

MARTIN EHALA

# Russian-Speakers in the Baltic Countries: Language Use and Identity

## I. Introduction

All Baltic countries have Russian-speaking communities.<sup>1</sup> The term *Russian speaker* refers here to a person who uses Russian as his or her first language. The majority of Russian speakers in the Baltic countries are ethnic Russians, but there are also many Ukrainians, Belarusians and members of other ethnicities who have shifted fully or partially to Russian, and in the linguistic environments of the Baltic countries, often categorise themselves and are categorised by others as Russian speakers.

Although there were Russians in the Baltic countries before World War II, the formation of the Russian-speaking communities started during the Soviet times through extensive immigration of workforce to the Baltic countries. As Russian was the common language for the mixed ethnic immigrant population, an extensive language shift towards Russian occurred, supported by the privileged status of Russian in the Soviet Union. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russian-speaking communities became minorities in the newly re-emerged nation states (Laitin 1998; Vihalemm 2005; Vihalemm and Masso 2003). Certainly, the common fate and common language have had an impact on the formation of the collective identities of the Russian-speaking communities, but besides the parallelism in recent history, the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic

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countries also have important dissimilarities which have also had some effect on their collective identity development.

The goal of this chapter is to characterise how language usage patterns are tied to the formation of collective identity, i.e. how the choice of language in everyday communication is related to the subjects' perception of their identity as Russian speakers in the Baltic countries. As language is quite central both to the Russian-speaking groups as well as to the three countries' titular ethnicities, the status and official recognition of their respective emblematic languages is the issue that most closely touches the collective self-esteem of major linguistic groups in the Baltic setting. The chapter reveals that a higher level of bilingualism is related to a less essentialist and more inclusive conception of collective identity. As language choice is related to human geography, or more precisely to the size, proportion and distribution of Russian speakers in the Baltic countries, collective identity construction depends also on the nature of the linguistic environment in which the subjects live.

The analysis is based on the results of a large-scale quantitative study that addressed both self-reported language use and attitudes toward the issue of official languages in the country. The quantitative data are triangulated by data from focus group interviews enabling us to have a closer look at the narratives and values characterising the ethnic identity of Russian speakers.

The chapter is organised as follows: the next section gives an overview of the demographic characteristics of Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic countries, along with some remarks on the history of the communities and their cultural and economic particulars. The third section provides a short overview of the theoretical basis and the research methods. The fourth section presents a comparative overview of the use of Russian and the state language by each country's Russian population as well as the titular group. The fifth section complements this picture by outlining three prototypical identity profiles of Russian speakers. The final section outlines the interaction of human geography, language use, and attitudes in shaping the ethnic identity of Russian speakers in the Baltic countries.

## 2. Demographic background

Even though all three Baltic countries have sizeable Russian-speaking communities, their proportion in the population of their respective countries differs considerably, as do the patterns of distribution in the territory. There are also some historical, economic and cultural differences between the Russian communities in each country. All these factors influence both the extent of the use of Russian language as well as the collective identity of Russian speakers in each of the countries.

### 2.1. Estonia

According to the 2011 population census, the population of Estonia is 1.295 million people, the majority of whom are Estonian-speaking Estonians (about 68.7 per cent of the population); Russian-speakers form 29 per cent or 395,000 people. Historically, Estonia has had a small Russian-speaking minority of about 30,000 people who have belonged to the Russian Orthodox Old-Believers community living in the eastern part of Estonia for centuries. However, about 90 per cent of the present Russian-speaking community settled in Estonia during the Soviet period. It consists of representatives of ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians and a number of other ethnicities of the Soviet Union who use mainly Russian as their home language.

About one third (130,000 people) of Estonian Russian speakers live in eastern Estonian towns, where they form more than 80 per cent of the population. This region is economically one of the less developed areas in Estonia, although it has large oil-shale mines and the main Estonian power plants powered by the oil shale. Nearly half of the Russian speakers (187,000 people) live in the capital, Tallinn, and surroundings, where they make up nearly 50 per cent of the population. The remaining 20 per cent live in other towns of Estonia, where they form a small minority compared to Estonians.

The Russian-speaking community in Estonia is not economically or culturally prominent, although there are some daily newspapers and local radio programmes. Mostly the community follows the TV channels of Russia and the Baltic Russian channel. Education in Russian language is available in primary and secondary schools. Politically the Estonian Russian-speaking community is fractioned, so that they do not have a strong political party. In summary, the Russian-speaking community in Estonia is characterised by relative economic, political and cultural weakness, although Russian language schools, home, and Russia's television provide strong support for Russian language use.

