I. Rozprawy i analizy

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Some aspects of snake euphemisms in Lithuanian: names based on appearance, habitat, and behaviour

One of the aspects of linguistic worldview are taboos and the ways they make their way into daily usage. In one kind of taboo, a word is endowed with a magical function, which leads to the emergence of euphemisms. These euphemisms are used to replace dangerous words that can call forth disasters or spirits, and enable the speaker to interact with others without the fear of breaking the taboo. The goal of this article is to analyse the euphemisms for the snake in the Lithuanian language. The analysis is based on a semantic classification of euphemisms. The data come from various dictionaries and texts of folklore. Euphemism for the snake constitute the largest group of animal euphemisms in Lithuanian and only a selected sample of them are addressed here. The ancient cult of the snake in Lithuania was abolished with the advent of Christianity and then a negative attitude to snakes was imposed. A possible classification of snake euphemisms would thus be to distinguish those that originated before Christianity and those that did after it had been introduced.

Key words: euphemisms; semantic classification; snakes; taboo; worldview; Christianity

Ethnolinguistics is usually defined as a field of linguistics concerned with the relationship between language and culture, and of course different authors or schools understand that relationship differently (Gudavičius 2009: 9). Besides, one must not forget about the individual aspect of language: a person's speech is partly defined by his or her nationality, as every nation has its own deep-rooted worldview that embraces its value system – this worldview is reflected in the language of each individual (Bartmiński 2009: 25). In many languages, one can notice how things that are forbidden, or taboos, make their way into daily usage (Жельвис 2001: 7–9). One element

of taboo is a linguistic taboo, when a word is given a magical function, thanks to which a word can call forth disasters, spirits, and so on. This leads to euphemisms which are used to replace dangerous words and enable the speaker to interact with the others without the fear of breaking a taboo.

Research on euphemisms is scarce in Lithuania but some publications on contemporary euphemisms have appeared (cf. Marcinkevičienė 1998), including those on certain groups of euphemisms, such as graphical euphemism (Kudirka 2012). Euphemisms have been covered, to an extent, in legal rhetoric (Koženiauskienė 2006, 2009) and rhetoric in general (Koženiauskienė 2001). The broadest studies on traditional euphemisms in the Lithuanian language have been conducted by Jasiūnaitė (2001, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2012), whose work deals with euphemistic problems, terms, possibilities for euphemistic analysis and classification, sporadically touching upon certain euphemistic names of animals and euphemisms having to do with people and their environment.[1]

The goal of this article is to analyse the euphemisms for the snake on semantic basis. The empirical material has been extracted from all volumes of the DLL (1941–2002), the Systemic Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language (1987), volume I (lexis) of ALL (1977), and texts of folklores. Euphemistic names occur in narrative folklore (fairy tales, myths), quite a few of them have been found in curative magic texts – these are the so-called incantations, where euphemisms for the snake are particularly abundant. They were published in "Lithuanian Incantations: Curative Formulas" (Lith. *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: gydymo formulės*) by Daiva Vaitkevičienė (2008). Other texts by the same author, e.g. "Sources of Lithuanian Incantations. An Electronic Digest" (Lith. *Lietuvių užkalbėjimų šaltiniai. Elektroninis sąvadas*; 2005) have been used as well.

Euphemistic substitutes are commonly used for creatures that are unpleasant, harmful, or dangerous to people. These can be names of harmful predators, such as the wolf, fox, bear, parasitic insects – lice, flea – and poisonous reptiles and amphibians (or those that are traditionally considered poisonous), such as the snake, blindworm, or toad. Amidst the traditional ethnical culture, snake euphemisms stand out in their plenitude, numbering in the hundreds.

[1] Cf. also work by Smetona (2013, 2014, 2015, or Jasiūnaitė and Smetona 2013). Articles offering a deeper analysis of the traditional euphemisms for people, animals, or aspects of the environment (and comparing them with those in other languages) are very few indeed.

The snake in the Lithuanian worldview

Paradoxically, the Lithuanian word for the snake, *gyvatė* (*gyvas* 'alive'), is a euphemism (Būga 1959: 510). The old Lithuanian term, present in kindred languages (Lat. *anguis*, Pr. *angis*), is *angis*. The name was mentioned in written texts as early as the 16th and 17th century. Today, *angis* 'viper' more frequently occurs in south-western subdialects, with the word *gyvatė* prevailing on the entire area covered by the Lithuanian language (Sabaliauskas 1990: 26). Derivatives of this word exist on a still wider territory: *angažolė* 'a herb that protects from snake-bites', *anginas* 'an imaginary huge and extremely poisonous snake'. The old name for this dangerous animal can be found rather often in text of folklore (VLF III 211, 303; LFT I 158) from Lithuania Minor regions, where the same Western Higher Lithuanian dialect is spoken (VLF I 216; Bl B 92). Old dictionaries contain phraseological or complex names of reptiles that contain this word, such as *geležinė angis* 'iron snake' (K I 248), *angis gluodena* 'blindworm viper' (Bl B). It should be remembered that the taboo phenomenon can be relied upon to explain the reasons behind the disappearance of older terms for the bear, snake, mouse, fox, marten, rabbit, frog, deer from many Indo-European languages (Трубачев 1958: 121). This means that euphemistic substitutes for the word *gyvatė* 'snake' already constitute stage two of its evolution and are actually substitutes for the euphemism for *angis* 'viper'.

