players. The nominal value of the first stamps is LT2.15, and of the second stamp is LT2.90. The stamps dedicated to the Sochi Olympic Games has been created by the artist Irma Balakauskaite.
Speaking Lithuanian: “Fat L” vs. “Skinny L”

Jonas Daugirdas

In the January 2014 issue of Draugas News, I discussed the differences in pronouncing the consonants “d”, “t”, and “n” in Lithuanian vs. English. To review, in English, these consonants are “alveolar,” said with the tongue tip pressed against the upper gum ridge, but the main difference is, that only the tip of the tongue is used in making the sound, the sides of the tongue don’t participate. This makes for a “skinny” thinner and more delicate, “L” sound. It is a soft “L.”

I remember going to South America for a World Lithuanian Youth Congress, and meeting Lithuanians who grew up in Argentina, and then, years later, to a similar youth congress in Europe, where I met Lithuanians who grew up in France or Germany. The Lithuanian spoken by some of the South Americans and Europeans sounded quite different, as they would speak Lithuanian almost exclusively using the “skinny” L. On the other hand, Americans would say all Lithuanian words using a “fat L” sound. “Fat.” In Spanish, French, or German, “L” has a variety of sounds, but in most cases is pronounced as a “fat L.” The tongue often is up against the upper gum ridge, but the main difference is, that only the tip of the tongue is used in making the sound, the sides of the tongue don’t participate. This makes for a “skinny” thinner and more delicate, “L” sound. It is a soft “L.”

What about Lithuanian? In Lithuanian, the usage of “fat L” vs. “skinny L” is about 50:50. What determines whether a “fat L” or a “skinny L” should be used? The vowel that follows. If the vowel that follows is an “e,” “i,” or “y,” then the speaker uses a “fat L.” For example: kuodas, kuolo, kuolūt. These words all are pronounced using “fat Ls.”

Now, if the vowel that follows is “e,” “i,” or “y,” a “skinny L” should be used; for example: balionas, balinera, baliūs. What makes this tricky is, that even if there is more than one consonant after the “L”, the choice between fat and skinny L will still depend (in most cases) on the vowel that follows. For examples: valdovas (fat), valdė (skinny), valdžia (skinny).

Think you got it? After each of the following words, write whether a “fat L” or a “skinny L” should be used (write F for “fat” and S for “skinny”):

buliūs ____, bilietas ____, bulka ____, kaltas ____,
kalėtā ____, kaltinta ____, kalė ____, valio ____,
valdytuvas ____, valentinias ____, valgo ____, valgysti ____,
valgias ____, balvonas ____, bulve ____, žižlas ____,
žalias ____, žołę ____, žulkas ____, žalsvas ____.  

Answers:

buliūs ____, bilietas ____, bulka ____, kaltas ____,
kalėtā ____, kaltinta ____, kalė ____, valio ____,
valdytuvas ____, valentinias ____, valgo ____, valgysti ____,
valgias ____, balvonas ____, bulve ____, žižlas ____,
žalias ____, žołę ____, žulkas ____, žalsvas ____.
Speaking Lithuanian: The letter “ė” (wet, mad, baby)

JONAS DAUGIRDAS

Now that we know how to pronounce some consonants like “v”, “d”, and “t” (see the January issue) and “f” (February issue), it’s time to move on to vowels. In this article we begin with the letter “ė”. I’m going to give you a simplified version of how “ė” is pronounced in Lithuanian, but the rules I’m proposing are far from perfect; they are only intended to help you get started. There are a substantial number of exceptions to these rules. Examples of exceptions are: kenčia (suffers), vesti (to wed), krentu (falls), kriū (cuts). In these words the “ė” in the accented syllable is pronounced as “wet”. It’s hard to make a solid rule for these exceptions. For example, in the word rūdenis (to roll) the “ė” is pronounced as “mad”, while in krentu “ė” is “wet”. Other exceptions where between “wet” and “mad”. Another type of pronunciation is very similar to the French pronunciation of “é”. A very close fit is how the French pronounce their term for “baby”: “bébé”. Examples of words with “ė” in them are:

RULE 4: If the “ė” falls on an unaccented syllable of the word, then it is usually pronounced as “wet”. Pronunciation of “ė” in different forms of the same word can change markedly depending on where the accent falls.

RULE 5: The letter “ė” is always pronounced the same way. The third way that “ė” is pronounced in Lithuanian is a very beautiful, wide “ė”. This pronunciation is indicated by writing this letter with an overlying dot “ė”.

RULE 6: The letter “ė” at the beginning or middle of a word is always pronounced as “mad”, whether the syllable is accented or not. At the end of a word, the letter “ė” is pronounced either as “wet”, or between “wet” and “mad”. What about “ė” in words like “ėka”, “ėnka” or “ėtka”? In the past, words now written with the letter “ė” were pronounced as “en”, and the pronunciation had a certain nasal quality (“ėnka” means “nasal” in Lithuanian). We can think of the nasal as signifying a hidden, missing “n” that is no longer being written as a separate letter. In more recent years the “n” sound and nasal quality are no longer commonly heard in words with “ė”. In present-day Lithuanian, when the letter “ė” is found at the beginning or in the middle of a word, it’s always pronounced as “mad”. For example, in to solve (to extend), the “ė” is said as “mad”.