## *2.2. Latvia*

The Latvian population, according to the 2011 census, was 2.1 million people, of whom 62 per cent were Latvians and 33 per cent Russian speakers of various ethnic origins (695,000 people). The Russian-speaking community in Latvia is the largest amongst the Baltic countries. Russian speakers are in the majority in the two largest cities in Latvia: the capital Riga (about 55 per cent of the population of the city) and Daugavpils (85 per cent of the population of the city). The remaining 40 per cent of the Russian speakers live in other cities where the Latvian population is the majority.

Historically, Latvia had a fairly large Russian population already before its incorporation into the Soviet Union. There was a Russian Orthodox Old-Believers' community, mainly peasants in Latgale and Vidzeme districts, as well as a middle class urban population in Riga already established during the tsarist times. Currently, the Russian-speaking community is largely urban, economically well off, and culturally and politically active. The Russian language is used as an instructional language up to the secondary school level; the three highest grades are Russian-Latvian bilingual. Several specialities in higher education use Russian as the language of instruction. Local Russian-language cultural life is active. There are a number of Russian dailies, radio and TV channels, and Russia's TV is also widely followed.

All this means that the Russian-speaking community in Latvia is self-aware, prominent and active. Their influence on Latvian politics, economy

and culture is larger than that of Russian speakers in Estonia or Lithuania in their respective societies.

### *2.3. Lithuania*

Lithuania is ethnically the most homogenous Baltic country, where the titular nation forms an overwhelming majority (ca 80 per cent). According to the 2011 census, the Lithuanian population was 3.05 million people. The estimated number of Russian speakers is roughly 260,000, which is about 8 per cent of the population. Nearly 40 per cent of the Russian speakers live in Vilnius, where they make up 20 per cent of the population. Russian speakers are in the majority in only one town in Lithuania – Visaginas, where they make up 75 per cent of the population. About 20 per cent (23,000) of the whole Lithuanian Russian-speaking community live in Visaginas. The absolute majority of Lithuania's Russian speakers moved to Lithuania during the Soviet times. For example, the mainly Russian population of Visaginas consists of the personnel of the Ignalina power plant and their relatives.

As the number of Russian speakers is rather small in the country's overall population, the community has not emerged as culturally active. Although there are Russian-language schools, parents prefer to send their children to Lithuanian-language schools. The local Russian-language cultural life is poor, but Russia's TV channels are followed widely, even by ethnic Lithuanians. The Russians in Lithuania are not politically organised.

## 3. Theoretical assumptions and method

Patterns of bilingualism and language use are directly connected to collective identity for many ethnic groups. Based on Lambert's (1975) conception of subtractive bilingualism, Landry and Allard (1987) proposed

a model explaining how language use, ethnolinguistic vitality and beliefs are interconnected and influence the emergence of subtractive bilingualism with its impact on ethnic identity. In this model, elaborated in several studies (Landry and Allard 1991, 1992) the phenomenon of language and identity shift is a function of a complex set of social and psychological phenomena that influence language behaviour and are in turn moulded by language behaviour.

A central element in this model is the individual network of linguistic contacts (INLC) which is a major environmental factor that shapes an individual's language aptitude as well as attitudes toward language use. Both aptitude and attitudes start to affect one's linguistic behaviour, which in turn influences one's INLC. INLC forms a part of the larger society and, in the case of subtractive bilingualism, the changes that individuals make in their INLC drive them gradually toward new language and concurring identity.

Measuring INCL was operationalised by Landry et al. (1996) for quantitative study as a self-reported language use questionnaire. Their ten-item questionnaire was adopted as part of a wider 60-item questionnaire for assessing ethnolinguistic vitality by Ehala (2009). The current study is based on the data collected using this questionnaire in a large-scale quantitative survey of ethnolinguistic vitality in the Baltic countries conducted in 2008–2010 and involving nearly 3,000 participants (998 in Estonia, 1,025 in Latvia and 900 in Lithuania). The surveys were conducted by professional survey companies in each country.

The quantitative survey was followed by qualitative research: nine focus group interviews are planned, three in each country. The interview protocol was developed to obtain in-depth information about the same conceptual categories that were measured by the quantitative survey. Furthermore, the subjects for the focus groups were chosen based on the results of the cluster analysis of quantitative data that revealed prototypical vitality profiles amongst the subgroups within each ethnicity. These profiles were used to choose the participants for the focus groups. The Estonian part of the qualitative section of the study has already been completed, and the results are presented in this chapter. The Latvian and Lithuanian parts of the qualitative study are still in the analysis stage.

