



**2004–2010**

**LANGUAGE  
SITUATION  
IN LATVIA**

**Research summary**

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This summary outlines the major conclusions of the study “Language situation in Latvia: 2004-2010” (2011) and the results of the Latvian language policy implementation.

According to the structure of the study “Language situation in Latvia: 2004-2010” here are data and facts reflected about the language situation in the Latvia from 2004 to 2010, taking into account the historical development of the language situation. The summary shows the progress made in the implementation of the language policy, as well as the main difficulties regarding the implementation of language policy and provision of competitiveness of the Latvian language as the official language. Brief information is provided on the following topics discussed in the research: language policy in Latvia and Latvian language in the EU, language skills, language usage and linguistic environment in Latvia, use the official language in major public sociolinguistic areas (central and local government administration, education, mass media and services), the Latvian language and globalisation.

**Research summary set and edited by** Gunta Kļava

**Authors:** Pauls Balodis, Māris Baltiņš, Vineta Ernstsone, Valts Ernštreits, Gunta Kļava, Dite Liepa, Kristīne Motivāne, Inese Muhka, Jānis Oga, Evija Papule, Jānis Valdmanis, Anna Vulāne

**Scientific editor:** Dr. habil. philol. Ina Druviete

**Managing editors:** Gunta Kļava, Inita Vitola

**Reviewer:** Ilmārs Mežs

**Translated into English by** Anita Grauduma

**English language editors:** Antra Legzdiņa, Pauls Balodis

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# LANGUAGE SITUATION IN LATVIA: 2004–2010

## Research summary

“If a spiritually healthy person, being fully aware that once he will have to part with this world, is still taking care of his own health as long as it is possible; why should a nation deliberately plunge into depression, a nation whose life is as strong and indestructible as the lives of many other life forms, certainly in case this nation definitely demonstrates a healthy spirit, if it honours its own life and is not blindly and hastily selling or exchanging its real life for that of an alien shadow. The core and the kernel of a nation is its language.”

*Kārlis Mīlenbahs, 1881*



2012

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## Abbreviations

- ATLLCH – Association of Teachers of Latgalian Language, Literature and Cultural History
- BISS – Baltic Institute of Social Sciences
- CM – Cabinet of Ministers
- CEEPS – Centre for East European Policy Studies
- CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning
- CSB – Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
- DGI – Directorate-General for Interpretation
- EC – European Commission
- EFNIL – European Federation of National Institutions of Language
- EU – European Union
- ILFS – The International Liv Friends' Society
- IATE – Inter Active Terminology for Europe
- IE LAS – Institute of Economics, Latvian Academy of Sciences
- ILL UL – Institute of Latvian Language, University of Latvia
- IMCS UL – Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Latvia
- Language 2007 – BISS. Language: report, August–September 2007
- Language 2008 – BISS. Language: report, March–April 2008
- LCS – The Liv Culture Society
- LF – The Liv Foundation
- LLA – The Latvian Language Agency
- LLA Opinion poll 2009 – Data Serviss. Sociolinguistic Research of the Latvian language situation: survey of the research work. 2009
- LLA interviews 2009 – Fieldex. Sociolinguistic Research of the language situation: report of the research results. Riga, 2009
- LLASA – Latvian Language Acquisition State Agency (until 1 July 2009)
- LLC – Latvian Literature Centre
- LU – The Liv Union
- MES – Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia
- NCE – National Centre for Education
- NLL – National Library of Latvia
- OCMA – Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs
- SLA – State Language Agency (until 1 July 2009)
- SLA Opinion poll 2004 – Data Serviss. Problems of development and use of the Latvian language. Riga, 2004
- SLC – State Language Centre
- SSAMSI – Secretariat of the Special Assignment Minister for Social Integration (liquidated in 2009)
- TC LAS – Terminology Commission, Latvian Academy of Sciences
- TTC – Translation and Terminology Centre (until 1 July 2009)
- UN – The United Nations
- WFFL – The World Federation of Free Latvians

# Introduction

“The Latvian language is the state language in the Republic of Latvia and the language of the integration of society; it is the basis for the national identity and part of the varied cultural heritage of the world. That is why the state of Latvia is both responsible to the society of Latvia and the present and future generations of the world for preservation and development of the Latvian language. This is the competence and responsibility of the state of Latvia, since Latvia is the only country in the world which can assume responsibility for the preservation of the Latvian language.”

(Valsts valodas politikas pamatnostādnes 2005.–2014. gadam [Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005–2014]. Rīga, 2007, 21. lpp.)

Regular investigation of language situation is the only way to evaluate the results of the language policy and to plan its forthcoming tasks. When assessing the progress of implementation of the language policy (improvement of language skills, institutional support, strengthening of the official language in some important sociolinguistic functions, research, etc.), the study analyzes the problems of the provision of the position of Latvian language as the official language. The strong language competition, challenges of globalisation, linguistic attitudes and behaviour features of Latvian themselves, which have contributed to the non-compliance of language skills to their use, and other factors significantly impede the strengthening of the official language in all relevant areas of public life.

On request of the Latvian Language Agency (LLA) the opinion poll of the inhabitants and in-depth interviews with experts<sup>1</sup> were conducted, in order to clarify the dynamics of the language situation in Latvia in the period from 2004 up to 2010, based on the analysis of the results of the state language policy determined in the Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005–2014.<sup>2</sup>

This has been an essentially eventful period in Latvian politics and in the development of the language situation:

<sup>1</sup> Data Serviss. *Latvijas valodas situācijas sociolingvistiskā izpēte*: pārskats par pētījumu [Sociolinguistic research of the Latvian language situation: survey of the research work]. LVA. Rīga, 2009; Fieldex. *Valodas situācijas sociolingvistiskā izpēte*: pētījuma rezultātu ziņojums (dziļās intervijas) [Sociolinguistic research of the language situation: report of the research results (in-depth interviews)]. Rīga, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *Valsts valodas politikas pamatnostādnes 2005.–2014. gadam* [Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005–2014]. Rīga, 2007, 30. lpp.

- Since 1 May 2004, Latvia is a Member State of the European Union;
- Since 2004, the Latvian Language Agency is a member of the European Federation of National Institutions of Language (EFNIL)<sup>1</sup>;
- The number of higher educational establishments where one can learn Latvian as a foreign language has grown – there is a possibility to learn Latvian and also use it for research in 24 establishments of 13 world countries;
- Bilingual education has been introduced and unified education ensured in all schools of Latvia;
- Changes have taken place in the institutional provision of the state language policy. Thus, with a maximum decrease of institutional support to enactment of language policy, state language development and the control mechanism of the State Language Law is still provided for, and further interference in the system of state language policy may negatively affect the implementation of language policy in the country;
- Based on the State Language Law, several essential regulations and legal acts of the Cabinet of Ministers have been issued;
- The period from 2004 up to 2006 has seen the largest number of persons (51 672 in total) during a 15-year period having acquired Latvian citizenship through naturalisation<sup>2</sup>;
- An active language research and cultivation of the Latvian language has been carried out.

Although some negative trends in the language situation have been noticed in that period (for example, limited use of Latvian language in private business, reduction of books and brochures published in Latvian: from 4.4 million copies in 2004 to 3.2 million copies in 2009<sup>3</sup>, etc.), the overall dynamics of the language situation can be characterized as positive.

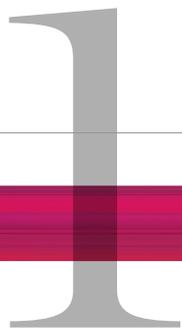
<sup>1</sup> The Federation unites organizations of the EU Member States and the countries of the European economical zone and its target is to achieve the competitiveness of all the official state languages, especially the small and medium ones.

<sup>2</sup> *Statistika: naturalizācija* [Statistics: naturalization]. Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (15.09.2010). Available at: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/statistika/Naturalizacija.html;jsessionid=886CA55BFDD407E0DB5162B3BAE89ABF>

<sup>3</sup> *Iedzīvotāji un sociālie procesi. Kultūra* [Population and Social Processes. Culture]. Central Statistical Bureau. (12.12.2010). Available at: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/dati/statistikas-datubazes-28270.html-0>.



**LANGUAGE  
POLICY  
IN LATVIA**



As the state enacted a complex of measures for preservation of functional grouping of spoken languages, for determination of collective and individual speakers' rights, for investigation and development of languages, language policy is important in any country.

After the renewal of independence of the Republic of Latvia, language policy has become a well-considered and motivated branch of home policy. Language policy in Latvia was developed on a strict basis of the sociolinguistic theory, bearing in mind the experience of many foreign countries. Experts from other countries have participated in its development and it has gained international approval.<sup>1</sup> Language policy in Latvia is closely connected with the social integration policy.

The fundamental principles of Latvian language policy, already since 1989 – also included in the Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005–2014 – are the following:

- the Latvian language is the state language in Latvia;
- the state guarantees the opportunity to preserve, develop and use in certain functions the languages of minorities of Latvia.

These basic principles comprise the idea on coexistence of hierarchy of languages with the priority of the state language.

The main directions of enactment of language policy are essential for successful realization of the targets and formulations of language policy, namely:

- 1) judicial (consolidation of the status of the official language in laws and other normative deeds),
- 2) pedagogical (teaching Latvian to Latvians and to minorities living in Latvia),
- 3) linguistic (scientific research, standardization of the Latvian language, publication of the sources of norms and informative literature).<sup>2</sup>

While carrying out the language policy in Latvia it is important to work with all the three directions. If any of these aspects is ignored and their activities are not coordinated, no positive result is to be expected in language policy.

In order to reach the targets of language policy in Latvia and to provide for a coordinated operation of its basic directions, on 2 March 2005, the Cabinet of

<sup>1</sup> Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View. Language, society, politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 169. lpp.; see also *Valsts valodas likums: vēsture un aktualitāte* [State Language Law: history and topicality]. Valsts valodas aģentūra. Rīga : Zinātne, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Druviete, I. *Latvijas valodas politika Eiropas Savienības kontekstā* [Latvian Language Policy in the context of the European Union]. Rīga, 1998, 35. lpp. Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View. Language, society, politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 115. lpp.

Ministers accepted the Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005–2014. These guidelines comprise all the three basic elements of the real state language status – language skill, usage of language and language attitudes.<sup>1</sup> At present we have to realize that to ensure a full-value state language status we need to avert the tendency of knowing but not using the state language. We should not allow violation of Latvian linguistic rights, though Latvians themselves are passive and too tolerant in the choice of communication language thus hindering public integration processes.

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<sup>1</sup> *Valsts valodas likums: vēsture un aktualitāte* [State Language Law: history and topicality]. Valsts valodas aģentūra. Rīga: Zinātne, 2008, 197. lpp.

2

**THE  
LATVIAN  
LANGUAGE  
IN THE  
EUROPEAN  
UNION**

Since 2004, the Latvian language is one of the official languages of the European Union whose multilingual character is always being stressed when speaking of its linguistic identity.<sup>1</sup>

There are 23 official languages in the European Union and more than 60 regional and minority languages, but the amount of spoken languages is still increasing due to ever growing migration processes. The target of the EU language policy is to protect the language diversity and to promote language skills.

Languages in the European Union are divided into the following hierarchic groups:

- 1) Official and working languages (23);
- 2) Language with a special status in programmes (Luxembourgish);
- 3) Regional or minority languages (more than 60);
- 4) Non-territorial languages (Yiddish, Romani language);
- 5) Diaspora and immigrant languages.<sup>2</sup>

The Latvian language is an official EU language. It also means the possibility to communicate with the EU institutions in Latvian (interpretation of the official sessions and meetings into Latvian, etc.).

To ensure that Latvian as the Latvian state language and an EU official language is capable of meeting all sociolinguistic functions, a unified and targeted state language policy is being created and implemented. One of its basic directions is the development and standardization of language, where the translation and term creation processes is of a special importance (presently at least 80% of the new words appear through the translations of fiction, official and business texts<sup>3</sup>). And it means that Latvia must prepare a sufficient amount of interpreters and translators and also be able to ensure a valuable and targeted

<sup>1</sup> Druviete, I. Mūsu valoda – Latvijas vai Eiropas Savienības identitātes daļa? [Our language – part of Latvian or EU identity?] *Lauku Avīze*, 2004, 11. okt., 10. lpp. In: Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View. Language, society, politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 157. lpp.

<sup>2</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture. *European languages*. 7 December 2010. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/languages-of-europe/index\\_lv.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/languages-of-europe/index_lv.htm); Druviete, I. Latvijas valodas politikas pamatnostādnes Eiropas Savienības kontekstā [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. *Letonikas pirmais kongress: plenārsēžu materiāli*. Rīga: Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmija, 2005, 19.–34. lpp. In: Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View. Language, society, politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 170. lpp.

<sup>3</sup> Druviete, I. Latvijas valodas politikas pamatnostādnes Eiropas Savienības kontekstā [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. *Letonikas pirmais kongress: plenārsēžu materiāli*. Rīga: Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmija, 2005, 19.–34. lpp. In: Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View. Language, society, politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 174. lpp.



process of term creation. The number of translated pages testify the growing volume of the translations. It has increased from 38 655 pages in 1953 to approximately 1.7 million pages in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

One of the essential aspects of the common EU language policy is promoting language skills of the inhabitants. Extended mobility within the borders of the EU, common market, migration flows and globalization – these are the reasons why the inhabitants daily face increasing language diversity. The EU has declared a specific aim for promoting multilingualism – the so-called Barcelona principle: every EU citizen should know his native tongue and at least two foreign languages (namely, multilingualism is being encouraged on an individual level).

Implementation of the mentioned Barcelona principle in the EU is not easy. It is connected with financial investments, complicated consolidation of public motivation and popularization of the idea. As concluded in the Eurobarometer surveys for 2006, the showings of the language skills of the EU citizens have improved and the attitude towards learning has become better, namely, knowledge of foreign languages is considered useful (83% of the respondents in 2005 compared with 77% in 2001 find that knowing foreign languages is useful).<sup>2</sup> Compared with the rest of the EU nations, the most active language learners are to be found in Sweden (32%), Latvia (28%) and Finland (28%), whereas those with the strongest intentions to improve their language skills reside in Latvia (39%), Slovakia (36%) and the Czech Republic (33%).<sup>3</sup>

The EU has faced several problems that influence the situation of its member states already now. Free movement of the labour force and changes caused by inner and outer migration in the language are the most essential challenges. The reality is that migration as a means of improvement of well-being in Europe encounters obstacles: differences in languages, culture, traditions, etc., which often serve as the basis of various conflicts. It has served as the grounds for the conclusion that successful immigration is based of integration but the main clue to it is good command of the language spoken in the host country.<sup>4</sup>

The common tendencies of the EU member states are indicative of radicalization risks and other challenges caused by the immigration process and, as

<sup>1</sup> *Studies on translation and multilingualism. The size of the language industry in the EU.* European Commission Directorate-General for Translation, 1/2009, p. 36; *Translation tools and workflow.* European Commission. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Europeans and their Languages. Special Eurobarometer 243.* European Commission, 2006, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Migrācijas ietekme uz valodas vidi Latvijā* [The influence of migration upon the language environment in Latvia]. R. Apinis, M. Baltiņš, Dz. Hirša u.c. Latviešu valodas aģentūra. Rīga: Zinātne, 2009, 32. lpp.



the result, more and more Western European countries have started implementing demands of language skills for the immigrants, thus willing to advance the integration process.

The role of Latvian has increased since the retrieval of independence. The existence of an independent state and EU membership offers the Latvian language full-scale functioning as of a modern up-to-date language. But the enactment of this possibility demands state investments in all spheres of realization of the language policy: juridical – determining the state language policy, its direction, goals, and implementation in laws and normative deeds; pedagogical – ensuring the acquisition of Latvian on all levels of expertise; and linguistic – providing scientific research, standardization and rating, as well as purposeful and systematic development of the Latvian language.

3

**LANGUAGES  
IN LATVIA:  
LANGUAGE  
PROFICIENCY,  
USAGE AND  
LINGUISTIC  
ENVIRONMENT**

Modern world tendencies of globalization and the rapid development of information society have strongly influenced the position of the Latvian language. The explicit competition of languages, migration-caused changes in the language, the linguistic attitude and behavioural peculiarities of Latvians impede strengthening of the state language position in all spheres of life. The above factors mark a dangerous tendency: the presently high state language skills in Latvia do not conform to the use of the state language. And that, in its turn, promotes an increase in the sociolinguistic function of Russian and the linguistic self-sufficiency of the Russian speaking community, burdening the integration process enacted on the basis of the Latvian language.

### **Situation of the Latvian language from the ethno-demographic viewpoint**

One of the factors that essentially influence the language situation is the number of its users, which is very significant for securing language competitiveness. Among the approximately 7000 world languages, Latvian is in the position between the 150th and 200th, according to the number of speakers.<sup>1</sup> The number of speakers, the quality of the Latvian language and the status of the state language can provide stable language positions though the modern globalization processes and the language competition together with the negative indications of the demographic situation in Latvia create risks for sustainability of Latvian which can be lessened by conscious language policy.<sup>2</sup>

Evaluating the language situation in Latvia the decreasing growth of population and changes in the national composition of inhabitants should be taken into consideration, namely, the ethno-demographical and linguistic structure, as well as emigration and immigration problems that have become topical after Latvia entered the European Union in 2004.