When a tail-end “ė” falls at the end of a noun, this signifies that the noun is being used in the sentence as the object of a verb or preposition. Example: Juokiai form the “tėrė” (I’m decorating the fir tree). Here the terminal “ė” would normally be pronounced as “wet”, because the “ė” falls on the last syllable of the word (Rule #1). Some speakers will pronounce “ė” at the end of such nouns like “wet”. Others will make the “ė” sound a bit longer, somewhere between “wet” and “mad”. Another type of word where “ė” is found commonly in the final syllable is the “dalyvis” or participle. Example: Juokiai form the “tėrė” (I’m sitting depressed). Here again, the terminal “ė” is pronounced between “wet” and “mad”, but closer to “mad”.

So, that’s about it. My wife was telling me: “Jonas, you were good at consonants, but stay away from the vowels. You’re getting in over your head!” Maybe she was (as always) right.

http://mkg.emokykla.lt/kalboskultura/lt/teorija/tartis/balsai/

Chicago celebrates Lithuania

On March 2 Chicago Navy Pier’s Crystal Gardens hosted its third annual Lithuanian independence celebration “Celebrate Lithuania”. These festivities are part of a city-wide event honoring the diversity of ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago.

The festival was opened by the Lithuanian Consul General in Chicago Mar

ijus Gasparavicius, who stressed that Lithuania is well versed in the price one must pay for the restoration of independence to its former glory. In these words the “ė” in the accented syllable is pronounced as “wet”. Other exceptions where between “wet” and “mad”. Another type of pronunciation is very similar to the French pronunciation of “é”. A very close fit is how the French pronounce their term for “baby”: “bébé”. Examples of words with “ė” in them are:

RULE 4: If the “ė” falls on an unaccented syllable of the word, then it is usually pronounced as “wet”. Pronunciation of “ė” in different forms of the same word can change markedly depending on where the accent falls. For example, in variations of the word kelti (to lift) we have keltas (meaning ferry) where the “ė” is pronounced as “mad”, and gėkėtas (repression)

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http://mkg.emokykla.lt/kalboskultura/lt/teorija/tartis/balsai/
Speaking to Lithuanians: Pronouncing the vowels "-a", "-i", and "-y."  

**Vowel** | **Accented syllable, except last syllable** | **Last syllable of a word** | **Uncounted syllable** | **Tailed vowel (p, s, l)** |
---|---|---|---|---|
| e | mad (father) | wet | wet | mad between mad and wet |
| a | father | bug | bug | father between father and bug |
| i | bit | bit | bit | bee between bee and bit |
| y | bee | bee | bee | |

**Rules for pronouncing the vowels -a, -e, -i, and -y.**

Let's look at a few examples. In these examples, the accented syllable of a word is denoted by bold underline.

**Examples regarding "-a."**

Accented syllable, other than last syllable: **bažis** (party) · **baku** pronounced like "father"

Accented last syllable: **seimg** (family) · (ma) pronounced like "bug"

Unaccented syllable: **pablog** (blanket) · (pał) pronounced like "bug"  

Tailed -a (ą): **apobolas** (oak tree) · (ą) pronounced like "father"

Tailed -a, last syllable (ą): **vižis** unjame t miestą (We’re riding to the city) · (ą) pronounced like "father" and "bug".

**And here are a few examples regarding "-i" and "-y."**

Accented syllable, other than last syllable: **Hlas** (grey-haired) · (įl) pronounced as "bit."  

**Jonas Daugirdas**

In Review: For the vowel "-e," we talked about the three forms of pronunciation, like in the words "mad, wet, baby." By now, you should be up to date on the basic principles. If the "e" falls on an accented syllable (unless the accented syllable is the last syllable of the word) it’s usually given a more intense, longer sound (like the "a" sound in the word "mad"), otherwise the "e" sound is short, as in the word "wet." The intense, longer form of "e" is also spoken when there is a "tail" on it (ę). The intense, longer sound is more pronounced when the "tailed-ė" is at the beginning of a word or in the middle of a word. When the "tailed-ė" is at the end of a word, the sound is somewhere between the intense, longer sound ("mad") and the shorter sound ("wet"). We talked also about the completely different sound of the vowel "-ė", which is a bit like the "a" in "baby."

This time, we’re moving on to the vowels "-a," and "-i" and "-y."