The main results of this comparative vitality study are presented in Ehala (2012) and Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2013); this paper focuses only on the interaction between language use and construction of ethnic identity, which can be studied by looking at correlations of language use patterns with other questions in the survey. The quantitative relationships are triangulated with data from the focus group interviews conducted in Estonian settings.

#### 4. Language use in Baltic countries

Language usage was measured by ten items that asked about the usage of Russian or the state language (Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian) with the following communication partners and channels: family members, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, service-sector employees, strangers, newspapers, radio, TV, cultural events. The first six items address language use from the most private sphere (family) to the most public sphere (strangers). The last four items concentrate on written, aural and audio-visual media and the consumption of culture. The questions were worded as follows: "In what language do you communicate with your friends?" The multiple choice answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale with variation in the name of the state language: 1 – *only in Russian*; 2 – *mostly in Russian*; 3 – *more in Russian than in Estonian/Latvian/Lithuanian*; 4 – *equally in Russian and Ee/La/Li*; 5 – *more in Ee/La/Li than Russian*; 6 – *mostly in Ee/La/Li*; 7 – *only in Ee/La/Li*.

Because of the large number, it is not reasonable to give an overview of answers to individual questions, instead all ten items were taken together to form an index of Russian language use. Since the internal consistency of this ten-item questionnaire was high for all six ethnic groups (Cronbach alfa over 0.7), using the summary index instead of individual questions is well justified. Next, the overview of Russian and state language usage patterns is given first by country, then followed by a comparative account.

#### *4.1. Language use in Estonia*

In Estonia, 75 per cent of Russian speakers use exclusively Russian to communicate with their family members and as much as 40 per cent also communicate with strangers only in Russian. The use of Russian with other communication partners falls in between. In media and culture consumption, between 50 and 60 per cent uses only Russian. Only 20 per cent are those who use Russian and Estonian equally or use more Estonian. This means that the Russian language is used widely in private spheres and quite widely also in the public sphere. This is facilitated by the fact that a large number of Russian speakers live compactly in the eastern towns of Estonia where the population is less than 20 per cent Estonian. Therefore the linguistic environment in this part of Estonia does not even provide many possibilities for using Estonian in the public sphere.

When we look at the language use patterns of Estonians, it is very much the mirror image of the Russian pattern: about 85 per cent use only Estonian with family members and about 35 per cent uses only Estonian also with strangers. Surprisingly, Estonians report using more Russian to strangers than Russians report using Estonian. This is perhaps a remnant of the Soviet pattern, where Estonians were actively bilingual while Russian speakers were not. Even though knowledge of Estonian has improved a lot amongst Russian speakers during the last twenty years, it seems that there are still more monolinguals amongst Russian speakers than amongst Estonians.

The media usage pattern is somewhat different, though. More than 60 per cent of Estonians use only Estonian newspapers, radio and cultural events, while only 30 per cent use only Estonian TV. However, Russian channels are followed quite sporadically, with only 15 per cent of Estonians using Russian and Estonian TV equally or more Russian channels than Estonian ones. The media usage pattern of Russian speakers is almost a mirror image of this: more than 50 per cent use only Russian language newspapers, radio and TV, and only 15 per cent use Estonian and Russian media equally, or more Estonian than Russian media. The usage is slightly more bilingual in attending cultural events – while nearly 50 per cent attend only Russian language events, about 22 per cent attend cultural events in both languages equally, or more Estonian events than Russian ones.

#### *4.2. Language use in Latvia*

In Latvia, 69 per cent of Russian speakers use only Russian at home, which is slightly less than in Estonia. The share of those who use only Russian to communicate with strangers in public places is also lower than in Estonia – 30 per cent in Latvia. Even with friends, only 40 per cent of Latvian Russian speakers use exclusively Russian, the same figure in Estonia is 55 per cent. Latvian Russian speakers are also less Russian-oriented in their media and culture consumption – depending on media type, only 30 to 45 per cent of subjects are exclusively oriented towards Russian sources, which is considerably less than in Estonia. This may be partly due to the fact that Russian speakers live in geographically less segregated areas in Latvia than in Estonia. While in Estonia, 20 per cent of Russians live in Estonian-dominant environments, in Latvia the proportion is 40 per cent.

