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Positioning the self 'from below': A case study of peasant's complaints (1901)

Although the micro-perspective on language use by less-privileged individual writers may lack representability and generalizability; nevertheless, as suggested by Voeste (2018: 98), zooming-in onto such practices may allow us not only to observe the paths of textualization during the lifespan of a person, but also to trace the development of one's linguistic self-projection. The latter may be approached via the study of *stance*, i.e. as a *stancetaking* practice that not only mediates social identities, but also index social acts or activities (Ochs 1996: 420). Even though the role of stance has been addressed in a number of historical (socio)linguistic studies (see Biber 2004, Dossena 2006, Fizmaurice 2004, Sairio 2013 among many others), most of them, however, focused on the stancetaking practices among the literate and more experienced writers. We still know rather little about the discursive construction of the self among the inexperienced writers in the past (although see Laitinen & Nordlund 2012 and Voeste 2018 that address this issue).

In this presentation, adopting stancetaking perspective, I will take a closer look at two Lithuanian complaint letters written in Cyrillic script by a peasant farmer at the turn of the twentieth century. These recently discovered complaints are by far the longest (N=2786 word tokens) surviving Lithuanian-Cyrillic texts 'from below', which makes them suitable for a more rigorous discourse-level analysis. My goal is to discuss these texts as manifestations of self-expression and to discern the discursive and linguistic strategies that the writer employs to encode his positioning or stance in order to persuade the addressee. The focus of my presentation will be twofold. First, I will discuss narrative and discursive organization of these letters, which exhibit features typical for both oral and written 'styles' of speech, thus, pointing to observable patterns of style-shifting. Second, considering the inscriptions made by the addressee in other documents related to this particular complaint-case, I will question the role that the choice of the alphabet might have played in the reception and perceived validity of these two texts by the addressee.

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