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The Language Situation in Latvia 1850-2004

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Abstract. Latvia's sociolinguistic situation has changed dramatically over the past 150 years as a result of historical and political forces. German, Russian and Latvian have all serially been the dominant language in the territory at various times, while numerous linguistic minorities have been variously oppressed, ignored or recognised and supported. The political environment has directly affected both the number of speakers and the status of the various languages, and affects sociolinguistics today, which is still closely tied to the politics of reestablishing Latvian as the official State language after the Soviet period. Concern for the status and at times the purity of Latvian has been the *leitmotif* of Latvian linguistic work from the time of the national awakening in the late 1800s onwards. Newer sociolinguistic work is beginning to give a more detailed view of actual language use and variation in Latvia, but political imperatives -- guarding against Russian influence and negotiating entry to Europe -- still influence the direction of the sociolinguistic field.

Introduction

The language situation in Latvia at present is by and large that the country is bilingual in Latvian and Russian, especially in the larger cities Riga, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Liepāja and others which may have pockets of Russian monolingualism. Certain rural areas, especially in central Kurzeme and central Vidzeme, are mostly monolingual in Latvian, although inhabitants have a passive knowledge of Russian. Latgale in eastern Latvia is trilingual in Latvian, Russian and Latgalian, with Latgalian hoping to be recognised as a regional language of Europe. The official language of Latvia is Latvian, and minority language status has been granted to Liv, a Finno-Ugric language formerly spoken in western coastal regions but now nearly extinct and revived by a small group of enthusiasts. Traditional minority groups include Russians (now 29.5 percent of the population), Belarusians (4 percent), Ukrainians (2.7 percent), Poles (2.5 percent), Lithuanians (1.4 percent), Jews (0.4 percent), Roma (0.3 percent), Estonians (0.1 percent) and smaller cultural communities such as Tatars, Armenians, Uzbeks (Latvia. Valsts Valodas Komisija 2004). Good relations between embassies of countries such as those in Scandinavia (especially Sweden and Denmark) but also *inter alia* Germany, France, and the USA fostered activities that encourage the

learning and use of Swedish, Danish, German and French. Globalisation has ensured that English has to a large extent become the *lingua franca* in the economic spheres of the capital Riga, as well as the means of communication in international relations and joint venture schemes within Europe and elsewhere. In effect, Latvian, English and Russian dominate the linguistic scene with respect to the economic sector in Riga and other large cities.

During the Soviet era, the Latvian language was perceived as existing under threat of attrition and marginalisation by its speakers, most of whom lived in a bilingual situation and noted signs of language deterioration, although the overall number of speakers has not been sufficiently low to arouse concern.

An elaboration of the language situation in Latvia must begin with a discussion of the so-called national awakening of Latvians during the 19th century (before Latvia became an independent state), because many of the attitudes that developed then are precursors of present-day language attitudes.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the language situation in Latvia is the sweeping change that has taken place there in the last 150 years. Originally, German was the prestige language, the language of culture and intellectualism, the language whose cultural patterns were translated into Latvian by the Baltic Germans, the language that was the model for the tradition of written Latvian and the language used in local administration. In the present day, German exists only very marginally in Latvia. Russian, on the other hand, was not dominant in the nineteenth century, despite the fact that officially the territory was part of Tsarist Russia. During the period of Latvia's first independence, Latvian became the official state language of Latvia for the first time. Now however, Russian, which enjoyed a period of linguistic domination throughout 1944-91, competes with Latvian for linguistic supremacy as a legacy of the Soviet period. The reasons for these sweeping changes were more than sociolinguistic in nature. Over the course of time, politics has determined both the demography and language policy of Latvia, thereby regulating the number of speakers of particular languages. For instance, in 1939 the Nazi regime recalled the Baltic Germans, who had been in Latvia for 700 years, to Germany, and during its period of occupation from 1941-44, nearly eliminated the Jewish and Roma peoples in Latvia. The war as such decimated the Latvian population through death in battles, deportations and flight. Subsequently, under Soviet rule, the use of Russian was imposed in the public domain and a long-term immigration policy was introduced

which meant that numerous speakers of Russian settled in the republic without learning the local language.

We will examine the evolution of the language situation in four phases: (1) Pre-First World War period; (2) the Interwar period; (3) Soviet Latvia; and (4) contemporary Latvia.

The Pre-First World War Period

The period prior to the First World War includes the national awakening of the Latvians and may in broad terms be characterised by a division between the language concerns of the ruling classes/aristocracy and the so-called "common people". This structure was in the throes of being overthrown. For the ruling classes, the dominant language was German, with Russian as an official language; the people, however, used a mixture of languages that could be described as varieties of Latvian and (to use a modern term) minority languages that included Yiddish, Romani, Lithuanian, Polish, Estonian and also the languages of the ruling classes, i.e. German and Russian. The Russian speakers themselves were heterogeneous. In Latgale, they consisted primarily of the so-called Old Believers, a religious grouping that saw its identity not solely in terms of the Russian language. Čekmonas (2001) discusses the urban and rural varieties of Russian in the Baltic region, including Riga.

The territorial boundaries of Latvia were quite different from today, and the political situation complex, for the region was part of the Tsarist Empire but ruled locally by Germans. German maintained its status largely because the Tsarist regime in the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century relied on German merchants and their guilds and councils to administer the cities, and on the German barons to administer the countryside. In the late 1800s, a more extensive Russian bureaucracy and education system emerged that initiated Russification (Plakans 1993).