Looking at Latvians' language use, the pattern is less monolingual than in Estonia, as well. Only 69 per cent of Latvians use only Latvian in their home, much less than in Estonia. When we look at those who use exclusively Latvian outside the home, the share is 30 per cent with all communication partners (friends, acquaintances, colleagues etc.). This indicates much lower levels of monolingual use than in Estonia, where up to 60 per cent of Estonian respondents use only Estonian with acquaintances. As for media use, 50 per cent of Latvians use only Latvian-language newspapers and only 15 per cent follow only Latvian-language TV channels. Monolingual Latvian radio use was reported by 42 per cent of respondents, and 29 per cent visit exclusively Latvian-language cultural events.

Thus, even though the Russian community in Latvia is more numerous, wealthier and more influential, it is less monolingual than the Estonian Russian community. On the other hand, even if the Latvian language policies seem to be the strictest amongst the Baltic countries, the Latvians themselves are using Russian quite widely.

#### *4.3. Language use in Lithuania*

The language usage of Russian speakers in Lithuania is considerably different from that of Estonia and Latvia. While the home language is exclusively

Russian for 75 per cent of the respondents, about 50 per cent use only Lithuanian in public spaces with strangers or service sector employees. This proportion is much less in Latvia (3 per cent) and in Estonia (5 per cent). As about 20 per cent of Lithuanian Russian speakers live in Visaginas, with a predominantly Russian population, around the same proportion (24 per cent) reports using only Russian in public spheres. The proportion of those who use only Russian with friends and colleagues is around 35 per cent.

As the media landscape is predominantly Lithuanian, about 15 per cent of Lithuanian Russian speakers report using only Lithuanian-language newspapers and radio, and 30 per cent report only visiting Lithuanian-language cultural events. Russian TV channels are followed widely, however, so that only 5 per cent report watching only Lithuanian TV.

Lithuanians report the highest monolingual use according to this study. About 90 per cent speak only Lithuanian at home, more than 80 per cent use only Lithuanian with tenders and acquaintances; more than 70 per cent use only Lithuanian with strangers. Communication with friends is in sharp contrast – only 50 per cent uses only Lithuanian. This means that the other half uses some Russian while communicating with their Russian-speaking friends. High rates of Lithuanian use also characterise media consumption – it is more than 80 per cent in Lithuanian, except Lithuanian-language TV, which is the only choice for less than 40 per cent of Lithuanian viewers.

The Lithuanian pattern is somewhat similar to the Estonian one in the sense that in both countries, there are two overwhelmingly monolingual linguistic environments where everybody tends to use the dominant language. The difference lies in the fact that the proportion of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia is about three times higher than in Lithuania.

#### *4.4. Comparison of language use patterns in the Baltic countries*

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 graphically present the most robust differences between the use of Russian and the state language in the Baltic countries, both among the Russian-speaking groups as well as the titular ethnicities. The graphs represent the share of respondents choosing each of the seven language

use options (from only Russian to only Estonian/Latvian/ Lithuanian, represented in the graphs as SL – the state language) cumulatively in six contexts of interpersonal communication (family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, tenders, strangers). For example the percentage of the option “only in Russian” represents the share of this choice over all six questions and by all respondents. In this way all seven options should total to 100 per cent, but as there were also missing cases, the total for all ethnic groups is less than 100 per cent, but more than 90 per cent. Therefore, the deviations caused by missing cases are not of a magnitude that they would distort the general trends revealed by this form of representation.

As can be seen in Figure 4.1, the monolingual use of Russian by Russian speakers is highest in Estonia, considerably lower in Latvia, and the lowest in Lithuania. Balanced bilingual use of Russian and the state language among Russian speakers is highest in Latvia, while the situation is comparable in Estonia and Lithuania. The proportion of those who use the state language exclusively in all contexts is highest in Lithuania, reaching 25 per cent. This percentage is an approximation of the share of Russians who have literally gone through language shift to Lithuanian.

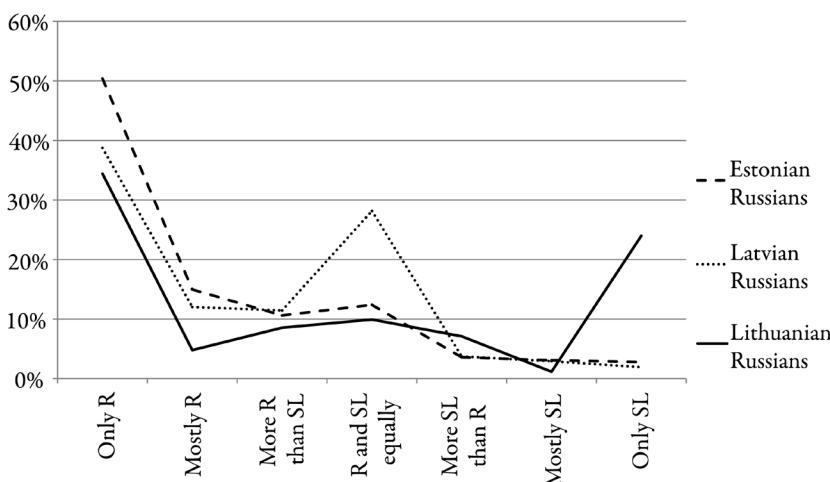


Figure 4.1. Language use patterns among Russian-speaking populations.