<sup>1</sup> Druviete, I. Aiz kokiem vajag saredzēt mežu [It is necessary to see the forest behind the trees]. *Karogs. Literatūras mēnešraksts*, 2009, Nr. 10, 177.–184. lpp. In: Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View. Language, society, politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 232. lpp.

<sup>2</sup> Druviete, I. Latviešu valoda kā valsts valoda: simbols, saziņas līdzeklis vai valstiskuma pamats? [Latvian as the state language: symbol, means of communication or basis of statehood?] In: *Latvija un latviskais. Nācija un valsts idejās, tēlos un simbolos*. Rīga: Zinātne, 2010, 149. lpp.

On January 2004, there were 2 million 319 thousand inhabitants in Latvia but on 1 January 2010, the population size had decreased to 2 million 248 thousand people. Changes in the national composition are displayed by comparison of the structure of inhabitants in 2004 and in 2010 (Fig. 1).

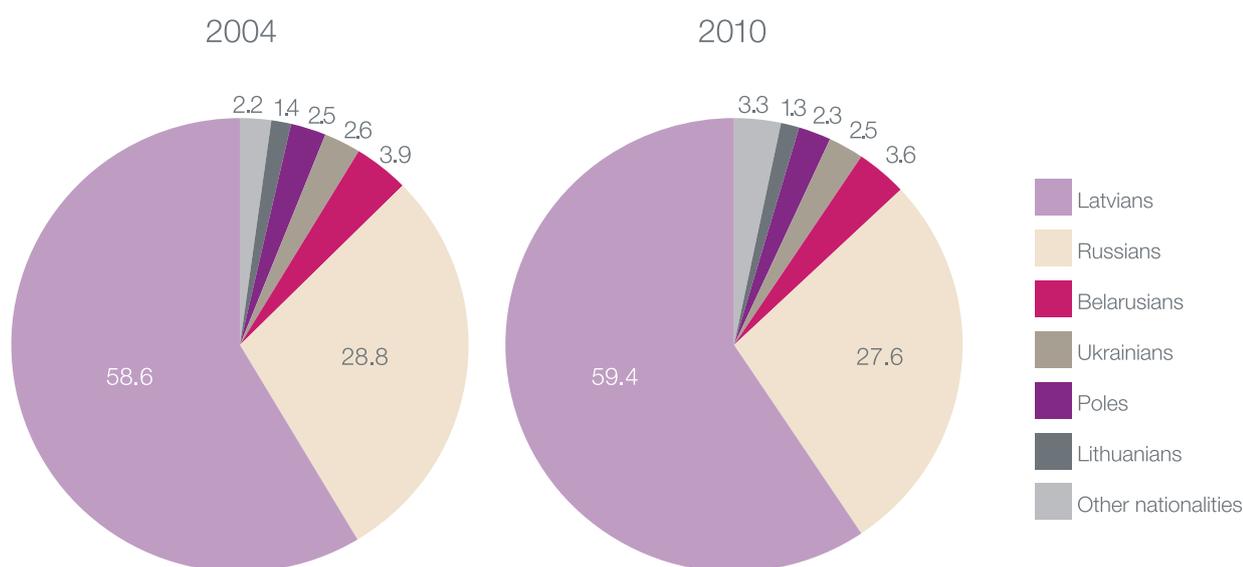


Fig. 1. National composition of the inhabitants of Latvia at the beginning of 2004 and 2010 (%).  
Data: Centrālās statistikas pārvalde. Statistikas datubāzes: Iedzīvotāji: skaits un tā izmaiņas.  
Available at: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/dati/statistikas-datubazes-28270.html-0>

The amount of Latvians in their homeland is decreasing systematically although the proportion of Latvians in Latvia is slightly growing with each year (these are the lowest relative showings of the indigenous population). According to the 1989 census, there were 1.39 million Latvians, in 2000 – 1.37 million but in 2007 – only 1.35 million. Consequently, the number of Latvians has decreased by more than 52 thousand persons.<sup>1</sup>

Some important aspects are to be observed for evaluation of the situation of the Latvian language in the context of demographical data:

- on the one hand, the proportion of Latvians in Latvia is increasingly growing, although to a minimum extent, which could be regarded as a positive tendency of the expansion of the use of the Latvian language;

<sup>1</sup> Zvidriņš, P. Paudžu nomaiņa un migrācija Latvijā [Generation change and migration in Latvia]. In: *Politikas gadagrāmata. Latvija 2007*. Stratēģiskās analīzes komisija. Rīga: Zinātne, 2008, 61. lpp.

- on the other hand, the number of Latvians in their motherland is still systematically decreasing (in the estimated period – by 24 thousand or almost 2% of the total number). Thus we cannot state that the Latvian language environment is expanding and its threats reducing;
- negative birth-rates and increasing emigration are the reasons for a decreasing in the number of Latvian speakers and for changes in language environment causing augmentation of the role of the competitor languages (Russian and English);
- continuously growing emigration and improvement of the economical well-being of the state in the nearest future will also produce growing immigration thus creating new challenges for the language situation in Latvia considering the former immigration tendencies when the majority of newcomers had arrived from the SU countries and the Russian language proficiency was one of the most essential motivations for choosing Latvia as their host country.

### Language proficiency of the inhabitants of Latvia

Latvian language proficiency of foreigners is still gradually improving. In the survey of the LLA for 2009 the younger respondents whose native tongue is Russian more often acknowledged good skills of Latvian than the older respondents, namely, young Russian-speaking people in the group between 17 and 25 years of age had better knowledge of Latvian: 64% had good command, 31% moderate level, and 5% had not ranked their skills. A larger number of people possessing skills of Latvian is found in the regions with suitable language environment (namely, Vidzeme and Kurzeme where there are less Russian speakers). The survey also shows that people with a higher income have better knowledge of the Latvian language.

The study also shows that the number of Russian speakers among Latvians is decreasing with each year. In 2004, 73% of the respondents estimated their skills as good, but in 2008 the proportion was 69%. Knowledge of the Russian language is poor in the category of young people (between 15 and 34 years of age) – 54% have good command of Russian, 38% low and 8% have no knowledge.

According to the LLA survey of 2009, the older respondents whose native tongue is Latvian have better skills of Russian. Latvian younger generation between 17 and 25 years of age have a lower level of this knowledge (Fig. 2). There is a lower self-appraisal of Russian language proficiency among rural population, namely, the inhabitants of Kurzeme and Vidzeme, i.e., areas with a high proportion of Latvians.

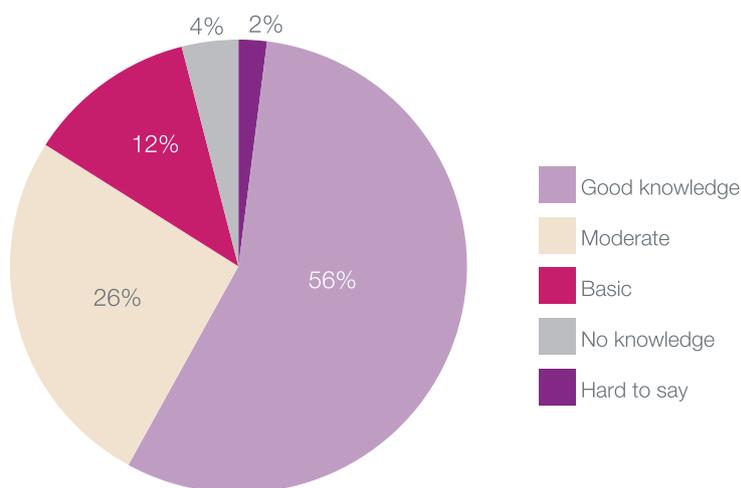


Fig. 2. Russian language proficiency of Latvian youths (between 17 and 25 years of age) (LLA 2009 survey)

In general the respondents with the native tongue of Latvian, in the 2009 survey, estimate their Russian language skills much higher than the ones with Russian as their native tongue estimate their knowledge of Latvian (Fig. 2 and 3). It follows that the proportion of Latvian and Russian speakers in Latvia is asymmetrical – the proportion of Latvian speakers (92%) in Latvia is still lower than that of the Russian speakers (98%). Moreover, 1% of the respondents whose native tongue is Latvian do not know Russian while 8% Russian speakers do not know the official language.

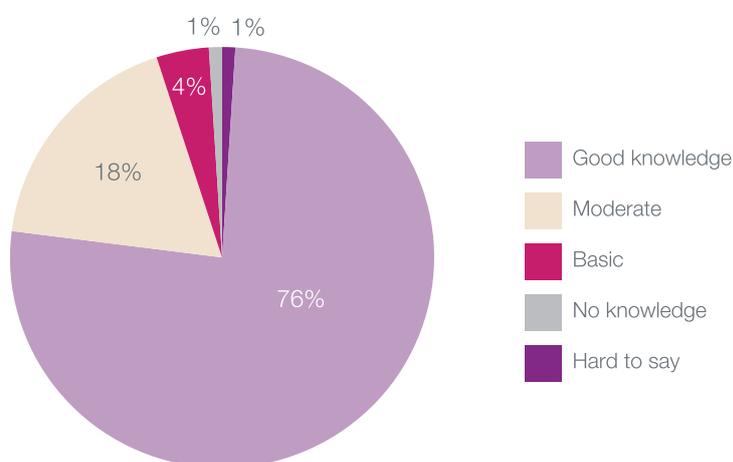


Fig. 3. Russian language proficiency of the respondents whose native tongue is Latvian (LLA 2009 survey)

As the data of the 2009 LLA survey show, 76% of Latvians have a good command of Russian but 48% of foreigners – a good command of Latvian (Fig. 4).

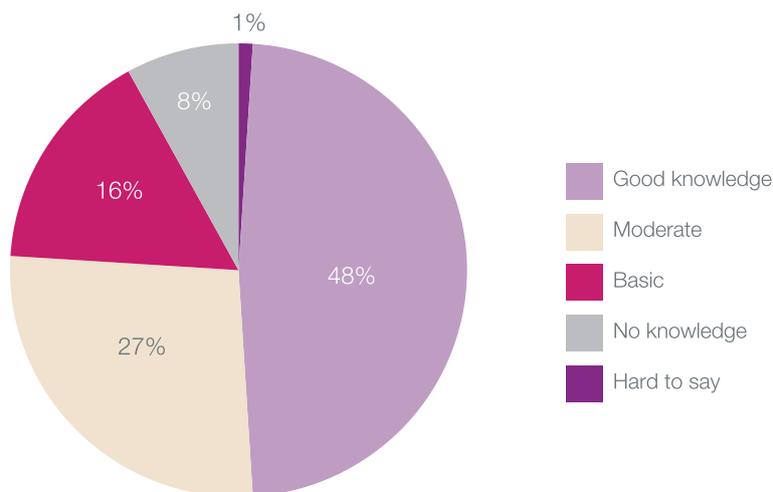


Fig. 4. Latvian language proficiency of the respondents whose native tongue is Russian (LLA 2009 survey)

From the view-point of language use positive tendencies can be seen in the age group between 17 and 25 years where the dissymmetry is different as 64% of Russian-speaking youths know the Latvian language well (Fig. 5) and 56% of Latvian youths know the Russian language well (Fig. 2). It should be stressed as an especially positive indication that no one of the polled Russian-speaking youth had chosen the responses “Basic knowledge” or “No knowledge”, namely we may consider that almost all Russian-speaking youths at the age between 17 and 25 years more or less know the official language.

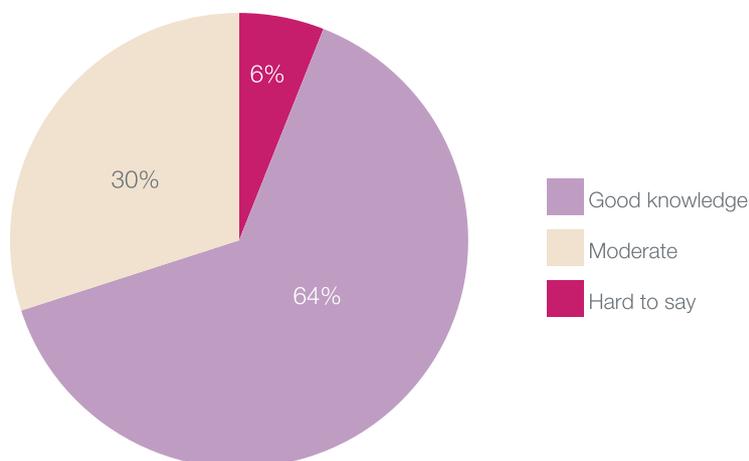


Fig. 5. Latvian language proficiency of the Russian-speaking youths (from 17 up to 25 years) (LLA 2009 survey)

## Foreign language skills

English, Russian, German and French are the most popular foreign languages taught in comprehensive schools of Latvia. As testified by the data of the Ministry of Education and Science, in the school-year 2008/2009, 82.8% of the pupils were learning English, 1.6% French, 35.3% Russian and 12.9% German. In the greatest part of EU states almost 90% of schoolchildren learn English, approximately 40% – German, 30% – French and less than 20% – Spanish. In Latvia, like in the rest of the Baltic States, the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular foreign language is Russian (in schools practising the minority programmes Russian is taught as the native language) but in the rest of the EU states it is taught very little or not at all.<sup>1</sup>

The results of the 2008 LLA survey demonstrate that the self-appraisal of the English language skills for both groups, Latvians and Russian-speakers<sup>2</sup>, is similar: 14% respondents with Latvian native tongue and 16% of Russian have a good command of English, 19% of Latvian-speakers and 21% of Russian-speakers – moderate knowledge but 23% of Latvian-speakers and 16% of Russian-speakers have basic knowledge of English (Figs. 6 and 7).

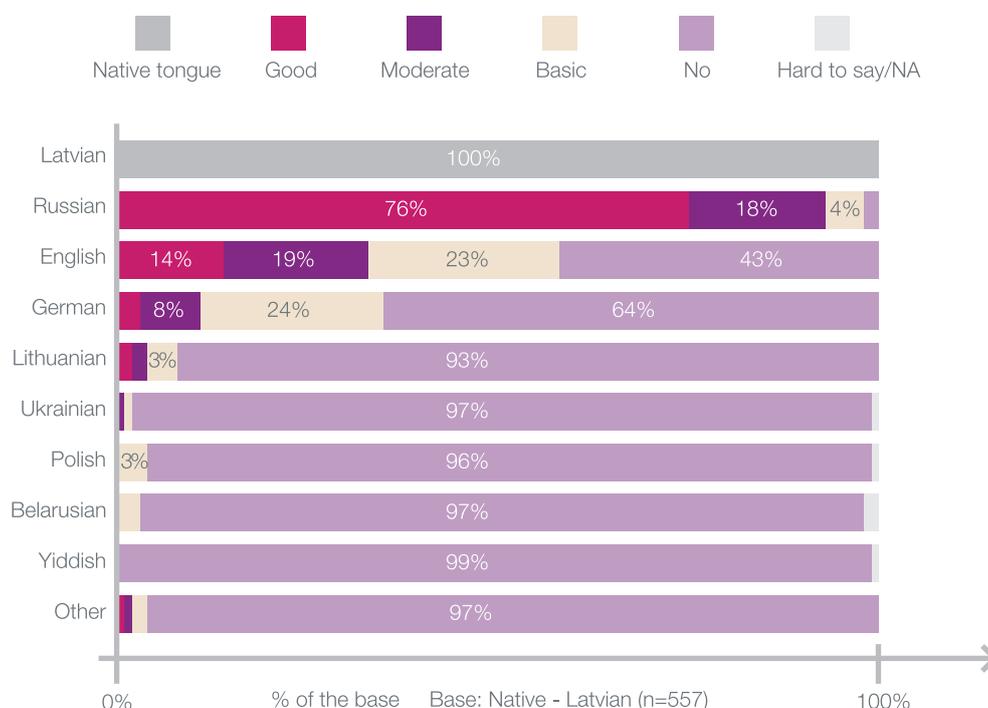


Fig. 6. Language skills of the inhabitants of Latvia whose native tongue is Latvian (LLA 2009 survey)

<sup>1</sup> *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe. 2008 Edition.* Eurydice Network, Brussels, 2008, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Participants of the LLA 2009 survey representing different ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Poles, Belarusians, Jews, etc.) have mentioned Russian as their native tongue.

# 3

## LANGUAGES IN LATVIA: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, USAGE AND LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

Irrespective of the native tongue better skills of English are marked by the inhabitants of Riga, younger respondents and also by the respondents with a higher level of education and income. We find more people with German language skills among those with Latvian native tongue than among the Russian-speaking inhabitants.

