

IN THREE WORDS ABOUT THE MODERN HISTORY OF LATVIA: VERBAL SYMBOLS

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ABSTRACT

Since 2003 Latvia nominates every year the Word of the Year, the Anti-Word of the Year and the Saying of the Year. Thus besides the nominated linguistic units reflecting popular lexis of the time and place, they also reflect the principles of selection of these nominations, accentuate the feedback, namely, attracts attention to the working process of the Terminological Commission and its results, allows to interactively participate in its activities – the public is involved in the search of yearly nominees, as well as their public discussion.

Keywords : Verbal Simbols, Terminology, the Word of the Year, the Anti-Word of the Year, Saying of the Year.

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Codification and standardization of the language and speech stirs up natural and widespread interest of the society, which mostly can be observed to its full extent on the Internet. Let us look at one aspect of the codification and standardization, which is related to the work of the Latvian Terminological Commission.

The Terminological Commission of the Latvian Academy of Science regularly publishes new formations – in the informative bulletins and on its web site (<http://termini.lza.lv/>). Commission, to be more precise its 30 Subcommissions (Subcommissions for Terminology of Botany, Demographics, Philosophy, Geology etc.), are trying to timely react to the advances in the language and speech– whether those are spontaneous word plays or an Anglicism that has come in active use.

Attention towards the words of one's language, their usage is important today as well, when the significance of the language is not always appreciated in the society. The linguistic problems and their solutions today in Latvia may be viewed from the different aspects.

So, the first way of finding a solution is the legislation. Let us name the regulatory acts indicated by the State Language Centre: **Regulatory acts that regulate the usage of the state language of Latvia:** State Language Policy Framework 2005-2014; **Laws:** The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia; Official Language Law; Citizenship Law; Education Law; General Education Law; Law on Institutions of Higher Education; Latvian Administrative Violations Code; Consumer Rights Protection Law; Electronic Mass Media Law; Law on Judicial Power; State Civil Service Law; Immigration Law; Law on Meetings, Processions and Pickets; Personal Identity Document Law; Law On Submissions; Freedom of Information Law; Law on Legal Validity of Documents; Document Legalisation Law; Law on Announcements; Electronic Documents Law; Personal Data Protection Law; Rule of Procedure of the Parliament; Law on Elections of the Parliament; Law on Elections of the Republic City Council and Municipality Council; Law on Scientific Activity; Law on the Change of a Given Name, Surname and Nationality Record; Law on the Status of a Long-Term Resident of the European Community in the Republic of Latvia; Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas; Geospatial Information Law; Law on Trademarks and Geographical Indications; Law on the Safety of Goods and Services; Advertising Law; **Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers:** Regulations Regarding the Level of the State Language Knowledge and the Order of the State Language Knowledge Testing for Fulfilment of Professional and Office Duties, for Receiving Permanent Residence Permit and Obtaining the Status of Permanent Resident of the European Union and State Fee on State Language

Knowledge Testing; Procedures for the Certification of Document Translations in the Official Language; Regulations Regarding the Ensuring of Interpreting at Events ; Regulations Regarding Use of Language in Information; Regulations Regarding Creation and Use of Place Names, Names of Institutions, Public Organisations, Undertakings (Companies) and Names of Events; Regulations Regarding Usage of Foreign Languages in Seals, Stamps and Printed Forms; Regulations on the State Fee for State Language Attestation for Fulfilment of Professional and Office Duties; Regulations on Spelling and Usage, as well as Identification of Personal Names in Latvian; Regulations of Personal Identification Documents; Regulations Regarding Testing of Fluency in the Latvian Language and the Knowledge of the Basic Principles of the Constitution, the Text of the National Anthem and the History of Latvia as Prescribed by the Citizenship Law; Regulations on Toponym Information; Regulation on Addressing System; The Order of Opening, Closing and Granting Names to the Public Railroad Infrastructure Objects – Railroad Stations, Crossing Points and Stops; Regulations for Legalisation of Public Documents; The Order of Formulation and Drawing Up of Documents; Procedures for the Preparation, Drawing Up, Storage and Circulation of Electronic Documents in State and Local Government Institutions, and the Procedures by which Electronic Documents are Circulated between State and Local Government Institutions, or between These Institutions and Natural Persons and Legal Persons; Procedures by Which Institutions Provide Information in Electronic Form when Co-operating, as well as Ensure and Certify the Veracity of Such Information; Regulations on the Order of Putting the Address of Addressee and the Sender on the Mailings; Provision on Senior Officials' Meeting on European Union Issues; **Instruction of the Cabinet of Ministers:** The Order of Evaluation, Coordination of the Translations of the European Union Documents and Correction of the Essential Errors Therein; **Statutes of the State Administration Institutions Associated with the State Language:** Statutes of National Centre for Education; Statutes for Latvian Language Experts Commission of the State Language Centre; Statutes of the State Language „Latvian Language Agency”; Statutes of the Terminology Commissions of the Latvian Academy of Science; Statutes of the State Language Commission; Statutes of the State Agency „Latvian Geopolitical Information Agency”.