Given the local conditions, it was only during the phase of national awakening from the 1860s onwards that Latvians and Estonians began to be perceived as peoples by the Germans. These Germans referred to themselves as Balts (*Balten*) whose language and culture was German (*Deutsch*) and the identities and cultures of the peasant people were labelled as non-German (*Undeutsch* -- comprising Estonians and Latvians). The general typology for both Latvian and Estonian was "peasant languages" (*Bauernsprachen*). Yet, in linguistic science, the Baltic languages (Lithuanian, Latvian and Old Prussian) had come into their own as fields of study providing valuable missing links in the theory of Indo-European languages. These findings did much to raise the prestige of the local languages, since the scientific findings filtered down to the public via

the education system of the day (Metuzāle-Kangere, 1990). Many of the activists of the national awakening period stressed to the public that linguistic issues were markers of identity and that it was a national mission to collect and systematise linguistic materials. This was the period when the production of Latvian grammar passed from the Baltic German clergy to teachers and then, in the early 20th century, to educated linguists.

The Baltic Germans were frequently well versed in the local language, many speaking Latvian with native language competency, others having Latvian at second language competency. Given their historical role in Latvia and Estonia, they saw themselves as the bearers of culture (*Kulturträger*) for the uneducated peasants. Many Latvians, striving for upward social mobility, adopted the German language and manners. With the emergence of a Latvian intelligentsia, pride in the Latvian language was propagated and the use of Latvian was no longer regarded as a marker of illiteracy and lack of culture. According to Volfarte (2004), Latvians in Riga spoke German not only in social intercourse but also in family circles during the latter part of the nineteenth century. She notes that an economic upswing in 1908-17 coincided with an increase in the use of Latvian in the streets of central Riga. Furthermore, she also states that prior to the First World War, varieties of Latvian were spoken in the outer suburbs of Riga, whereas in central Riga, German was the predominant language.

It may be argued that the Tsarist Russian attempts to neutralise the local power of the Germans through the introduction of Russian in all Latvian schools and for governmental bureaucracy created a linguistic struggle between German and Russian, thus aiding and abetting the strivings of the nation-building movement in Latvia and its self-awareness as a community with a common language. Furthermore, the Russification movement opened up other career possibilities for upwardly mobile Latvians as officers in the Russian Army and Navy and other Tsarist structures.

As a result of the national awakening, language issues in Latvia became increasingly a matter of the prestige languages of the ruling classes as opposed to the language of common identity of the Latvian people.

The activities of much of the national awakening movement were directed from Riga, where the Riga Latvian Society took the initiative for centralising and coordinating efforts to extend the learning of Latvian as a formal subject in schools. In 1904, its Linguistics Section was created, comprising both linguists and teachers of Latvian. In 1907, the first grammars of standard Latvian for use in schools appeared, one for pupils/students, and one for teachers (Endzelīns and Mühlenbachs 1907; 1908). The first sentence of the foreword to the latter states that: "What we

have learnt from the mouth of the people and the history of the Latvian language, we hereby transmit to our readers.” The authors go on to say that not only foreigners and speakers of other varieties of Latvian distinct from the written language, but also speakers of the central dialect should have an interest in this book, thereby demonstrating that the central dialect had become the standard for Latvian. In the foreword, the authors refer to the detrimental effect of foreign languages (notably German and Russian) on the Latvian language, and state that “the font of the Latvian language flows in all its purity only in the old generation of Latvians not affected by education and foreign languages” (*ibid*). Finally, the authors take it upon themselves to show what is correct and incorrect. Interestingly, this paragraph defines the main problems of regulating language in society when a standard has to be observed.

The two major linguists of the time, Kārlis Mühlenbachs and Jānis Endzelīns, who also co-authored the above-mentioned grammars for educational purposes, were of crucial importance not only on account of their scholarship, but also because of their involvement in developing Latvian as a language to be taught in schools and used in society. Both of them travelled throughout Latvia, registering the language and its variants in a division of tasks: Whilst Mühlenbachs recorded vocabulary of all dialects in a monumental Latvian-German dictionary, Endzelīns wrote a comprehensive academic grammar of the Latvian language and its dialects. As Mühlenbachs died before the completion of his task, Endzelīns carried on with the dictionary whilst also continuing with the grammar that was completed during the First World War and published in 1922. Endzelīns lived on, preserving his authority on Latvian until his death in 1961. His enormous linguistic legacy also engendered attitudes towards linguistic purism, and as a public figure he never shied from engaging in polemics on language issues in pre-Soviet Latvia.

The recognition of a standard language, especially one that represents a given geographic area, creates an inequality and throws up questions of difference in prestige between language and dialect. The political processes at this time were complex, and the Russification movement of the Russian Empire affected the entire Baltic area. Latgale witnessed a different development from the rest of Latvia. This region did not host a Baltic German nobility but was strongly Polonised. A ban on printing books in Latgalian was imposed between 1865-1904; this did not apply to the rest of Latvia, where the Baltic German nobility allowed the printing of books in the Latin alphabet. However, in contrast to Lithuania, where books were printed in Lithuania Minor (East Prussia) and imported illegally into Lithuania Major, the Latgalian intelligentsia had no help from outside

during this crucial period (Stafecka 2003). The Latgalian movement cast its lot for its region to become part of Latvia in 1917, but has never been satisfied with the definition of Latgalian as a dialect or variant of the central dialect, since historically Latgalian has developed separately. With respect to criteria such as the publication of grammars, dictionaries and an independent literature, Latgalian could be recognised as a language, not a dialect. However, on account of the practice of the day whereby the distinction between language and dialect should be based on linguistic evidence for its definition, the debate on the criteria for Latgalian as a language instead of a dialect was decided by linguists, and the views of Endzelīns prevailed. There are three main dialect groupings of Latvian: the Central dialects; the High Latvian dialects; and the Tamian dialects. The Latgalian variants form part of the High Latvian dialects. Dialects are well studied and documented in Latvian linguistics. A good overview of these in English is offered by Balode-Holvoet (2001), and a detailed study is available in German by Gāters (1977).