The discussion of snake euphemisms here follows semantic classification as the reliable. The most convenient starting point was the largest group, that of names based on the animal's **appearance**, which can in turn be divided into smaller subgroups. Quite frequently, one can find snake euphemisms that are based on colour terms: *juodoji*, *juodutė*, *juoda pajuoda*, *raudonoji*, *raudona paraudona*, *raudonoji gyvatė*, *geltonoji gyvatė*, *margoji*, *margulė*, *marginė*, *margukė*, *rainoji*, *dryžė*, *dryžoji*, *dryžuotukė*, *išilgai dryža*, *padryža*, *skersai dryža, padryža*, *šėmoji*, *šėmutė*, *žaloji*, *žalmargė*, *raudonmargė*.

These examples show that the skin of the snake, in terms of its colour, is associated with a rather complex palette. Lithuania's only poisonous snake, the viper *Vipera berus*, naturally occurs only in two colour variations: dark brown or almost black, and grey, grey-brown or dark brown, with a brown or black stripe on the back (SLE I 1985: 66). We should not forget non-venomous snakes from the Colubridae family (two species, namely, the smooth snakes and ringed snakes, are found in Lithuania), with their defensive hissing and fake strikes, which is why they are feared and mistaken for vipers. Apart from behavioural similarities, an important aspect is colour. The smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) is grey, tawny with a yellow or grey tint, and has

brown or dark brown stripes or spots on its neck that merge at the top of its head in the shape of a crown (www.raudonojiknyga.lt). The ringed snake (*Natrix natrix*) is grey or black and looks very much like the viper, the only difference being the two yellow or orange spots on the sides of the former's head (lt.wikipedia). The legless lizard, blindworm (*Anguis fragilis*), is usually slightly more colourful and mottled. First silvery-grey in colour, this reptile eventually becomes sooty tawny or grey with a bronze tint (the female has two black stripes on its back, the male has dark brown spots; some specimen living near water have bluish spots (www.proin.ktu.lt)). Rural populations have a different understanding of its looks and colour: the snake is viewed as speckled, coppery, iron, black, or white.[2]

Euphemistic substitutes for the word *gyvatė* can be motivated by the name of the achromatic dark colour, the adjective *juodas* 'black', the name of the major bright colour of the spectrum, the adjective *raudonas* 'red', and several other words usually attributable to various animals: *margas* 'mottled'; *rainas*, *dryžas* 'tabby', 'striped'; *žalmargis* 'rufous-spotted'; *raudonmargis* 'red-spotted'; *šėmas* 'ashy', 'dark grey with a bluish tinge'; *žalas* 'rufous', 'dark brown'. Interestingly, most of those adjectives are related to the names for the devil: cf. devil names *juodasis* 'black'; *raudonasis* 'red'; *rainasis* 'stripy'. It should be noted that colour-related names for the devil are a little more numerous: thirty five of them have been recorded (Jasiūnaitė 2012: 104).

Snake euphemisms that are formally related to the adjective *juodas* 'black', such as *juodoji*, *juodutė*, *juoda pajuoda*, approximate an accurate reflection of reality: such reptiles do exist in nature. Of course, black snakes bearing a certain type of pattern are sometimes mythological and are considered to be very dangerous. One should remember that in traditional cultures (the snake is a chthonic creature) the colour black often symbolises evil, darkness, or the underworld.

Several euphemisms at hand are motivated by the adjective *raudonas* 'red', which can be used to describe ginger hair of a person or an animal: *raudonas kumeliukas* 'a red colt', *vokietys raudonplaukis* 'a red-haired German'. Unsurprisingly, this colour is also used in the context of

[2] There are no derivatives of the adjective *baltas* 'white' among the euphemisms, yet the white snake is well known in folklore for being the queen of all snakes. It is white as the bark of a birch skin (LPĮ I 218), white as snow (Juod Kn 101), big as a log (JB IV 187). Even wizards try to avoid it as they cannot hope to overpower it: "It is the white one alone that I am not sure I could enchant" (Srd). This snake has a place in Slavic folklore as well: Russian incantations mention a "white snake" (Rus. *белая* [*змея*] РЗЗ 300). Poles and Croats have a tale of a white king of serpents. Checks, Slovaks, and Serbs see the white snake as the protector of the hearth. The colour white is a defining feature of the chthonic characters that have to do with death and dead ancestors (Гура 1984: 137).

a tawny reptile with a bronze tint, the blindworm. This can be evidenced by the blindworm's figurative name: *raudonoji gyvatė* 'red snake', which only occurs in texts. Obviously, it goes hand in hand with the euphemism *raudonoji* '(the) red one', which has been recorded on the territory of the Northern Samogitian dialect. It denotes a lethal venomous creature that dwells deep underground and only emerges once in seven years to strike people dead: *Ka jau raudonoji įkanda, sako, ne ką beišgyn* ("He who is bitten by the red one, rarely recovers"). Its euphemisms, *margulė*, *marginė*, *rainoji*, *dryžė*, accentuate the patterning of the snake. This creature is considered a benchmark of patterning in linguistic stereotypes as well: *Rainas kaip gyvatės kailis* ("Striped like the snake's skin"). Sometimes reptiles are named with words that have limited lexical combinability and are normally used to describe the hair of large livestock, such as cows or bulls. There are snakes that are ashy, rufous, or rufous-spotted: *šėmutė*, *šėmoji*, *žaloji*, *žalmargė*.