Analyzing the situation of language teaching at schools in the Baltic States we come to the conclusion that there is a greater percentage of schoolchildren learning German and French in Estonia and Lithuania while in Latvia the proportion of English learners is a little bigger.<sup>1</sup>

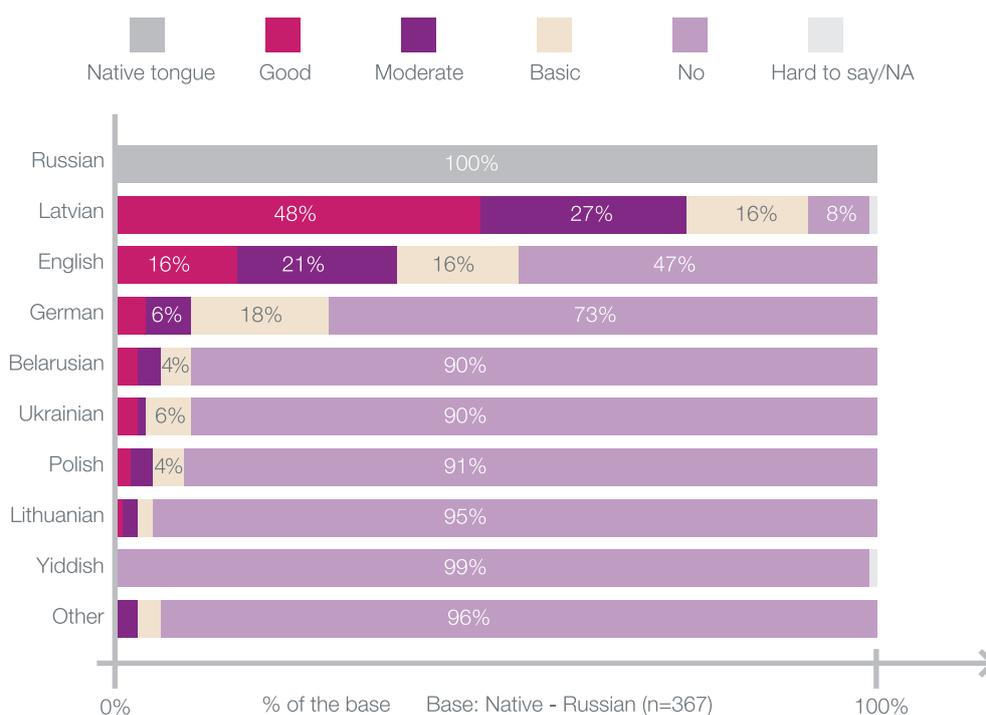


Fig. 7. Language skills of the inhabitants of Latvia whose native tongue is Russian (LLA 2009 survey)

The answers of the respondents with Latvian native tongue to the question of the LLA 2009 survey, what languages children should learn at school, are traditional: English, Russian, German and more seldom – French (Fig. 8). The majority of respondents (92%) mark the necessity to teach English at schools, less people (70%) acknowledge the necessity of Russian. It is typical that people

<sup>1</sup> Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe. 2008 Edition. Eurydice network, Brussels, 2008, p. 74.

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with a higher level of education more often mark the necessity to teach English, German and French at schools but less frequently – Russian. Acquisition of English is more important for younger respondents than for older people.

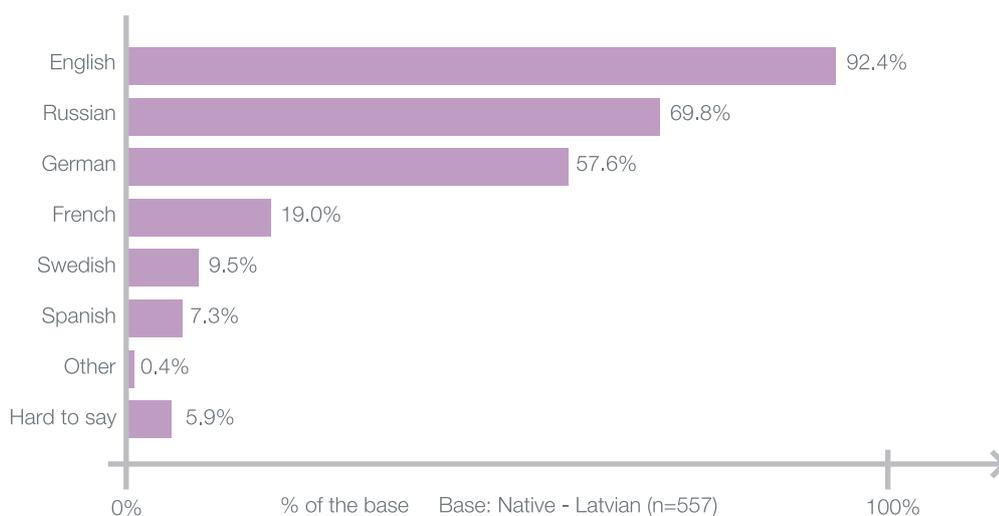


Fig. 8. Opinion of the respondents about the foreign languages to be taught (compulsory or optional) at schools (LLA 2009 survey)

Attention should be paid to the fact that during the LLA survey of 2009, 81% of the respondents with Russian as their native tongue gave an affirmative answer to the question about the need to know Latvian (Fig. 9) and only 6% gave a negative answer. In the LLA 2009 survey such answers are characteristic of the respondents living in the territories where the number of Latvians is larger (countryside, Kurzeme, Zemgale).

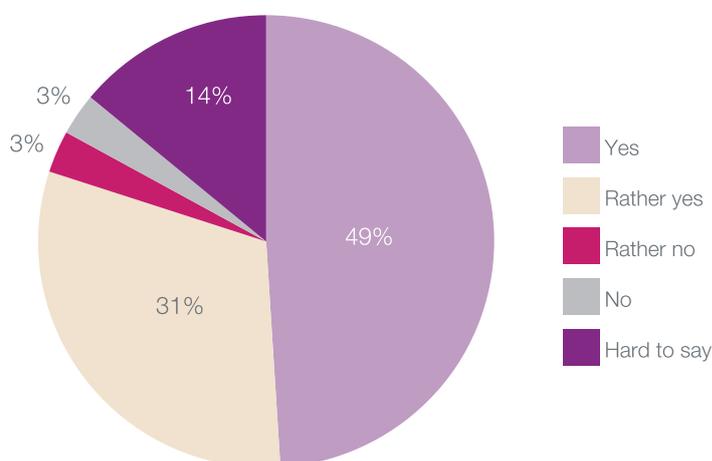


Fig. 9. Answers of the Russian-speaking respondents to the question "Should the residents of Latvia know the Latvian language?" (LLA survey 2009)

The data of LLA 2009 survey testify that people with insufficient language proficiency presently encounter communication difficulties which increase alongside the growth of the level of officialization of communication. As the number of those who do not understand the Latvian language at all has decreased and is quite small today (according to data of LLA survey – 8%), using quantitative surveys this group of Russian-speakers at a representative level is not accessible. Detailed investigation of this group demands qualitative research methods. The majority of respondents who have pointed that they do not know Latvian feel certain difficulties caused by this inability – most often in communication with state and local government institutions (Fig. 10).

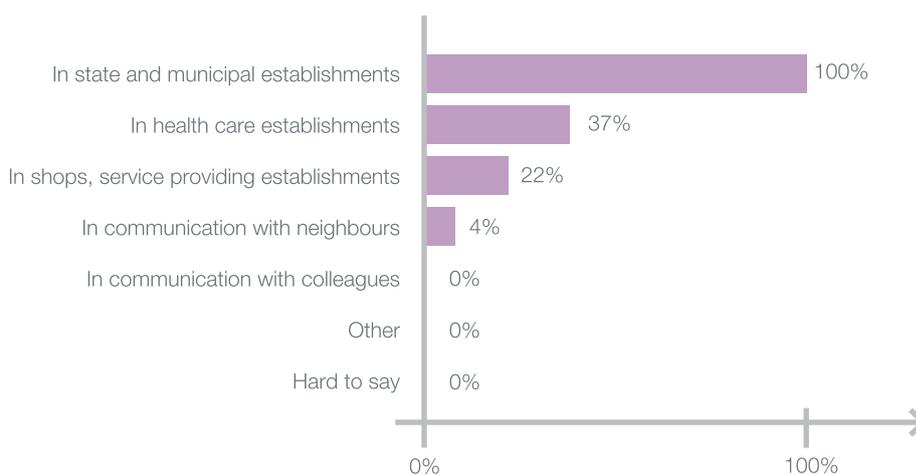


Fig. 10. Answers of the Russian-speaking respondents who do not know Latvian to the question “In which spheres do you encounter difficulties caused by the inability to speak Latvian?” (LLA 2009 survey)

While the formal nature of communication is diminishing the communication difficulties for those who do not know Latvian are lessening as well. A great part of Latvians and representatives of minorities still know the Russian language and use it in communication with Russian speakers and the representatives of other minorities. Thus the self-sufficiency of Russian is still strengthening in various sociolinguistic fields and hindering the consolidation of the state language in Latvia.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poriņa, V. *Valsts valoda daudzvalodīgajā sabiedrībā: individuālais un sociālais bilingvisms Latvijā* [The state language in multilingual society: individual and social bilingualism of Latvia]. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 2009, 167. lpp.

While clarifying the awareness of the Russian-speaking respondents of the state language proficiency level demanded for the execution of professional duties, the majority of respondents of the LLA 2009 survey affirm that they know what level is needed for their profession (Fig. 11). Young and middle-aged (from 36 up to 45 years) respondents, as well as respondents with a higher level of education and income, are better informed.

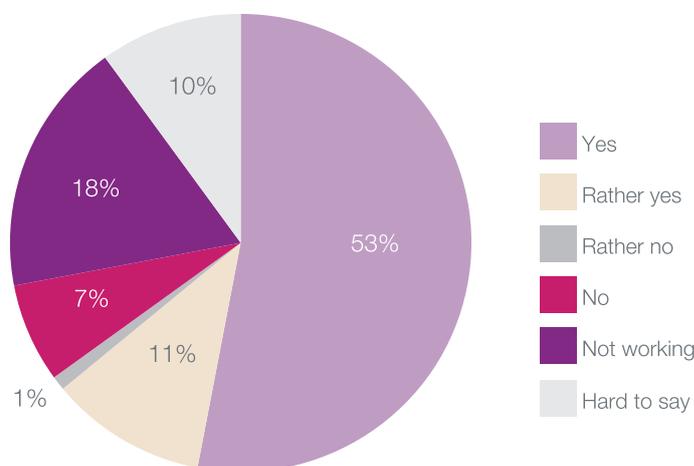


Fig. 11. Awareness of the Russian-speaking respondents of the Latvian language proficiency level needed for the execution of professional duties (LLA 2009 survey)

Improvement of the state language skills of the representatives of minorities is an essential achievement of the language policy of Latvia, but in future more attention should be paid to the increase of the state language use and consolidation of the status of the state language.

### Language attitudes and linguistic behaviour of the inhabitants of Latvia

To understand the linguistic behaviour of the collective language body it is important to analyze linguistic attitudes. Language attitudes are a complex of subjective factors of various ethnic and social groups or individuals – peculiarities of language perception, attitude towards different languages and mechanisms regulating the language situation.<sup>1</sup> The concept *language attitudes*

<sup>1</sup> *Valodniecības pamattermiņu skaidrojošā vārdnīca* [Explanatory dictionary of the key terms of linguistics]. Rīga: LU LVI, 2007, 219. lpp.

comprises several elements: attitude to one's own language and other languages rooted in the historical experience, subjective ideas or stereotypes of the nations, ethnic mentality, the given linguistic environment and situation, namely, these attitudes have a social origin that may have an essential impact on the behaviour and sustainability of language.<sup>1</sup>

One can observe that the factor of nationality and native language markedly influences the attitude towards the state language proficiency, the necessity of language acquisition and its use and it comes to light not only in the population polls but also through the answers of the experts during the LLA 2009 interviews.

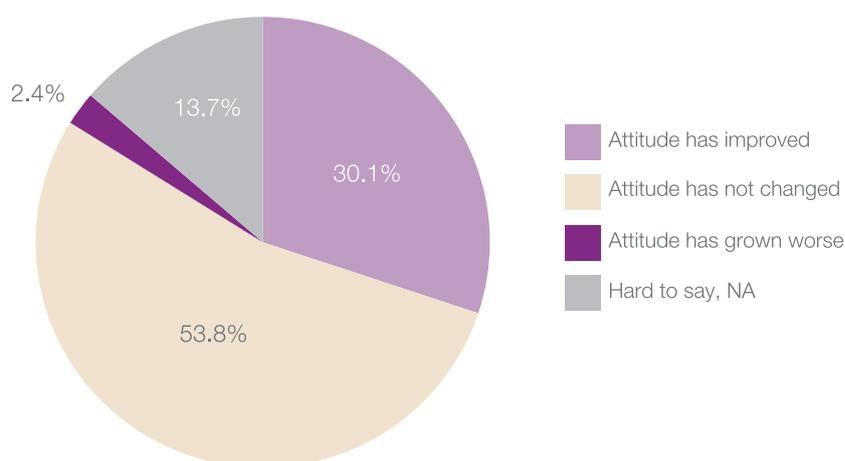
According to the data of the year 2000 population census, 73% Belarussians, 68% Ukrainians, 58% Poles and 79% Jews consider Russian as their native tongue.<sup>2</sup> For comparison purpose: results of the study "Language 2008" testify that for 97% of the polled Latvians and 99% of Russians ethnic belonging and native language coincide. The situation with the representatives of minorities is different: 14% of them, i.e. respondents who are neither Latvians nor Russians, have marked that their native tongue is Latvian, 43.6% – Russian, but 42.6% named another language (Language 2008). Since the turn of the century, awareness of the native language among the representatives of minorities is changing – the number of respondents who consider Russian as their native tongue is decreasing but the number of those who consider another language as their native tongue is growing (Language 2008).

The ethnopolitical context, political discussions and implemented activities play a significant role in the formation of attitude towards the state language. Thus, for example, in 2004, when the minority education reform encountered a severe opposition, discussions about the targets and means of the reform were extremely hot, the attitude of non-Latvians towards use of Latvian had become sharply negative, as seen from the press publications of that period. But with the gradual introduction of the reform (reaching a compromise about the proportions of languages of instruction in secondary schools, providing preparation of tutorials and guidance manuals, organizing different courses of professional perfection and the Latvian language for teachers, as well as other supportive activities) it was no longer received as a threat and the attitude towards the use of Latvian in every-day life became more favourable (Language 2008).

<sup>1</sup> Trudgill, P. *Introducing Language and Society*. Penguin English, 1992, p. 44; Druviete, I. *Latvijas valodas politika Eiropas Savienības kontekstā* [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. Rīga, 1998, 100. lpp.

<sup>2</sup> Mežs, I. *Latviešu valoda statistikas spoguļi* [Latvian language as reflected in statistics]. Rīga: Karšu izdevniecība Jāņa sēta, 2004, 16. lpp.

The state language has been stabilized in the formal environment where its use is determined by the law but in the situations when the choice of language depends upon the individuals themselves preference is given to the native tongue. This gives rise to the idea that the language policy is not so successful in the context of public integration, since the attitude of minorities towards the state language is more instrumental in regard of its usefulness but concerning the integrative capabilities of language – i.e., to promote understanding and free communication – today this is a considerably weaker stimulus for the acquisition and use of the Latvian language (Language 2008).



Base: Native tongue - Russian; good knowledge of Latvian, older than 35 years of age (n=88)

Fig. 12. Answers of the respondents to the question “How has your attitude towards the Latvian language changed during the years of independence of Latvia?” (LLA survey 2009)

Analyzing the change of the role of Latvian during the last five to ten years experts of the LLA 2009 survey express different opinions – one part of them consider that it has grown, the other – that it has decreased and another part that the role of the official language has not essentially changed. But almost all of the interviewed have stated that this is an important period for the development of the state in general because several crucial questions influencing the status and role of the official language are to be solved.

Among the main achievements of the former development of the Latvian language, experts of the LLA interviews 2009 name, firstly, the adoption of the Official Language Law and the reform of the minority education content, and secondly, the consequential increase of everyday use of the Latvian language by

the minorities. The development of the role of Latvian in education is considered as particularly essential.

Those experts who consider that the role of Latvian has increased most often refer to:

- consolidation of the legal status of the language,
- acquisition of the status of the EU official language,
- introduction of bilingual education,
- education policy in general, providing acquisition and use of the Latvian language for the minority target groups and encouraging comparatively positive attitude towards the state language and its use.

The LLA survey and interviews of 2009 testify earlier observations that up to the present time the *acquisition* of language has been facilitated mainly by the administrative system, i.e., legislation and activities of education policy closely connected with the activities of the official language policy and determined by the documents planning the state language policy. However, in the linguistic situation of Latvia completion of language proficiency as the only activity of the implementation of language policy cannot ensure full value *use* of the Latvian language in the society.