With respect to minorities, the two groups most referred to in Latvian folklore and literature are Jews (*žīdi*) and Roma (or 'Gypsies': *čigāni*). Frequently they are paired, probably to represent "the other," but possibly also on account of their non-territoriality, which differed from that of the normally settled Latvians. Yiddish in the Baltic areas has not received much attention but, according to research by Neil G. Jacobs (2001), the Latvian variety of Yiddish shows interference from Baltic German and virtually none from Latvian. Latvian literature often portrays the travelling Jewish tradesman and his way of speaking Latvian. The representations of this language in literature are quite uniform from author to author, and the older generation of Latvians that has been in contact with this variety of Latvian has attested that the literary versions are mostly correct. The main features of interest are those related to a reduction of the complex morphology of Latvian: neutralisation of gender and case, nouns and person endings and tense of verbs. Other characteristics such as the addition of an article and Germanicised vocabulary are also present. However, there does not seem to have been difficulty of mutual comprehension between various groups at the level of communication needed for simple business transactions. Needless to say, the variety of Latvian spoken by Jews, especially with respect to the neutralisation of gender, is often regarded as interesting material for comedy.

The use of Romani in Latvia was sparsely documented until the appearance of the first dictionary of Latvian Romani (Manušs et al. 1997), a concise but exceedingly informative classification of the former ethnolinguistic distribution of Romani. The Latvian group consists of two

branches, defined by the geographic regions Vidzeme and Kurzeme which have a common language with two varieties. According to this source, there is evidence of far-reaching phonetic influence of Latvian on Romani.

The Inter-war Period

This was a vital period for the consolidation of Latvian as a state language within a defined geographic space and as a mark of Latvia's independence. Whilst people in Latvia continued to speak more or less in the same manner as before, linguistic practice became institutionalised. If earlier, the Linguistics Section of the Riga Latvian Society had been the sole semi-official instance of linguistic policy, there now developed a state political area of responsibility and increased emphasis on Latvian in all spheres of life. The University of Latvia was established in 1919, and scholars who had pursued studies and careers abroad now returned to take up their positions in academic life here. Besides, as Latvian was the operative language of political and social life in Latvia, Latvian language matters no longer served merely to express patriotic feelings but also offered career possibilities in many walks of life. With the onset of an authoritarian form of government from 1934 under Ulmanis, Latvian nationalism was strengthened, as was the position of the Latvian language as the means of communication, though in compliance with the various minority language policies demanded by the League of Nations.

In the fields of linguistics and language teaching, the dichotomy of a descriptive approach for dialects and a prescriptive approach for the standard language continued. The authority of Jānis Endzelīns dominated linguistic thought during this period, when linguistic policy was translated into language laws, and government committees were formed for debating public language issues. Although Latvian had been a written language since the seventeenth century, much work still needed to be done. The orthographic reform from the Gothic to the Latin script had to be accomplished, which involved codification issues. By the onset of the Second World War, the Latvian language had indisputably established itself as the official language of Latvia. Vanags (2004) offers an excellent survey of the development of language policy in Latvia during this period.

Soviet Times

Leaving aside the turbulence and tragedy of the three occupations suffered by Latvia during the Second World War, it is nonetheless

important to emphasize the demographic changes that took place then. Firstly, the titular nation was decimated; secondly, to all intents and purposes, Germans, Jews and Roma peoples either left the country or were annihilated. Without delving into the complexities of demographic estimations, we can state that German, Yiddish and Romani were no longer on the language panorama. Latvian became once again a local language in a larger political unit where Russian was expected to be used by every member of the community. Latvian sociolinguistics developed slowly over this time, largely in the footsteps of older philological work on both standard literary Latvian and dialectology, a field of work which has continued. Changes in linguistic patterns and in particular contact issues with Russian received increasing attention, and dominant Soviet paradigms in studying languages were increasingly cited.

The nature of the ensuing bilingualism with Russian in the non-Russian republics of the USSR has to be set against the background of the Soviet ideologies underpinning their language policy. These were made known to the people through the medium of education, and in the 1970s a number of books appeared in Latvian with titles such as: *A Free and Mighty Brotherhood of Republics* (Īverts 1972); *National Relations and International Education in the Implementation of Communism* (Brolišs & Holmogorovs 1975); *The National and the International in the Socialist Nation of Latvia* (Šmidre 1976); and *An Internationalistic Education* (Brolišs 1978). All of the arguments presented were based on allegedly contemporary scientific research, often inspired by the thoughts of the founders of communist ideals, Marx and Lenin. These books were written by non-linguists, but the works of linguists of the Academy of Sciences and the University of Latvia are cited.

These titles show that the relation between “national” and “international” had to be reconciled, including the issue of national and international language. The new society based on the pooling of economic resources to maximum effect was to be achieved in two stages: first, in order to put all on an equal footing, the centre was to offer its aid to the national peripheries; and secondly, this would then lead to the perfection of internationalisation, with one socialistic society as an economic unit without national boundaries. Lenin was quoted as saying: “We must fight against nationalistic narrowness, isolation, segregation in favour of recognition of the totalitarian and general, the submission of the part in the interests of the whole” (Brolišs, 1978, 13).

Language was not a separate issue in this process, but an integral part of the holistic philosophy for the building of a communist society. The arguments used in the above-mentioned works follow the same line of

reasoning with respect to language: for the moment, the communist society consists of differing peoples and cultures and languages. However, the communist nation is also international, and there is a need for an international language, Russian, which is expected to enrich the national language through contact. Russian figures as the means of communication for everyone and therefore has more potential and functions than a national language. Through the intermixing of peoples and mutual enrichment benefits thereof, the need for national languages may disappear. Indeed, it was considered that many people had already opted for a one-language solution, whilst others were still bilingual. Scientists were of the opinion that in the future only one, or possibly two or three languages would be needed worldwide.