**Vowel -a:** For the vowel "-a" the rules are very similar to those for "e" (see Table). The intense, longer sound is pronounced like the "a" in the word "father. The short sound is pronounced like "u" in the word "bug." The longer sound is used when the "a" falls on an accented syllable, except when the accented syllable is the last syllable of a word. Otherwise, the "bug" form is used. When the "a" has a tail on it, (ę), then it’s pronounced like the "a" in "father." When the "a" is at the end of a word, the pronunciation is somewhere between "father" and "bug."  
**Vowels -i," and "-y." The vowel "-i" is ALWAYS pronounced as a short sound, like the "i" in the word "bit." This happens even when the "i" falls on an accented syllable. The long "i" sound, like "bee," is used only with "-y" or with the tailed, "-i."
Speaking to Lithuanians: Pronouncing the vowels “-o” and “-u”

**“Bore” and “book of booze”**

In Review: With this last article on pronunciation of vowels, we have the complete list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Accented syllable, except last syllable</th>
<th>Last syllable of a word</th>
<th>Unaccented syllable</th>
<th>Tailed vowel (p. s. j)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>mad*</td>
<td>wet</td>
<td>wet</td>
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<tr>
<td>a</td>
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*there are exceptions **don’t pronounce “o” like “ow”. Just the pure “o” sound by itself! ***when “-ų” falls on an accented last syllable, it is pronounced like “booze”.

Vowel “-ų”.
The letter “ų” is pronounced like the “-o” sound in the word book. The pronunciation is roughly the same whether the vowel is found in an accented or unaccented syllable, although some will pronounce it between book and booze when the “-ų” makes up the accented syllable of a word. Lithuanians who grew up in South America or some European countries sometimes mispronounce the letter “-ų” as booze when it is pronounced as book.

The tailed “-ų” can be found in the middle of a word or at the end of a word. The tailed “-ų” is pronounced like booze when in the middle of a word. When at the end of a word, the tailed “-ų” is pronounced somewhere between book and booze.

Vowel “-ū”.
The “-ū” sound is the dedicated long form of the vowel, and is always pronounced like booze.

Let’s look at a few examples. In these examples, the accented syllable of a word is denoted by **bold-underline**.

Examples regarding “-o”

Unaccented syllable: **muro** (my) - (vo-) pronounced like the bore.

Unaccented syllable: **švogis** (both) - (bu and du) are each pronounced like book.

Tailed “-ų”, other than last syllable: **švogis** (to send) - (šių) pronounced like booze.

Tailed “-ų”, last syllable, accent- ed: **vainų** (medicines (possessive case)) - (-ų) pronounced like booze.

Tailed “-ų”, last syllable, unaccent- ed: **vainųslainių** (medicinal herbs (possessive case)) - (-ių) pronounced between book and booze.

Examples regarding “-u”

**šviris** (cheese) - (sių) pronounced like booze.

And here’s your final exam:

“Už jūrų marių, už upių van- denių” (beyond the ocean seas, beyond the river waters).

Please pick up your diplomas on the way out. You are now “habilitated doctors” of Lithuanian vowel pronunciation!
Augsburg cross, 1948.

The Lithuanian American Community, together with the Lithuanian Embassy in Germany, are collecting donations to have the Augsburg cross restored to its former glory. If you would like to contribute to this effort, please send your donation to the Lithuanian American Community, Inc., in the memo field, write: Augsburg Cross. Your donation will be forwarded to the Lithuanian Embassy in Germany and used to defray the high costs of restoration. Checks should be sent to the following address:

Rimantas Bitėnas
4 Midland Gardens, Apt 4J
Bronxville, NY 10708

Speaking to Lithuanians:

"Jonas, do you love me?" or the "Hey, you!" ending for Lithuanian names.

Jonas Daužigis

You’ve been dating for three months now; you like her and she likes you. With deep, soulful eyes, she looks up at you and asks, "Jonas, do you love me?" How do you reply? "No," of course. Why? All your life, no one had ever addressed you as Jonas; rather, your parents, relatives, and siblings always called you Jonai.

Speaking Lithuanian is complicated because nouns have a number of different endings, depending on how the noun is used in a sentence. The endings of the vocative case ("Hey, you!") are useful to know if you hang out with Lithuanians, even if you don’t speak the language, because this affects how you address your friends by name. Let’s talk about boys and girls separately for clarity’s sake.

Boy names typically end in -as, Marius, Kęstas, Vytas, Kęstas, Vytas, -as (Raimis, Gytis, Marius, Saulius, Saulius), and -is (Milda, Rūta) or -e (Milda, Rūta) in the "Hey, you!" form. For example: "Hey, Jonas!" In this case, "Hey, Jonas!" is the "Hey, you!" form. The problem is simpler for girl names that end in -ė, "Hey, Vytas!" The name endings are changed to -ai, and nouns ending in -is are changed to -e. For example: "Hey, Jonas!" In this case, "Hey, Jonas!" is the "Hey, you!" form.

For children who don’t speak Lithuanian, the "Hey you!" case still has an impact when addressing one’s father or grandfather. The word for father is tėvelis, and for grandfather is senelis. If your child goes up to his or her Lithuanian father or grandfather and proudly announces, "Tevelis, tevelis, or senelis, senelis, look what I made!", it might make tevelis or senelis feel even more proud if the kid were to say, "Tevelis, tevelis, or senelis, senelis, look what I made!" Note that the "Hey, you!" ending for tevelis or senelis is -e, the same as for people names-ending with "-ė".

Lithuanian is a tough language, and the "Hey, you!" form can be different for nouns than names. In some instances, nouns ending in -ė get changed to -ė (konsulas, konsule), and nouns ending in -is may get changed to -is (tėvė, tėvė).