In the study “Language 2008” respondents representing the minorities state that they use Latvian if they are addressed in Latvian and in case the companion does not speak Russian. This fact proves that Latvians can facilitate the distribution of the Latvian language intensifying the use of Latvian in conversations with the Russian speakers. Approximately half (49%) of the representatives of minorities speak Latvian in state establishments, 40% speak Latvian when surrounded mainly by Latvians. 27% of them use Latvian also if there is a Latvian present among other persons but 24% speak Latvian for practice. If to compare the data of 2008 with the indications of the turn of the century, we see that the frequency of use of the Latvian language has increased in all earlier described situations.

The respondents of the study of the State Language Agency, “Linguistic attitude and language use of Latvian speaking inhabitants of Latvia”, most often mention that the ever growing need to use Latvian is the factor that facilitates the state language use, and it is marked by half of the respondents (Fig. 13). Quite often other factors are mentioned like: the Official Language Law, the Latvian language testing for acquisition of citizenship, the state language proficiency testing. Not so frequently they mention the Education Law (see further the section “Role of education”) and also the extensive possibilities to learn Latvian.

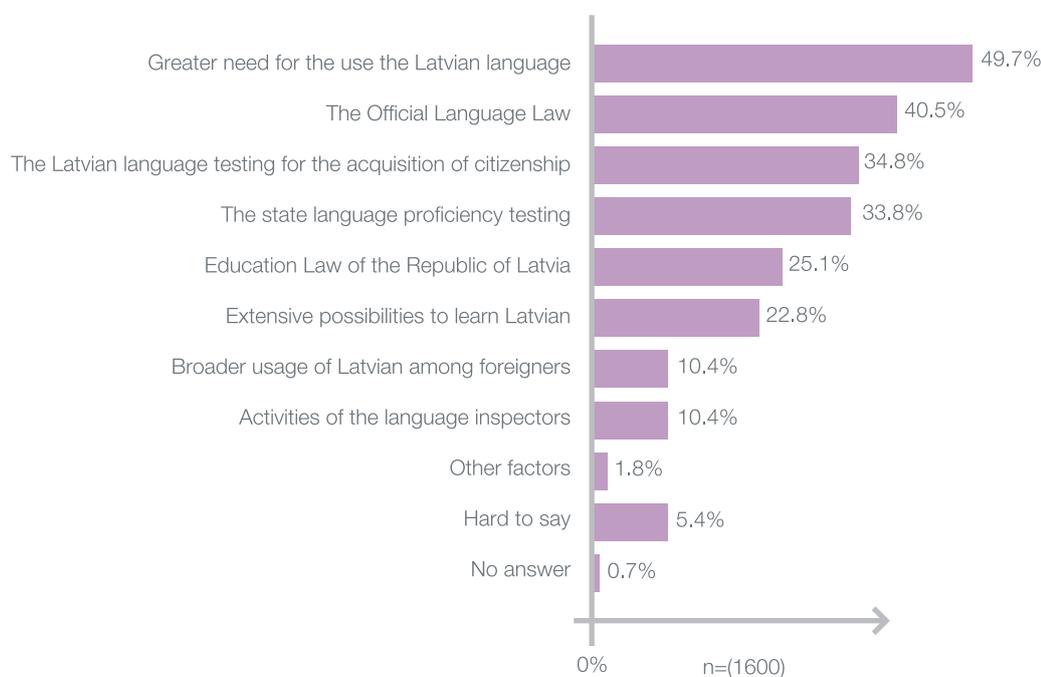
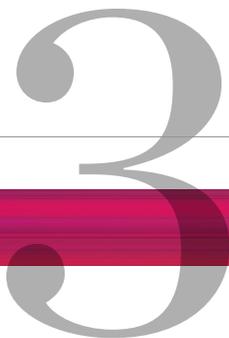


Fig. 13. Factors facilitating the use of the Latvian language as marked by the respondents (LLA survey 2004)

In 2009, the Latvian language testing for the acquisition of citizenship, the status of Latvian as of the sole official language, the official records management in the state language, etc., are still mentioned as the essential factors that ensure gradual increase of the role of the Latvian language. In the LLA survey 2009 Latvians unequivocally support further use of these norms and the increase of the role of Latvian, and there are no differences between generations.

### Linguistic environment: language use and dynamics of the use of Latvian

The economical necessity of the Latvian language skills and the aspect of language use is a significant indicator reflecting the real language hierarchy and its dynamics in Latvia. As testified by the data of the LLA survey 2009 (Fig. 14) the use of the Latvian language in 2009 if to in certain spheres has slightly increased, in comparison to 2004, according to Latvian respondents.



# LANGUAGES IN LATVIA: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, USAGE AND LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

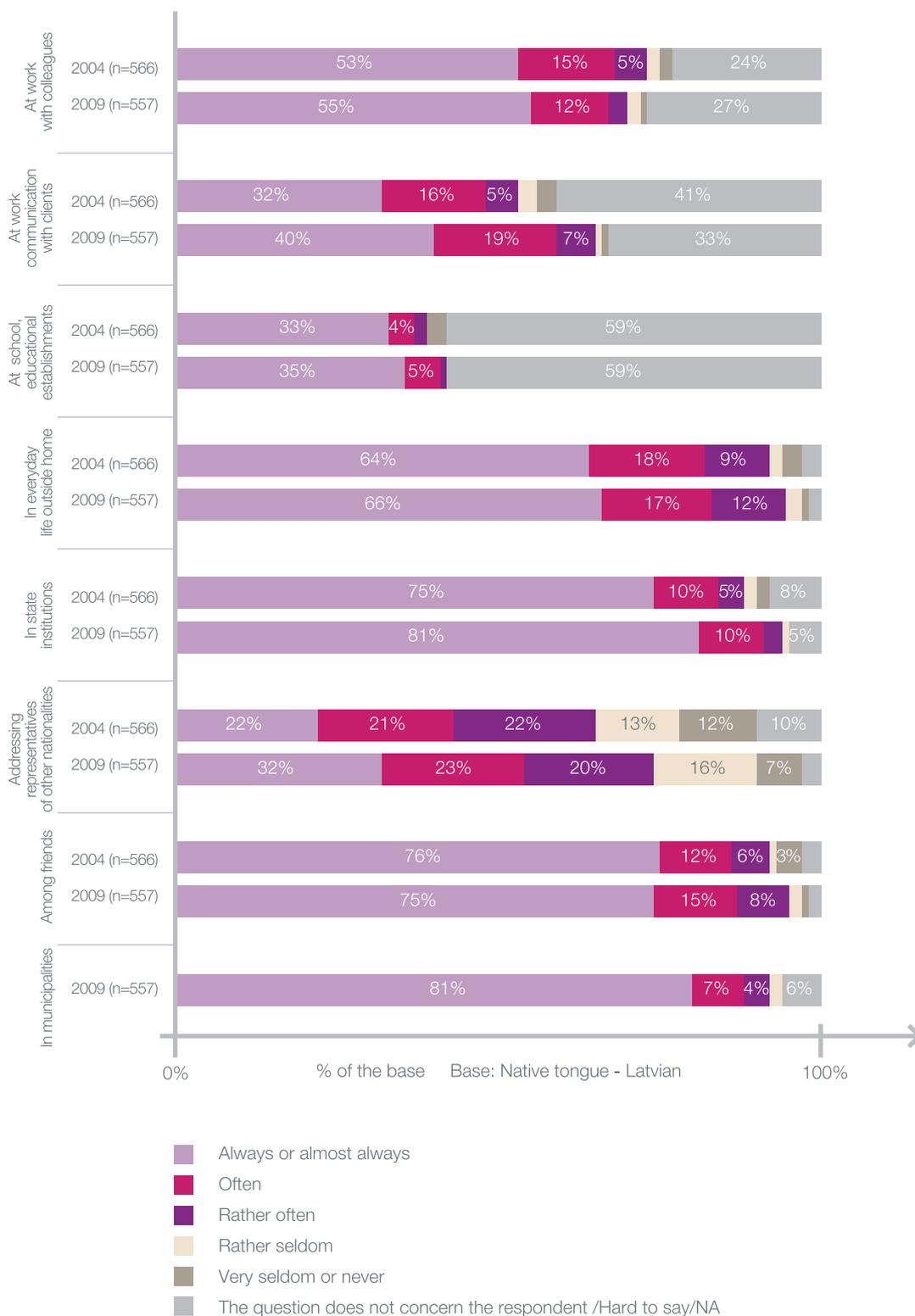


Fig. 14. Answers of the respondents to the question “How often you use Latvian in the given situations?” (LLA survey 2009)

Analysis of the data of LLA 2009 survey allows forecasting that in case the proportion of Russians having good knowledge of the Latvian language is increasing as the result of natural movement of the population, but the proportion of Latvians who have a good knowledge of Russian is decreasing; in future we may occur in the situation when the proportion of Russians having good knowledge of the Latvian language is exceeding the number of Latvians having good knowledge of Russian. That would automatically mean that people of Russian nationality have a higher competitiveness in labour market due to their language skills (this process has already started in the group of youth). It should be mentioned that the conclusion of the year 2005 study “The influence of language skills upon the quality of life of the economically active population” is that “it will be difficult for economically active people from Latvian rural areas to integrate in metropolitan labour market where the Russian language skills are still needed.”<sup>1</sup>

Latvian language skills are obligatory for all economically active inhabitants, namely, the priority of the official language in all spheres in the territory of Latvia (for both the private and the public service providers) is axiomatic. In the recent years, we can see a tendency to demand mandatory Russian skills, especially in the private sector (usually also in enterprises having no connections with Russian partners that might serve as an explanation for the demand) and it should be treated as a violation of the linguistic rights of Latvians and of the inhabitants with other foreign language skills.<sup>2</sup>

The Latvian language use encounters its biggest problems in public spheres, like shops, social events, etc. Situations when Latvians do not get answers to their questions in Latvian (Fig. 15) in state, municipal, medical care and educational establishments are rare and can be observed only in Latgale and Riga. These situations can be seen more often in public events, transport and trade (in Riga and in Latgale, not so often elsewhere in Latvia).

<sup>1</sup> Data Serviss. *Valodu prasmes ietekme uz ekonomiski aktīvo iedzīvotāju dzīves kvalitāti: sociolingvistiskā pētījuma kopsavilkums* [The influence of language skills upon the quality of life of the economically active inhabitants: summary of a sociolinguistic study]. VVA. Rīga, 2006, 11. lpp.

<sup>2</sup> See also Druviete, I. *Skatījums. Valoda, sabiedrība, politika* [View: Language, Society, Politics]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010, 234. lpp.; Poriņa, V. *Valsts valoda daudzvalodīgajā sabiedrībā: individuālais un sociālais bilingvisms Latvijā* [The state language in multilingual society: individual and social bilingualism of Latvia]. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 2009, 75.–85. lpp.

# 3

## LANGUAGES IN LATVIA: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, USAGE AND LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

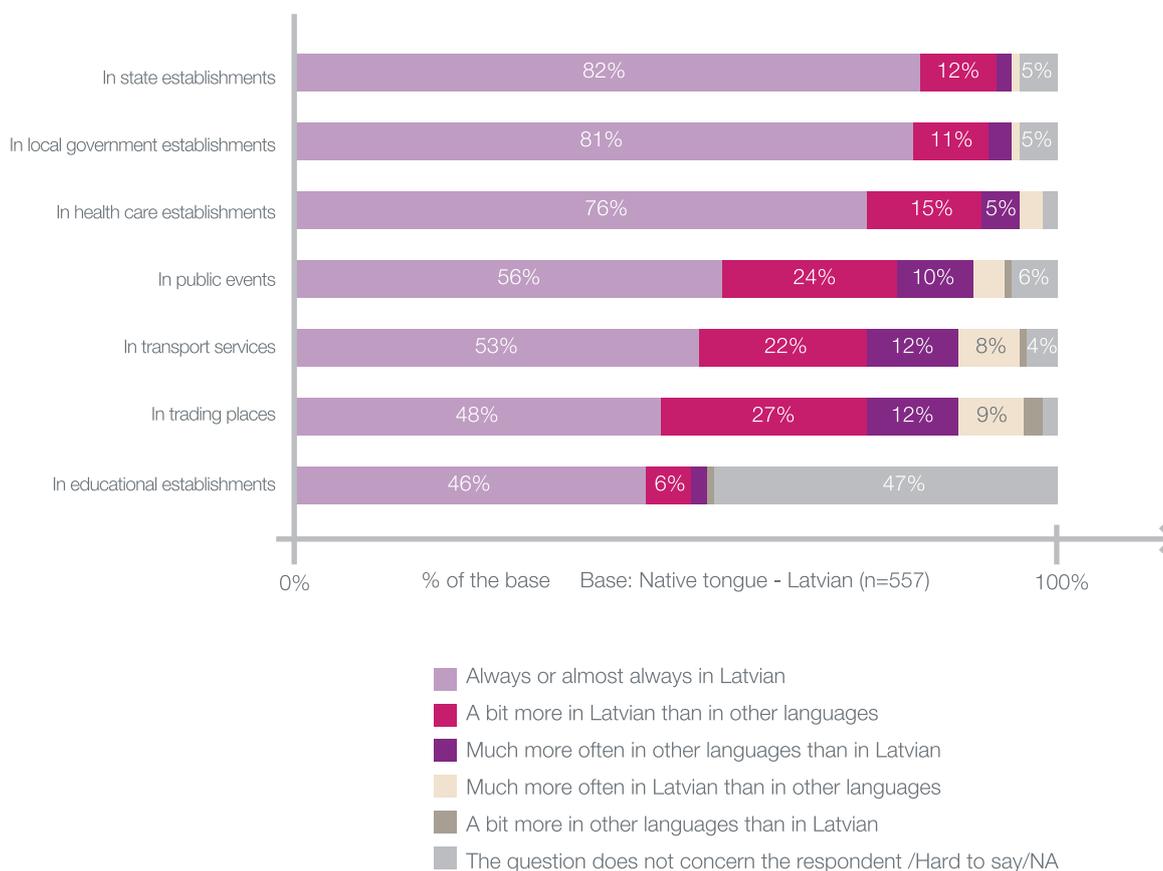


Fig. 15. Answers of the respondents to the question “In what language you get answers to your question or request in Latvian?” (LLA survey 2009)

In 2004 Latvian respondents pointed out increasing frequency of Latvian use in comparison with 1998 and 1999 but in 2009 they much more often recognize that there are no changes if to compare with years 2003 and 2004 (Fig. 16). Stabilization of the situation does not mean that Latvian enjoys all the full-value priorities of the official language. We can still encounter the competition of languages and the economical values that prevail over ethical values of our modern pragmatic world, and we also have to solve the problems caused to the language situation during the occupation years.

The data of the SLA study in 2005 testify “that in daily communication there is an obliging attitude towards those who do not know the language and the people who have better language skills usually align with the capabilities of the people who do not know Latvian or Russian. There is an opinion that this

alignment makes communication easier and is timesaving.”<sup>1</sup> In the linguistic space of Latvia Latvians are usually those who adapt themselves to Russian-speaking interlocutors and today this tendency is one of the topical problems of the enlargement of the Latvian language use.

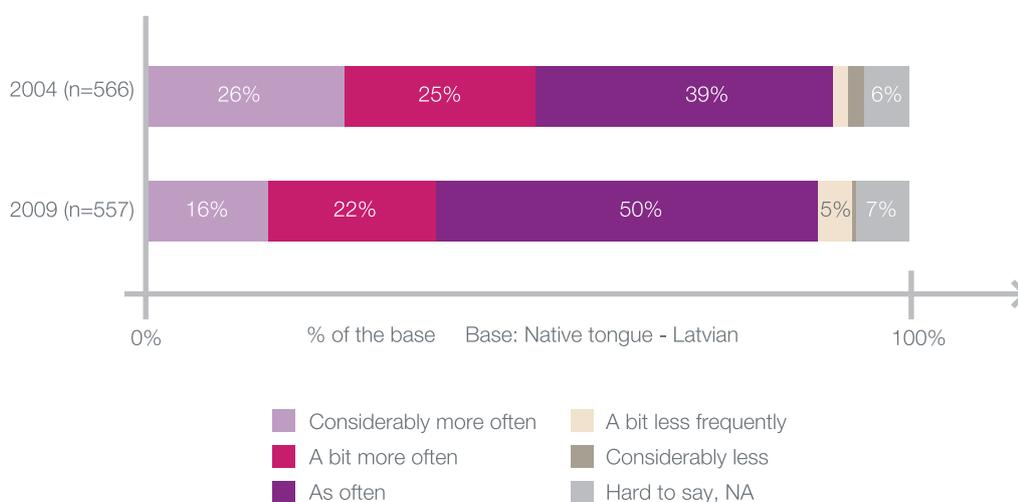


Fig. 16. Use of Latvian in the places of residence (villages, dwelling areas and the like) in comparison with the situation five or six years ago (LLA survey 2009)

Evaluating the use of Latvian in diverse spheres (Fig. 17) not more than 27% of Russian respondents point out that *Russian is prevailing* and or *everything is solely in Russian* (these are the answers about language use in shops, service providing sphere). However, the responses that everything is solely in Latvian are not exceeding 47% (not a half even!) and it is about the language use in state institutions and local governments. Thus, like in the case of the data analysis of Latvian respondents, we can see that in the perception of Russian respondents the Latvian language in general dominates but its positions are not exclusive enough to exclude communication in Russian.