Latvian linguists, however, used this official rhetoric that recognised bilingualism (albeit as an intermediary phase) for the purposes of language maintenance. An insistence on the tolerant view of national cultures in a bilingual situation became the strategic basis on which to propagate the rights and wrongs of a “pure” form of Latvian. A series entitled *Latvian Language Cultural Questions* (*Latviešu valodas kultūras jautājumi*) was published annually from 1965 onwards. It discussed the recommended usage of Latvian, at times also clarifying the official language policy. Thus, in 1973 one of the contributors, Aina Blinkena of the Latvian language section at the Academy of Sciences turned the official rhetoric on its head with her elaboration on bilingualism. She stressed on the one hand the enormous debt that the Latvian language (supposedly) owed to Russian for enriching its vocabulary but then, in the pursuit of language purity, also listed numerous examples of Russian language interference in Latvian which she argued needed to be rectified (Blinkena 1973). Members of the Academy also wrote occasional pieces in daily papers such as *Soviet Youth* (*Padomju Jaunatne*) during the 1980s. Here they discussed a range of language issues more informally, including perceived mistakes in Latvian language usage.

This theoretical model of “national” and “international” languages left little room for language variation. Dialects continued to be researched on an academic level, but simultaneously the supremacy of the “literary language as reflecting the culture of a people” (Graudiņa 1973) needed to be stressed. In practice, this meant that dialects were disappearing fast (ibid). As Nau (1998) points out, the notion of “literary language” was used throughout the former Soviet Union, combining elements of “standard language” and “written language”. She notes that in Latvia, where language purism was strong, this was often understood as “the language as it should be” (ibid).

The source of “sub-standard” language could be found in “sub-standard literature” such as detective stories. The only sociolect that was unofficially recognised by the Soviet state was that of criminals. A dictionary of Latvian criminal argot was published in 1979 for internal use by the Militia (Police), lawyers and jail wardens (Kavalieris 2002).

Linguists in Latvia feared that due to the bilingual situation and the domain loss of Latvian, particularly in the scientific and legal spheres, a process of language attrition had been set in motion (Metuzāle-Kangere 1992). Despite the growing influx and prominence of Russian, this did not however involve the eradication of Latvian; full primary and secondary education, a large number of higher education courses, more than one television channel, several newspapers and publications, several radio programmes and a host of other cultural and information services continued to be offered in Latvian.

Nevertheless, the dichotomy of “national and international” languages within the Soviet Union meant that non-Latvian minority groupings in Latvia could choose to speak either Latvian or Russian, but not also cultivate their own languages. This resulted in the neutralisation of the linguistic diversity that had been characteristic of pre-Soviet Latvia, and also in the creation of a group of Russian-speakers that were not necessarily ethnic Russians and which in time became comparable in size to that of native Latvians. In post-Soviet times, the increased size of this Russian-speaking minority that was a direct result of the neutralisation of minority languages during the Soviet era became a strong argument for criticising Latvian language policy.

The Sociolinguistics of Contemporary Latvia

Since the regaining of independence, sociolinguistics in Latvia has been overwhelmingly driven by political urgency, with the academic study of language contact, language shift, language use and language attitudes often being exercised in the shadow of political conflict. This has resulted in a clear tension -- sociolinguists have largely been concerned with the analysis and often the support of language laws introduced from the late 1980s to reassert the status of the national language. This has been done under the unremitting gaze of local, former Soviet and now Russian, and European interests questioning aspects of this language policy. Sociolinguistics in Latvia has not been able to be an academic pursuit alone.

The last Soviet census of 1989 showed a demographic and linguistic situation vastly changed from that of the period of Latvian inter-war

independence. The proportion of the titular nationality in the population had been reduced from 75.5 percent in the pre-war period to 52 percent. The proportion of Russians had meanwhile increased from 10 percent to 34 percent, while other Slav groups constituted another 12 percent; Jews, Germans and others had been reduced to very small numbers. In linguistic terms, only 20 percent of non-Latvians were fluent in Latvian, a proportion slightly higher than the comparable situation in Estonia (15 percent) but significantly lower than in Lithuania (35 percent). Latvia and Estonia had been major and popular targets for the expansion of Soviet industry, and with the new industry came a population of new workers, managers and administrators, as well as military forces. This influx meant a steady change in the linguistic landscape; Russian increasingly became the language of administration and management, as well as of public information. This resulted in the widely reported situation of asymmetric bilingualism, where the titular nationals in the Baltic republics were bilingual in their mother tongue and Russian, but Russophone settlers found little need to learn the local national languages. The changed linguistic situation as a result of Soviet occupation is well covered in the available literature (Comrie 1981; Kreindler 1985; Knowles 1989; Laitin 1998; Grenoble 2003).

The extraordinary changes in the Soviet Union as a result of *glasnost* and *perestroika* during the late 1980s saw language issues gain unprecedented prominence. Leninist language policy had stipulated the equality of languages, and for most of Soviet history there was in fact no single official language in the Soviet Union -- as an imagined union of nationalities, the status of all republican languages was that of an equal official language in their territory, alongside Russian. In 1986, however, Russian was declared the official language of the Soviet Union. The *de facto* spread and increasing use of Russian in all the non-Russian republics meant that this new linguistic situation was one of the targets of national movements that went beyond Gorbachev's intended aims to pronounce far more radical and dangerous ideas of strengthening the sovereignty of the republics. In all non-Russian republics, language laws were debated, promulgated and passed, reasserting the importance of their national languages and attempting, in varying degrees, to limit the spread of Russian (Maurais 1991). All three Baltic states passed such laws in 1988-89, accompanied by even more radical moves to limit Slav immigration, and to begin to loosen centralised control over the economy and other institutions. Calls for independence arose from the myriad of non-government organisations that sprouted in this period and began to exert pressure on official bodies in the republics.