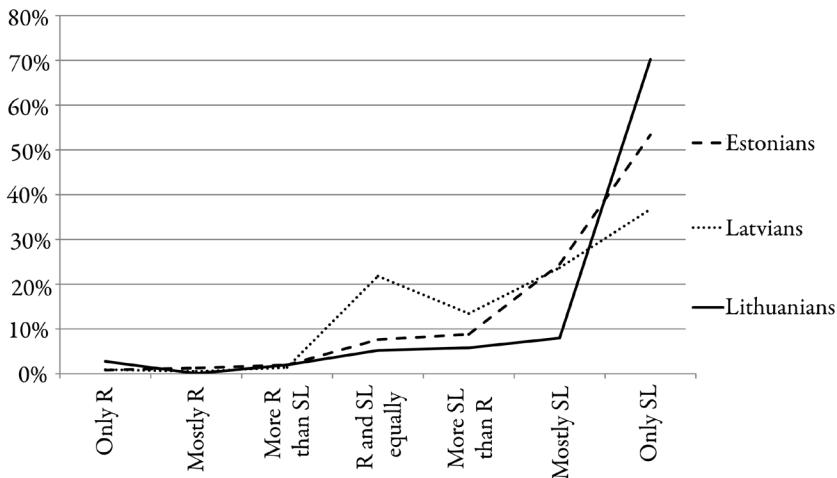


Figure 4.2. Language use patterns among the titular ethnicities.

When we look at the language use patterns amongst the titular ethnicities, Estonians and Lithuanians show similar patterns, except that Lithuanians represent more exclusive monolingual use, while a considerable number of Estonians use some Russian. Latvians show a distinctly different pattern, as the share of those using Latvian and Russian equally is nearly three times higher than in Estonia or Lithuania. The number of those exclusively using the state language is lowest in Latvia.

To summarise the language use patterns, we can see that Estonia and Lithuania display segregated language use patterns, with language shift from Russian to the state language clearly visible in Lithuania, but almost not present in Estonia. Latvia differs from its neighbours in a high percentage of mutual bilingual use, among the Russian speakers as well as Latvians.

As Figures 4.1 and 4.2 suggest, language use patterns are highly dependent on the ethnic composition of the linguistic environment where the respondents live. For example in Lithuania, where Russian speakers live in predominantly Lithuanian-speaking environments, the percentage of those who have also become Lithuanian users is the highest, while there are still many who use exclusively Russian, presumably in the Russian-populated

Visaginas. Latvia, with two large ethnic communities distributed evenly, shows the highest rate of bilingual use. Estonia seems to be an exception at first glance, as over half of its large Russian-speaking community lives in mixed linguistic environments, but the language use pattern is the most monolingual of the three countries. Still, statistical analysis of the Estonian data shows that even in this country, the general trend is valid: the higher the percentage of Estonians, the wider the usage of Estonian by Russians ( $\rho= .623$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $N=457$ ); and the higher the percentage of Russians, the wider the usage of Russian by Estonians ( $\rho= .447$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $N=537$ ).

Thus, the usage patterns depend on the intensity of contact with members of the other ethnicity, and it is reasonable to hypothesise that the intensity of contact also affects identity. Therefore, the ethnic identity of a Russian-speaking person is likely to differ depending on the intensity of their contacts with members of the titular ethnicity. It is evident that language usage and intensity of contact varies greatly from one location to another, but it also varies due to economic, educational and personal factors. All this creates a scale of identity types where the boundaries between different types are blurred, and a constant process of identity negotiation and construction is going on. This process is well revealed in the qualitative analysis of focus group interviews outlined next.

## 5. Identity types

To study the attitudes, beliefs and identity of different subgroups of Russian speakers, focus group interviews were conducted in all three countries after the quantitative surveys, in the years 2009–2011. At the time of writing, the Estonian interviews have been fully analysed, while the rest of the material is still in the process of analysis. Thus the current paper reflects only the Estonian qualitative data.