<sup>1</sup> Data Serviss. *Valodu prasmes ietekme uz ekonomiski aktīvo iedzīvotāju dzīves kvalitāti: sociolingvistiskā pētījuma kopsavilkums* [The influence of language skills upon the quality of life of the economically active inhabitants: summary of a sociolinguistic study]. Rīga, 2006, 12. lpp.

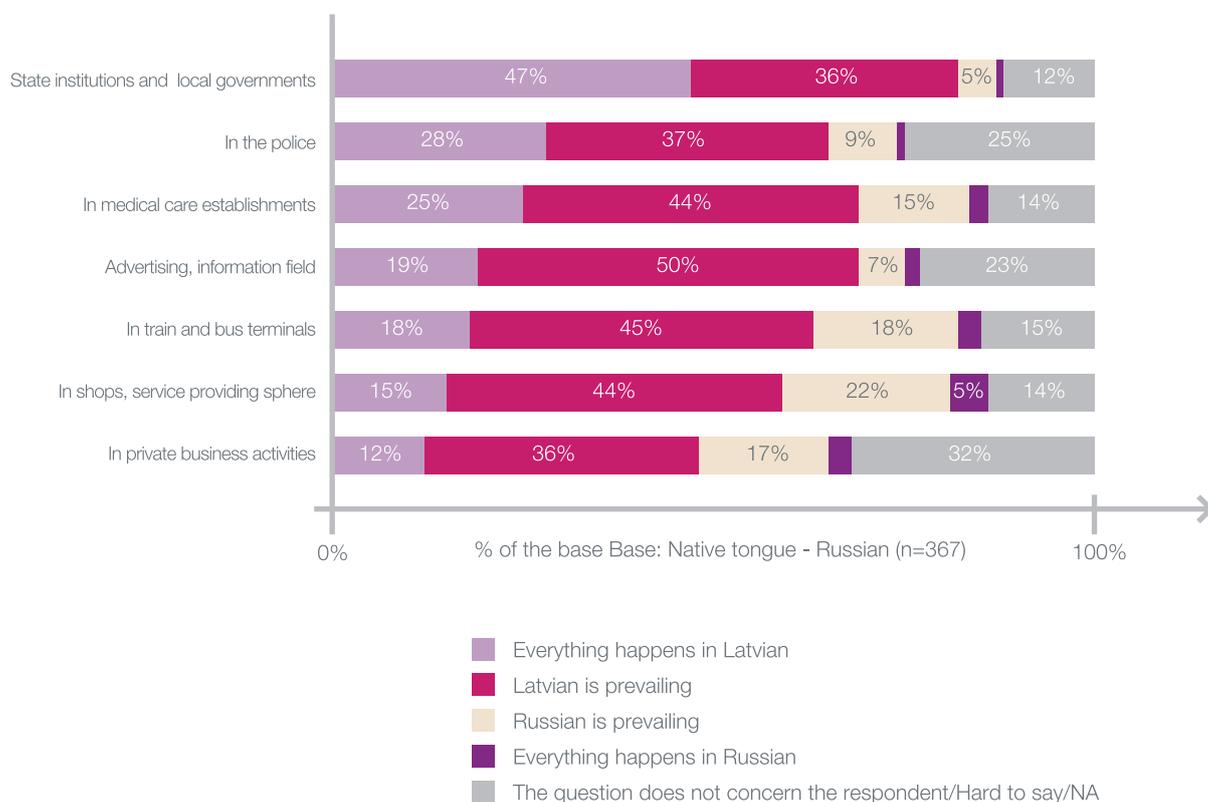


Fig. 17. Opinion of Russian-speaking respondents about the present language use in the city where (or near to) they reside (LLA survey 2009)

Data of the survey offer the possibility to calculate the part of Russian-speakers for whom the Russian language is self-sufficient (namely, they do not speak Latvian at all) for realization of their daily needs. The study “Language”, for example, shows that the part of population which is using only Russian in public communication area is decreasing: in 2004, one-third (31%) of working non-Latvians (more often inhabitants of cities and those with lower income and level of education) used only Russian in public communication space (at work, with friends, in the streets, in the shop). It means that for one-third of the working non-Latvians the Russian language has been self-sufficient. Data of the 2008 survey testify that only one-fifth (20%) of the working Russian-speakers use only Russian in public communication space. Decrease of the self-sufficiency of the minority language comes to be regarded as a significant proof of the strengthening of the majority language status. But data of the LLA 2009 survey, in its turn, show that the role of the Russian language is still a large one in public space.

**4**

**USAGE  
OF THE STATE  
LANGUAGE  
IN MAJOR  
SOCIOLINGUISTIC  
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# 4 D

Different spheres of language use demonstrate the real language situation and the problems caused by historical, socio-political and other circumstances which are disclosed in the results of the surveys, and they still exist.

The concept “official language” is understood as:

- 1) the language which is functioning in all socio-linguistic functions;
- 2) guaranteed citizens' rights to use this language in all the territory;
- 3) language proficiency in order to work in definite professions and to hold definite positions;
- 4) the language with state-guaranteed protection.<sup>1</sup>

As seen from the LLA 2009 survey and the results of the LLA interviews of 2009 that were analysed in the previous chapter, today we encounter a few problems in each group of the mentioned official language features.

Characterising the processes, institutions and circumstances that influence the use of the Latvian language the experts mention the role of educational establishments as the most essential one; namely, they emphasize the meaning of the system of education. The educational establishments, to a great extent, are responsible for the scale and quality of Latvian used by the youth.

The position of mass media and the quality of language use is the second most mentioned influencing factor. Experts see it as a field affecting the competitiveness of the Latvian language in Latvia both today and in the long run. Mass media form the attitude of inhabitants towards the state language policy and its activities and also activate, or on the contrary – ignore the problems of language policy. Experts assessing the role of the mass media, point to several tendencies: too few high-quality broadcast content in Latvian, but abundance - in foreign languages, especially in Russian, lack of diversity of programs offered, the low quality of the Latvian language, including ignorance of the rules Latvian orthography.

According to experts, globalization entering the European Union and other international structures imply important events and processes influencing the use and development of the official language. The data of the LLA 2009 survey show that 76% of Latvian respondents who acknowledge that the Latvian language is imperilled name the influence of globalization as its reason, 50.6% of all the respondents whose native tongue is Latvian have answered “yes” or “rather yes” to the question if Latvian is imperilled (Fig. 18).

<sup>1</sup> Druviete, I. *Latvijas valodas politika Eiropas Savienības kontekstā* [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. Rīga, 1998, 38. lpp.

## 4 USAGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN MAJOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREAS

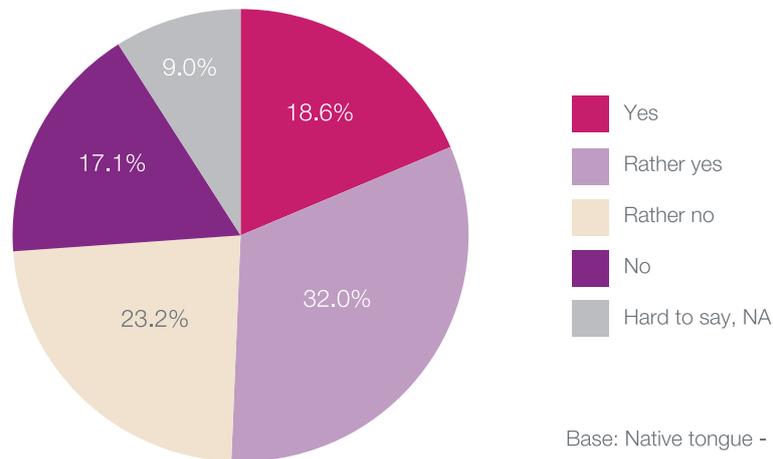


Fig. 18. Answers of the respondents to the question “Do you think that the Latvian language is in danger?” (LLA 2009 survey)

Globalization processes are connected with other processes that are essential for the development of Latvian – influence of foreign languages and migration. For example, experts point out the influence of the English language (upon Latvian terminology of the new mass media and technologies, also upon common conversational language) and mark the influence of migration (both in and out of the country), new technologies and other processes of the development of our modern global world.

According to expert opinion, the situation of Latvian today and in the nearest future is actively influenced by migration processes, and especially we should talk about the newcomers from Russia and former Soviet countries because their communication language is and will be Russian both among themselves and with the inhabitants of Latvia. In case the newcomers are many it will directly influence the daily use of the Latvian language.

As the consequences of the earlier mentioned and other processes and events in different fields of language use the experts of the LLA 2009 interviews outline the problems of competitiveness that are topical for the Latvian language:

- insufficient daily use of Latvian;
- functioning in the scale of the EU (the influence of entering the EU upon the language situation is not unequivocally judged – the fact that Latvian is strengthening as an official EU language is considered as positive but the free and also illegal migration of

## 4 USAGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN MAJOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREAS

labour force are considered as potentially negative, as the new target groups, which previously were not topical in the language and integration processes, are entering Latvia);

- new words, new terms entering Latvian, etc.;
- insufficient provision of political support for the development of Latvian.

The greatest part of experts of the LLA interviews 2009 holds the view that the opinions estimation of the role and use of language in various socially demographic groups are different.

The main regional differences in Latvia are determined by the historical development of the ethnic composition of the population and traditions.<sup>1</sup> Ethnic composition is a precondition for the creation of a definite language environment. The mentioned problems are disclosed also in the studies of language situation in 2009.

From the demographic viewpoint, the LLA 2009 survey convincingly show that the inhabitants of Vidzeme and Kurzeme whose native tongue is Russian much more often indicate Latvian as an exclusive language (the only language), but the inhabitants of Latgale demonstrate an opposite opinion. Namely, the inhabitants whose native tongue is Russian and who possess good skills of Latvian are more often encountered in the places where Latvian is more used – in Vidzeme (82% of the respondents mark good skills, 13% – moderate) and Kurzeme (62% of the respondents indicate that they have good skills of Latvian, 34% – moderate).

Age-group differences explicitly come to light in the attitude towards Latvian, Russian and English, in theoretical recognition of the need of language skills and its real acquisition, and also in the choice of communication language as well. Latvians consistently support the increase of the role of their language and there are no essential differences among the generations (the age-group opinions differ concerning the evaluation of the language quality). From the analysis of the language skills and use of the minorities it that becomes clear that the level of Latvian skills and use by the younger generation (up to 25 years old) is higher than that of the older generation (Fig. 19). It is explained by successful implementation of the reform of education contents and by a more positive linguistic attitude.

<sup>1</sup> *Latviešu valoda 15 neatkarības gados. Lingvistiskā situācija, attieksme, procesi, tendencijas* [Latvian language in the 15 years since independence. Linguistic situation, attitudes, processes, and tendencies]. Valsts valodas komisija. Rīga: Zinātne, 2007, 301. lpp.

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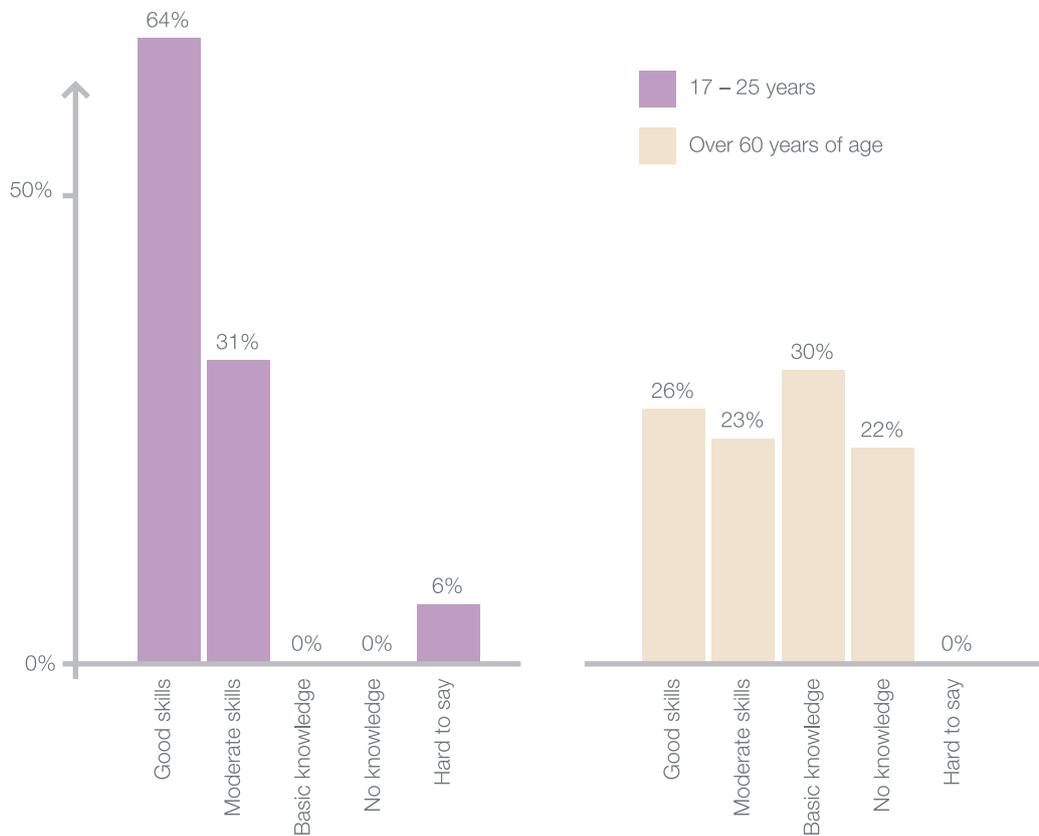


Fig. 19. Self-estimation of the Latvian language skills of the respondents whose native tongue is Russian in different age groups (LLA 2009 survey)

The year 2004 study of BISS and the IE of the LAS conclude that the employers, estimating the Latvian language skills, have observed positive tendencies in the minority youth group. Young people more often value the advantages of state language proficiency for their carrier-building and for achievement of their personal goals.<sup>1</sup> The situation of the Russian language is the objective opposite. Among those whose native tongue is Latvian a better knowledge of Russian is in the older age-group. It means that as a result of purposeful implementation of language policy the change of language hierarchy and consolidation of Latvian as the official language is taking place in Latvia.

Latvian in public environment is mostly spoken by rural population (except Latgale), but less frequently by city dwellers. Likewise Latvian is more often used also outside regional centres, in rural territories and small towns (Fig. 20). These results are determined by the proportions of ethnic groups in the respective populated places.

<sup>1</sup> *Sabiedrības integrācija un uzņēmējdarbība: etniskais aspekts* [Integration of the society and entrepreneurship: the ethnic aspect]. Rīga: Baltijas Sociālo zinātņu institūts, LZA Ekonomikas institūts, 2004, 19. lpp.

## 4 USAGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN MAJOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREAS

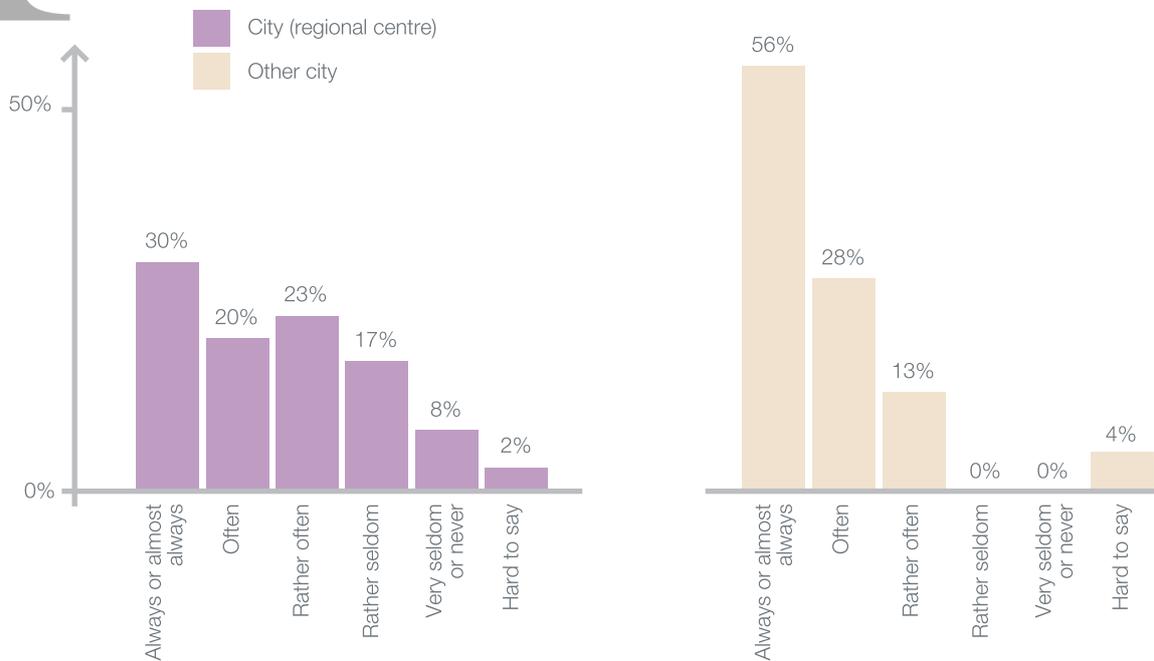


Fig. 20. Use of Latvian by the respondents when addressing representatives of other nationalities (respondents – inhabitants of big cities and small towns, whose native tongue is Latvian) (LLA 2009 survey)

The inhabitants whose native tongue is Russian and who possess good skills of Latvian are more commonly met among people with higher incomes. Data of the LLA 2009 survey shows that among the people with a lower income the number of those who do not know Latvian is larger (Fig. 21). Better English skills are also demonstrated by the respondents with a higher level of income, irrespective of their native tongue.