Now let us look at the snake euphemisms that are based on its **bodily dimensions**: *ilgoji* 'the long one', *biznoji* 'the short one'. A contrast is clear: at stake is the length, which can also actually means the shortness of the animal: *ilgoji*, *ilgatė* : *ilgas* 'long' vs. *biznoji* : *biznas* 'short'. The snake is a long, slim, slithery creature, which leads to an assumption that the term *biznoji* could have originated as an antonym to *ilgoji*. A euphemistic use of antonyms is mentioned by Vidlak (Видлак 1965, 277). The authors of ALL I claim that the word *ilgatė* represents a contaminative form (*ilgoji* 'the long one' + *gyvatė* 'snake'; ALL I 152).

Dangerous reptiles are often named after their **body parts** or **characteristics**, such as *raguočė padraguočė*, *žiauna pažiauna*, *geležiniauodegė*, *geležiavuodegė*, *ilgauodegė*, *brizgauodegė*, *pabrizgauodegė*, *šaltuodegė*, *gyvatė šaltauodegė*, *smailavuodegė*, *gyvatė žalčiadañtė*. Euphemisms from this subgroup are used exclusively in texts of curative magic rather than in daily spoken language.

We should note that some euphemisms constitute rather bizarre cases that might seem illogical at first glance. One case in point is naming the snake after its "missing" body part – horns (*ragai*): *raguočė padraguočė*. The motivation behind this combinational reduplicative euphemism on the one hand is based on reality, and on the other, on mythological thinking. Indeed, the viper's scales above its eyes make a formation in the semblance of horns. But in texts of folklores, horns are a characteristic of the chief snake, the snake queen: *Sako, yra gyvatė su rageliais kokiais. Tai vadas. Ana kai įkanda, reikia dvylikos žadėtojų. Vienas nemačija* ("They say there is a snake with some sort of horns. That's the leader. Its bite takes twelve enchanters to

cure. One just will not cut it.") (Sariai).[3] The second euphemisms used in the same incantation, *žiauna pažiauna*, most probably derives from the noun *žiauna* 'jawbone' (cf. a similar derivational case of *akelė padakelė*).

Other aspects of motivation of this subgroup of euphemism are the characteristics of the tail: *geležiniauodegė* (*geležinė* 'iron' + *uodega* 'tail'), *ilgauodegė* (*ilga* 'long' + *uodega*), *smailavuodegė* (*smaila* 'pointed' + *uodega*). These examples show that as far as motivation is concerned, the most important characteristics of the tail are its thermal properties (it is cold as iron) or its shape (it usually narrows to a point). One rather interesting name is *brizgauodegė pabrizgauodegė* (*brizgus* 'that which is quick to come unravelled' + *uodega*). Why the tail of the snake is frayed, is hard to tell. Is this a reference to the snake's ability to shed its old, "worn-out" skin? Another quite unusual name is *žalčiadantė* (*žaltys* 'grass snake' + *dantis* 'tooth').[4] As we know, the grass snake is not venomous; still, people avoid them for their similarity to the snake.

Some euphemistic snake names derive from its **similarity to metals**: *auksutė*, *aukselis*, *auksinė padauksinė*, *sidabrutė*, *sidabrėlis*, *sidabrinė pasidabrinė*, *varinė* ("copper one"), *varinukė*, *varinė kirmėlė* ("copper worm"), *varinė gyvatė* ("copper snake"), *miedinė pamiedinė* (cf. Pol. *miedź* 'copper') ("copper snake"), *geležė* ("iron snake"), *šaltageležė*, *geležinė pageležinė*, *geležinė kirmėlė* ("iron worm"), *geležinė gyvatė* ("iron snake"), *žalvarinė gyvatė* ("brass snake") – all meaning 'blindworm'.

All of the above euphemisms are related to the names of metals: *auksutė*, *aukselis* (*auksas* 'gold'), *sidabrėlis*, *sidabrinė pasidabrinė* (*sidabras* 'silver'), *varinukė*, *varinė kirmėlė* (*varis* 'copper'), *miedinė pamiedinė* (*miedis* 'copper'), *geležė*, *šaltageležė*, *geležinė kirmėlė* (*geležis* 'iron'; cf. Polish *żelazo*). Sometimes we can argue if the names are really based on appearance, the words *auksutė*, *sidabrutė*, *aukselis*, *sidabrėlis* can be simply seen as traditional hypocoristic addresses, some sort of metaphor of similarity of value

[3] The image of a horned snake is widespread in various mythologies. For instance, it has a firm foothold in the folklore of Japan and India (MHM I 468). Ancient Indians had Shushna, the draught demon, who was portrayed as a horned, all-devouring hissing snake (ME I 386). To different South African cultures, huge snakes are the embodiment of rain and water: their myths show them as horned creatures (Biedermann 2002: 140). A horned king of snakes has a mention in Ukrainian (Войтович 2002: 192) and Russian folklore. Russian texts of curative magic refer to the snake as *казюля* (*козюля*), probably because the people imagined it to have horns (Zavjalova 1998: 69).

[4] The Northern Samogitian dialect has similarly derived pejoratives in relation to a person, such as *žaltakis* (*žaltys* 'adder' + *akis* 'eye'), *žaltanosis* (*žaltys* + *nosis* 'nose'), *žaltaplunksnis* (*žaltys* + *plunksna* 'feather'), meaning 'creep, rascal'.

