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A PRISM OF IDENTITIES IN MOTION: LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND *SELF-REFLECTION* IN IMMIGRANT WOMEN THROUGH THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE

Abstract. Whilst the social integration and sociolinguistic state of Lithuania's largest national and ethnic minorities have received considerable academic attention in recent decades, studies on first-generation adult immigrants from all over the world have primarily discussed their challenges, motivations, and attitudes towards the Lithuanian language or learning it. However, a holistic investigation into first-generation adult immigrants' *self-reflection* on their migration story, identity development, and interpersonal relationships through the Lithuanian language is currently overlooked. The article aims to explore language attitudes and identity as intertwined elements in first-generation adult immigrants' understanding of themselves and Lithuanian society. Ten first-generation adult immigrant women were recruited for a pilot study and completed a questionnaire consisting of four sections: personal biography, language repertoire, Lithuanian language learning, and identity in transformation. Then, they participated in semi-structured interviews to share memories and future projections. Language attitudes are discussed in the article following the theoretical framework of three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes. The data show that the Lithuanian language is necessary to feel integrated and show respect to the country, however, the process of reevaluation of identity requires not only the learner's efforts but also the encouragement of a supportive network of peers and relatives. Overall attitudes are positive, and learning Lithuanian, together with codifying cultural constructs, helps achieve the women's feeling of personal independence to function in society as active citizens, not as temporary guests. Experiences with the COVID-19 outbreak, the importance of using digital learning tools, and the role of the acquired family are some of the factors influencing the development of new identities that emerged as a result of the research.

Keywords: identity; language attitudes; Lithuanian language; migration; oral narratives.

Literature Review

The societal structure of Lithuania, as any other multicultural nation, encompasses the country's major national group, other smaller national

minorities, and immigrants; the composition is the result of socio-economic developments in Lithuania since the restoration of its independence established in 1990. According to the latest published governmental statistics of the *2021 Population and Housing Census*, 15.4% of the population in Lithuania is not ethnically Lithuanian (Statistics Dissemination and Communication Division of Statistics Lithuania, 2021). When examining the ethnic makeup of the population, among the largest historically ethnic minorities are Poles, Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. Furthermore, around 16,200 "people of other ethnicities" (p. 13) dominate the lower end of the results. Although the final figures may be the results of incomplete information or irrelevant for public disclosure, they signify a considerable number of individuals whose ethnic identity or nationality remains unknown. The missing information, consequently, challenges the study of immigrants' integration and language learning, and a potential societal change in Lithuania is overlooked. The largest national minority groups in Lithuania have been extensively investigated over the past two decades from a sociological perspective, especially by the Department of Ethnic Studies at the Institute of Sociology at the Lithuanian Center for Social Sciences (see, for example, *Ethnicity Studies* by Pilinkaitė-Sotirovič & Šliavaitė, 2012) and from a (socio)linguistic perspective (see the collective monographs *Cities and Languages* by Ramonienė, 2010, 2013).

The current situation of immigrants and refugees in Lithuania provides a foundation for exploring the reasons of inbound mobility, immigration policies and practices in the country, and in literature several studies explore related topics. Despite the significant collection of data, primarily through surveying and semi-structured interviews, participants seem to be mainly non-EU or with refugee status. For instance, researchers have examined refugees in Lithuania regarding their access to social assistance among women granted asylum (Užkurienė, 2008), their relation to health care in the host country (Bartušienė, 2011), perceived societal attitudes towards vulnerable Muslim women (Jakucevičienė, 2022), and developed social networks through media communities to seek help among Ukrainian women refugees after the Russian invasion in 2022 (Pavlova et al., 2023). In the studies, the relationship between the refugees and the host country was analyzed; nonetheless, an investigation into personal stories within a case study engaging a diverse group of immigrant

people is needed to broaden the discussion on immigrants in Lithuania. As outlined previously, studies on immigrants in Lithuania primarily focused on the social conditions of refugees; however, some insights into Lithuanian language learning were also provided. In a 2009 research on non-EU immigrants, half of the respondents reported that they did not comprehend Lithuanian, yet they were aware of possible negative reactions from the society, as they lacked language skills (Beresnevičiūtė et al., 2009). In the case of Russian and Afghan refugees, the Lithuanian language was described as *difficult* due to its complex grammar and, unfortunately, the one-year integration program at the municipalities was insufficient for learning the national language well enough to seek and obtain better financial opportunities in the country (Muravina, 2012). Other studies, involving both students learning Lithuanian and adults found that (socio)linguistic competence and *personal motivation* play a key role (Kubś & Michałowska-Kubś, 2020; Ramonaitė, 2020; Zygmantas, 2011). Non-native Lithuanian speakers in Kaunas showed positive attitudes towards the Lithuanian language, seeing it as useful for work and social interaction (Urbaitytė, 2018). However, immigrants living in Vilnius and Klaipėda counties did not perceive Lithuanian as necessary compared to Russian or English, and they only began to speak and appreciate it when they wanted to *feel* part of society (Ramonaitė in Hilbig et al., 2023). While previous studies have explored motivation, ethnicity, and language learning, limited scholarly attention has been given to adult immigrants' understanding of *the self* in migration through the Lithuanian language. Therefore, this article addresses the following research question: Which topics related to their identities do first-generation adult immigrants find relevant when reflecting on their migration experience and their encounter with the Lithuanian language?