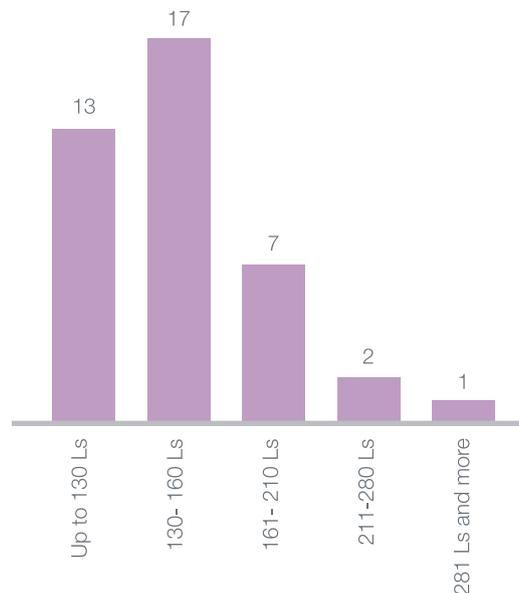


Fig. 21. The amount of people (%) who do not know Latvian depending on the level of income (the native tongue of the respondents – Russian) (LLA 2009 survey)

## 4 USAGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN MAJOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREAS

The data of the LLA 2009 survey show that the inhabitants with a higher level of education, which usually ensures also a higher level of well-being, have a better knowledge of the official language and other languages and a more positive linguistic attitude (Fig. 22). In addition, this group is characterized by the awareness of the role of language and by the ability to use each language according to its socio-linguistic functions.

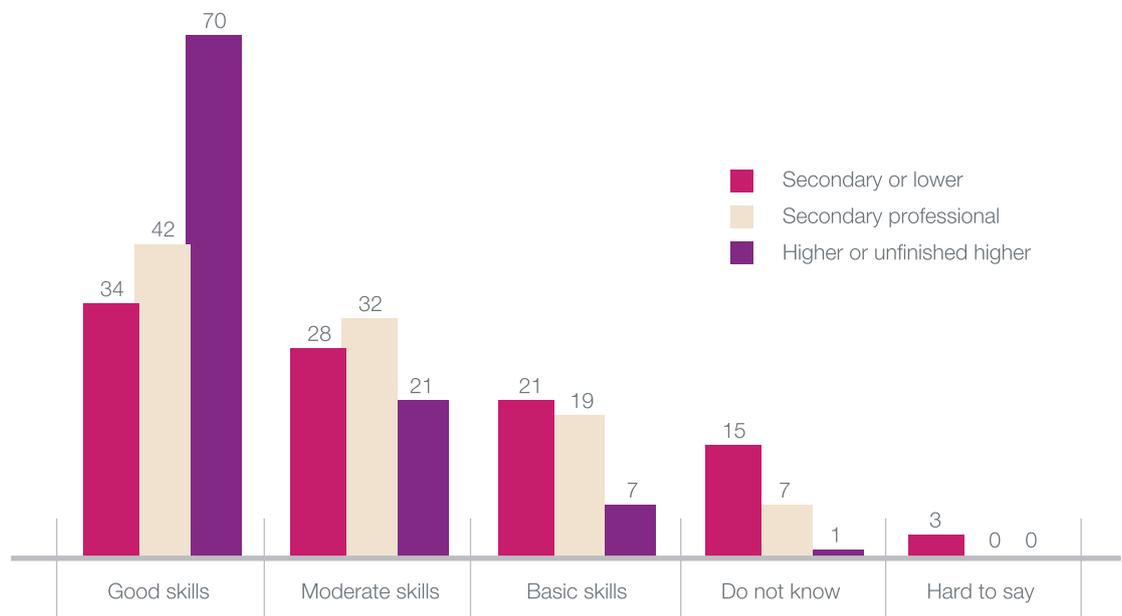


Fig. 22. Latvian language skills according to the level of education of the respondents (%) (native tongue of the respondents – Russian) (LLA 2009 survey)

It should be acknowledged that the attitude towards the skills and use of Latvian by the above-mentioned groups (age, education and level of income) is largely ethno-demographically conditional, while in the ethno-linguistic situation of Latvia this criterion has a regional dimension as well.

### State language in state administration

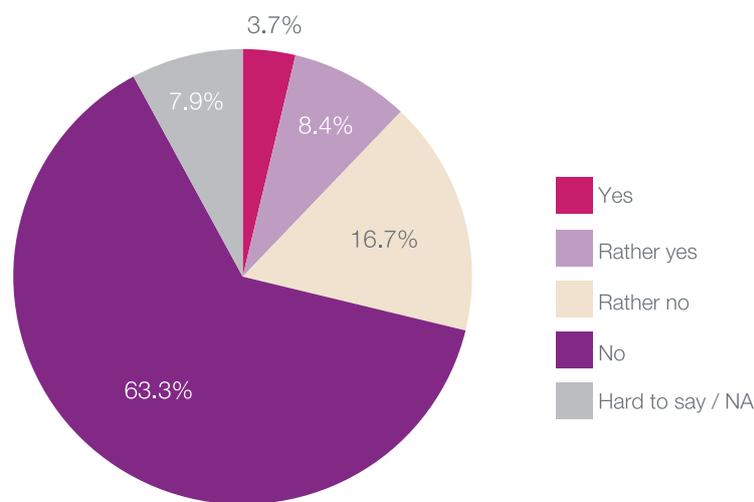
Latvian is most often used in state and local government institutions. There its monopolistic function was renewed most quickly and successfully taking into account the formality of socio-linguistic function of this language, stronger subjugation to the state ideology, regulations and control.<sup>1</sup> This is the

<sup>1</sup> Druviete, I. *Latvijas valodas politika Eiropas Savienības kontekstā* [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 1998, 89. lpp.

## 4 USAGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN MAJOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREAS

area in which Latvian is most widely used and therefore – least endangered. At the same time, it is the area in which all (100%) those respondents who speak only Russian experience difficulties as they do not know Latvian. Another linguistic environment in which the Russian-speaking group of respondents experience difficulties is health-care establishments (see Fig. 10).

Taking into account the call of mass media (especially those issued in Russian) to expand the role of the Russian language and to grant it an official status<sup>1</sup>, which in essence is against the ideology and principles of Latvia as a national state, the survey has clarified that the majority of respondents are against these calls and do not consider that Russian should be granted the status of the official language (Fig. 23).



Base: Native tongue - Latvian (n=557)

Fig. 23. Opinion of the respondents about the necessity to grant Russian the status of the official language (LLA 2009 survey)

The experts of the LLA interviews of 2009 have also almost unanimously acknowledged that official bilingualism is impossible and inadmissible in Latvia. The majority of experts estimate it as a direct threat to the existence of the Latvian language, and moreover, not only to its legal status.

<sup>1</sup> See publications in *Latvijas Avīze* (06.11.2006); [www.novonews.lv](http://www.novonews.lv) (29.08.2008); [www.diena.lv](http://www.diena.lv) (25.09.2010), etc.

It should be added that before the restoration of independence the Latvian language was almost completely eradicated from public administration but it was renewed and strengthened most rapidly because this area is best regulated and it is observing the demands of the normative documents.

### **Implementation of education policy for national minorities: some aspects of evaluation**

As in 1999 the new Official Language Law came into force and Latvian language proficiency became mandatory in both public and private sectors, it was necessary to create a system of education that would secure a level playing field in the education and labour market to graduates of all schools. The need to develop Latvia as a country with consolidated society was an important argument for increasing the proportion of the Latvian language.<sup>1</sup>

The new Law on Education was adopted already on 29 October 1998 initiating abolition of segregation and anticipating the creation of a unified system of education. The Law on Education is the basis for the formation of the system of minority education. It ensures that the minority education programme includes the content that is necessary for passing over the cultural heritage of national minorities and for pursuing goals such as social integration and equal opportunities for every inhabitant of the state.<sup>2</sup>

Following the adoption of the Law on Education, the policy of minority education was developed and implemented according to the following basic principles:

- minority education and its progress viewed in a unified policy of education of Latvia;
- the principle of oneness was observed in decision-making determining the establishment and operation of the enforcement mechanisms, including financial support and provision;
- changes were introduced purposefully and gradually.

<sup>1</sup> Hirša, Dz. Izglītības reforma: realitāte un izdomājumi [Education reform: reality and fabrications]. *Latvijas Avīze*, 2004, 6. marts.

<sup>2</sup> Kļava, G., Kļave, K., Motivāne, K. *Latviešu valodas prasme un lietojums augstākās izglītības iestādēs: mazākumtautību izglītības saturu reformas rezultāti* [Latvian language proficiency and its use in higher education institutions: results of the reform of minority education contents]. LVA. Rīga, 2010, 6. lpp. Available at: [http://www.valoda.lv/downloadDoc\\_456/mid\\_510](http://www.valoda.lv/downloadDoc_456/mid_510) (last accessed 12.01.2011).

# 4

In an about ten-year period, from 1995 till 2004, significant changes were made in national education policy, formation and development of the system of education. Several educational reforms were implemented, including the reform of minority education content. To ensure the learning of national educational content or subject content, teaching literature, mostly textbooks, for practically all subjects and all classes, was restored.

Formation of a supervision system or monitoring of the quality of national education has been started, including the establishment of a unified state examination system, namely, state examinations for the pupils of grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, defining the objectives and needs for the results, diagnostics, and naming the subjects of the centralized tests.

Changes in education in Latvia affected a huge part of the society creating preconditions and essentially affecting the creation of a democratic society. The effectiveness of the minority education policy is affecting the integration process of Latvian society and its successful progress. The gained experience has promoted the accomplishment of the goal determined by the State of Latvia – integration into the European Union.

The process of the formation and development of minority education can be divided into three conventional stages:

- 1) from 1995 to 1998;
- 2) from 1998 to 2004;
- 3) from 2004 to 2008.

Concerning the aspect of language policy the completion of the minority educational reform on the level of general secondary education was very important in the period between 2004 and 2008. When developing models for minority secondary education programmes, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) made use of the positive experience gained in the introduction and implementation of the minority primary education programmes. The MES regularly collected school survey and research data, as well as the licensing data of general secondary education. For example, the statistics of the general secondary education programmes licensed in 2001 showed a positive fact:

- 60% of schools at that time already indicated that they have planned and are ready to start tuition in Latvian as the training process has been organized and held bilingually;
- 10% – that tuition is in Latvian;
- From 25% to 30% of schools are teaching three subjects in Latvian (these schools had at least two years for making changes).

Identifying and evaluating the teachers' attitude it has been found that at least 86% of the teachers support bilingual education and teaching in Latvian and the majority of teachers are already working bilingually.

Revising the conditions of the implementation of minority education policy it is important to draw attention to the demographic situation in Latvia in this period and to the decreasing number of schoolchildren. Due to the decrease in the number of pupils, schools were closed and reorganized.

Amendments of the Cabinet of Ministers (CM) from 13 May 2003 to "Regulations No. 463 from 5 December 2005 regarding the State General Secondary Education Standard" determine that from 1 September 2004 in the minority education programme, beginning from Grade 10:

- 1) Not less than five subjects shall be acquired in the Latvian language for each year of study. These subjects shall not include the Latvian language and literature.
  - It means that in comparison with earlier requirements the number of subjects to be taught in the official language has been gradually increased only for two subjects;
  - Schools are choosing the subjects for Latvian language of instruction.
- 2) The acquisition of the content of learning in a minority language may be provided for up to two-fifths of the total amount of lessons in a year of study.
  - Analyzing languages of instruction in the already licensed schools, consequently approved by the state, it must be concluded that the proportion of the minority language use has changed from 47 to 40%. For the implementation of these requirements the schools were given a transition time until 2007.
- 3) At the same time, a transition period was determined – during the year of study 2004/2005, in grades 11 and 12, and during the year of study 2005/2006, in Grade 12, not less than three subjects shall be acquired in the Latvian language.
  - It means that the detailed requirements determined by the CM come into force in full scale only from 1 September 2007 when those pupils who had started bilingual education on 1 September 1999 (in the whole country) start learning in secondary schools;
  - Forming their educational programmes the schools are coordinating them with the local government (Educational Administration) and then with the Ministry;

# 4

- In the transition period from 2004 up to 2007 while coordinating the school programmes the Ministry is working with each school and evaluating it individually respecting differences and the real situation of the school, the city, region, focussing on full scale execution of the CM requirements in Grade 12, consequently.
- 4) From 2007, while implementing the minority education programmes and freely choosing the use of the language of instruction, the content of the State test shall be in the Latvian language:
  - Formulation – the content of the State test in Latvian – is chosen for several reasons:
    - It is flexible as it anticipates the situation when the examination paper is in Latvian but the pupil taking the State test in 2007 (five exams and tests in total) may have a possibility to choose the response language: Latvian or one of the minority languages;
    - The MES is monitoring the language choice and use for the State test.

Thus, in 2008, the reform of the content of the minority education was completed and with the implementation of the minority education policy Latvia has fully implemented bilingual education:

- Learning in two languages takes place from Grade 1 till Grade 12.
- The minority language and literature remains as a separate (compulsory) subject, the State test (tests and examinations) including.<sup>1</sup>
- Starting from school year 2007/2008, grade 12 centralized examinations are only in Latvian, but the student can choose the language for completion of the work or answering.
- Centralized state examinations for grades 3, 6, 9 are still prepared and written in two languages – Latvian, minority language (mostly Russian, also Polish). It should be noted that the teaching aids are still being prepared and published in at least two languages – Latvian and Russian, apart from the materials for foreign language teaching.

<sup>1</sup> Regulations of the CM No. 1027 from 9 December 2006, “Regulations Regarding the State Basic Education Standard and Basic Education Subject Standards”. Available at: <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=1050407&from=off>; Regulations of the CM No. 715 from 2 September 2008, “Regulations Regarding the State General Secondary Education Standard and General Secondary Education Subject Standards”. Available at: <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=181216> (last accessed 09.02.2011).

# 4

## USAGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN MAJOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC AREAS

- Latvia has a unitary educational system and all schools use the same state educational standards in all subjects from Grade 1 to Grade 12.

As a result of the implemented changes, the basic principles of Latvian language policy and education policy have been executed:

- 1) Taking responsibility to ensure that schoolchildren have equal competitiveness in the education and labour market: full-fledged Latvian language skills are an important precondition for further professional career in Latvia;
- 2) Ensuring the minority rights to education, Latvia has chosen and is implementing pedagogically grounded bilingual education (theoretically and practically corresponding to the situation of Latvia). Evaluating their ethnic structure very many states historically have chosen this model as politically, economically and culturally the most eligible solution. The EU, emphasizing the importance of multilingualism, also supports this way of educational development. The methodology of bilingual education<sup>1</sup> was established step by step and today it is acquired mainly by minority teachers, but it is planned to involve gradually other schools as well (continuing the work started in 1996, since 2004, the LLA has organized further training courses, seminars, exchange of experience and educational activities for teachers, that were attended by 2000 to 4000 teachers every year);
- 3) Since the beginning of the 1990s, national minorities in Latvia have had the opportunity to learn in their native language. Currently these rights are used by eight national minorities implementing the minority programmes. The perception that Latvia offers learning only in two languages – Latvian or Russian – is not correct. At present, discussing the transition to learning in Latvian, an incorrect view about the violation of interests of the so-called Russian-speakers is being politically sustained. It is politically incorrect and inconsistent with the real situation to treat all those people as the representatives of one – Russian – minority; it is the result of the Russification policy carried out by the previous state power. Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Estonians, Gypsies and Lithuanians have already established schools and they support policy, including educational, of the State of Latvia. The majority of Russian

<sup>1</sup> The Latvian Language Agency is implementing it in further education programmes for teachers.

schools also support the transitional processes of the state and understand the needs of schoolchildren (to provide opportunities for competitiveness).

Thus, along with the introduction of bilingual education in Latvia the aim of the EU “to be united in diversity” was enacted, namely, implementation and maintenance of multicultural and multilingual principles in education and society, promoting tolerance and understanding of the importance of several language skills (in the interests of an individual and the society of Latvia).