(Jasiūnaitė 1998: 45). Most probably, the traditional hypocoristic addresses fall into this subgroup for their formal motivation. Several figurative names bearing a taboo word, such as *varinė gyvatė* 'copper snake', *geležinė gyvatė* 'iron snake', are intentionally inserted here as well. They make it evident that the euphemisms *varinė*, *geležinė pageležinė* eventually evolve out of the regular reptilian epithets.

Both figurative, epithet-based, and metal-related names are commonly used in reference to a completely innocuous legless lizard, the blindworm, rather than the venomous viper. That is due to several of the blindworm's characteristics: its coldness, or its shining, tawny brazen tint. Eastern Higher Lithuanians associate its name with iron, whereas Western Higher Lithuanians associate it with copper. The blindworm is popular in folklore not for its specific natural attributes but rather for the qualities that are ascribed to it by people's fancy and imagination. Mythical thinking turns this reptile into a culprit responsible for a plethora of sins: *Geležinė gyvatė kerta tik vieną kartą per septynis metus, ir kerta kur papuola, ir tas jos kirtimas neišgydomas* ("The iron snake only strikes once in seven years, and it does not choose its target, and its strike is incurable") (LI 202).

Zavjalova (1998) argues that snakes share a similarity with metals not only through their looks, but also because they belong in the chthonic world, for metals are a symbol of the underworld (Zavjalova 1998: 69). Reptiles have a function of guardians of subterranean treasures in mythical worldview (Biedermann 2002: 139). Once upon a time, a belief emerged that treasures were guarded by some kind of an animal who is none other than the deceased owner of the treasure. The popular belief (anchored in Indian, Greek, and German mythology) that the guardian of treasure is a snake does not have much hold in Lithuania (JB IV 94). In fairy tales, the snake bestows the treasure to those who have its favour: *O tas žaltys, kaip, būdavo, išlenda iš volos, tai tam vaikui atnešdavo visokių brangių akmenų ir auksinių zobovų* ("And that snake would emerge from its hole, and bring all sorts of precious stones and golden toys to the kid") (OFS 77).

Names that are based on similarity to metals are closely connected to snake euphemisms deriving from another visually impacting characteristic of reptiles – that of **glittering**: *žibančioji*, *žibanti*, *žibutė*, *žibulys*, *žibulinė*, *žibulinė gyvatė*, *žibuoklinė gyvatė* ("glittering, sparkling, the sheeny one") 'blindworm'. Source references indicate such names to be typical of Southern Higher Lithuanians.

One unique subgroup of euphemisms consists of blindworm names made with the verb *žibėti* 'to glitter' or its derivatives: *žibutė*, *žibulys*, *žibulinė*,

žibuoklinė (*žibuoklė* 'a little light, a spangle'). Sometimes a sentence given in DLL makes it difficult to identify the animal in question, whether it is the blindworm or the viper: *Duok arkliui žibančios, bus ėdresnis* ("Give some of the glittering one to the horse, and that will improve its appetite") (Srj).

The motivation behind blindworm names based on sparkling is beautifully described by the speakers themselves: *O yra tokia, vadom žibulinė, tai visa žiba, tep kap stiklas kokis geltonai* ("And there is one, we call it 'sparkly', as it sparkles all around, just like some sort of yellow glass") (Kb). *Kitokia ir spalva, žibanti – tos geležinės gyvatės* ("The colour is different, too, all sparkling, that of an iron snake") (Svn). There is a traditional comparison where the reptile is considered a benchmark for sparkling: *Žiba kai žaltys* ("Sparkles like a grass snake") (J. Jabl). It has made its way into a popular riddle: *Žiba kai žaltys, ėda kai arklys* (i.e., dalgis) ("Sparkles like a grass snake, eats like a horse" (a scythe)) (Snt).

Another subgroup of euphemistic names for the snake based on appearance covers words relating to this poisonous creature's **resemblance to objects**. Such "material" euphemisms have use in folklore and in the general variety of spoken Lithuanian: *lazdinė* ("resembling a stick"), *pantinė* ("resembling a bond"), *verpstinė* ("resembling a bobbin"), *pantis* ("a bond"), *pantis be mazgo* ("a bond without the knot"). It is argued that when a snake is referred to as "a bond", it stops or keeps running in place, and if it is referred to as "a bond without the knot', it disappears. Vaitkevičienė (2008: 35), a researcher in incantations, claims that this type of figurative name is a riddle-like identification. Indeed, euphemisms largely resemble specific words that are used in riddles to conceal, or encode, a certain object (Jasiūnaitė 2005: 115).

Things that inspire euphemistic substitutes for the snake call for a more detailed investigation. These are *lazda* ("a stick; a pruned straight twig used for support when walking or for beating"), *verpstė* ("a bobbin; an old spinning tool consisting of a long sharp stick with a cogwheel"), *pantis* ("a bond; a short, thick rope for binding livestock"). The shape of all these things resembles that of a snake. It is for a reason that they have a place in traditional similes: *Užmušiau gyvatę kaip pantį* ("I killed a snake like a bond" (big, fat); Dkš); *Žaltys galvą parietęs kai varpstę* ("The grass snake's head is folded like a bobbin"; Kp). Within ethnic culture, everything has its own meaning, everything stands for something and has to do with a certain situation, and therefore we can say that there is a certain "language" which helps us understand the rituals better (Zavjalova 1998: 150). The semantic

of "binding" is rooted in Lithuanian tradition: the names *pantis* or *pantis be mazgo*[5] keep the reptile in check by "binding" it.[6]

A lot of snake euphemisms are related to its **habitat**: *žeminė*, *žeminė pažeminė*, *žemenėlė metelėlė*,[7] *muminė žeminė*, *motinėlė žieminėlė*, *žiemienė motina*, *žemininkė*, *purvyninė*, *purvinė*, *krūminė*, *krūmininkė*, *raistinė*, *giriniė*, *gyvatinė šaltininė*, *vandeninė*, *vandeninė pavandeninė*, *palaužė*, *urvinė*, *pakalnė pakalninė*.