Language Attitudes in Sociolinguistics

Considered the father of sociolinguistics, William Labov suggested in the early 1970s that research should move beyond assessing linguistic performance alone to investigating linguistic competence, stressing the importance of speakers' experiences in the learning process and in social

contexts (Labov, 1972). An effective framework to analyze the experience of language learners or speakers is by measuring their *language attitudes*. As stated by Garrett (2010), language attitudes can be defined as the perception and opinion on a language or its features and are traditionally categorized into three components: *cognitive* (the beliefs system), *affective* (emotions), and *behavioral* (practical actions). When analyzing the three aspects, similarities shall not be predicted to agree, as actions may differ from thoughts and *vice versa*. In this article, direct measures such as a written questionnaire and *oral narratives* collected through semi-structured interviews were coded based on four parts presented in the next chapter. In sociological and sociolinguistic research, oral narratives and biographies support self-reflexivity and reveal interesting aspects of immigrants' identities. As per Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), *identities* are the way people categorize themselves, and through oral interaction, identities are positioned, and thus negotiated. Indeed, working with language attitudes involves working with people, and researchers shall consider selecting the most appropriate strategies, which limit the *observer's paradox* in the data collection and analysis processes. It is important to emphasize that researchers must be aware that they may have potential influence not only during data collection but also in the interpretation of data, where unconscious bias may lead to interpretations aligned with the desired outcomes. In this study, the author—herself an immigrant—was aware of this challenge and drew on personal experience to contextualize the questions and discuss real-life problems. The narratives were coded and summarized analytically as discussed in the next chapter.

Methodological Framework

The article aims to discuss the identity of ten first-generation immigrant women living in Lithuania. The data presented are the results of a pilot test conducted to assess the reliability of a methodological design, and it was launched in spring 2023. Sampling the population started with the author's network, but it also attracted additional participants who joined the study through calls disseminated via online social networks. Developing

a questionnaire for descriptive statistics, completing the interviews for qualitative analysis, and transcribing the data took approximately four months. The online questionnaire in English presented around 60 open, closed, and Likert-scale questions covering four parts: personal biography, language repertoire, Lithuanian language learning, and identity in transformation. Around 8 hours of semi-structured interviews in English were digitally recorded and transcribed following an adaptation of the Lancaster Spoken Language Transcription Guidelines (Gablasova et al., 2019) with added metadata, including ethnographic notes from observing the interview setting, and personal impressions from the author. The interviews were designed to position the interviewee within an imaginative timeline of memories and future projections. The transcribed texts underwent a content-based analytical approach, in which coding was employed to identify and summarize themes relevant to the research question.

The responses related to Lithuanian language learning shed light on immigrants' language attitudes, whilst the remaining responses contribute to the narrative of each immigrant's perception of the *self*. It is assumed that different levels and uses of the language, together with their attitudes, can enrich the sociolinguistic analysis of contemporary Lithuania and broaden the discussion of identity change in migration. In selecting participants, individuals born or raised in Lithuania and belonging to national minorities in the country— whose identities have been vastly covered in literature—were deliberately excluded. Instead, the study involved immigrants from countries within and beyond Europe. All respondents provided written consent to be recorded and to have their stories disseminated with accurate anonymization and guaranteed confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents data extracted both from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. As shown in Table 1, all participants self-identified as women and were biologically female, yet the group is varied in age (between 29 and 61 years), country of origin (Egypt, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Turkey, Ukraine, U.S.) years spent

in Lithuania (between 2015 and 2023) and self-reported Lithuanian language competence (basic, independent, fluent). They moved to Lithuania after the country's accession to the European Union in 2004, do not have any Lithuanian origin, and might have visited Lithuania before it adopted the Euro in 2015, but eventually settled down after that. Out of 10 women, 5 are in a relationship with a Lithuanian male partner, 1 has a newborn child, and 2 have grown-up children with a non-Lithuanian partner. Their language repertoire is worth noting: they all share an incredible bilingual or multilingual background. Within this plurality of languages, Lithuanian is the latest language they have learned or are immersed in. As reported in the questionnaire, on average, they started to learn the Lithuanian language as soon as they moved to the country and the learning process lasted between 1 and 8 years. For half of the group, Lithuania is the first country to relocate abroad, whilst the other half has already experienced living abroad between 2 and 4 years. The participants are listed in Table 1 in chronological order according to their year of relocation in Lithuania.

Table 1

Biographical Data about the Participants N=10

Pseudonym	*Age*	*Civil status*	*Child*	*Country of origin*	*L1*	*L2*	*L3*	*Year of arrival*	*Relocated abroad for the first time*	*City of residency*	*Level of Lithuanian language (self-reported)*
Himari	33	Single	-	Japan	Japanese	English	Spanish, German	2015	No	Kaunas	Basic
Olivia	61	Married to a Lithuanian	1	U.S.	English	French	Spanish, Russian, German	2015	Yes	Kaunas	Independent
Maria	31	Single	-	Ukraine	Ukrainian	English	Russian, Italian	2016	Yes	Kaunas	Fluent
Sofia	45	Married to a Mexican	2	Mexico	Spanish	English	French	2018	No	Kaunas	Basic
Aya	29	Single	-	Egypt	Arabic	English	French	2019	Yes	Kaunas	Independent
Bhavika	30	Married to a Lithuanian	-	India	Tamil, Hindi	English		2019	Yes	Kaunas	Basic
Zeynep	32	Married to a Lithuanian	-	Turkey	Turkish	English		2019	No	Vilnius	Independent
Rosa	29	Married to a Lithuanian	-	Peru	Spanish	English	French, Japanese	2020	No	Kaunas	Fluent
Klara	33	Partnered with a Lithuanian	1	Germany	German	English		2021	No	Vilnius	Basic
Vittoria	61	Married to an Italian	-	Italy	Italian	English		2022	Yes	Kaunas	Basic