The problems of Latvian language are also tackled by different institutions. Here are some of those for an insight. **The State Language Centre** (<http://www.vvc.gov.lv>) is the centre for the implementation of the state language policy under the supervision of the Minister of Justice, founded in 1992 to ensure enforcement of the Language Law entering into force on 5 May, 1992. Since 1993 the centre is the public administration institution under the

supervision of the Ministry of Justice that implements the state policy, as well as ensures the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language by supervising and controlling abiding to the regulatory acts for the state language. (<http://www.vvc.gov.lv>) **The functions of the State Language Centre are the following:** 1) to supervise abiding to the regulatory act for the state language usage; 2) to protect the rights and interests of the users of the state language; 3) to define the usage of the state language in the state and public life spheres on the occasions envisaged in the regulatory acts; 4) to promote organizing of the cultural environment of the language, particularly facilitating renewal and protection of the toponyms characteristic to the county; 5) to promote rightful functioning of the Latvian language in the institutions of the European Union; 6) to do translations of the international contracts and conventions binding to the Republic of Latvia, as well as of the documents connected with the application of the European Union legislative acts; 7) to translate the legislative acts of the Republic of Latvia into the languages of the member states of the European Union; 8) to translate the documents related to the activity of the NATO into Latvian; 9) to prepare proposals for the use of the unified terminology that corresponds to the norms of Latvian language in the regulatory acts; 10) to elaborate and develop the methodology for legal acts translation. (<http://www.vvc.gov.lv>) To perform these functions: - with a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers the Chief State Language Attestation Commission was formed, that managed the attestation process in Latvia; - with a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers the State Language Inspection was formed, that controlled the implementation of the State Law, and since 2000 of the State Language Law and the related regulatory acts; - with a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers the Toponym Commission was formed, that promoted preservation, renewal and precise usage of the historically correct and characteristic to the Latvian cultural environment toponyms; since 2000 it is the Toponym Subcommittee of the Latvian Language Experts commissions; - the Latvian Language Experts Commission was formed, to maintain and standardize the Latvian literary language and facilitate its development and functioning in the status of the state language. (<http://www.vvc.gov.lv>)

It must be said that the State Language Centre organizes campaigns to popularize on regular basis, for example, on 27 March, 2012 the State Language Centre commenced a campaign "Latvian Language-Friendly Environment " with the aim to reveal, evaluate and award the companies in the service sector, where the requirements of the State Language Law and other regulatory acts for the usage of the state language are being followed to the fullest extent. (<http://www.vvc.gov.lv>)

Another institution that should definitely be mentioned is **the Latvian Language Agency (<http://www.valoda.lv>)**, one of the most important activities of which is to organize Latvian language courses. From 2007 to 2012 the target audience of the Latvian language courses organized by the Agency had been the teachers and parents of the minority schools, as well as the nationals of the third countries, but from 2012 the special support for improvement of the language skills is provided for the teachers and workers of the preschools educational institutions. (<http://www.valoda.lv>). Additionally, anyone who is interested in the information about Latvia and supplementary materials for language learning, can get acquainted with the informative educational portal “Communication Bridge” (<http://www.sazinastilts.lv>). The portal is designated for the students of Latvian language both with the background knowledge and without. Intermediary languages are English and Russian. In the portal there is general information about Latvia and the lexical minimum useful for the language students, which has been translated into Russian, English, French, and German. In the portal there is also wide range of audio and video materials supplemented with interactive self-test tasks. The students of Latvian with a background can use interviews with representatives of different areas of activity who are popular in Latvia. (<http://www.valoda.lv>)