The enchanter usually machine-guns the incantations, slurring them, sometimes talking in a hushed voice. Therefore, writing magical texts down often involves errors and distortions. Sometimes an unexperienced collector of folklore trips over the phonetics or morphology of a dialect. As a result, *žeminėlė* (*žeminė* 'relating to or of ground') becomes *žemenėlė* or *žieminėlė*. The form *žiemienė* clearly has the Eastern Higher Lithuanian suffix *-ienė* (cf. adjectives *kvietienis*, *rugienis*, *žirnienis*). Root vocalisation coordinates with suffix vocalisation: the correct form would be *žemienė*, i.e. 'that which comes from the earth, lives in the earth'.

For the above reasons, all of the instances both self-evident (*žeminė*, *žeminė pažeminė*) and dubious (*žemenėlė*, *žieminėlė*, *žiemienė*) formally connect to the word *žemė* 'ground, earth'.[8] They all describe the snake as a reptile dwelling in the ground and having a close relationship with it. This presumption is supported by Slavic names that follow the same formational principle: *червъ земляной*, *гад подземельный* (Zavjalova 1998: 71).

In traditional rural culture, there is a prevalent belief that snakes spend the whole cold season burrowed in the ground. There are even certain days when snakes go into hiding and reappear: these are the so-called *Matkibožiai* or *Šilinė* (September 8) and *Blovieščius* (March 25). The seasonal lifestyle is favoured by evil spirits, such as the folklore devil, as well.

Then there are the peculiar euphemisms: *purvinė* (*purvas* 'mud; wet, slushy ground') and *purvyninė* (*purvynas* 'slush'). One is more apt to see a snake in a warm, sunny place rather than a slushy mire. Sometimes the nomination of the reptile is related to bodies of water, wet places, or water

[5] This is most probably not accidental. A knot, and a thing with many knots in particular (such as a knotty rope, string, or net) has a protective (apotropaic) function: the evil forces are believed to be powerless to untie knots (Толстой 1995: 237).

[6] Not only snakes; it stops other potentially harmful animals, such as dogs, wolves, bees, or bad people, like thieves (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 34).

[7] By virtue of metathesis, the word *metelėlė* could have derived from *meletėlė*, a diminutive for *meleta* 'the black woodpecker'.

[8] For the sake of curiosity, we should mention it here that the devil is also called *žeminiu* 'relating to, or of ground' or *požeminiu* 'subterranean', based on the same attribute (Jasiūnaitė 2011: 94).

itself: *gyvatinė šaltininė* (*šaltinis* 'spring'), *raistinė* (*raistas* 'bog; a wet, marshy forest'), *vandeninė* (*vanduo* 'water'). Grass snakes love water and are excellent swimmers. A huge fan of water and the lord of the element is the dragon – a flying serpent – of our fairy tales: *Smakas judydavo marias ir liedavo ant miesto vandenius* ("The dragon would move the sea and rain water on the town") (VLF III 71).

Several snake euphemisms are formally connected to woods or brushes: *girinė* (*giria* 'forest'), *krūminė*, *krūmininkė* (*krūmas* 'bush'). Here are some more names: *palaužė* (*laužas* 'bonfire; a pile of boughs', *urvinė* (*urvas* 'a hole'), *pakalnė pakalninė* (*pakalnė* 'foot of a hill'). Formally and semantically, it is the last example that appears to be more interesting, constituting a combinational (complex) name. The word *pakalnė* here most likely occurs as an adjective to denote "that which lives under a hill". The second word in the combination containing the suffix *-inis* is made out of the first component. The Samogitian euphemistic substitute *palaužė* has to be accentuated. The same habitat is identifiable in the following Samogitian proverb: *Kad tik būtų laužų, o gyvačių netrūks* ("If only there are bonfires, snakes will abound") (Sd).

The snake is believed to have various attributes describing its nature and therefore a group based on **temper** requires a separate discussion. It can be evil, negative: *pikta* ("angry"), *pikta papikta*, *piktoja*, *piktelė*, *piktukė*, *pyktis*, *pikta piktybė*, *piktoji kirmėlė*, *bloga blogybė*, *gyvatė piktoji*, *piktageležė*, *nelaboji*, *ledoka*, *ledokoji*, *ledokėlė*, *negadnoja*, *gerutė*; *ramutė*. The formation of such euphemisms is rather variegated. Next to the usual pronominal (*piktoja*, *gyvatė piktoji*) or diminutive (*piktelė*, *piktukė*) forms, we can see the derivative *pyktis*, the reduplicative complex names *pikta papikta*, *pikta piktybė*, the original metaphorical compound *piktageležė* (*pikta* 'angry' and *geležis* 'iron'), cf. *šaltageležė* (*šalta* 'cold' and *geležis* 'iron').