Language Use and Attitudes towards the Lithuanian Language

All women have higher education or a university degree and are fluent in between two and four languages, excluding Lithuanian. They are all

employed in the private or public sector, except for Olivia, who is a retiree, and Vittoria, who is a freelancer. As shown in Table 1, a significant factor can be observed: despite similar years of arrival or age, various levels of Lithuanian are achieved. A longer period lived in Lithuania does not guarantee an extended time dedicated to learning the language. Some women who have been living in Lithuania for a short period seem to have reached a higher proficiency level than those who moved before. Having a rich multilingual background and linguistic sensibility seems to be a *catalyst* to acquiring Lithuanian easily. Maria, Aya, Rosa, Olivia, and Zeynep, whose language proficiency ranges from independent to fluent demonstrated enthusiasm for speaking foreign languages and showed comparison examples during the interview. Among all, Zeynep is the only respondent having a negative attitude towards Lithuanian, as she dislikes its grammar and does not see any positive applications of the language in the global economy.

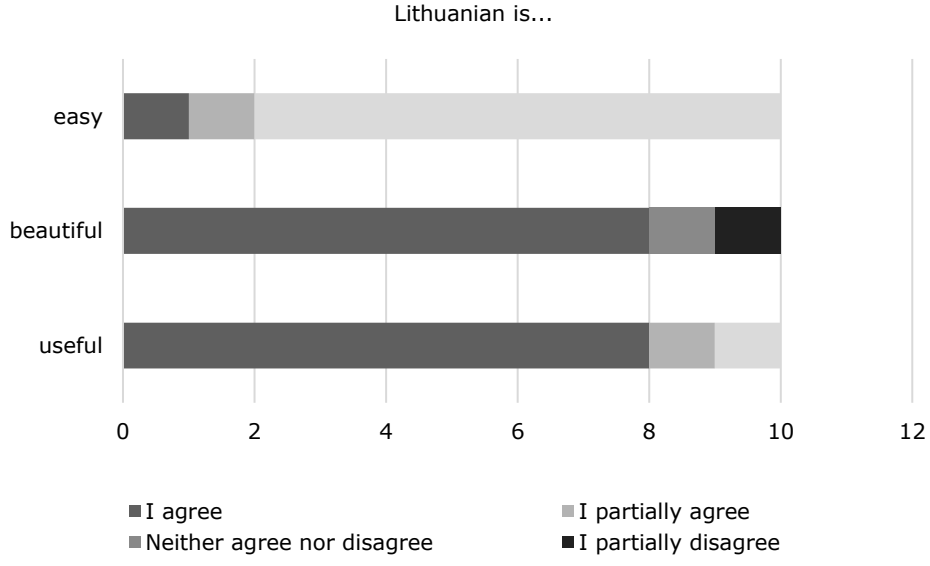
The women's L1 serves as a communicative bridge to stay in contact with the family of origin (80%) yet, none of them rarely use it regularly in education, local cultural activities, or in governmental institutions and public administration in Lithuania. Very often or sometimes, L1 turns into a passive activity of using social media, blogs, online podcasts (80%) and reading online or paper magazines/newspapers (60%). L2, mainly indicated as English, connects them with neighbors and friends (80%), it is used at work (90%), in education (60%), during cultural activities (80%) and helps them navigate the public administration (60%). The languages listed under L3 are limited in their use and, similar to L1, serve as a passive tool for personal hobbies, following the news, or social media. From the perspective of maintaining one's L1, the risk of not actively practicing it and replacing it with English or Lithuanian may lead not only to a potential *language attrition* or loss, but also to disconnection from their cultural identity, which may already be influenced by their lifestyle in the host country. As shown in Figure 1, on average, most of the respondents have positive attitudes towards Lithuanian, as they find it both *useful* (cognitive dimension) and *beautiful* (emotional dimension). As for its application, results show contrasting trends: Lithuanian is not *easy* (behavioral dimension), which confirms the results presented in previous investigations (Kubś & Michałowska-Kubś, 2020; Ramonaitė, 2020; Zygmantas, 2011). Those

two women who agree or partially agree that Lithuanian is easy are language lovers with a major in education or linguistics, and it is thought that their comment may be the result of having developed learning strategies to overcome second language acquisition challenges.

All the respondents who live in Kaunas, a city whose Lithuanian ethnic composition is around 96.2%, acknowledge the usefulness of the Lithuanian language. where immigrants may find themselves in circumstances requiring exclusive communication in Lithuanian. As a result, they are often encouraged to learn the language and use it regularly. However, doubts come from the respondents living in Vilnius, a more multicultural and multilingual city with around 70.4% of Lithuanian population and a higher percentage of other ethnicities, such as Poles, Russians, and Belarusians. Considering that the Lithuanian capital city has a more heterogeneous society, the preference of English or Russian as *lingua franca* may prevail over Lithuanian. Such phenomenon can be observed in Vilnius and Klaipėda counties, where some immigrants might prioritize English or Russian while only acquiring a basic variety of Lithuanian to meet their practical needs (Ramonaitė, 2020).

