

An aerial photograph of a zebra crossing with colorful stripes. The stripes are white, purple, green, red, cyan, orange, brown, blue, and white. Several people are walking across the crossing in various directions. The background is a solid purple color.

LANGUAGE SITUATION IN LATVIA

2016-2020

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LANGUAGE SITUATION IN LATVIA: 2016–2020.

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The leading partner of the project is the University of Latvia.

The study is the next stage of the regular LVA study of the language situation, and it analyses the dynamics of the language situation from 2016 to 2020. The study analyses the Latvian language skill of Latvian residents and the problems related to its acquisition, language use in various sociolinguistic domains, and the proficiency and positions of various other languages in the linguistic environment; it pays more attention to language positions in the work environment, as well as the Latvian language diaspora. The study is based on the results of both quantitative and qualitative surveys, it provides analysis in the context of both the results of previous studies and other data sources. The final chapter summarizes the main conclusions and recommendations for the implementation of language policy in the future.

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LANGUAGE SITUATION IN LATVIA

2016-2020

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC
STUDY



Latvian Language Agency

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Foreword

The study of the language situation in the previous five years (2016–2020) reflects the situation of the Latvian language as the state language, as well as the language environment and conditions we have reached throughout the thirty years of independence. Moreover, it is possible to review and assess what exactly has changed, and how, during these five years, as well as how dynamically or slowly the Latvian language situation and its main components and parameters, i.e. language skills and use, have changed since 1990.

This has been made possible thanks to regular research, monitoring and reporting on the language situation every five years using the same systemic criteria, thus ensuring comparability and continuity of sociolinguistic data and results. It has allowed the identification and accurate analysis of the dynamics affecting different components and states of the language situation, to describe the causes that affect the use of the language and to motivate the acquisition and/or improvement of Latvian language skills.

Providing a clear picture of the state of the language in the most important sociolinguistic domains, the study also presents what has been successful in strengthening the position of the Latvian language, what aspects are relevant and what needs to be done in the future by state institutions, local government institutions and society.

However, an important question also arises as to whether it will be possible in the future to ensure the continuity of such studies that provide an opportunity to compare and assess arguments, as it is currently unclear how the programme “Latvian language (2018–2021) will be continued, there is also no certainty about the continuity of the statutory function of the Latvian Language Agency to analyse the situation of the Latvian language, i.e. the state language, and the further dynamics of sociolinguistic processes.

Since 1897, Latvia has accumulated rich historical statistical data on the native language of the population, including language skills. The interruption of this historical tradition by changing the principles of the census is worrisome (information on the spread of the Latvian language throughout the territory of Latvia is no longer gathered). This is one of the primary issues to be addressed – to include in the national registers data on the native and/or other language skills of the country’s population.

The continuation, in turn, allows for a more accurate assessment and definition of future objectives. When assessing the main events and circumstances that have affected the language situation in the last five years, it must be acknowledged that after the so called

language referendum of 2012, which was a blatant and complete attack on the positions of the state language, there are now attempts to crumble and weaken the positions of the state language by legal means, by separate elements within policy-making, "brick by brick". These attempts are clearly visible in the motions and complaints to the Constitutional Court. The most blatant of them are motions related to the strengthening of the state language in the general education system, and further in higher education. Despite the provisions stipulated in the Labour Law, what is alarming are unfounded demands to know Russian language in the labour market (employers tend to require foreign language skills in situations where they are not needed).

Analysing the facts characterizing the language situation, it can be seen that the greatest problem is the linguistic attitude of society, which is the basis for motivation to use the language and which is at the same time related to the level of language proficiency. Improving the linguistic attitude of society, approximating it to an optimal one, is the most important objective in language policy. Understanding that any manifestation of social bilingualism (i.e. the use of Russian alongside Latvian) and any possibility to use Latvian in which we choose to prefer Russian anyway, reduces the use of Latvian, gradually brings Latvian closer to other lesser-used, disappearing languages.

The state is responsible for the existence and development of the state language. But the state is first and foremost its citizens, the people who live in it, society. The state language as a national value in today's world is complemented by the socially unifying function it holds, without giving this role up to foreign languages. As an example, one can mention an economically strong country such as Norway, whose government, on 12 May 2020, announced a proposal for a new language law to strengthen the position of the Norwegian language and ensure the socially unifying role of the Norwegian language, as well as determining responsibility for the Sámi language and languages of traditional national languages.