The dangers of these moves for the Baltic states were soon apparent. Moscow had no intention of giving up control of these territories, and in language policy bitterly opposed moves to limit the status of Russian. The Language Law of 1989 in the case of Latvia was very much a compromise law in the light of the actual sociolinguistic situation -- it asserted that Latvian was to become the primary language of administration and the working language in all public spheres, while still allowing Russian to be used in communications of various kinds. The Russian stream education systems would only slowly be changed, starting with higher education. The central requirement of the law was that all employees, whether in public or private employment, who had contact with the public and who had not had a Latvian stream education, had to be able to pass a test at an appropriate level in the national language, with a proposal to begin such attestation testing in 1992. To the surprise of many, Latvia kept to this timetable and employees began to be tested in 1992, in a process that has continued to the present day (Latvia State Language Centre 2002).

The reaction from Moscow to these moves to change language policy began immediately in the late 1980s and, in varying ways, has continued to the present day. The laws were denounced as nationalist and discriminatory (Alksnis 1991; Karklins 1994), and after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 Russian attention turned to encouraging international bodies to see these laws as discriminatory and to take action to censure Latvia and accept Russian as the second official language.

The language issue was exacerbated in Estonia and Latvia by also being tied to another policy unacceptable to Moscow -- restrictions on citizenship. At the end of the Soviet Union and gaining of independence, in all the non-Russian republics except Estonia and Latvia, citizenship was granted on the basis of the so-called zero-option; that is to say that all legitimate permanent residents of a republic became citizens of the new state. Lithuania, with its small non-Lithuanian population, took this course as well. But Estonia and Latvia considered their Soviet-era settler populations too large to follow this course, and citizenship of renewed Estonia and Latvia was restricted to those who had been citizens at the time of the Soviet occupation in 1940, and their direct descendants. A process of naturalisation was instituted, with citizenship being available to those who were able to pass a test on history and the constitution, and also a basic oral and written language test. Opposition to this from Russia has been constant over the past decade, with insistence that Estonia and Latvia grant citizenship to all (Jubulis 2001). Around 22 percent of the population currently remains non-citizens.

These moves on citizenship and language also placed European, and indeed world, institutions in a quandary. There are few identifiable international norms in relation to citizenship, and practices vary widely within western Europe itself. Estonian and Latvian requirements were not unique, but the departure of these two countries from the zero option meant further endless wrangling, as Moscow put increasing pressure on Europe to declare such requirements illegitimate. European institutions did put pressure on Estonia and Latvia to make citizenship laws less exclusionary, insisting successfully that children born in the country be able to claim automatic citizenship, and removing some other administrative barriers. Yet they were not successful in arguing for an easing of language requirements for citizenship applicants, which the two states considered central to the naturalisation process (Ozolins 1999).

European bodies also put pressure on Latvia to change some aspects of its language laws. Despite Moscow's objections, European bodies have never openly insisted on Russian being made a second official language, though this has been promoted at various times by individual European officials and several independent commentators (Fukuyama 1992; de Varennes 1996). European bodies did however object to the reach of language laws into the private economic sphere, and the requirement for candidates for public office to have a stipulated level of Latvian. More broadly, the OSCE also attempted to set guidelines generally for language policy (clearly in response to situations in Eastern Europe, such as the Baltic states) and produced the Oslo recommendations on linguistic rights (OSCE 1998). Questions as to what extent such norms can be considered universal and relevant to the Baltic situations, and the degree to which they have influenced European bodies and the accession process to the EU, have been commented on elsewhere from widely diverging perspectives (Johns 2003; Jurado 2003; Ozolins 2003; Van Elsuwege 2004). Of the succession of issues that have tested the renewed Latvian state, the issue of reform of the Russian stream secondary schools, which began most radically in September 2004, is the newest site of conflict and international attention.

Much of the sociolinguistic work in Latvia has essentially been a response to this highly politicised situation, and this political imperative -- seen by some as a question of ultimate survival of language and culture -- has had serious repercussions on actual sociolinguistic work. At the same time, sociolinguistics has had to establish itself among, and in some cases against, an already established linguistic establishment prominent during the period of first independence of 1918-40 and the Soviet period -- particularly dialectology, historical change, syntax and semantics, lexicography and orthography.

Early works that can be considered as sociolinguistic, looking entirely at general status and use patterns within the context of Soviet language policy, emerged during the breakdown of the Soviet language situation. Blinkena (1990) and Liepina (1990) both presented at the International Sociological Associations' 1990 congress and pointed to the negative consequences for the Latvian language of Soviet language and demographic policies.