Figure 1

Attitudes towards the Lithuanian Language



Learning the Lithuanian Language

The process of learning Lithuanian does not begin at the same time for everyone. Some women, in preparation for their move to Lithuania, started to learn basic words either independently or with the help of their Lithuanian partner. When examining immigrants' attitudes towards the Lithuanian language, it is fundamental to recognize that their first encounter with the language may not necessarily begin once they migrate to the host country; it could begin prior to their arrival in the host country. However, as far as active learning is concerned, women decided to attend courses after settling down in Lithuania. When looking for Lithuanian language courses, they found formal classes, usually held by recognized language institutes or professional and qualified instructors trained at the university, and informal learning solutions with either language specialists or volunteers adopting a peer-to-peer approach. Professional instructors are considered a key to guaranteed learning and engagement in small groups or one-to-one classes, as they know how to organize lectures and use relevant learning resources:

> I was happy because we were really lucky because *this teacher was a real teacher* <unclear> with *proper education* because some of my friends who went according to this volunteering program to other countries they faced another experience, for example, they had classes of course of the local language, but the teachers were volunteers like, I mean usual people who just helped foreigners to learn local language, and we in Kaunas, *we had a real professional teacher*. (Maria, Ukraine)

> Yes, one-to-one *teacher*, but not for like a three months less than three months. And not every day. […] Some printed out forms and yeah, it *was based on a book*. […] Yeah, it was hard for me, you know, because it was hard as we were getting involved in the language. (Sofia, Mexico)

Instead, volunteers may not have enough resources to manage free classes, and quality is influenced by factors such as the number of students or lack of training:

> I went to course, but *it was very crowded* not much attention. […] we were twenty-twenty people around something like that and you know in language courses you need to practice *you need to have time* you need to speak, teacher has to listen you something - something but we didn't have chance. […] it was face to face at the beginning then they turn to online and especially online *I lost my interest you know*. (Zeynep, Turkey)

Amateur tutoring presents similar challenges. Language exchanges or local friends involved in explaining complex grammar rules of the language can be appealing, but being a native speaker does not imply excelling in linguistic skills, nor does it mean replacing a language teacher:

> Well, I asked maybe. Two or three friends to do so, and then we had the three-or four-times lessons in total, like for each person, but those kind of informal tutoring problems were. And like the *lack of the knowledge* like, because even they could manage Lithuanian language, *it was very hard for them like to explain* why and how that the grammar goes so. (Himari, Japan)

Mediatization in Learner-Oriented Language Teaching

Lithuanian is one of the most recent languages they have learned, which means that a more modern and learner-oriented teaching could have been adopted. For example, in the last 5 years, songs and videos have mainly been used in language teaching, and they seem to have been positively appreciated:

> …she was taking us to these like sides of like the city and explaining to us that this is called an <foreign=alija> [alėja; avenue], this is called <foreign=skveres> [skveras; square]. So, the class *was not all the time theoretical*. It was like *game-based and media-based* and that has kind of facilitated the learning experience for us. […] more *interactive* way and that has introduced the language for me as a kind

> of a mean of communication rather than a theoretical language that I have to pass a test for you know, yeah. (Aya, Egypt)

> It was always-always *interactive classes* with many with a lot of practice. Always interactive with *listening Lithuanian music, Lithuanian songs, very interactive*. And since we were only three people, sometimes even two sometimes four huh, we were really happy to have this full-full-full *involvement and engagement*, let's say. So, I'm-I'm very happy about it. (Maria, Ukraine)

> No, we actually did start face-to-face, but we had like three four classes and then the lockdown came on. So, we continued online. […] We had *some videos sometimes*, but it was mainly theoretical. We were mainly based on what the-the book lessons. […] I also took some like private classes also. But just speaking online as well. […] She did use a lot of like *multimedia*. […] So, it-it was interesting because it was more applied, there was more bits I would say of like *current culture Lithuanian culture* and so on, so that that I really enjoyed. (Rosa, Peru)

On the other hand, reflecting on previous experiences from early 2010, one woman struggled to learn the language properly, as the teacher failed to provide clear explanations in a language that was understood by all:

> Those classes *were not really interactive*, of course, like a teacher always like a gave us some like a speaking task or practice. […] And one teacher was not speaking English very well and then *I really did not understand what she was trying to say*, so I asked many questions to my friends and then they helped me and also sometimes *she explains the grammar based on the Russian grammars*. (Himari, Japan)

Some of the participants moved quite shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which set an additional challenge in early adaptation and Lithuanian language learning. At that stage, it was challenging to learn the language in an in-class environment and practice it naturally in a serene

context conducive to integration. Online classes were soon available; nevertheless, such solutions were not favorable. Bhavika and Zeynep say:

> I did go for a three-week course out of which like one and a half week… […] So I have downloaded all the videos, and I have not watched it yet. As […] but I feel like *online class is something not for me*. I could easily drift off, put off my camera… […] I don't think I am built for going to an online class. (Bhavika, India)

> You need high motivation and if it is online […] I don't know *I cannot focus*. (Zeynep, Turkey)

Solutions for Self-taught Learning of Lithuanian

Some women could not attend courses or find suitable solutions to their needs. Under these circumstances, alternative strategies reflect their current lifestyle and cognitive abilities, such as using textbooks, apps, or interacting with people from their job or neighborhood:

> I have *no institutional language*. Everything I've taught I've learned is *self-taught*. […] So, from books I do have quite a few books, but *I have never been to any Lithuanian classes*. […] to get out to the county does not permit me, and especially at nighttime, does not permit me to be able to go and participate in anything that would be productive. Most classes that I've seen are like at five or seven o'clock. (Olivia, U.S.)

