VOCALIC AND PROSODIC FEATURES
OF THE SOUTHERN AUKŠTAITIAN DIALECTS

Summary

The area of the Southern Aukštaitian dialects encompasses the districts of Lazdijai, Alytus, Varèna and Kaišiadorys. Formally it includes parts of the districts of Trakai, Eišiškės and Šalčininkai, where the majority of the population speak two or even three languages, and the Lithuanians are in the minority. Villages, speaking several languages or not speaking Lithuanian can be found in some other parts as well, e.g. around Kaukornis, Varviškė (Lazdijai district), and Valkininkai (Varèna district). A small non-Dzūkian region around Žasliai and Palomenė and several peripheral subdialecsts of Punskas-Seinai, Pelesa, Naujeji Giernykai, Varanavas, Nevašiai, Nočia, Rodūnia and Pliauki are also attributed to the Southern Aukštaitian dialect on the basis of its main distinctive feature – the pronunciation of the vowels ą, ė and semidiphthongs an, am, en, em.

For a long time the speech of the Southern Aukštaitians was accorded much less attention than that of the Žemaitians or Eastern Aukštaitians. It was treated as rather homogeneous, and its phonetic, morphological, prosodic and other traits were considered easily describable and explicable. In actual fact, however, this dialect must be researched equally extensively as any other both for its archaic peculiarities and its tendencies to change.

The present study is devoted to the analysis of the phonological vocalic system, the allophone inventory and usage in the greater part of the Southern Aukštaitian area. Much attention is paid to the stress, tonemes, their functioning and features, the tendencies and causes of change. The specifics of particular subdialecsts or their groups make the total picture of the dialect more complete and detailed. The peripheral subdialecsts, despite the fact that they are interesting and share many common
features with the greater area of Southern Aukštaitian, are hardly dealt with, since having experienced both long-time isolation and a strong influence of the Slavic languages, they have undergone significant changes, and the general trend of their development is different. They should be researched and described separately and only then can they be compared with the subdialects of the greater area.

Among the major dialectological issues, investigated in this book, the following could be mentioned: the still debatable tonemic levelling of long syllables, containing the vowels [i:], [u:], [e] / [e'] and [ɔ] / [ɔ’] / [ɔ’] and polyphthongs [ie] and [uo], the quality and duration of the first components of the semidiphthongs with different tonemes, the usage of secondary stresses, the nasality of the vowels [i'] and [u'], the length and quality of phonemes and their allophones, etc.

The investigation has yielded a number of significant results, allowing the formulation of the following general conclusions.

The Vowel System

The phonological subsystem of the Southern Aukštaitian vowels consists of twelve phonemes, five of which are short /a/, /i/, /e/, /o/, /u/ and seven long /a’/, /i’/, /e’/ (e.g./e’); /el/, /i’e/ (o’), /o’e/; /u’/ and /uo’/. Low-frequency short phonemes /æ/ and /e/ are on the periphery of the system.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
/i/ & /u/ & /i/ & /u/ \\
/e/ & /e/ & /o/ & /o/ \\
/e’/ (e’) & /e’/ (o’, o’) & <e> & <e> \\
/æ/ & /æ/ & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

The front phonemes /e/ and /e/ are not to be found in the subdialects of Southern Aukštaitian. They are realised as /a/ and /a/ when they are in the absolute word initial position, which is their only relevant position.

The phonemes /i’/ and /u’/, in some cases being in opposition to the long /i’/ and /u’/ of a similar realization and in others merging with them, have the status of the optional phonemes ('Janus-phonemes'). In the process of communication all the aforementioned phonemes are
represented by clusters of allophones, e.g. the short /u/ can be realised in four variants: [u], [u'], [u], [u] or [u]. The inventory of allophones, their quality and length and other features are defined by the adjacent elements, the boundaries of the word, the place of stress, tonemes, the tempo of speech, individual properties of the informants, etc.

With the exception of isolated cases, the opposition of vocalic length is preserved in the stressed syllables. In unstressed non-final syllables the long vowels are shortened; nevertheless, they usually differ quantitatively from the ordinary short ones. In the unstressed final position only the variants of the phonemes /a/ and /a/ are regularly neutralised with respect to length. The disappearance of the length opposition of other short and long vowels is optional in the stem of the word. Full shortening is more characteristic of long vowels in word final position, particularly in open syllables; this change is accompanied by qualitative and prosodic modifications.