To ensure further successful development of minority education, attention should be paid to:

- preparation of teachers (in higher education institutions and in pedagogue professional development);
- creation and development of text-books, study aids using the latest knowledge in world experience; for the development of well-considered study content (new learning subject standards) and demands, considering language situation development tendencies;
- development of an educational quality inspection system and regular implementation of it.

One of the future challenges of the system of education in Latvia will also be provision of education for immigrants, in which the principles of bilingual education can be successfully applied while taking into account specific characteristics of the target audience (in the creation of teaching aids, teacher training and school information). Since immigrants do not have preliminary knowledge of Latvian and their motivation for learning Latvian is varied (e.g., temporary or long-term stay in Latvia), it is necessary:

- 4) to develop a common curriculum anticipating intensive acquisition of Latvian as the second language at different levels of skills;
- 5) to develop further training programmes that provide teacher training for special programmes, selection and development of materials;
- 6) to develop methodological recommendations for teachers who will teach Latvian to immigrants as a foreign language; and
- 7) to develop a variety of study materials for immigrants for acquisition of Latvian as a foreign language.

## Language in private business activities: in the service sector

The largest number of employees in the country is concentrated in private business and the majority of workers are employed in the service sector, in trade, accommodations and food companies (it was 18% of all the employees in 2004, 19.5% in 2009<sup>1</sup>). If the official language in such socio-linguistically important areas as public administration, local government and other establishments function well, as seen from the results of the LLA 2009 survey, the greatest problems of the use of Latvian are encountered in the service sector and in private entrepreneurship, especially in Riga and Riga District, in the largest cities of Latvia and in Latgale. The 2004 survey of the inhabitants<sup>2</sup> showed that approximately 70% of the Russian-speaking residents had pointed out that in everyday life outside their homes (in service providing) Latvian is quite often used, but the data of the LLA 2009 survey show that only 59% of the Russian-speaking population have acknowledged that Latvian is being used in the service sector (Fig. 24). This leads to the conclusion that the use of the Latvian language in the service sector has decreased.

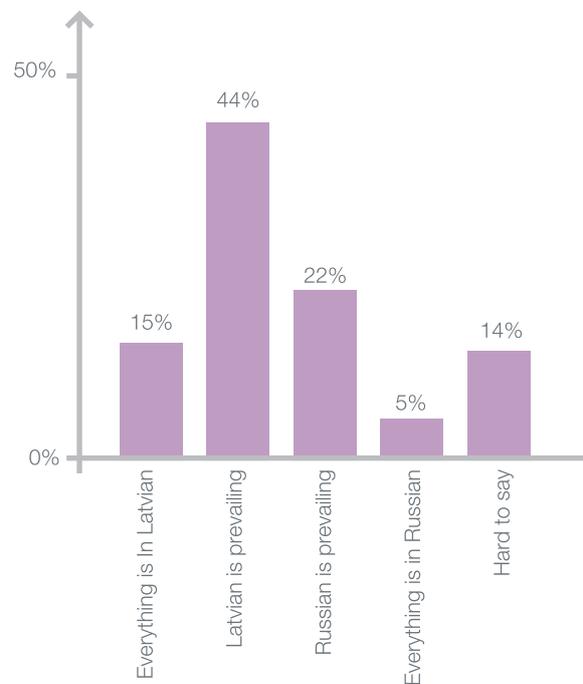


Fig. 24. Answers of the inhabitants, whose native tongue is Russian, to the question: “What is the present language use in your residence cities, shops and in the service field?” (LLA 2009 survey)

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. Nodarbinātība un bezdarbs [Employment and unemployment]. Available at: <http://data.csb.gov.lv/DATABASE/Ikdzsoc/Ikgadejie%20statistikas%20dati/Nodarbinatiba/Nodarbinatiba.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> Data Serviss. *Latviešu valodas attīstības un lietojuma problēmas* [Problems of the development and use of the Latvian language]. Riga, 2004.

It has been emphasized by the experts in the LLA 2009 interviews that the language use in private business is one of the negative tendencies in the development of the language situation in 2004–2010. Although the state has imposed certain requirements for both the employers and the employees, in reality the fact that private business and private or personal life is not one and the same is often ignored – one of the goals of private entrepreneurship is to provide all the inhabitants in the whole territory with services that must be available in the official language.

Section 1, clause 3 of the Official Language Law defines “... the right to freely use the Latvian language in any sphere of life within the whole territory of Latvia”. In 2008, the scale of professions in which the language proficiency level is determined was enlarged<sup>1</sup> and it received a positive judgement. Experts believe that in the long term it will definitely positively influence the extension of the Latvian language use.

The data of the LLA 2009 survey are indicative of the problems in language use in private entrepreneurship and in the service sector: answering the question “in which language you usually get answers to questions or requests in Latvian”, Latvian respondents indicate only 48% when the response at the shop is received in Latvian. It is considerably less than, for example, in the state and local government institutions (82 and 81%). As recognized by the experts, this is the area to be considered as the landmark in which freedom to communicate using one’s native tongue – e.g., of a shop-assistant – on the one hand, confronts the rights of the inhabitants to receive services, and fully ensure their needs, in Latvian in their own country. In this case, the right to receive services in the official language of the particular state is to be regarded as a priority against the freedom to use any other language.

The experts have also found that the prestige of the official language is affected, though indirectly, by the situation of the labour market, and the demand of a large part of the employers for knowledge of the Russian language has become more explicit in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the linguistic rights of Latvians are being ignored and the inhabitants who do not know Russian are discriminated (especially in cases when the Russian language proficiency

<sup>1</sup> Professions classifier, see *Noteikumi par valsts valodas zināšanu apjomu un valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudes kārtību profesionālo un amata pienākumu veikšanai, pastāvīgās uzturēšanās atļaujas saņemšanai un Eiropas Kopienas pastāvīgā iedzīvotāja statusa iegūšanai un valsts nodevu par valsts valodas prasmes pārbaudi*. Regulations of the CM No. 733, 07.07.2009. Available at: <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=194735&from=off>.

<sup>2</sup> See also Poriņa, V. *Valsts valoda daudzvalodīgajā sabiedrībā: individuālais un sociālais bilingvisms Latvijā* [State language in multilingual society: individual and social bilingualism in Latvia]. Rīga, 2009, 75.–86. lpp.

becomes a priority for recruitment, understating professional qualification of the potential employee). In such situations Russian is deliberately raised as a more competitive language this undermining full-fledged functioning of the Latvian language. Certainly, the employees' language skills are closely linked to business competitiveness and development, but there is no reason to require exactly a mandatory proficiency of the Russian language in Latvia. The only mandatory (particularly in the service sector) thing is the official language proficiency.

Skills of any language are positively estimated and from a business point of view, language proficiency of the employees is a big plus, but every company that provides services in the territory of Latvia, and to the inhabitants of Latvia, must be able to provide full-fledged services in the official language.

### **Influence of mass media upon the language situation**

Due to its conscious or unconscious influence media play a crucial role in shaping the public opinion and language environment of modern society. As mentioned above, experts of the LLA 2009 interviews have stressed that the current situation of the Latvian language is mostly affected by the system of education and by mass media where the processes can be perceived both as a threat and a challenge to the Latvian language.

No one of the experts has ever claimed that the development of new media and technologies would jeopardize the existence or use of Latvian; this effect is mostly related to language quality. Those experts, who view language as an uninterrupted process of development, often evaluated various deviations from Latvian spelling rules characteristic of the new mass media today as a positive phenomenon, since it proves that the language can adapt to new situations and adjust to them. As positive the experts have acknowledged the fact that the activities of media and the development of new technologies contribute to language development – first of all, in the creation of new terms and in the expansion of language application fields.

According to experts, one of the reasons why foreigners do not want to use the media in Latvian, thus denying themselves the chance to improve their Latvian language skills, is the substantive shortage in TV and radio broadcast offers, thus maintaining the division of information space in Latvia. A great many of the media in the Russian-speaking information space provide openly opposite information about the situation and the events taking place in Latvia.

It is often highly politicized. Thus the gap in the Latvian society is becoming wider, splitting civic consciousness and delaying integration.<sup>1</sup> Experts have also pointed out that splitting of the information space, in the long-term, is an essential threat to the Latvian language.

Communication of public figures (politicians, representatives of state establishments, cultural workers, officials) with mass media in the Russian language is strongly destroying the prestige of the Latvian language and the attitude towards it. Experts have pointed out that today it is one of the most important unsolved problems. As pointed out by the Chairman of the State Language Commission A. Veisbergs, “public officials, especially ministers, should be using only Latvian in the state mass media, demonstrating their understanding of the importance of the state language and its unifying role.”<sup>2</sup> It is totally unacceptable that on public TVs, registered in Latvia, public figures express their views in Russian.<sup>3</sup> That is how signals about the reduction of the language role are spread as nowadays the media shape the public opinion and consciously or unconsciously influence it.

<sup>1</sup> Hermanis, V. Integrācijas procesa tālvadības pultis [Remote control unit of the integration process]. *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze Latvijai*, 2007, 8. okt.; *Valsts valodas likums: vēsture un aktualitāte* [State Language Law: history and topicality]. Ernstsone, V., Hirša, Dz. u.c. Rīga: Zinātne, 2008, 97.–117. lpp.; Hirša, Dz. *Plašsaziņas līdzekļi par latviešu valodu. Attieksme, izpratne, informācija un dezinformācija* [Mass media about the Latvian Language. Attitude, understanding, information and disinformation]. Rīga, 2007, 76 lpp.; Poriņa, V. *Valsts valodas daudzvalodīgajā sabiedrībā: individuālais un sociālais bilingvisms Latvijā* [State languages in the multi-lingual society: individual and social bilingualism in Latvia]. Rīga, 2009, 99.–108. lpp. u.c.

<sup>2</sup> Prezidenta komisijas vadītājs: amatpersonām valsts medijos jālieto tikai latviešu valoda [Chairman of the Presidential Commission: public officials should be using only Latvian in the state mass media]. *Delfi* (last accessed 01.03.2010).

<sup>3</sup> Jauce, S. Valodas jāaizsargā pašu mājās [Languages should be protected in their homelands]. *Latvija Eiropas Savienībā*, Nr. 8, 2007. gada decembris, 10. lpp.

5

**THE LATVIAN  
LANGUAGE  
IN THE  
PRESENT-DAY  
GLOBALISATION  
CONDITIONS**

The modern world is characterized by globalization, extensive use of technology; increased mobility of the population which causes a disruptive influence on the traditional way of life and to a certain extent threatens language as a cornerstone of identity.<sup>1</sup> Glo-

balization and the resulting migration, cosmopolitanism, expansion of borders and other tendencies are closely related to the language and identity change and unprecedented prosperity of cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity.

One of the most noticeable manifestations of globalization today is the language competition where the most vivid example is the ever-increasing role of English in business environment, media, education and science, which is certainly weakening and undermining the positions of other languages. This problem is topical not only in Latvia, but in the whole Europe, especially in the countries with small numbers of the official language speakers.

The most important socio-linguistic functions in Latvia are performed by the Latvian language and the Russian language, but the role of English is increasing as well. The role of these languages in the situation of Latvia is determined by several interrelated factors – language skills of the population, the actual socio-linguistic features of languages, linguistic attitudes and language status.<sup>2</sup> As recognized by the experts of the LLA interviews 2009, on the global scale the Latvian language is not competitive enough in comparison with English and in the present situation of Latvia – with Russian as well.

Everyday language use is one of the aspects of linguistic competition, and the competitiveness of the Latvian language cannot be regarded as good. In this respect, the results of language competition are affected more by the language users than by external factors; taking into consideration the fact that Latvians often choose Russian in communication with Russian-speakers and that not all the Russian-speakers who know the official language really use it, the competitiveness of the Latvian language can be considered as endangered.

This fact is confirmed by the data of various population polls in Latvia as the number of those Latvians who do not choose Latvian for communication with foreigners is still comparatively high. Only about one-third of Latvians have emphasized that in such situations they always choose Latvian. The Professor of University of Latvia I. Druviete has repeatedly emphasized that

<sup>1</sup> Druviete, I. Mūsu valoda – Latvijas vai ES identitātes daļa? [Our language – part of the identity of Latvia or the EU?] *Lauku Avīze*, 2004, 11. okt.

<sup>2</sup> Druviete, I. *Latvijas valodas politika Eiropas Savienības kontekstā* [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. Rīga, 1998, 85. lpp.

language competition really exists, and it appears any time when we choose one or another communication language.<sup>1</sup>

We have to acknowledge that at least presently the influence of English does not endanger the existence of Latvian as there is no English environment in Latvia today and the number of those who speak both languages is small. There are only a few specific socio-linguistic areas in which English has started to take a more and more significant role and can really be considered a threat to the Latvian language – that are mostly science, some sections of culture, probably the new technology. This tendency is typical of most European countries although to some extent it can be controlled by laws and rules.<sup>2</sup> But the Russian language is still the biggest competitor of Latvian (Fig. 25).

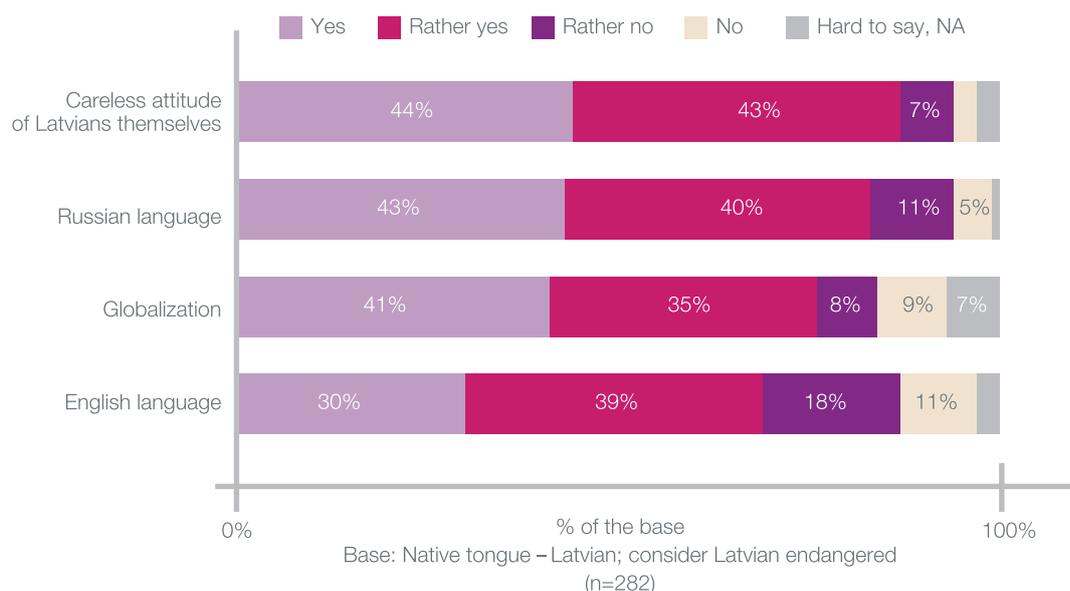


Fig. 25. Answers of the respondents to the question “Do you think that Latvian is endangered by...” (LLA 2009 survey)

The experts particularly emphasized that in the interaction of both these languages negative impact is found directly on the Latvian language mainly due to the greater economic value of the Russian language.

<sup>1</sup> See Druviete, I. Mūsu valoda – Latvijas vai ES identitātes daļa? [Our language – part of the identity of Latvia or the EU?] *Lauku Avīze*, 11.10.2004; Jauce, S. Valodas jāaizsargā pašu mājās [Languages should be protected in their homelands]. *Latvija Eiropas Savienībā*, Nr. 8, 2007. gada decembris.

<sup>2</sup> Druviete, I. *Latvijas valodas politika Eiropas Savienības kontekstā* [Latvian language policy in the context of the European Union]. Rīga, 1998, 98. lpp.

Evaluating the accession to the EU, the experts of the LLA 2009 interviews agree that this step has diminished Russian influence on the Latvian language while at the same time the impact of English has increased. Experts point out that in this context it is very important to analyze and evaluate which of the EU's direct or indirect impacts are acceptable and adaptable and which should be rejected in order to maintain the uniqueness and prevalence of the Latvian language without any restrictions under the pressure of other languages.

In today's globalized circumstances the modern democratic society had changed its world outlook which accentuates the importance of diversity. Not for nothing the EU has put forward the Motto Unity in Diversity. The majority of the interviewed experts have also expressed the view that multiculturalism and multilingualism do not endanger the Latvian language, but rather enrich it and provide for its full integration into the international community.

Parallel to the influence of globalization processes we have to create pre-conditions for the preservation of the uniqueness of every language. That is why scientific research should be developed to ensure that the decision concerning each language is well-weighed and justified.

### **The Latvian language in the world**

We may distinguish two ways in the acquisition of Latvian outside Latvia:

- Latvian as the native tongue (for the representatives of the diaspora);
- Latvian as a foreign language.

Lately, especially after joining the EU in 2004, the number of people who wish to learn Latvian as a foreign language has increased and the opportunities to learn have been enlarged (Fig. 26).