As we can see the official status of Latvian language is ensured, supervised, controlled by various institutions on the basis of broad legislative base. However, the people of Latvia for the several years in a row express incredulity towards the vast public administration. According to the data of the study performed by the research agency TNS in cooperation with the TV company LNT (16-18 April, 2013, participants: 8050 economically active Latvian inhabitants aged from 18 to 55), the lowest trust was towards the government - 12% - and the Parliament - 10%. The trust towards the local region's or town' government, General Prosecutor's office, ombudsman and media was within 41% to 45%, and the State President is trusted by 34% of the respondents. Approximately half of population of Latvia comparatively more often trust the Constitutional Court (CT) - 55%, the State Police (SP) and also the church. 9% of the respondents trust CT a lot, but sooner trust 46%. Meanwhile 51% of the population of Latvia generally trusts SP, and 48% - the church, of which 12% of the respondents express great confidence in it.

(http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/461868-iedzivotaji_joprojam_neuzticas_saeimai_un_valdibai)

Therefore the activities of Latvian institutions that are related to the language aspect stir up the public interest in the special cases and when the media hype starts, for example, the offer

to use the form 'eira' (to replace the habitual usage of 'eiro'), the offer to use in the documents the form 'euro' after introducing the 'eiro' ('euro'?) in Latvia.

Therefore it is important to continue and clarify the work of the institutions in a popular manner (not only informing and clarifying but also popularizing!), using also the potential offered by nomination of the Word, the Anti-Word and the Saying of the Year. We shall turn our attention to these campaigns and look closer at their results.

Latvia similarly to the USA, Germany nominates every year **the Word of the Year, the Anti-Word of the Year and the Saying of the Year**. The word, anti-word and saying of year of Latvia are being chosen since 2003 by the Riga Latvian Society together with the Latvian Writers' Society and Terminological Commission of the Latvian Academy of Science.

It is known that vocabulary is the area of language most sensitive towards all the twists and turns of public life. Certain historical period can be characterized by a certain string of words that define the notions that are most fundamental to the society, and due to its topical semantics become popular in the society. Such units of languages are called by different names (depending on the aspects of its research – cognitive, sociolinguistic, cultural studies, lingvo-psychological etc.): **das Schlagwort, topical lexicon, prestige word, buzzword (catch phrase), precise word, temporal indicator, chronofact words, chronological marker, verbal symbols**.

Verbal symbol is a marker of a certain period in time, which according to Z. Fomina (Фомина 1995: 209) has huge semantic capacity, informative saturation and characterizes various realia of life of the society. Linguistic implementations of verbal symbols vary – separate words, onyms, precedent sayings, stereotypes, mythemes and ideologemes. The Word, the Anti-Word and the Saying of Latvia unquestionably belong to cultural phenomena of such kind. Let us look at them in the chronological order.

The first event, which took place in 2003 proclaimed the Word of the Year to be *zīmols* (to replace the word *brands*, stemming from the English *brand*), the Anti-Word – *eiro* (*euro*) due to its indeclinability. The Saying of the year was *zelta rokas* (*very skilful hands*, literally *golden hands*) with a new meaning promoted by the bribery scandals.

The Word of 2004 – *mēstule* (from Latvian *mest* and *vēstule*: to replace English *spam*), the Anti-Word was *māsterplāns* (*masterplan*, which is being used ignoring the offered *virsplāns* and *dižplāns*), the Saying – *valsts deg zilās ugunīs* meaning „the state being at crisis”.

In 2005 as the Word of the year was chosen *smacenis* (instead of English *smog*), the Anti-Word – *centrs*, being used widely a small or large place, where something is happening),

the Saying of the year was *vanags noknāba cālīti* – the saying appeared in time when a priest Juris Cālītis was excluded from the Lutheran Church led by the archbishop Jānis Vanags; very bright saying, which makes topical and puts into new context a phenomena long known in Latvia.

In 2006 the Word was *draugoties* (literally *to friend*, verb appeared to label the activity of the users of a social network draugiem.lv), Anti-Word – anglicism *hendlings*, (from English *handling*, which does not sound ethical in context related to human beings). The Saying - *ņēma un uzmeta*, which became folklore characterizing the trend of Latvian language in written in spoken texts to compile strange incompatible forms.