The snake's temper is evident in the traditional comparisons of the Lithuanian and other nations alike: *piktas kaip gyvatė* ("angry like a snake") (Rm), cf. Polish *zły jak gadzina* (LAS II 298) or English *as angry as any serpent* (LAS II 298). Rural people believed that the malice of the snake was down to its diabolical descent. One incantation goes: *Užgemant velnias tave sutvėrė* ("The devil made you") (Dg). The fiend grieves over a misfortune that may befall a snake: *Kad rupūžę ar gyvatę užmuši, tai velnias verkia* ("When you kill a toad or a snake, the devil cries") (Grz). He, too, likes to appear before a person disguised as a reptile: *O tas žaltys – tai jų tas velnias, ką juos vis gundo į keikimą* ("And the grass snake is the devil that leads them into temptation to swear") (Brt).

Other euphemisms from this subgroup can be indegenous (*nelaboji*), loanwords from Polish or Belarusian or hybrid derivatives (*bloga*, *blogybė*,

ledoka, *ledokoji*, *ledokėlė*, *negadnoja*). Such loanwords or hybrids can be found on the territory of the Southern Higher Lithuanian dialect and on Belarussian islands. Within these subdialects, they are formally connected to the adjectives *ledokas*, *negadnas* 'angry, mean' and describe the creature based on these attributes.

The meaning of the melioratives *ramutė* (*ramus* 'calm') and *gerutė* (*geras* 'good') (Sv) is the opposite. Such hypocoristic addresses are aimed to appease the snake. They describe the unpleasant creature at its best. With some reservations, the euphemisms *saldutė*, *medutė*, *saldžyja bitelė* should be put into this group, too. Melioratives such as *saldus kryželi* 'sweet cross' or *medaus kory* 'honeycomb' are sometimes used to describe a woman, but normally such "sweet" metaphors are not very typical of the Lithuanian language and occur more often in English (cf. *honey*, *sweetie*) (Jasiūnaitė 1998: 51). When words like these are used to interact with a snake, it is hard to say if they mean the "sweet" bite of the animal or its "sweet" temper.

Another group of snake euphemisms are based on the animal's **action and behaviour**. Semantically, they should be split into two subgroups: (1) names based on the method of movement, (2) names based on the sounds issued. In the first subgroup, one finds the following euphemisms: *šliaužas*, *prakeiktasis šliužas* ("goddamn reptile"); *žeme šliaužianti* ("that which slithers on the ground"), *šliūžiotė*, *slanka*, *skraiduolė*, *skraiduolinė paskraiduolinė*, *šuolinė*, *striuoklė*, *šmeižmė*. All of them are made from the following verbs or their derivatives: *šliaužas*, *šliužas*, *šliūžiotė* (*šliaužti* 'to crawl, to slither'), *slanka* (*slinkti* 'to crawl'), *skraiduolė* (*skraidyti* 'to fly'), *skraiduolinė paskraiduolinė* (*skraiduolė*), *šuolinė* (*šuolis* 'a leap'), *striuoklė* (*striuoksėti* 'to hop'), *šmeižmė* (*šmeižti* 'to run around nimbly, to snoop about, to pop in and out').

Many of the above euphemisms describe the snake as a crawling beast – it is a legless, slithering creature. People find this method of movement repulsive, one that creates a lot of negative associations with immense subservience, cringing, unnecessary humiliation; cf. figurative compounds *keliais šliaužti* ("to crawl on one's knees") or *pilvu šliaužti* ("to crawl on one's belly"), which mean 'to adulate, fawn'. There are traditional comparative phraseological units, which indicate that the Lithuanians see the snake as a token of clumsy, awkward, ungraceful, sluggish movement: *Lervoja kaip gyvatė* ("Moves slowly like a snake") (Pn).

The Samogitian dialect has snakes crawling rather than slithering. DLL provides examples containing the verb *slinkti* 'to crawl' used in the sense of 'to slither' with reference to reptiles: *Kitą sykį būk žmogus miegojęs ir prie jo slinko kirminas įkąsti* ("Once there was a man sleeping and a worm was

crawling towards him to bite") (Žgč); *Ieva, po daržą bevaikščiodama, pamatė įslinkusį į užgintąjį medį žaltį* ("Ieva was walking in the vegetable garden and saw a grass snake that had crawled up the forbidden tree") (M. Valanč). The meaning of the word *slinkti* leads to the assumption that the word *slanka* 'snake' is its derivative. We could suspect that the meaning has been transferred here, too, as snakes, for the purposes of magic, are often named after birds (*lakštutė* 'nightingale' (dim.), *kregždytė* 'swallow' (dim.), *žylaitė* 'titmouse' (dim.), and *slanka* is also Lithuanian for 'woodcock', a bird of the sandpipers family.

Snake euphemisms can also be motivated by the creature's mythological ability to fly (*skristi*, *skraidyti*): these are *skraiduolė* and *skraiduolinė paskraiduolinė*. References to flying (darting) snakes can be found in sagas and beliefs. Since these are faster, they can protect their slithering mates: *Jei užkliudysi gyvatę, tai ji susišaukia lekiojančias gyvates, kurios pasiveja žmogų ir sukapoja jį* ("If you hurt a snake, it will call darting snakes who will catch up with the man and strike him dead") (OFo IV 128). The most common example of a flying snake in world mythology is the dragon.