> But language is something that I struggle with that *I cannot learn from books and theory*. I think it would be something that I would like to learn, very practical and not just have you know these. *I did have these words written down* like alphabetically and like for a is as in Apple a is an Ant like that it was in Lithuanian. (Bhavika, India)

> […] from the interviews, *from the meeting with other people* who were speaking just Lithuanian, and *I am listening to the to the people*

> *speaking*. So, I understand some-some words. […] Just a very simple conversation I don't know, about coffee, about tea and for-for food or with my neighbors about weather. (Vittoria, Italy)

> *I hear my partner speaking Lithuanian with my kid*, and then it's why I'm asking like, oh, what is this? What's this word? What does that mean? Or something like that. So, I'm at least picking up like a few words. […] *I was starting with an app* which I, which I found that was like kind of maybe-maybe that could be a thing because *I can do it in my own time*. […] Now *I also often read books Lithuanian books to my child* sometimes I have like a book where you press the button and then it's reading for you. So, I-I can read this with the lines. And then *I ask my partner what it means* then I kind of you know, like, learn how it's like pronounced different words. (Klara, Germany)

A Supportive Network is Key to Integration

Encouragement and motivation in learning come from several domains. The priority of learning is for one's *personal development*, which may be justified by the surrounding environment. In one case, learning is seen as an investment for the future, but in some job positions, Lithuanian is not necessary:

> But if we are going to stay for more years, I think I should be. *Pushing myself to improve*. But the point is that I don't even work in the environment that-that the people talking Lithuanian when that's the other point. (Sofia, Mexico)

In another instance, colleagues are happy to interact in Lithuanian:

> For me it was, probably the reason I learned the most Lithuanian was because *my coworkers pushed me to it*. Which at the beginning I was a bit shocked maybe about. Because, like, why are you talking to me in Lithuanian, they know I'm a foreigner, right? But after that, *I was super thankful*. (Rosa, Peru)

Both the partner and family provide great support in language learning:

> I mean, *my husband does encourage me* and from the very beginning he was like the-the main like, oh, *you should take classes* and <unclear> like look I saw this teacher and so on. (Rosa, Peru)
> My partner *is always encouraging* me also, because like, he says, like, oh, even when you say it, like in your funny accent or not the correct way like people just appreciate that you try. (Klara, Germany)

> But my parents-in-law, yes. […] They every time I see them, which is like twice a month, the least *they have always been encouraging me to speak in Lithuanian*. They ask me questions in Lithuanian and if I'm like, looking like deer in headlights, they translate it for me, so I understand. (Bhavika, India)

Also, support comes from local friends:

> Every, every, every friend, *all my Lithuanian friends encourage me every time*, every time when we meet. […] For example, one of my friends he-he wrote a book in Lithuanian, and I was very happy to-to-to-to buy his book and to read it and in Lithuanian and I mean for me it's. […] Like a big-a big step and also, I appreciate his-his artwork and improve my Lithuanian. (Maria, Ukraine)

Even strangers can contribute to individual's motivation:

> Mother-in-law […] and relatives […] and neighbors, and the people the most encouraging, honestly, most encouraging of me have been to the women at <foreign= Šilainių turgus> [market at Šilainiai district]. […] They're always telling me how wonderful my Lithuanian is. And I'll tell you *the encouragement of those words keeps me going*. Otherwise, I would have gotten frustrated a long time ago. (Olivia, U.S.)

> But *when people find you like knowing some words, they encourage you* to, like, use the rest. So, for example, when I use to go to like

> the <foreign=turgus> [market] instead of saying like <foreign=aš norėčiau> [I would like] maybe <foreign=penki šimtai gramo> [penki šimtai gramų; five hundred grams] of something they just were telling me like just say <foreign=pusė kilo> [half a kilo]. (Aya, Egypt)

Based on their experience, they feel motivated to encourage others to learn Lithuanian as well. Among a set of suggested inputs, the most selected categories are friends (40%), partner and/or children (40%), foreign neighbors (30%), course mates (10%), and colleagues (10%). As reported in the questionnaire, women decided to learn Lithuanian for integration purposes, particularly to enhance their social life (80%), respect and sense of curiosity towards Lithuania (60%), better results at work (40%), better results in studies (10%), to support their own child in educational institutions (10%), and to function in society without relying on their partner's assistance (10%). Those women who have an unclear picture of their future life in Lithuania have basic Lithuanian skills. Nevertheless, they know well what they should learn if they decide to start learning soon:

> Yeah, I will go one-to-one, but trying to get not theoretical things, *I will try to do more practical things* that I need to learn. (Sofia, Mexico)

> I-I think *both classes in person and also some lessons online*. And I think it's important to-to *listen some-some videos or some podcasts* in Lithuanian. But not now, in-in-in second step. (Vittoria, Italy)

> Yeah, I found some like *I am going to take an online class* which will be held during summertime this year because I have been interested in the *Lithuanian summer course*, but usually like I spend time like to work in Japan like during summer and then winter vacation. So, like I really, I have missed to-to participate, but my friend told me like *I could take it online* as well. And so, *I applied for that*. (Himari, Japan)