From the early 1990s, detailed sociolinguistic work started on the actual language situation in Latvia. This was under the leadership of Ina Druviete, who conducted the first exhaustive survey of language use and language attitudes undertaken by the Latvian Language Institute, part of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (Druviete 1997a, b). As is the case with much other work, Druviete found that Latvian speakers and Russophones can and do lead parallel linguistic existences, with little cross-linguistic exposure to media, education, or friendship groups. At the same time, she pointed to two highly significant language attitudes, repeatedly found in subsequent research, that have been important in understanding the Latvian language situation. First, Druviete reported that generally Russophones were favourably disposed to the view that Latvian should be the state language, that residents should be encouraged to learn it, and that it was important for children at school to learn it to a high level. This contrasted to the respondents' own self-reported limitations in the language. Secondly, the research found that Latvian-speakers were overwhelmingly tolerant of Russian speakers, usually willing to switch to Russian in their presence, and exhibiting little overt hostility to Russian while also seeing it as crucial that Latvian be strengthened as the state language. This combination of attitudes has been a crucial reason for the relatively conflict free language situation *within* Latvia, despite the considerable political turmoil *about* Latvia regarding language policy, described above. The overall positive or neutral attitude of Russophones started to be picked up by other scholars in the early to mid-1990s, for example in the *Barometer* studies of political attitudes in Eastern Europe. In 1994, Maley and Rose found that in the three Baltic states a majority of Russians *disagreed* with the proposition that "People like us should not be made to learn a Baltic language", which to the authors indicated a lessening of ethnic tensions in this region. Other commentators, however, have continued to see this situation as a site of potential ethnic conflict (Coulby 1997).

Druviete's work has continued to link sociolinguistic findings (1998; 2000) to strong advocacy work on Latvian language policy, engaging in extensive debates over accusations of discrimination or violation of human rights as a result of such policy (Druviete 1997; 2002). She has stressed the

specificities of the Baltic language situation and its essential difference from other minority language situations, for example in western Europe:

The Baltic countries represent a unique case, probably not taken into consideration when universal declarations on linguistic human rights are written. Their situation shows that the linguistic human rights of state language speakers can also be infringed and that the official state language in an independent country may be an endangered language at the same time. (Druviete 1997a, 183)

Contesting criticism of Latvian and more broadly Baltic language policy has been an inseparable part of sociolinguistic work, particularly criticism that such policy is discriminatory or simply an ethnically-based turnaround of previous Soviet Russification policies (e.g. Knowles 1999). Valdmanis (2002) has argued the necessity for the state to protect Latvian where it could be overwhelmed by economically more powerful languages (Russian and English) and a tenaciously monolingual Russian minority if a *laissez faire* approach is taken to language issues. Račevskis (2002) has argued that both linguistic and population policies of the former Soviet Union have placed the Baltic states in an essentially post-colonial situation that demands redress.

Druviete's more recent work has concentrated on education and school reform, with attention to the various forms of bilingual education that were introduced in the Russian stream secondary school system, where the proportion of teaching in Latvian was steadily increased until achieving an overall preponderance of 60 percent in 2004 (Druviete 2001; 2003). Druviete's work has not been academic alone: a member of the most recent parliament, she was made Education Minister in late 2004.

The single best summation of linguistic and language policy issues in Latvia is in Maurais' (1998) collection (in French) of language policy in the Baltic states with contributions from Blinkena and Druviete among others. Priedīte (2003) has also given an overview tying together sociolinguistics, policy, law, and education issues.

However, even more so than in the Estonian situation described in this review issue, the overwhelming proportion of sociolinguistic work has been directed at quantitative descriptions (usually self-reported) of language knowledge, language use and language attitudes, tied to usually overt defences of Latvian language policy. Relatively less developed is the staple of much sociolinguistic work in the West -- studies of actual language behavior in various contexts, use of real recorded or observed

texts, attention to code-switching, use of loanwords and grammatical borrowings and adaptation, the toolbox of contact linguistics.

Amongst of the most promising work by younger scholars -- still usually delivered at unpublished conferences and in hard-to-find publications -- is that of Poriņa, whose work on code-switching among bilinguals in Latvia deserves wider publication (Poriņa 2001 a; b). Poriņa has also gone beyond what are often rather static descriptions of language attitudes to look at more complex issues. For example, she shows that gender differences in views of language and education are significant among Russophones, thereby raising an issue that clearly cross-cuts ethnic differences but which is largely ignored in other work. She finds that women are both more receptive to and more active in learning Latvian and desire their children to also do so (Poriņa 2000).

Similarly, Ernstsone (2001) has examined the sociolinguistics of everyday communication between generations, another neglected topic. Even in a monolingual speaking context, language use among different generations seems to be heavily differentiated by the successive influences of German, Russian, and now English, on Latvian. A comparative study of youth language by Tidriķe (2004) shows that youth slang in German is mostly borrowed or calqued from English, whereas Latvian youth slang has Russian as its source language. Meanwhile, Baltaiskalna (2000; 2003) has followed Druviete's line of analysing language attitudes, comparing Russophone and Latvian groups.

While many have commented on the status of Russian or the Russian-speaking minority (e.g. Kolstoe 1995; Geistlinger 1997), detailed sociolinguistic work is still lagging behind. Laitin's (1998) work has largely concentrated on Estonia, but presents an exemplary blend of political, sociolinguistic, quantitative and qualitative approaches to look at language policy at both macro and micro levels. He too finds a relative lack of rancour in language relations, but his emphasis in the Estonian situation on the difficulties of acquiring the state language in an almost hermetically sealed Russophone context only partly mirrors the Latvian situation, where populations are more intermixed, though still tending to inhabit a separate linguistic habitus.

Romanov (2000) is one of the few internationally published articles which not only discusses language attitudes of Russian speakers but also pays some attention to the changing nature of Russian itself under the influence of long-term residence and the increased prominence of Latvian as a State language. He gives a realistic account of the "Russian-speaking" population as being immensely diverse and having quite varying attitudes to the Latvian language situation; accommodation and even apathy are far

more frequent than overt mobilisation on the issue, and individual solutions are usually sought if necessary. Volkov (2000) has concentrated on Russian youth and examines their difficulties of identity formation in the post-Soviet situation. While the Russian language is their most significant identity marker, Volkov indicates there are strong processes of differentiation in this group: attitudes to learning Latvian and confidence in being able to integrate their Russian identity into Latvian society differed sharply from others in females, those with citizenship and those with an intention of long-term residence in Latvia. Kronenfeld (2002) has also looked at identity formation among Russians in Latvia, seeing signs of a stronger regional mentality emerging. Meanwhile, Dirba (2000) has looked at young people in bicultural families and their identity issues, where acceptance of bilingualism is often more explicit.