There are a few euphemisms that describe the snake as a very agile, nosy animal that can even jump: *šuolinė*, *striuoklė* and *šmeižmė*. A reptile fleeing from danger can indeed move in huge sweeps or loops: *Gluodenas vingiais spiriasi, kad eita* ("The blindworm pushes itself forward in loops to move") (Trk). Otherwise, the representative of traditional culture tends to hyperbolise the reptilian ability to hop: *Gyvatė kad bėga, kampus meta, šuoliais šoka* ("The snake runs quick, bending and hopping along") (J. Sagas). Beliefs carry truly fantastic references to snakes or grass snakes that, if put to serious disadvantage, will rear up to chase their offender and have their revenge: *Atsistoja [žaltys] ant uodegos, ir taip lekia, kad vos spėji pabėgti* ("[The grass snake] rears up and flies so quickly you can barely escape") (Pin). Sometimes this miraculous ability is only bestowed on the king of snakes: *Gyvatės turi savo karalių, kuris dėvįs aukso vainiką ir bėgąs stačias* ("The snakes have their own king who wears a crown of gold and runs upright") (Kp).

The snake's ability to coil and squirm (Lith. *vingiuoti*, *rangytis*) often comes to mind when this dangerous creature needs to be encoded in riddles. Here, the snake is referred to as *vingiuotas diržas* ("coiling belt") or even as *vijoklė* ("creeper"), a word specifically coined to accommodate riddles.

The group of names relating to snakes' actions and behaviour also contains a small set of those that allude to the gravity of the strike: *gyvatė sunkioji* ("the heavy snake"), *gyvatė lengvoji* ("the light snake"), or simply *sunkioji* ("the heavy") and *lengvoji* ("the light"). There are incantations that use the epithet "weak" (*silpna*) for the snake. Many folklore presenters

across Lithuania point that the snake's strike varies in gravity: the most dangerous, as per above, is the blindworm, a gravid snake (one that will spawn snakelings), or the so-called *morčinė* (spring-time) snake. The way to protect oneself from the "heavy snake" is to use more incantations or other implements, such as poppies. The snake is believed to lose its stinger after it strikes, and ceases to pose any danger. The stinger (i.e., the gravity, dangerousness of the strike) is obtained from stone, which turns soft as a result, or nettle – an angry, "stinging" plant: *Bet kad tik ji [gyvatė] gaun prieiti prie akmenio, tai ji tada tuoj sau gylį ir pasiim. Tai tada tas akmuo paliekt teip minkšts kai košė* ("But when it [the snake] gets close to a stone, it takes its stinger back from it. The stone then becomes soft like porridge") (Grz).

The second action-related group of euphemisms includes those where the snake can be named not only after the way it moves, but on the basis of the sounds it emits: *šnypšteklė*, *šnypštuolė*, *šnypštelė*, *šnypštukė*, *šnipštokas*, *šnipždė*, *čiužu čiužutė*, *čiūžė*, *čiūžinas*, *šlamu šlamutė*, *čiulbutė*, *čilbutė*. These examples have been recorded from both spoken language and from folklore.

All of the cases falling into this subgroup are related to verbs denoting different sounds: *šnypšteklė*, *šnypštuolė*, *šnypštelė* (*šnypšti* 'to hiss'), *šnipždė* (*šnibždėti* 'to rustle, to whisper'), *čiužu čiužutė*, *čiūžė* (*čiužėti* 'to rustle'), *šlamu šlamutė* (*šlamėti* 'to rustle'), *čiulbutė* (*čiulbėti* 'to chirp'), *čilbutė* (*čilbėti* 'to sing, to chirp'). That the snake can whisper, is evident in *Anykščių Šilelis* by A. Baranauskas: *Kas te šnibžda? – Ė šnypščia iš kelmo piktoja* ("What is whispering there? – That is the evil one hissing out of a stump") (A. Baran). Hissing is a low, muted sound resembling an elongated diphthong *sh* that can be imitated with different lexemes. This is evident in the traditional comparative phraseological units that convey the stereotypical view of the sounds that reptiles make: *Ko čia šnopšti kaip gyvatė* (piktai)? ("Why are you hissing like a snake (angrily)?" (Ob); *Kap kirmėlė švykščia* ("Hisses like a worm") (Tvr); *Ko šnypšti kai gyvatė kelme?* ("Why are you hissing like a snake in a stump?") (Ut).

The euphemisms *čiužu čiužutė*, *šlamu šlamutė* have absolutely no unpleasant connotation. The Samogitian *čiūžinas* even has a slightly comical semantic tint. In this context, we need to emphasise that words with the root *čiuž-*, or reduplicative combinations of such words, are used in folklore to denominate animals quite often. The animal in question is often the fox (*lapė*) but it can also be the wolf (*vilkas*), e.g.: *laputė čiuženutė*, *vilkas čiužys*. This forges a connection between the Samogitian snake euphemism *čiūžinas* and the verbs of the same dialect: *čiūžti* 'to slide, slither' and *čiūžinti* 'to shuffle along, to crawl'. It would seem then that the legless snake does not walk but rather slides, crawls on the ground, so that *čiūžinas* can be classified

as a name based on the method of movement. It can be placed into this subgroup for its link with words denoting sound-accompanied movement.

