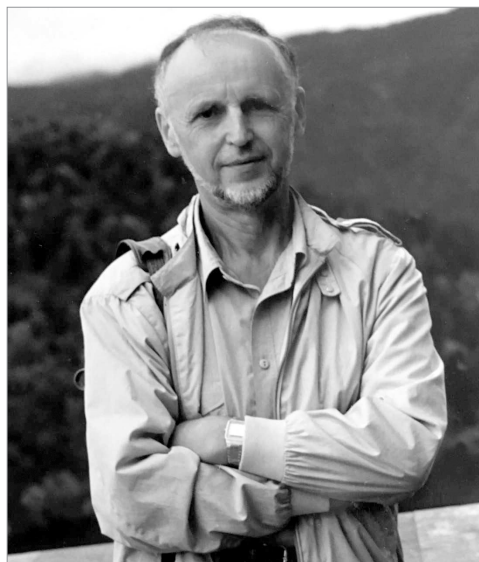


Albertas Steponavičius (1934–2018)

Albertas Steponavičius, Professor of English Philology and Linguistics, passed away on 2 March 2018 in Vilnius, Lithuania, at the age of eighty-four. During his academic career spanning over 50 years, Professor Steponavičius chaired the Department of English Philology at the University of Vilnius, served over many years as the editor-in-chief of *Kalbotyra* ('Linguistics') – the principal journal of linguistics in Lithuania – was the founding president of the NGO *The Lithuanian – Danish Society*, and a long-time member of *Societas Linguistica Europaea*.

Born on 2 January 1934 in the village of Juodiškės, Kaišiadorys region of Lithuania, Steponavičius came to the capital from a province, similar to many Lithuanian



(From a family photo album)

linguists of his generation. As a boy, Steponavičius was schooled at the Gymnasium of Kaišiadorys. However, after the Steponavičius household fell victim to dekulakization, the early days of school were patchy, with the family forced to spend a few years hiding in the woods in an effort to avoid deportation to Siberia. By Steponavičius's own admission, he was fortunate to have been able to attend the Gymnasium of Kaišiadorys – an excellent school whose teaching staff included a number of prominent figures such as mathematician Dr. Gerardas Žilinskas, and teatrologist and literary theorist Dr. Antanas Vengris among others. However, it was the tutelage and mentorship of Algirdas Anužis – a distinguished Lithuanian teacher of the English language and literature – that eventually motivated Steponavičius to pursue English studies at the University of Vilnius.

Albertas Steponavičius finished his undergraduate degree in 1958, with a dissertation on *Analysis of the Lithuanian Translation of "Othello" by William Shakespeare*. Then followed a two-year period of mandatory post-graduate teaching practice, after which he enrolled, in 1960, in post-graduate research studies ("the aspirantura") at Leningrad State University (now Saint Petersburg State University). The Department of English Philology at LSU, then chaired by Irina Ivanova – a prominent Russian Anglicist, was a centre of excellence for General, Germanic and English linguistics, with a broad range of courses and seminars to choose from. Albertas Steponavičius enrolled in seminars on Gothic and Old Norse, taught by Mixail Steblin-Kamenskij, as well as a course of Danish. It was the guidance of Ivanova and, especially, Steblin-Kamenskij that shaped Steponavičius as an English historical linguist. Under Steblin-Kamenskij's supervision, Steponavičius completed a candidate's (i.e. PhD) dissertation entitled *Vokalizm kentskogo dialekta do obrazovanija anglijskogo literaturnogo jazyka* ('Vocalism of the Kentish dialect up until the formation of literary English'), defended in 1965.

Having obtained his candidate's degree, Steponavičius returned to the University of Vilnius, where he chaired the Department of English Philology from its foundation in 1968 to 1971. Testament to the seriousness of his academic endeavour was commitment to research and scholarship, which led, over the next few years, to his (post-PhD) habilitation. While expanding his horizons in general linguistics, Steponavičius maintained a concentration in historical phonology, with a doctor habilitus dissertation, entitled *Diachroničeskaja fonologija i problemy anglijskogo vokalizma* ('Diachronic phonology and the problems of English vocalism'), defended at Leningrad State University in 1978. The habilitation opened new doors, including the opportunity to take his scholarship to an international level. Thus, in 1978 Steponavičius was awarded a Fulbright fellowship for an academic visit to the USA, which resulted in a series of lectures given at the Universities of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and Texas. In Europe, Steponavičius disseminated his work and lectured at the Universities of Aarhus, Uppsala and Greifswald. One of his more significant academic engagements was with the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, where he spent six months in the capacity of a visiting fellow.

In 1982, Steponavičius was promoted to the rank of Professor – the first ever full professorship at the Department of English Philology, University of Vilnius. He served as Chair of the Department a second time between 1985 and 1990. Following his retirement from the University of Vilnius in 2001, Steponavičius was offered a professorship at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Białystok (Poland), where he worked until retirement in 2011.

Albertas Steponavičius's research output covers a spectrum of topics in the areas of phonological theory, history of the English language, etymology, grammar and

lexicography. In addition to numerous articles published in journals and collections, his books include two 1982 volumes of *Osnovy istoričeskoj fonologii* ('Foundations of historical phonology'): (i) *Očerki istorii i tipy zvukovyx izmenenij* ('Outline of the history, and types of sound change') and (ii) *Mexanizm zvukovyx izmenenij* ('Mechanism of sound change'). Steponavičius's internationally best-known work is his 1987 monograph *English historical phonology*, published under the guise of "an aid for students".¹ The book represents the most thorough exposition of Steponavičius's views on the history of the English sound system, though with an emphasis on the Old English period. Steponavičius's contribution to English etymology, entitled *Diachronic linguistics and etymology*, appeared in 2006, after his move to the University of Białystok. That was followed by *General and English linguistics: A course of lectures*, published in 2012.

Over the course of his career, Albertas Steponavičius was a believer in the importance of pursuing scholarship: one's mission as a competent educator is complete only if one is actively engaged in research; only as a scholar does one conduce to the livelihood and advancement of one's field. As an administrator and an authoritative academic, he is indubitably to be credited with elevating the scholarly profile of his Department, as well as with promoting the rejuvenation of its academic contingent. In the classroom, Steponavičius's uncompromising approach to teaching Germanic historical linguistics, Gothic and History of the English Language, with a special focus on sound change, earned him the affectionate nickname of Grendel, by which he has been known to many successive generations of his students. For a scholar of his academic stature, at a personal level Steponavičius was a modest man who did not care to seek out the spotlight but was able to delight in the successes of those around him.

Albertas Steponavičius's life story makes one reflect on an epoch in the history of scholarship in Lithuania: there was once a time when knowledge and competence were not subject to compromise. It seems a paradox, in this day and age of unlimited access to resources and information, and unprecedented opportunities, that the loss of a scholar can leave a rift in the fabric of academic legacy whose true meaning is little short of an intellectual privilege.

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¹ In the Soviet Union, academic monographs were, as a rule, only published in Russian or any of the local languages; only language manuals and study aids for language students could be published in foreign languages.

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