Currently, according to the data of the Latvian Language Agency, the Latvian language teaching and/or research-work is being carried out in the higher education institutions of approximately 13 states of the world.

Another direction is acquisition of Latvian as the mother tongue in diaspora. It should be assessed in the context of the period when the diasporas have emerged and the host country in which the Latvian emigrants have settled, as the acquisition and preservation of Latvian in these groups are very different.

The expansion of Latvian in the world, both as a foreign language and as a native language, should be promoted by tackling a number of problems and accomplishing the needs which have been specified by the educators of foreign universities and the educational workers of the diaspora. And they are:

- lack of dictionaries;
- lack of Latvian grammar materials, syntax and semantics in foreign languages;
- informative and/or methodologically outdated teaching aids (to be more precise, lack of modern teaching aids);
- difficulties in recruiting qualified lecturers, teachers from Latvia;
- incomplete information about where, at what proficiency level and how the Latvian language is being taught/studied;
- limited opportunities of the children who have returned to Latvia to fully align with the educational system of Latvia.

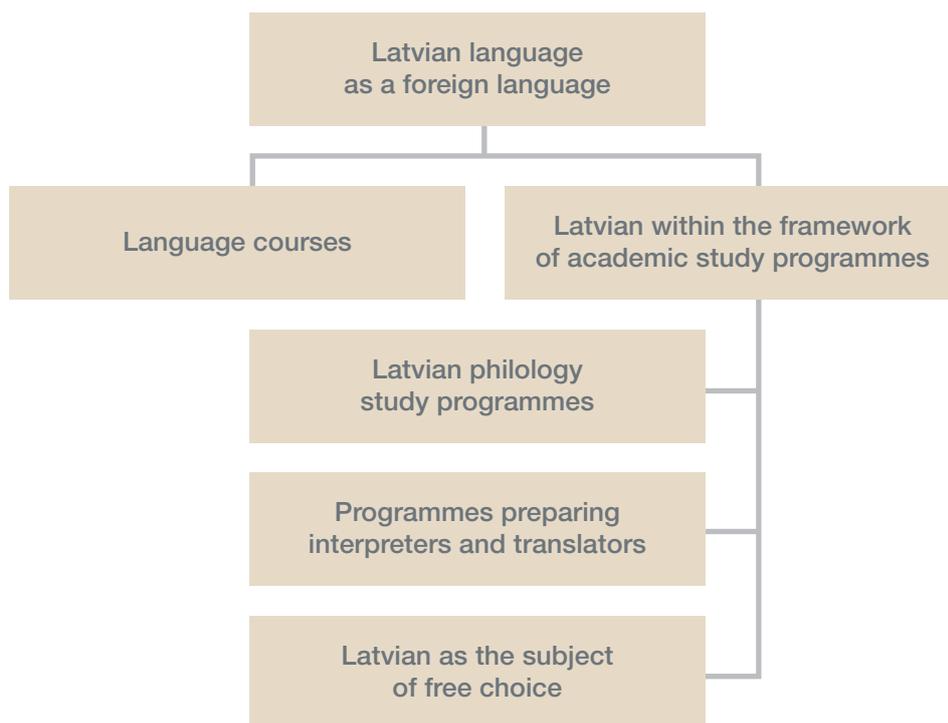


Fig. 26. Opportunities to learn Latvian as a foreign language (formal and informal education)

### **Influence of migration processes upon the language situation**

Consequences and problems caused by migration in different countries around the world confirm the need to stabilize state language problems. A vivid example is Germany where the integration problems of the large Turkish immigrant communities have prompted the German government to think about the

demand of a definite language proficiency level. When creating or revising the national migration policy, it is very important to balance immigration and integration so that the situation would promote economic development, and at the same time would not cause internal political tension.<sup>1</sup> Successful integration is possible if the state guarantees the integration of immigrants into the society never infringing the rights of the indigenous inhabitants. The main problem of integration is the language barrier that is becoming more and more urgent nowadays, when the economy is based on services and expertise.<sup>2</sup>

As the EU Member State Latvia must follow the common principle of migration policy – free movement of persons, and implement the migration policy in accordance with international law and the interests of the State of Latvia. As recognized by the researchers of migration, migration policy in Latvia is neutral (even conducive) towards emigration and restrictive towards immigration.<sup>3</sup>

A person, who is legally working in Latvia, can be employed as long as the residence permit allows. There are three types of residence permits in Latvia:

- a temporary residence permit (one year for a self-employed person and five years if a person arrives on employment contract or entrepreneur contract basis, or other civil contract);
- a permanent residence permit;
- a long-term resident status of the European Community (EC) in Latvia.<sup>4</sup>

Without questioning the immigration's contribution to national economic development and demographic challenges, and recognizing Latvia's future need to engage the necessary labour force, as well as taking into account the experience and migration caused problems of other EU states, the most important work to be done is the integration of immigrants as the economic grounds cannot serve as the justification for the loss of national values and ideals.

One of the most important prerequisites for successful integration is language skills and basic knowledge about the state. The Immigration Law anticipates language proficiency need only for those immigrants who wish to obtain

<sup>1</sup> Indāns, I. *Migrācija Latvijā vēsturiskā perspektīvā* [Historical view on migration in Latvia]. Report at the conference "Vai Latvija iet Īrijas pēdās: darbaspēka migrācija [Does Latvia follow in the footsteps of Ireland: work force migration]". Available at: [http://www.politika.lv/temas/izglitiba\\_un\\_nodarbinatiba/6316/](http://www.politika.lv/temas/izglitiba_un_nodarbinatiba/6316/) (last accessed 05.11.2008).

<sup>2</sup> *Migrācijas ietekme uz valodas vidi Latvijā* [The influence of migration upon language environment in Latvia]. R. Apinis, M. Baltiņš, Dz. Hirša u.c. Rīga: Zinātne, 2008, 29. lpp.

<sup>3</sup> Karnite, R., Karnitis, K. *Iedzīvotāju starpvalstu ilgtermiņa migrācijas ietekme uz Latvijas tautsaimniecību* [The impact of long-term cross border migration on Latvian economy]. Rīga, 2009. Available at: [http://www.politika.lv/temas/fwd\\_eiropa/18267/](http://www.politika.lv/temas/fwd_eiropa/18267/) (last accessed 15.01.2011); *Imigranti Latvijā: iekļaušanās iespējas un nosacījumi*. BISS, Rīga, 2009, 6. lpp.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

permanent residence permit (Section 24, paragraph 1, clause 5 of the Immigration Law) provided they have spent five years in Latvia on temporary permit basis. Staying in Latvia with a permanent residence permit or in the status of the EC long-term resident, the immigrant can apply for naturalisation and obtain Latvian citizenship.<sup>1</sup> And it means that the immigrant can live in Latvia for five years with a temporary residence permit and he does not need to learn the state language. If after these five years the immigrant wants to obtain a permanent residence permit, he must submit the certificate of the state language proficiency proving the knowledge of at least A2 level.

The number of foreigner nationals is growing with each year. The official OCMA statistics show that since the beginning of 2010 there have been 36,249 foreign residents with permanent and 13,785 with temporary residence permit living in Latvia, while in 2004 there were 25,466 foreigners with permanent and 7,547 with temporary residence permits.<sup>2</sup>

As shown by statistics and surveys<sup>3</sup>, nearly half of the immigrants come from the former republics of the Soviet Union and, as they have a very good knowledge of Russian, this group of immigrants enlarges the Russian language environment in Latvia. The ethnic composition in Latvia is still unfavourable for its native population, the number of non-citizens is large enough and the main direction is still the same – these components of immigration make the stabilization of the situation and social integration very difficult.

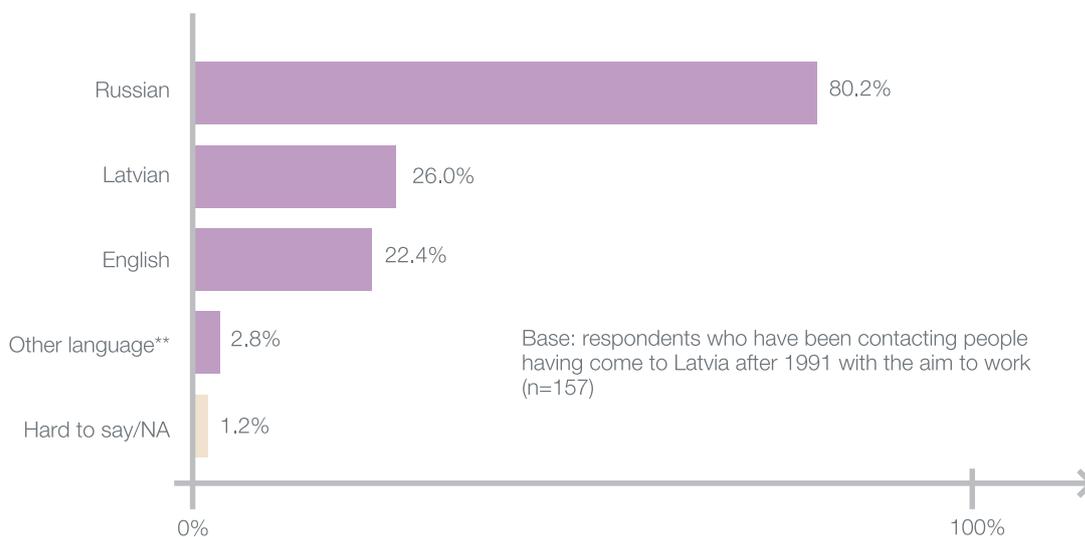
In this connection we have to repeat that the linguistic behaviour of Latvian population demonstrates a degrading influence, namely, choosing Russian as the communication language with non-Latvians (mainly Russians) (Fig. 27).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*; more information about the procedures of immigrant arrival and residence on the webpage of the OCMA [www.pmlp.gov.lv](http://www.pmlp.gov.lv).

<sup>2</sup> PMLP. *Statistika: uzturēšanās atļauju izsniegšana* [OCMA. Statistics: issue of residence permits]. Available at: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/statistika/uzturesanas.html> (last accessed 12.02.2011).

<sup>3</sup> CSP. *Demogrāfiskās statistikas galvenie rādītāji 2009. gadā* [CSB. Key indicators of demographical statistics in 2009]. Informative source 2010. Available at: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/dati/informativie-apskati-28307.html> (last accessed 15.01.2011); *Migrācijas ietekme uz valodas vidi Latvijā* [The influence of migration upon language environment in Latvia]. R. Apinis, M. Baltiņš, Dz. Hirša u.c. Rīga: Zinātne, 2008, 96. lpp.; *Viesstrādnieku attieksme pret valsts valodu Latvijā* [Attitude of the guest workers towards official language in Latvia]. SKDS. Rīga, 2008; *Latvijas iedzīvotāju attieksme pret viesstrādniekiem* [Attitude of the inhabitants of Latvia towards guest workers]. SKDS. Rīga, 2008 u.c.

<sup>4</sup> *Latvijas iedzīvotāju attieksme pret viesstrādniekiem* [Attitude of the inhabitants of Latvia towards guest workers]. SKDS. Rīga, 2008.



\*As every respondent could mark more than 1 answer the total number of answers exceeds 100%.

\*\*In the category "Other languages" the respondents have marked: German (twice), Lithuanian (once), and Ukrainian (once).

Fig. 27. Answers of the inhabitants of Latvia to the question "In what language do you communicate with people, who have come to Latvia with the aim to work after 1991?"  
Data: *Latvijas iedzīvotāju attieksme pret viesstrādniekiem* [Attitude of Latvian inhabitants towards guest workers]. SKDS, Riga, 2008.

That is confirmed also by the experts as they hold the view that a large number of immigrants would threaten the use and development of the Latvian language, especially because so far these processes have not been adequately controlled and directed. And it means that institutions of Latvia should start planning and building up a modern migration policy which aims to ensure a successful public integration already now.

Another key aspect of the migration process is emigration. It also has an effect on language environment and has become a growing concern since 2004 when, taking the advantage of free movement of labour force, a great number of people started to leave and are still leaving Latvia.<sup>1</sup> Language is the strongest bond of all the Latvian people in the world, but the opportunities to use their native language are severely narrowed for the representatives of the diaspora. The young people growing up in foreign countries do not acquire sufficient knowledge of Latvian. Latvia has an obligation to support the wish of the expatriates to learn their native tongue, to preserve and develop their language

<sup>1</sup> See also Kļava, G., Motivāne, K. *Valodas lietojums diasporā: citu valstu prakse un Latvijas rīcībpolitikas izvērtējums* [Language use in the diaspora: experience of other states and evaluation of Latvian action policy]. Riga, 2009.

# 5

## THE LATVIAN LANGUAGE IN THE PRESENT-DAY GLOBALISATION CONDITIONS

skills. Moreover, as pointed out by the experts, the emigration processes reduce the total number of language users, thus endangering the already negative demographic situation in Latvia.

Currently the most topical problem for immigrant integration is the lack of teaching aids and qualified teachers of Latvian as a foreign language, as well as the still poorly developed system for integration provision, respectively, the shortage of financial and administrative support and of practical opportunities for immigrant integration.

6

**FUTURE  
TASKS  
OF THE  
LANGUAGE  
POLICY  
IN LATVIA**



“Future of the Latvian language will be determined by its speakers’ ability to recognize its importance for the world and for themselves, as well as by intentional preservation and development of the language.” (I. Druviete)

As a small country Latvia should be proud of its own – Latvian – language as one of the common treasures, as the national language is the repository of nation’s experience and centuries’ long development.<sup>1</sup> Today Latvia is a small nation with its own special spirit, culture and language in the European Union and only Latvians can take care of this specific feature of their identity. At the same time, taking into account the geographical location and its socio-economical interests, Latvia can be proud of its ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity.

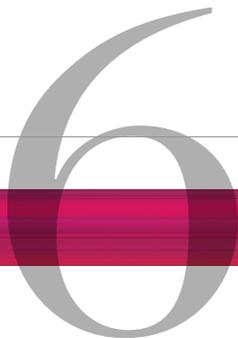
Evaluating the current language policy in Latvia, the views expressed by the experts of the LLA 2009 interviews in most cases are positive. The experts have stressed that the language policy was successfully implemented, and it is demonstrated by the results:

- strengthening of the legal status of the language is slow, but with a positive tendency,
- Latvian language proficiency, the number of its users and the usage has increased,
- the problems of language use have been identified,
- the quality of the Latvian language is high,
- the education content reform has been successfully implemented,
- tolerance of the ethnic minorities towards the state language and their willingness to learn it has increased.

At the same time we must be aware of the actual problems:

- linguistic behaviour of our society;
- strengthening of the status of the official language (especially in the areas of private and business services, mass media);
- decrease of the role of Latvian language in some areas due to language competition (language of science, services, requirements of language proficiency for employers, prioritizing the Russian language proficiency);
- development of terminology;
- immigrant integration, which is becoming topical with the economic growth and rising immigration, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Sciriha, L., Vassallo, M. *Living languages in Malta*. Malta, 2006, p. 2.



At present, when complicated economic conditions have caused the change of political priorities, the state language policy is of minor importance. This in turn means less moral and financial support for the implementation of the state language policy, which may ultimately impair the role and the status of the official language. According to some experts, the share of the responsibility should lie to linguists as well, because they, as the experts of the given field, should be politically and socially active in promoting the development and advancement of language.

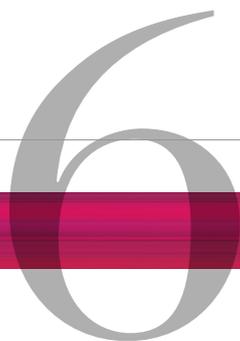
As recognized by experts, the current situation and media have a strong impact upon the language situation and language policy, which deserves a special attention, emphasizing the exact importance of language use. It is important to continue successful introduction and implementation of the bilingual education model, to extend understanding of its positive influence upon the quality of foreign language learning in general educational establishments.

One of the main tasks and objectives is public participation in language policy: public discussions of language issues, providing information and analysis on the current and desired situation, involving more people in the decisions referring to these issues, using the language in everyday situations and focusing on language quality.

While implementing the language policy, it is necessary to expand the use of the Latvian language and to strengthen its role in everyday communication, because only the language which is being used is a living language. Therefore, the need to introduce positive methods stimulating the state language acquisition and usage is emphasized.

The analysis of language situation (2004–2009) shows that in future there are several tasks to be put forward:

- promotion of positive linguistic attitude and behaviour;
- strengthening of the role and status of language in the system of education;
- further implementation of bilingual education (in the broader sense of the term);
- wider use of language promotion, including Latvian media;
- stronger demands for language use in business according to legislation, anticipating amendments;
- solving the integration issues in the context of immigration tendencies;
- development of the Latvian language in the epoch of information technologies;



- promoting acquisition of the Latvian language in diaspora and preparing the educational establishments for the work that would allow emigrant children return and continue their studies in the educational system of Latvia;
- systematic support for the acquisition of Latvian as a foreign language in foreign countries and successful integration of the Latvian language in the international environment.

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