Two unique euphemisms of this subgroup are *čilbutė* and *čiulbutė*. The sounds that the snake makes are not melodious or aesthetically appealing, yet it is named with words that are normally used for songbirds: *Čiulbute, lakštute, o kur tu tupėjai?* ("O piping nightingale, where did you roost?") (Kp). It could be that such epithets were applied to reptiles for their constant association with birds in ethnic culture: cf. the snake euphemisms *skraiduolė* ("flyer"), *paukštelė* ("little bird"), *kregždytė gražioji* ("beautiful little swallow"), and so on.

Conclusions

The motivation for euphemisms are rooted in reality: when people see and generally have experience of snakes, they impart them with certain characteristics pertaining to the latter's appearance and behaviour, or the places where they can usually be found. The Lithuanian language has more than 200 euphemisms of the snake, the largest group among animal euphemisms, so this study only covers a selection of those. The number of snake euphemisms can easily be explained: there once was a cult of the snake in Lithuania, but it was abolished with the advent of Christianity and a negative attitude to the reptiles was imposed. We can presume that snake euphemisms can be divided into those that originated before Christianity and after it had been introduced. This is most clearly reflected in positive, compliment-like euphemisms, and those that compare the snake to birds. Interestingly, the largest number of euphemisms can be found in incantations: this suggests that people would cross paths with snakes often and, apparently, snakes were large in number and did not shy away from humans. Analysis of snake names indicates that some euphemisms are motivated by the creature's characteristics of appearance, such as colour, dimensions, shape, qualities of body parts, similitude with respect to another object. This kind of nomination process can reflect mythical thinking (*raguočė padraguočė*), various beliefs (*skraiduolė*, *skraiduolinė paskraiduolinė*), or a wish to win favour (*čilbutė*, *čiulbutė*). The euphemisms that are not motivated by appearance show that the snake is named after the locations where it can be seen, its temper, or actions and typical behaviour.

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Abbreviations

Brt – Bartninkai, Vilkaviškis District
Dg – Daugai, Alytus District
Dkš – Daukšiai, Marijampolė District
Grz – Gruzdžiai, Šiauliai District
J – *Litovskiy slovar A. Juškeviča s tolkovanyem slov na russkom i polskom yazykakh*, vol. I
JB – the works of Jonas Balys
J. Jabl – the works of Jonas Jablonskis
Bl B – *The Black Book*
Kb – Kabeliai, Varėna District
Kp – Kupiškis
DLL – *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*
ALL – *Atlas of the Lithuanian Language*
LFT – *Lithuanian Fairy Tales*
LPS – *Lithuanian Proverbs and Sayings*
VLF – *Various Lithuanian Fairy Tales*. Compiled by J. Basanavičius
LI – *Lithuanian Incantations*
M. Valanč – the works of Motiejus Valančius.
ME – *Mythological Encyclopaedia*
OFo – *Our Folklore*
Ob – Obeliai, Rokiškis District
OFS – *Ožkabaliai Fairy Tales and Sagas*
Pn – Panevėžys
Pin – Piniava, Panevėžys District
Sd – Seda, Mažeikiai District
Snt – Sintautai, Šakiai District
Srd – Seredžius, Jurbarkas District
Srj – Seirijai, Lazdijai District
Svn – Suvainiškis, Rokiškis District
SLE – *Soviet Lithuanian Encyclopaedia*
Trk – Tirkšliai, Mažeikiai District
Tvr – Tverečius, Ignalina District
Ut – Utena
Žgč – Žygaičiai, Tauragė District
МНМ – *Мифы народов мира*
РЗЗ – *Русские заговоры и заклинания*

Wybrane aspekty eufemizacji nazw żmii w języku litewskim: określenia motywowane wyglądem, miejscem zamieszkania, sposobem zachowania się

Każdy naród posiada swoją własną, ukształtowaną przez tradycję wizję świata, która znajduje odbicie w jego języku etnicznym. Na przykładzie wielu różnych języków można obserwować, w jaki sposób zjawiska zakazane, objęte tabu, funkcjonują w otaczającej nas przestrzeni. Różnego rodzaju zakazy mają związek z językowym tabu, kiedy wyraz obdarzony mocą magiczną podlega eufemizacji. Bywa on wówczas używany zamiast wyrazów

niebezpiecznych, które w przekonaniu mówiących mogą przyciągać nieszczęścia, choroby czy też aktywizować działanie istot demonicznych. Używając eufemizmów rozmówca może porozumiewać się z otaczającym go światem bez obawy naruszenia tabu. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest opis eufemizmów dotyczących nazw żmii w języku litewskim. Jest on oparty na klasyfikacji semantycznej nazw eufemistycznych przyjętej dla języka litewskiego. Materiał do badań został wyekscerpowany z różnorodnych słowników i tekstów folkloru. W artykule została przeanalizowana tylko nieduża część eufemizmów związana z nazwami żmii, jednak stanowi ona najliczniejszą grupę eufemizmów dotyczących zwierząt. Zjawisko to można łatwo wytłumaczyć: żmije na Litwie dość długo były uważane za istoty święte i dopiero wpływ wierzeń chrześcijańskich przyczynił się do zmiany tego (pozytywnego) nastawienia i przypisania im wartościowania negatywngo. Litewskie nazwy eufemistyczne tych gadów można podzielić na dawne, powstałe jeszcze w okresie przedchrześcijańskim, i późniejsze, ukształtowane po rozpowszechnieniu się wierzeń chrześcijańskich.

Słowa kluczowe: eufemizmy; chrystianizacja; żmije; tabu; językowy obraz świata