The (Socio)Linguistic Role of Lithuanian Partners

Half of the women's group has a Lithuanian male partner, either married to them or in a relationship. Except for the Turkish participant who met

her husband in Lithuania, others moved to the country together; therefore, love and family projects, among other reasons, motivated them to follow their partners. The decision was taken positively, and for some women, the role of the partner soon changed into a cultural and linguistic mediator to help them navigate Lithuanian society. From family reunions to official documents, the Lithuanian partner becomes a *translator*:

> But I do not speak to my in-laws. It's always like them passing their regards or when they come, they are speaking in Lithuanian and I'm just like standing there and *my husband translates*. (Bhavika, India)

Additionally, partners could be in the position of correcting mistakes like a language editor. For example, Zeynep's husband corrects her Lithuanian expressions, and she remembers vividly how she learned to use them properly for the future:

> One time sometimes my husband said to me <foreign=varyk varyk varyk> [go!] and like go to-to kitchen something-something, one time I said to <foreign=močiutė> [grandmother] <foreign=varyk varyk> [go!] and everybody looked at me very weirdly because <foreign=varyk> [go!] for saying animal for horse like *go fast* or something like that in but in slang like *street language* you can say to your friends something-something but not to <foreign=močiutė> [grandmother], if you use <foreign=jus> [you] to somebody you cannot say <foreign=varyk> [go!] so it was <foreign=močiutė> [grandmother] looked at me like that and husband and <foreign=mama> [mom] said *you need to say like* <foreign=einam> [let's go!] <foreign=ateisit> [you will come] something like that, not <foreign=varyk> [go!]. It is very rude to say, and I felt embarrassed that time, it was bad. (Zeynep, Turkey)

However, receiving corrections or help with Lithuanian does not happen to many. Olivia wishes she could spend more time with her husband practicing the language.

> … when he gets off the phone, *he has no desire to listen* to bad Lithuanian. He wants me to speak. Say what I have to say and be done with it. He will help me to a very limited degree, and I do try to talk to him in Lithuanian. But when I start making mistakes, he'll tell me would just-just say it in English, when he doesn't understand. (Olivia, U.S.)

Despite their efforts, taking on the responsibility to help their partner learn the language can create tension within the relationship and it foster psychological dependence on the Lithuanian partner. Such a habit may damage any attempt at self-determination or ruin the well-being of the couple. Learning Lithuanian and the country's customs represent a tool to gain independence from the Lithuanian male partner. Rosa knows that well, in fact, she reports:

> The being also dependent on my boyfriend or husband, the because of the language barrier. I didn't understand how things work so. I had to go back to. Okay. *I'm depending on one person. It can be frustrating*. What tools do I need in order to regain *my-my independence*? […] Learn the language. Okay. First thing, *first thing first*, learn the language. Get a job. Just feeling that if anything would happen, I could still, you know, get *through things by myself*. (Rosa, Peru)

New Surnames as Strategies for Inclusion?

Lithuanian surname-taking is a fascinating linguistic practice in the Indo-European language family. Married women can decide to keep their maiden surname or register a new one, which consists of taking their husband's surname and traditionally adding the suffix *-ienė* or *-uvienė* (Ramonienė et al., 2020). Additionally, the recent trend of adding a hyphen to the maiden surname followed by the married one is widely accepted. Without a doubt, it could lead to some misunderstandings internationally. For instance, in India, a married woman's surname should be identical to the husband's one, without any suffixes. As Bhavika says:

> One of the things that will-will kind of stop me from people recognizing me as a Lithuanian is that *my name is masculine*, which is <Lithuanian

> surname in -as> and anyone who marries is a <Lithuanian surname in -ienė>, and every time I go to the hospital or like a clinic, and they ask me my name *they immediately know* that I am not. (Bhavika, India)

Numerous international law acts can collide with one another and cause hostile situations within the public administration. It is then the choice of the woman to accept or improve the perception others have about her, as Zeynep discusses her thinking on changing her surname or not:

> But if I'm going to different doctor, it is the hard and could be racist sometimes. Because before I didn't change my surname before after marriage. Then we saw that it's not a good idea. Then we change and *now it is a bit better* in official centers and hospitals. (Zeynep, Turkey)

Changing the surname may bring additional benefits in daily life and during emergencies. Being considered Lithuanian perhaps could bring better job opportunities, and in extreme situations, the surname could be enough to prove kinship without further documentation, as Rosa believes:

> I guess so, I mean. For example, by just my name, if I would be <Lithuanian surname in -ienė> you will not tell that I am not Lithuanian. So, it-it could give my chances, I don't know if when it comes to like *job opportunities* or whatever, maybe. But we also discussed this when the war started. If the if the borders were closed or something like that and I had to go back to my country. Unless I have my marriage certificate, *no one would know that I am married* to a Lithuanian. (Rosa, Peru)

A Prism of Identities in Motion

Migrating to Lithuania has prompted women to reflect on their present identities and their journey so far. When asked about their current sense of self, three primary perspectives emerged. First, some women are aware of living a new version of themselves, which is given by a new lifestyle, habits, and, for one woman, motherhood.

> … I shouldn't get offended by all these things, because this is the culture, and I need to change myself and now I feel *I have changed myself and made myself acquainted* to how to behave around Lithuanian strangers. (Bhavika, India)

> So, if we put it on a scale of like empowerment, then definitely it has risen like before I came here. And after I came here. Why? Because this has given me an access to a new opportunity or many new opportunities and therefore *it has definitely risen the self-confidence level.* (Aya, Egypt)

> But I think *more changes came from motherhood* and my-my time how I spend my time, than actually because of the place. (Klara, Germany)

> I think I always expected something external to entertain me. And I have *my identity crisis has come in.* You know, if I am by myself and depending on me, what do I need to do to make me content? (Olivia, U.S.)

