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Gender and Language Ideologies: the Lithuanian female surname as a national frontier

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Nationalism is the founding paradigm of modern Lithuanian identity. And the Lithuanian language has played a key role in establishing, perpetuating and sustaining the integrity of what contemporary scholars call the 'mythologized ethnolinguistic identity'. Lithuanian language ideology sees Lithuanian women as chief guardians and repository of national spirit and ethnic tradition. Moreover, the Lithuanian surnames and especially the 'ancient' suffixes of female surnames is constructed as an untouchable 'cultural stuff' within the hegemonic language ideology. So when, in 2003, the non-suffixed female surname was introduced to be used alongside the traditional suffixed ones, it was faced with hostile backlash. As I propose a historicized gendered understanding of both nationalist and language ideologies of contemporary Lithuania, I argue that the self-naming practices of Lithuanian women are inevitably embedded in both bureaucratically *and* discursively institutionalized language ideology. Consequently, an in-depth understanding of the genealogies of available collective resources in narratives of self-naming by contemporary Lithuanian women enables to locate moments of 'bottom-up' strategies that may contest or subvert dominant ideologies. Moreover, the emerging dissatisfaction with existing suffixes in traditional female surnames in other post-socialist societies (in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) suggests that traditional female surnames can be theorized as an analytical category where language and gender identities are reproduced, challenged and reversed when confronted with other - often competing - ideologies.

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