In 2007 as the Word of the year was recognized *ēnstrādnieks* (from Latvian *ēna* + *strādnieks*), denoting illegal workers. As Anti-Word of year was chosen *siera produkti* (analogical to *piena produkti*). In 2007 the Saying of the year were the words of the former General Director of Latvian Television Jānis Holšteins *bojāts horizontālais taimkods*, the saying that came to denominate how to avoid telling the truth.

In 2008 as the Word of the year was recognized the word *talkot* (verb from the noun *talka*), it was this year when the first Latvian National Neighbourhood Clean-up took place – an example of solidarity and selflessness. Anti-Word of the year *šis te... šo te...*, sounding very often in different declination and presenting classical idle talk. In 2008 the Saying was *Pārāk liela cilvēcība sabiedrībai nav saprotama* by politician E. Zalāns. In 2008 new nomination appeared „The Nail of the Year” to honour the notorious answer of the Minister of Finance A.Slakteris to a journalist of the Bloomberg Channel about what is happening in Latvia and why the billion worth loan was necessary – *nasing spešl*.

The Word of 2009 *glābējsilīte* (literally saving crib to replace English *baby-box*), Anti-Word *saīsināt*, which spread out in a rather unpleasant context (to cut salaries, staff, time etc.), and which is not being used very correctly: quite often it is used as in a pattern of Russian language where other verbs should be used instead (to scale down, to select etc.). The Saying of the Year – the rhetoric question of the Minister of Healthcare *Un ko jūs saprotat ar politisku atbildību?* (*And what do you understand by political responsibility?*), which became a 'model' of political demagogy.

In 2010 the Word of the Year was *zibakcija* (literally flash action – replacer of *flashmob*), the Anti-Word – *pa lielam* (colloquial saying meaning „mostly, mainly”, usage of which brings in also some colloquial *toilet* meaning). As the Saying of the Year was recognized a comment of the prime Minister A. Dombrovskis to politician A. Šlesers, whose

political nickname is Bulldozer, *Krāniem un buldozeriem jāstrādā ostā* (*Cranes and bulldozers should be working at the harbour*).

The word 'staidzināt' ('to walk', formed according to the popular grammatical models: klauzīnāt, valdzināt, maldināt etc.) was declared as the Word of the Year 2011, the Anti-Word being 'konsolidēt' ('to consolidate', reminding of the economic hardships experienced by the population and also rejecting the attempts to disguise the budget cuts with a grandiloquent but wrongly used foreign word), and the Saying of the Year – 'Order No. 2' (related to the most dramatic event of 2011: the Order of the State President initiating the referendum on dissolution of the 10th convocation of the Parliament of Latvia).

In 2012 (10th public poll!) as the Word of the Year was acknowledged the word 'ziemotne' ('wintering'), the Anti-Word of the Year – 'uzrunāt (*problēmu*)' ('to address (a problem)'), while as **the Saying** was declared the phrase "Vilks paziņoja, ka Lapsas sūdzība par Zaķa pārkāpumu tiks izskatīta" („Vilks (literally 'wolf') informed that the complaint of Lapsa (literally 'fox') about the violation of Zaķis (literally 'hare') will be considered") in this case the factor of success was the play of the surnames with the inner form: Andris Vilks – the Minister of the Finance, Dzintars Zaķis – representative of the party Vienotība, the member of Parliament, Lato Lapsa – journalist). In 2012 alongside with the search for the most colourful and popular word the Latvian Language Development Group this time had announced an additional activity "**Neologism Forge**" – a contest for the new words coiners. "Neologism Forge" is organized to consider in the Word of the Year event not only the words that have already obtained popularity, but also neologisms that meet the requirements of the morphological norms of the Latvian language and are suitable for expression of various notions and enriching the expressiveness of our language."

(<http://lvak.wordpress.com/2012/12/27/jaunvardu-kalve-gadumijas-konkurss-jaunvardu-darinatajiem/>)

Thus besides the nominated linguistic units reflecting popular lexis of the time and place, they also reflect the principles of selection of these nominations, accentuate the feedback, namely, attracts attention to the working process of the Terminological Commission and its results, allows to interactively participate in its activities – the public is involved in the search of yearly nominees, as well as their public discussion.

Altogether, it must be said that one campaign taking place for already 10 years in Latvia has promoted natural interest in the native language, attention towards the problems of usage of the own language – not sporadic but systemic, it must also be mentioned both with a grain of humour and self-criticism, and educational, ethical notes.

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