Second, other women do not perceive a notable change, and maintain a neutral approach to their journey without questioning who they are or who they have become:

> No, no*, I feel I adapt*. If I don't speak. I feel like I adapt. Because I look like Lithuanian, you know, so you know, like, *I like this feeling*. (Zeynep, Turkey)

> *I don't consider myself as a migrant.* Let's say, I mean, literally. And according to the documents, let's say, yeah, I am like, I'm working here. Like I'm I have a temporary residence permit but, in my heart, […] I feel myself like a such a traveler […]. (Maria, Ukraine)

> … *I do appreciate a lot the fact of being adaptable* […]. I think this like maybe yeah *not that strong identity* just as it is, did help me. Help me

> taking other things and. Just being open-minded and just understand that things can be different elsewhere and not doesn't mean that it's better or worse, just *different*. (Rosa, Peru)

> *I am always curious* to discover this country, and I want. I would like to to-to know better people, especially different people, not just single group or other and my curiosity about Lithuania is always big. (Vittoria, Italy)

Third, for two women, living in the country as a minority has solely accentuated cultural differences and strengthened their national or ethnic identity:

> We eat the food from here but *that does not change my roots*. You know my identity. It's I know, my kids really know also myself, like myself. That it's-it's we are from Mexico and-and Mexican. (Sofia, Mexico)

> Yeah, while living in Lithuania, *my identity as a Japanese person is relatively emphasized* because some people ask me like question asked me to share the opinion *like as a Japanese person*. (Himari, Japan)

Lithuanian: A Gateway to Integration

What does integration mean to immigrants? Those who speak Lithuanian fluently feel positively integrated, as they can express themselves in the society and reclaim independence:

> Yes, *I feel very integrated*, yes. […] integration is when I'm really involved in the *-involved in the local community* and I communicate, do-do and do some things with them, activities. […] when we are discussing something, *I can-I can express what I think in Lithuanian* […] and I feel really good of course because of language. (Maria, Ukraine)

> Feeling like you are part of the society like that, *you bring some value* to it and that *the society has also some support for you* in return. […] I do know foreigners that live here for years and don't speak the language. […] If you are always depending on someone else to do those things for you, I don't think you can ever feel fully integrated. You're like an annex, you know, to someone else. Or like always, like a guest. (Rosa, Peru)

Integration is somehow linked to the way the majority treats the minority group. Being fully accepted or not has to do with the extent women understand and are understood:

> Now my first goal is to-to learn Lithuanian, and I think when I-I-I have learned a bit Lithuanian I-I can understand better this country <unclear> today. *Integration is when people don't-don't look at me as a foreign*. I am a foreign, of course I am Italian, but for the other people it's not important and I-I-I like when people on in the street. Huh. Ask the ask me some information about the city in Lithuanian. Unfortunately, I-I don't speak Lithuanian. So, I-I hope in in the in the future in the closer future to-to-to have *the opportunity to-to answer to those people that ask me about in Lithuanian.* (Vittoria, Italy)

> I knew the local places where the local people go to get their like essentials and essential items and definitely in such places you need to use the language, so it's not only about knowing the place where you get to the item, but *knowing how to get the item from there,* how to sometimes bargain. […] *I'm in the grey zone* because I still feel like as long as I cannot develop a conversation that includes, like, my personal experiences, my opinion and my thoughts and feelings, I still and also understand the other sides. (Aya, Egypt)

> Well, I really don't have a very positive image like about that the word itself cause integration the most cases *are forcing the social minorities to become the like the same way like to the majority group*. […] Maybe

> I really don't think like I-I could be successfully integrated like in the future, but *it doesn't mean like a very negative way.* (Himari, Japan)

When language skills are missing or lacking, integration is compromised, but together with that, collective values and lifestyle must be shared to really feel a sense of belonging within the Lithuanian community:

> *To be part of the community*. But *for that you need to know the language* and not knowing the language, I don't feel that I am part of the-the community. Honestly, even though I'm trying and sometime. With few words you can see that the people is like, oh, nice, you talk Lithuanian, no I don't talk. I just know a few of words, you know. (Sofia, Mexico)

> I don't because I think it's completely age-related <pause=7> I will never. I miss my own holidays. I miss my ways of celebrating my holidays. *I will never be completely comfortable speaking Lithuanian* with Lithuanians because I like to have deep conversations. […] If I had <pause=3> friends relatively available that *I could talk to without having any anxiety and any frustration*, *I would feel integrated*. (Olivia, U.S.)

