The use of non-standard and informal lexis on air (a retrospective analysis of variation 1960-2010)

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The normative Lithuanian language tradition that applies to radio and television, as to all other forms of media, raises certain demands concerning representation of a particular standard of language and to spread standard language norms in society. Journalists, actors and writers (regular talk show participants in any given period) serve as a guideline which the rest of society should follow, adopting their consistent and proper use of language norms. This kind of normative provision was formed in independent Lithuania, remained in place during the Soviet period and has survived to this day. The motivating factor for this provision is that as part of their studies, all representatives of these professions undergo a special Language cultivation course covering the basics of the normative, ideal language and are thus obliged to use the ideal language standard in public. Similar expectations are also linked to other frequent public speakers (such as politicians, scientists and artists).

This paper presents corpus based research, the aim of which is to identify the main factors why speakers choose not to represent the ideal standard language when speaking in public, i.e., to discuss those cases when these potential model speakers have on various occasions and in different periods used non-standard lexis on radio and television programmes. The dynamics of use of colloquialisms, swearwords and slang in the corpus reveals the processes of informalization Lithuanian broadcast media has undergone over the past decades.

The texts in The Corpus of the Lithuanian Broadcast Media (350 000 words) are divided into three periods, distinguished according to the main changes that took place in the media that could have had a determining influence on changes in language use – the Soviet period (1960-1987), the transitional period (1988-1992), and the contemporary period (1993-2010).

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