The ‘mowa prosta’ (MP) is spoken in the border-region of Belarus, Lithuanian and Latvia. It is an agglomerate of strictly oral varieties of Belarusian with at best a rigidly local prestige. It is heavily influenced by Russian and Polish, to a lesser degree by Lithuanian. Its speakers are bi- or trilingual (with Polish or Russian used as prestige language). Although MP is not clearly rooted in any traditional Belarusian dialect, these mixed, non-codified local varieties must have existed for at least two centuries in a more or less stable way. They unite features of all the languages mentioned above, so that MP can be regarded as the most unembellished and geographically widespread Slavic variety type of the whole Circum Baltic Area. At the same time it is still the least investigated one. In fact, its investigation promises to render essential insights into tendencies of structural convergence in phonology, morphosyntax and the lexicon, typical for the Slavic-Baltic contact area.

My talk will be devoted to the question to which degree phonological and morphological variation in MP can be considered to be chaotic or governed by rules, and how this depends on the particular type of multilingualism of MP’s speakers. Particular phenomena to be addressed are (i) allophonic realizations of palatal and non-palatal consonants, (ii) morphonological variation with stems, (iii) the tendency to eliminate neuter gender and to establish subgenders. I will mainly use my own data, which I collected while doing fieldwork in 2000-2002, and argue that the internal variation of MP does not depend on borderline effects because there is no roof variety.