The interview frame was designed to match the quantitative study of ethnolinguistic vitality (see section 3). Each interview was about 2,5 hours

long and addressed a wide range of topics that emerged in the discussion. The interviews were conducted in Russian by a Russian Estonian bilingual researcher. The interviews were transcribed and the names of the participants changed. The following analysis uses data from one interview setting only – young specialists in Narva, Estonia.

By identity type we mean a set of personal characteristics of the subject, such as education, language knowledge and career as well as his/her statements concerning ethnic identity, values and beliefs. As the analysis shows, even if the participants of the focus group all fall into one quite well-defined social category (young urban specialists), their life trajectories as well as their beliefs and value judgments represent quite a wide span, further indicating that there is no single uniform identity for all Russian speakers in Estonia, not to speak of the whole Baltic region. Below, I provide three identity profiles that are quite distinct and are able to define quite a large scale of possibilities. A more detailed account of the identity types is presented in Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2013), which this overview relies upon.

### *5.1. Sergei*

Sergei (here and below, all names are changed) has Russian citizenship, but he was born in Estonia and lives in Narva, in northeastern Estonia. In the interview, he revealed that he did not complete his university studies, as he could not pass the Estonian language test. Regarding his language practices, he admitted that he has some Estonian colleagues, but he “communicates with them in Russian, of course”. He said that he sometimes watches the New Year speech by the Estonian president, “but not always with the sound, to be honest”. He sees ethnic identity as rigid and unchangeable; this is characterised by his statement that “Russians will be Russians, even if they have lived for generations in the USA”.

When talking about ethnic identity, he expresses a discourse of victim identity by drawing parallels between the situation of Russian speakers in Estonia and Jews in Nazi Germany (see example 1) or African-Americans in the USA in the beginning of the twentieth century (example 2). He knows that his views are not shared by others, and therefore his radical

comparisons are followed by an admission of exaggeration (example 3). Still, he chooses to use these strong metaphors in constructing the Russian identity in Estonia.

- 1) *Это всё когда-то было, т.е. нормальный фашизм, [...] т.е. есть как бы евреи и есть люди, и здесь как бы тоже самое.*  
“All this has already been, i.e. clear Fascism, [...] i.e. there are Jews, and there are humans, and here it looks like the same”.
- 2) *Ну это очень похоже на соединённые штаты начала 20-го века, да вот есть там место для негров, есть места для белых...здесь тоже самое абсолютно.*  
“This is very similar to the USA in the beginning of the twentieth century – there are places for the Negroes and places for the whites...here it is absolutely the same”.
- 3) *Я очень сильно утрирую.*  
“I exaggerate very strongly”.

### 5.2. Aleksander

Aleksander has graduated from an Estonian university and knows Estonian on an intermediate level. He has Estonian colleagues and communicates with them in Estonian. He considers himself Russian, but when abroad, he already has doubts, which becomes evident from a story about his visit to a pub in Russia. When he entered the pub and ordered his beer, he noticed that people around him were looking at him strangely. Later, when he entered a conversation with somebody there, he was told that he was not considered a native Russian because of behaving too politely (i.e. saying too many *thank-you's* in the exchange with the bartender). He admits that, in a sense, he could not consider himself a prototypical Russian, but still he is Russian and would not want to give this identity up (example 4):

- 4) *Вот если бы мне сказали махнуть палочкой волшебной и ты превратишься в эстонца, я бы отказался...вот честно.*  
“If a wizard said that ok, just a tap of the magic wand and you'll turn Estonian, I would say no...honestly”.

Yet, in constructing the future, he clearly expresses an integration discourse by imagining a future where the boundary between Estonians and Russian speakers becomes significantly blurred (example 5). He envisions a future where the Russians in Narva (now 90 per cent of the population) are as fluent in Estonian as the Russians in Tartu (20 per cent of the population) are now (example 6). He would welcome a time when all inhabitants of Estonia could just be called Estonians (see 7), despite the fact that he would reject this possibility for the immediate future (example 4, above).

- 5) *лет 50, [...] будет общая такая страна Эстония, где нет такого разделения – там *muulased*.*

“In fifty years [...] there will be a common Estonia where there is no such category of *muulane* ['alien']”.

- 6) *Я думаю что размешается и будет ну так как в Тарту например [...] такая же ситуация будет и у нас...конечно не лет там через 5–10, а лет через 30 так будет.*  
“I think that mixing will be as in Tartu, for example [...] such a situation will be here too, not in five to ten years, but in thirty years it will be like this”.