A series of works on Latvian minorities published during the mid-1990s under the auspices of the Centre for Ethnic Research at the Latvian Academy of Sciences also comments on the language situation of these groups. Although the recent Soviet experience means that Russian dominates as the language of communication for the majority of individuals in these groups, attendance at schools for ethnic minorities has succeeded in diversifying the language panorama from that of two "streams", Russian and Latvian. As Vēbers (1997, 69) puts it: "The changes in linguistic patterns in Latvia are breaking down, step by step, the stereotype that all non-citizens in Latvia are Russian language speakers only. The number of non-Russian non-citizens who speak both their own ethnic language as well as the Latvian language is increasing steadily". However, the works note that many speakers of Russian have also become more aware of their non-Russian ethnicity since the gaining of Latvian independence, and regard this as important for their self-identification.

Rucka (1999) examines the Polish language in Latvia, with some attention to historical changes in syntax, phonetics and inflexion as well as use patterns inside and outside the family. Usefully, the article looks historically at Polish during the Soviet regime as well as its place after the regaining of independence. Zielinska (2002) has studied Polish in contact situations in the whole "Borderlands" region (Lithuania and Belarus as well as Latvia), with some attention to regional variations. And Hogan-Brun and Romanienė (2004) have given a useful comparative view of bilingualism across the Baltic states, with all three Baltic states achieving a similar trajectory in raising competence in the state language.

The use of Latgalian in Latgale is widespread, and the area may be regarded as trilingual. Latgalian schools, in contrast to ethnic minority schools, receive no financial support from the government for extra

curriculum development or teacher training in Latgalian (Cibuļs 2004). The Latgalian movement bidding for the status of a regional language of Europe is not encouraged and the language-dialect issue is still being debated (see Proceedings of the conference "Regional Languages in the New Europe" 2004).

Despite these contributions, the detailed study of actual language behavior of the language minorities remains perhaps the greatest shortcoming of Latvian sociolinguistics.

With respect to the language behavior of Latvians, the "literary language" as a standard is still a deeply ingrained concept. The recommendations of the State Committee on Terminology are to be observed and in some cases, e.g. with regard to the case ending of the monetary unit Euro, their transgression is punishable by law. Spoken language is beginning to register taboo words even in the media. Research on colloquial language, however, is related to what is explicitly referred to as the sub-culture [sic] of youth language, excusing this behavior by the psychological need for self-assertion. If parents of school children use "youth language", this is interpreted either as a joke, because they want to demonstrate their affinity with their children or they want to feel young (Tidriķe 2004). The possibility that adults use "sub-standard" language as part of their daily life is not put forward as the obvious explanation.

The term "spoken language" is not neutral. This is attested by Lauze (2004) in her recent book on colloquial Latvian, where she states in the English-language summary that:

If we use prestige in society, the literary language and colloquial speech can be separated in the Latvian language. Each of these varieties of the national language has its own characteristic specialisation of sociolinguistic functions. The prestige of the literary language is higher than that of colloquial speech. Although because of the democratisation process going on in society the prestige of colloquial speech has risen ... the position of the literary language in the stratification of the national language is sound.

Other sociolinguistic elaborations can also be briefly mentioned. A significant contribution is that of translation theorist Veisbergs, whose work has always included actual examples of linguistic practice when examining several different aspects of language and translation issues in post-independence Latvia (Veisbergs 1995). For example, he looks at necessary changes to legal language as a result of regained independence -- the fourth such transition in legal language needed in the twentieth century because of regime change (Veisbergs 2001a) -- and provides a striking historical study of dysphemism as influenced at various times by both Nazi

and Soviet periods of rule (Veisbergs 2001b). McGurty and Silova (1999) examine the learning of English as a Foreign Language in Latvia and the way the nature of material and approaches has changed over nearly a decade of independence.

Other works on specific sociolinguistic sites includes Lauze's study of seller-buyer interactions (Lauze 2001), as well as her survey of the linguistic situation in Liepāja (Lauze 2003).

We conclude by drawing attention to the changed sociolinguistic situation in Latvia after a decade of regained independence, and some of the problems that remain.

The 2000 censuses in both Estonia and Latvia showed more than a doubling of the previous level of knowledge of the respective titular languages among Russian-speakers -- in Latvia from 20 percent in 1989 to 58.5 percent in 2000, and in Estonia from 15 percent to 39.7 percent (Latvia Valsts Valodas Komisija (nd) 2004; Estonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002). Druviete (1998a) and Järve (2002) have shown that it is the need to obtain language certification for employment that has been by far the major factor behind the growing desire to learn the official state language, and that this has been more than twice as important as the prospect of gaining citizenship. In Latvia, for example, some 400,000 individuals had passed the language certification tests at various levels by 2000 -- that is to say, around half of all adults who had not attended a Latvian language school (Latvia State Language Centre, 2002).

Further to the exhaustive 1995-96 studies of language use and attitudes by Druviete et al, further monitoring has been accomplished by Zepa and other members of the Baltic Social Sciences Institute. These have produced annual surveys of language use and attitudes, the most recent in 2003. The surveys in question provide an excellent guide to Latvia's shifting language situation over the past seven years; by standard sociolinguistic criteria this can be considered an extremely short period, but in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the Baltic states, a lot has been demanded of language policy over this period (BSZI 1996-2003).