It has been noticed that in dealing with people, speaking the standard language or its approximate variant and with the representatives of the neighbouring Western Aukštaitian or other dialects, the Southern Aukštaitians not only readily drop their Dzūkian traits, but also their main distinctive feature – they pronounce [a] and [e] instead of the long [a] and [e] (‘an, ‘en). True, the length of these sounds can vary. The vowels [a] and [e] can often be heard in certain words, especially of more recent origin in a particular dialect, e.g. drūsu. (StdLith drūsu) ‘brave’ acc. sg. masc.; trašū. (StdLith trąšū) ‘fertilizer’ gen. pl. Urban dwellers and informants who do not consider their language prestigious enough try to communicate with the newcomers either in the standard language or at least not purely dialectally.

The inventory of the compounds, of which at least one component is a vowel, comprises compound diphthongs [ai], [au], [ei], [ui] and [ou], semidiphthongs [e], [i], [u], [r], [e], [e] / [e] / [e], [e] / [e] / [e] / [e] + [R] and the so-called triphthongs [iem], [ien], [ie] and [uo]. In stressed syllables the toneme is essential for the prosodic and qualitative characteristics of the vocalic constituents of these compounds. In unstressed positions they lose a part of their length, intensity and undergo certain qualitative changes.
The comparison of isolated vowels with those in the stream of speech and with the cardinal vowels of Daniel Jones' diagram indicates that extreme peripheral front, back and close articulations are not peculiar to the Kučiūnai subdialect, but a certain shift towards greater openness is noticeable. The vowels [e], [ε] and [ɪ] and the allophones [ε'], [α] and [α'] are to be attributed to the front vowels. The vowel [u] and [u'] is the only labial vowel, since [ɔ] and [ɔ'] are only slightly labialised. The vowels [ɛ], [a], [ɛ] and [α] as well as [ɔ] belong to the group of open vowels. It is to be noted that the vowels [ε'], [α] and [α'] treated as central until now, are characterised by a front vowel resonance. Similar conclusions could possibly be drawn from an analogous analysis of other vowels of the south-western area of the Southern Aukštaitian subdialects.

The vowels of the south-eastern subdialects should differ considerably in quality from those of the south-western subdialects of Southern Aukštaitian. Experimental investigation would probably reveal slightly different acoustic characteristics of these sounds, since aurally they seem tenser, closer and more labialised, etc. Differences of quality are particularly obvious in the comparison of the south-western vowels [ε'] and [ɔ'] with south-eastern [ε'], [ɔ'] or [ɔ'].

Experimental data also do not support the current opinion about the full denasalisation of [ɪ] and [u] in Southern Aukštaitian. The nasal resonance of these vowels is still perceptible in isolated words. In natural speech conditions they are often realised in the same way as other allophones of [ɪ] and [u'].

Prosody

In the Southern Aukštaitian dialects the main stress is free and can fall on any syllable in a polysyllabic word. It can be realised by prosodic and quantitative features. Stress retraction is peculiar only to a small area around Paparčiai. In other subdialects stress retraction or shifting can depend on various factors: demotion, the formation of new accentuation types, certain functional peculiarities of the word, etc.
In addition to the main stress, several types of secondary stresses are distinguished. Relatively frequent is the rhythmic secondary stress, e.g. *pars'tnėždaςva* ‘(he/they) used to fetch’, *kame'laς ‘mare’ acc. pl.* This stress strengthens the main stress and its function. Its place in the word depends on the main stress, and the stresses are arranged according to the trochaic rhythmic pattern. Sometimes the rhythmic secondary stress is even placed on the enclitic, which is conceived as the first syllable of the phonological word, e.g. *kap_iš'vārə* (StdLith *kaip išvōro*) ‘as (he/they) drive out’.

The morphemic secondary stress is observed in compound words, e.g. *de'vne'zēdē'ziims* (StdLith *devyniasdešimti*) ‘ninety’, *brūkne,vuogəs* (StdLith *brūkne*) ‘cowberry’ nom. pl., and in word forms, the morphemes of which are capable of bearing the main stress, e.g. *dai'niasjā i* (StdLith *dainiōtum*) ‘(you) would sing’, *pāsakjē* (StdLith *pāsakoja*) ‘(he/they) tell’. In some cases its place coincides with the position of the rhythmic stress. In Southern Aukštaitian only individual cases of the non-distinctive morphemic stress are recorded.

The distinctive morphemic stress is not very prominent and is used inconsistent. Its examples could be *vįš'jēs* ‘hen’ gen. sg. : *vįš'jés* nom. pl., *tuř'jū* (StdLith *tuštę*) ‘wealth’ acc. sg. : *tuř'jū* (StdLith *tuščę*) gen. pl. The presence or absence of this stress can be established on the basis of the prosodic and qualitative features of the syllable. Experimental data show that the Southern Aukštaitians do not always distinguish this stress aurally.