- 7) *Ну и будет ДАЙ БОГ когда-нибудь чтоб русских и эстонцев называли одним словом эстонец, это было очень хорошо, я только за это.*

“And it will be one day – God permitting – that Russians and Estonians are called by one word, ‘Estonians’, it would be very good, I am for this”.

### 5.3. *Malle*

Malle has been a Russian Estonian bilingual since her childhood; she went to Russian-language school, but later obtained a degree from an Estonian university. She is married to an Estonian man. For her, it is easy to switch between identities to suit her mood or to adapt to the situation (see example 8):

- 8) *Мне нравится, когда меня воспринимают как русского человека, но иногда это не выгодно по ситуациям [...] а где хочется немножко раздора и веселья, тогда идёшь в другую сторону [...] и мне тогда очень сладко себя интерпретировать с кем либо, потому что для меня два языка родных.*

"I like that people take me as a Russian, but sometimes it is not advantageous in a situation [...] but when I want to have a bit of fun, I go to the other (Russian) side [...] it is very easy for me to interpret myself as I please, since I have two native languages".

In the context of the focus group interview, she acts as an intergroup broker (even though the Estonian side is not present) when other members of the group begin to express ethnocentrism views (example 9):

- 9) Sergei: *Во-первых, русский немного благообразней, вот, по лицу же видно*  
 Malle (interrupts): *Ну я скажу, что мне сложно по лицу и по одежде сказать что*  
 Sergei (interrupts): *ну запутаться конечно можно, но довольно большая доля...*  
 [...]  
 Pjotr: *У нас женщины одеваются классически и как тона мой взгляд красивее, у них как то есть вкус.*  
 Malle: *Ты говоришь о нарвских женщинах или о тех, которые живут в Эстонии русские?*  
 Pjotr: *В Эстонии русские.*  
 Malle: *т.е. я по своему опыту, мне сложно сказать по одежде и по внешнему виду*  
 Sergei: *Не, ну по одежде то там сложно судить, с одеждой то непонятно...я то имел лицо...ну именно внешнее...*  
 Malle: *Ну как, что такое черты лица русского или черты лица эстонца?*  
 Sergei: *Не, ну согласитесь в эстонской среде гораздо большие дегенеративных черт встречается, чем в русской...*

Sergei: "Firstly, Russians are a bit more noble, I mean, you can see it on their face..."

Malle: "But I'd say that for me, it is hard to distinguish by face and dress that..."

Sergei: "Yes, you can be mistaken, but for a quite a large proportion..."

[...]

Pjotr: "Our women dress with style, and in my opinion, they are prettier, they have taste".

Malle: "Are you talking about Narva's women or about those Russians that live in Estonia in general?"

Pjotr: "Estonian Russians".

Malle: "My experience tells me that for me it is hard to tell by dress and appearance..."

Sergei: "Well, by dress, it is hard to judge, clothing is not that clear, what I meant was the face, and appearance".

Malle: "So what are the features of a Russian face and features of an Estonian face?"

Sergei: "No, you have to agree that in the Estonian environment you can see much more degenerative features than in the Russian..."

When we compare these three individuals, it is clear that their attitudes towards Russianness and Estonianness differ, as do their values and identity orientations. Therefore, it is possible to imagine a scale of ethnic identity where on one extreme are individuals who feel high interethnic discord between Russians and Estonians, who have low knowledge of Estonian, little contact with Estonians, little motivation to learn the language, and rigid ethnic identity. Sergei would be a representative of this type of Russian identity. On the other extreme would be individuals who perceive low interethnic discordance between Estonians and Russians, have good knowledge of Estonian, extensive contacts with Estonians and a dynamic ethnic identity. Malle would be a representative of this type. Aleksander would be located somewhere in the middle on this scale, by feeling some discord, having some contacts with Estonians and conceptualising ethnic identity to be relatively stable, but still in evolution.

## 6. Interrelation of identity and language usage

There is no doubt that language is the key feature in the identity of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, as well as for the Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia. In Lithuania, the situation might be somewhat different, as the small number of Russians in Lithuania makes it more difficult to maintain Russian language as the main feature of collective identity.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the issue of Russian as an official state language in Estonia and Latvia is at the centre of identity management battles, and the opinions on this matter diverge sharply along ethnic lines. In Estonia, 89 per cent of Russians share the view that Russian should be the second official language, while 86 per cent of Estonians oppose this possibility (see Table 4.1). In Latvia, 85 per cent of the Russian speakers support the idea while 69 per cent of Latvians are opposed to it (see Table