The complexity of Latvia's linguistic situation was well demonstrated in the 1996 survey (BSZI, 1996). Amongst ethnic Latvians, some 96 percent had Latvian as a mother tongue, while some 98 percent of ethnic Russians had Russian as their mother tongue. Of those who were ethnically neither Latvian nor Russian (predominantly Ukrainians, Poles, Belarusians, Jews and other ethnicities), some 53 percent had Russian as a mother tongue, 4 percent Latvian, and 43 percent another language. These figures point to the Russification processes that were underway in Latvia during the Soviet period, but also to the fact that the tendency to divide the

population into Latvians and Russians is misplaced. It is an open question as to how many of those inhabitants who are not ethnic Latvians see themselves as forming part of the "Russian" or "Russian-speaking" population so often invoked by Russia in its political discourse towards the Baltic states (Ramishvili 1998). Over the period of the survey, some changes can be traced in this composition: by 2003, for instance, some 10 percent of the "other" ethnic group had Latvian as their mother tongue.

The surveys show a continuing high knowledge and use of Russian among Latvia's inhabitants (for example, only 5 percent of those whose mother tongue is Latvian say they do not know Russian at all), and a steady growth of ability in Latvian. By 1996, only some 22 percent of those who had a mother tongue other than Latvian reported they did not know Latvian. The report also highlighted the different domains in which respondents knew their non-mother tongue: Latvian mother tongue speakers rated their competence in Russian as greatest in speaking, then reading, with writing following close behind. Non-Latvian mother tongue speakers on the other hand reported significantly higher levels of competence in Latvian in reading, with lower competence in speaking and writing. This shows the different ways in which the two languages are learned -- Latvian speakers pick up spoken Russian in everyday interaction, and have reinforced this with formal learning of reading and writing, whereas non-Latvian mother tongue speakers have acquired Latvian firstly through more formal means of reading, with everyday interaction through speaking lagging behind.

By 2003, only 12 percent of Russophones did not know any Latvian at all, but these results were very uneven among different age groups. Younger groups continued to show a rise in reported knowledge of Latvian at increasingly higher levels, most markedly in the 15-34 age group, where 25 percent claimed a high level of Latvian, an 8 percent rise from 2002. The 35-49 age group also demonstrated a steady increase in knowledge of Latvian. For those over fifty, however, the percentage with a command of Latvian had not changed over the past five years, and 20 percent of this group still knew no Latvian at all.

However, despite the overall increase in knowledge of Latvian, the report of 2003 notes with some concern the slowdown, and in some cases reversal, of some of these trends. Rather than a steady increase in the use of Latvian in most work and public situations, as was the case in the 1990s, they find that a stable and slowly changing divided linguistic space is starting to emerge. The early gains made by Latvian in such spheres as the workplace, media and shops have slowed, signalling an ethnic and linguistic polarisation. Thus, for example, between 1996 and 2002 there

was a steady increase in Russophone respondents reporting using more Latvian than Russian at work (from 9 percent in 1996 to 26 percent in 2002), but in 2003 this declined to 20 percent. Each language group also tended predominantly to gain information from its own media, thus reinforcing a very divided information space. The authors of the report also noted a tendency towards passivity in relation to language learning, with Russophones tending to favour language classes and increased subsidies from the government as their preferred method of improving their Latvian skills, on the grounds that since the government was pushing the learning of Latvian, it should also pay for this.

The authors argue that the concerted campaign against the Russian-language secondary school reform and a number of other attempts at mobilising the Russophone population appear to have had some effect in hardening Russophone attitudes, particularly as far as the school reform specifically is concerned (see Klave 2004). In this respect, the failure by the anti-reform movement to mobilise large numbers of students in Russian stream secondary schools behind a proposed boycott of classes at the start of the current academic year may be only a temporary setback to a determined campaign.

With reference to the media in general, Latvia faces the same difficulties as all language communities that are not sufficiently strong economically to finance their own cultural needs in their language. The television programs that Latvia can afford to produce in Latvian cannot compete with the Russian market, and even foreign concerns prefer to make channels like Discovery, Eurosport etc. available in Russian rather than the local Baltic languages. The advantages that Russian has over Latvian in the media are hardly compensated for by Latvian television, which relays programmes in Russian and Latvian interchangeably. It is normal practice to transmit films in foreign languages with a spoken one-voice overlay of Russian or Latvian over the foreign text and the sub-titles in the other language. This undoubtedly influences language competency, although research into this has so far not been forthcoming.

Finally, given the lack of research on language practice of young Latvians, in October 2004 the first author of this article questioned informally two 21-year old students from the School of Economics in Riga on their knowledge of Russian (one from Riga, one from Valmiera). Both were completely fluent in Russian and thought it unwise to pursue any form of business in Latvia without the knowledge of Latvian, Russian and English. Their social network was mainly Latvian.

An interesting recent development relevant to the integration of society stems from successes by Latvia's sports teams. Formerly, there were

Latvian sports (basketball, bobsleigh) and Russian sports (ice hockey, football). Recent successes by traditionally Latvian sports teams have prompted greater identification with Latvia amongst the Russian community, and the development of a fan base that shows its support by chanting slogans in Latvian. When games played abroad are screened in public, the audience is mixed, and shares the joy of success and bitterness of defeat together. The connection between identity and the shared image of Latvia abroad is a field for further investigation.

Sociolinguistics in Latvia is still a new discipline, but one that has been instantly embroiled in some of the most difficult and important issues of the post-Soviet period. While largely an issue of international politics, the insistence on Latvian being reinstated as the official state language and the determination to expand its sociolinguistic functions have also raised important issues between the Latvian majority and other groups in the country. The importance of sociolinguistics in the wider political scene is that it provides a basis for understanding language use and language attitudes, and having this understanding count in debates that are dominated by political, ethnic or legal rhetoric.

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