Instrumentally it has been shown that the prosodic and qualitative features of the unstressed syllables are less distinctive than those of the stressed ones. They are pronounced in a lower pitch, less intensively, and are reduced both quantitatively and qualitatively. Sometimes the opposition between long and short syllables is neutralised, especially when they are final and open. Before short stressed syllables of disyllabic words there is a tendency to preserve the original length (or at least its greater part) of unstressed syllables, the basis of which is made up of long vowels, e.g. *plįš'ūs* (StdLith *physūs*) acc. pl. ‘slots’, *ci'li* (StdLith *ṣvili*) ‘(you) keep silence’. In words of more than two syllables the pre-tonic long syllables are often shortened to their half length.
The unstressed pre-tonic syllables, the basis of which is semidiphthongs, remain long still less frequently, e.g. baiśiś (StdLith baisūs) nom. sg. masc. ‘terrible’.

In Southern Aukštaitian two types of tonemes (syllable accents) – acute and circumflex – are observed. Their allotone is the middle toneme. The acute toneme should be regarded as marked and circumflex as unmarked.

Clear tonemic oppositions, performing a distinctive function, can be observed in the syllables, whose nucleus is a diphthong or a diphthongoid sequence, e.g. rā’uk ‘ear, uproot’ imp. 2nd p. sg.: rā’uk ‘wrinkle, ruffle’ imp. 2nd p. sg.; kā’rtaś ‘hanged’: kā’rtaś ‘(point in) time’. The type of the toneme can be defined easily on the basis of the total length and the duration of its separate components and their quality. Generally acuted compounds of two sounds are pronounced longer and quantitatively they resemble long vowels. The pitch and intensity are only additional distinguishing features of the tonemes of diphthongs and semidiphthongs. True, in the circumflex-accented words the voice pressure can be shifted onto the first component, i.e. such words can be pronounced in the way as if their toneme was acute. This phenomenon is frequent in the localities where bilingualism or trilingualism is widespread. Sometimes tonemes can be heard in syllables bearing secondary distinctive or non-distinctive stress, e.g. šlo-kē’m (StdLith šlōkiam) ‘such’ dat. sg. masc., nesju’de’;tā’i (StdLith nesujudētum) ‘(you) would not move’.

In transcribing dialect texts the length of the first components of acuted diphthongs and semidiphthongs should be defined carefully. Traditionally they have been considered equivalent in length to the long vowels. However, this is not quite true, since in connected speech these first components can be pronounced both long and half long due to the influence of various factors.

According to experimental data, sometimes levelling can take place in the tonemes of the stressed syllables, the basis of which is long vowels and polyphthongs [ie] and [uo]. This conclusion is supported by the results of acoustic investigations. However it would be wrong to assume that the Southern Aukštaitians do not distinguish between
the tonemes of long vowels and polyphthongs. These sounds are often
recognizable very easily, and especially in slow articulate speech the
tonemes of long vowels and polyphthongs [iœ] and [uœ] are quite
distinct.

Toneme opposition is neutralised in unstressed pre-tonic and post-
tonic syllables, and the tonemes are represented by the archprosodeme,
i.e. the circumflex.

Experimental data show that diphthongal inflections, containing
tonemes of different origin, are not quite identical, e.g. sakai ‘(you) say’
pres. tense 2nd pers. sg. : sakai ‘resin’ nom. pl. masc., maišai ‘(you) mix’
pres. tense 2nd pers. sg. : maišai ‘bag’ nom. pl. masc. Quality should be
considered their principal and most reliable distinguishing feature.
Additional characteristics, defining the differences between diphthongal
inflections, are the main tone and intensity. Length is not a distinc-
tive feature. Acoustic research has shown that the Southern Aukštaitians
themselves do not always properly perceive the differences of diphthongal
inflections, containing tonemes of different origin and they often
identify them wrongly.

The subdialects of Varviškė (Lazdijai district), Dubičiai (Varėna
district), Eišiškės, Šalčininkai and some other places differ from the
majority of the Southern Aukštaitian subdialects in vocalism and
prosody. The language of the Lithuanians, who are in the minority in
these localities, is influenced to a great extent by the Slavic languages.
Consequently the system of their vowel phonemes has undergone
changes analogous to those in the peripheral subdialects of Pelesa,
Varanavas and other places. The system of the vowel phonemes, their
allophones, distribution, neutralization, accentuation, tonemes and other
phenomena could be determined only after appropriate comprehensive
investigations.