4.2). In Lithuania, the situation is considerably different with regard to Russian speakers: only 64 per cent of Russians think that Russian should be an official language in Lithuania, while 84 per cent of Lithuanians are against it (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.1. Agreement with a statement about Russian as an official language in Estonia.  
Statement: "Russian should be the second official language in Estonia".<sup>2</sup>

	agree completely	agree	rather agree	rather disagree	disagree	disagree completely	N
Estonians	4%	3%	7%	14%	25%	47%	537
Russians	52%	20%	17%	7%	4%	1%	457

Table 4.2. Agreement with a statement about Russian as a second official language in Latvia. Statement: "Russian should be the second official language in Latvia".

	agree completely	agree	rather agree	hard to tell	rather disagree	disagree	disagree completely	N
Latvians	7%	5%	14%	5%	7%	11%	51%	419
Russians	60%	15%	10%	4%	4%	4%	3%	406

Table 4.3. Agreement with a statement about Russian as a second official language in Lithuania. Statement: "Russian should be the second official language in Lithuania".

	agree completely	agree	rather agree	hard to tell	rather disagree	disagree	disagree completely	N
Lithuanians	1%	7%	6%	2%	9%	32%	43%	402
Russians	8%	26%	30%	3%	13%	15%	5%	233

<sup>2</sup> In the Estonian study we did not include the "hard to tell" option in the scale, fearing that this would be an easy option to hide one's opinion. Clustering of the responses in two opposite poles of the scale indicated that this would not be a problem. In the Latvian and Lithuanian questionnaires, we did include this choice.

It is important to point out that the attitudes toward Russian as a possible official language are in statistically significant correlation to language usage patterns: the more a Russian-speaking respondent reports using the state language, the less s/he agrees that Russian should be an official language in their country ( $r=.351$ ,  $p<.001$  in Estonia;  $r=.352$ ,  $p<.01$  in Latvia;  $r=.280$ ,  $p<.01$  in Lithuania). Also, the more a Latvian, Lithuanian or Estonian respondent reports using Russian, the less s/he is against Russian as an official language ( $r=.456$   $p<.000$  in Estonia;  $r=.415$   $p<.01$  in Latvia;  $r=.304$   $p<.01$  in Lithuania).

Therefore, there seems to be a direct link between the use of Russian and the state language, the attitudes towards Russian as a state language and the collective identity of the Russian speakers. The less the state languages are used, the more rigid and essentialist the Russian-speaking identity is perceived to be and the higher the sense of deprivation by Russian speakers. Wider use of the state language seems to be associated with more flexible identity and a lower sense of deprivation.

## 7. Conclusion

For Russian speakers in the Baltic countries, the use of Russian and the state language is very tightly connected to collective identity and the associated set of values and beliefs. Roughly, one could say that the greater the use of the state language, the more positive the respondent's sense of identity and the lesser the feeling of deprivation and interethnic discord.

This would imply that improved knowledge of the state language would lead to a more positive and harmonious collective identity. This implication is well known to the policy makers in the Baltic countries who have tried for over twenty years to improve knowledge of the state language as the main tool for integration of the Russian-speaking community into the societies of their country of residency.

Yet the task has not been an easy one, because the language–identity link is not unidirectional, but bidirectional. This means that a rigid

essentialist identity accompanied by the sense of deprivation and hostility towards the state authorities leads to a very low motivation to learn and use the state language. The resulting low level of state language competency in turn means that a person cannot apply for certain jobs, study in most fields at university, apply for citizenship and so on. These restrictions quite clearly further the feelings of deprivation and hostility.

The interrelatedness of collective identity, attitudes, language knowledge and use creates a vicious circle of mutual reinforcement which is hard to break. This process is in turn influenced by human geography, as well. As the data presented in this article show, segregation of the Russian-speaking community and the majority population is highest in Estonia. In this country, the divergence on the issue of the state language also shows the highest level of potential confrontation. In Latvia, which has the most mixed interethnic population and shows the highest level of bilingual use among both Russian speakers and Latvians, is slightly less confrontational on views about the state language issue. In Lithuania, the Russian speakers are distributed sparsely and the state language issue is not essential in the interethnic relations in this country.

Even though the linguistic and identity processes are slow, there is no doubt that both the language use patterns and the identity of Russian speakers in the Baltic countries have undergone large changes over the past few decades, and that these processes are likely to continue. In Lithuania it seems to lead to Russian language and identity shift, in Latvia to negotiation of a bilingual Latvian-Russian civic identity that would embrace both ethnic identities (Latvian and Russian), while in Estonia the linguistic divide will continue to be one of the most salient features of the society.

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