> I believe that *integration is not only speaking same language you need to share your same goal and feelings* also. So, If I could speak Lithuanian, I could understand them, but it doesn't mean *I could be fully integrated* because most of the time I'm not supporting their ideas and thoughts. (Zeynep, Turkey)

> So, I think *integration is definitely having a social life* now. […] Yeah, the fact that I don't know Lithuanian plays a very, very negative part in my life because *I can't go up to someone and just have a conversation*. And most of the time, the people that I ride in the cabs with are very friendly and I can't really talk to them, and *I feel not integrated because of these reasons*. (Bhavika, India)

> I'm not kind of necessarily bound to anything and I don't feel yet that maybe that's why I miss *missing this feeling of like actually being fully integrated*. […] Integration. *It's a sense of belonging for me*, like kind of to, like integration for me it's not-not just about language, but also like kind of, can, can you *unfold your lifestyle* if that country in that country, with the people there and not just like, for example, with other foreigners, right, like, kind of, but like kind of *being integrated in, in the current society can you can take part of it*. Also voting actually. Actually, also voting for me as a part of integration. (Klara, Germany)

Conclusions

The study sought to explore the role of the Lithuanian language in shaping the identities of ten first-generation immigrant women, which can be positioned in three scenarios: experiencing crisis and adaptation, remaining neutral, or reinforcing one's national roots. In these stages, higher competence in Lithuanian facilitates *integration*, because Lithuanian helps navigate the new culture, gain acceptance in the society, or achieve independence from the partner, who temporarily plays the role of a linguistic mediator.

In response to the research question, it was found that first-generation immigrant women discussed the topics of motherhood and kinship, marriage and surname changes, education, professional careers or retirement, community participation, adaptation, and national identity. Throughout these stages, Lithuanian is present, and those who have basic communication skills are aware of missing an enormous opportunity to feel a sense of belonging in Lithuanian society. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian society seems to react positively when immigrants are speaking the national language and encouragement comes from everybody: family, colleagues, friends, and even strangers. In accordance with the results, the women who self-reported a higher level of Lithuanian language skills are grateful for a supportive network of coworkers, family members and friends, who helped them during their learning journey.

Despite several proficiency levels, *cognitive* and *emotional* attitudes linked to their identity development are overall positive. The *behavioral*

attitudes are positive in recalling the past and projecting the future (almost all the respondents plan to improve some aspects of their Lithuanian), but no proactive actions are found in the present. First-generation adult immigrant women hardly invest in improving their Lithuanian due to commitments at work and challenges in finding flexible language solutions adapted to their lifestyle and integration purposes. Most immigrant women studied Lithuanian through formal learning in accredited schools or with professional teachers and appreciated the use of media resources and innovative approaches oriented to enhance their plurilingual competencies. However, professional teachers should also be involved in improving informal learning, considering the tendencies of immigrants seeking alternative methods, such as language exchanges or digital apps, as well as the prospect of national emergencies like the COVID-19 outbreak.

As for the methodology implied, the results suggest that adopting a mixed-methods approach is necessary because *overt* data from the questionnaire do not fully represent the *covert* attitudes expressed during the semi-structured interviews. This pilot study provides the first steps in further exploring the identities of first-generation adult immigrants in Lithuania. Future research should focus on gathering a larger sample of respondents from all over Lithuania, potentially encompassing a diverse range of genders, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic repertoire.

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TAPATYBĖS PERKAINOJIMAS: KALBINĖS NUOSTATOS IR IMIGRANČIŲ MOTERŲ SAVIREFLEKSIJA PER LIETUVIŲ KALBĄ

Anotacija. Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais didžiausių Lietuvos tautinių ir etninių mažumų socialinė integracija ir sociolingvistinė būklė susilaukė nemažai mokslininkų dėmesio, bet tyrimuose apie pirmosios kartos suaugusius imigrantus iš viso pasaulio pirmiausia aptariami jiems kylantys iššūkiai, motyvacija ir požiūris į lietuvių kalbą ar lietuvių kalbos mokymąsi. Šiuo metu pasigendama holistinio tyrimo, kuriame būtų nagrinėjama pirmosios kartos suaugusių imigrantų *savirefleksija* apie jų migracijos istoriją, tapatybės raidą ir tarpasmeninius santykius per lietuvių kalbą. Straipsnyje siekiama ištirti požiūrį į kalbą ir tapatybę kaip susipynusius elementus pirmosios kartos suaugusių imigrantų savęs ir Lietuvos visuomenės suvokime. Bandomajam tyrimui buvo atrinkta dešimt pirmosios kartos suaugusių imigrančių, kurios užpildė klausimyną, sudarytą iš keturių dalių: asmeninės biografijos, kalbinio repertuaro, lietuvių kalbos mokymosi ir tapatybės transformacijos. Vėliau pusiau struktūruotuose interviu jos dalijosi prisiminimais ir ateities prognozėmis. Straipsnyje kalbinės nuostatos aptariamos remiantis trijų dimensijų teorine sistema: kognityvinės, afektinės ir elgesio nuostatos. Duomenys rodo, kad lietuvių kalba būtina norint jaustis integruotam ir rodyti pagarbą šaliai, tačiau tapatybės perkainojimo procesas reikalauja ne tik besimokančiojo pastangų, bet ir palaikančio bendraamžių ir artimųjų tinklo paskatinimo. Bendras požiūris yra teigiamas, o lietuvių kalbos mokymasis kartu su kultūrinių konstruktų kodifikavimu padeda pasiekti, kad moterys jaustųsi asmeniškai savarankiškos ir galėtų funkcionuoti visuomenėje kaip aktyvios pilietės, o ne kaip laikinos viešnios. Patirtis, susijusi su COVID-19 protrūkiu, skaitmeninių mokymosi priemonių naudojimo svarba ir įgytos šeimos vaidmuo – tik keli veiksniai, darantys įtaką naujų tapatybių formavimuisi, išryškėję kaip tyrimo rezultatas.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: identitetas; kalbinės nuostatos; lietuvių kalba; migracija; žodiniai pasakojimai.