In order to ensure the role of the state language as a fully-fledged unifier of society in Latvia, it is vital to improve and optimize the attitude towards the Latvian language in order to expand its use and promote the use of the state language – always and everywhere, even in exceptional circumstances. It is an essential task for public officials, municipal employees, opinion leaders and politicians to use only the state language in communication with the public and especially with the media. One should completely and utterly reject the various excuses that use euphemisms and word combinations that blur the true meaning of terms such as inclusive communication, two-way communication, and inclusive language.

The existence and development of language is truly the responsibility of the state, which in fact means society, and this can only be ensured through the active participation of everyone – society, mass media, each individual – everyone has their own responsibility.

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Abbreviations

- UN** – United Nations
- JSC** – joint stock company
- CSP** – Central Statistical Bureau (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde)
- ESF** – European Social Fund
- CJEU** – Court of Justice of the European Union
- IZM** – Ministry of Education and Science (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija)
- KM** – Ministry of Culture (Kultūras ministrija)
- LU** – University of Latvia
- LSSR** – Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic
- LVA** – Latvian Language Agency
- MK** – Cabinet of Ministers (Ministru kabinets)
- NVA** – State Employment Agency
- CIS** – Commonwealth of Independent States
- OECD** – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PMLP** – Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs
(Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde)
- ST** – Constitutional Court
- TM** – Ministry of Justice (Satversmes tiesa)
- VAS** – State public limited liability company
- VISC** – National Centre for Education (Valsts izglītības satura centrs)
- VVC** – State Language Center (Valsts valodas centrs)
- VVPP** – State Language Proficiency Examination
(Valsts valodas prasmes pārbaude)

CHAPTER I

FIVE YEARS IN THE LIFE OF THE LATVIAN LANGUAGE (2016–2020)

Ina Druviete

The study “The Situation of the Latvian Language in Latvia 2016–2020” is yet another stop on the road for the situation of the Latvian language and its research¹. It is not merely an isolated snapshot that synchronously captures the situation in certain sociolinguistic domains, but a diachronic indicator that helps us understand changes in language use and quality. If we have data and facts about the expansion, narrowing or stability of language functions, and knowledge of the political, socio-economic and cultural context, it is possible to determine the causal relationships of specific sociolinguistic processes, assess the potential impact on the positions of Latvian language in general, and recommend solutions at the state policy level.

¹ Latvia is one of the countries where long-term and regular research on the language situation is carried out. The use of Latvian and Russian was studied as early as in 1987 [Drižule, Gerentoviča 1990], a complex sociolinguistic study on the language situation in Latvia was carried out in 1995 and 1996 with the support of the UN Development Program and the US Embassy [Druviete 1995, 1996], comprehensive monitoring of the sociolinguistic situation in Latvia has been carried out since the foundation of the Latvian Language Agency (this publication already includes the third panel study). [See also Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010; Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015] Several monographic studies and collections of articles on the language situation [e.g., Baltiņš, Druviete, ed. Veisbergs, 2007; Valsts valodas likums 2008, ed. Veisbergs, 2013], as well as several dozen articles have been published in Latvian and foreign publications. Publications and materials on the situation of the Latvian language can be found on the Latvian Language Agency website www.valoda.lv; since 1997 a full bibliography of Latvian linguistics has been available on the website of the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia www.lulavi.lv.

Is it possible at all to give a true picture of the language situation, and, in particular, its evaluation in a given language area and period, taking into account global and regional trends in language stability and changes in society, researchers and policy-makers' attitudes toward languages, language competition and state regulation? The answer to this question is not simple. Language is so important in the life of every individual, social group, society and state that in all its manifestations objective and subjective factors are inextricably linked. We can evaluate language from the point of view of an individual, social group, national identity or even global linguistic diversity, and each party will have their own truth. The ideal objective of a language policy is to balance these points of view. The scientific assessment of sociolinguistic processes and the recommendations of researchers can form the basis of language policy legislation, but they can also be questioned and ignored. Both the traditional approach to language issues accepted at the national level and the leading global trends, which are currently evolving towards, for instance, individualism and the free market, can play an equally important role in reviewing language policy guidelines. Therefore, it is desirable to clearly define in each study the theoretical direction and methodology of the study of language situation and language policy, so that discussions are based on a common concept or at least on clearly identified fundamental differences in approach.

1.1. The theoretical basis of the evaluation of the Latvian language situation and language policy

The historical decision of 6 October 1988 *On the status of the Latvian language* (adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR before the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia) marked the beginning of the process of changing the hierarchy of languages and guaranteeing the sustainability of the Latvian language. The likelihood of the Latvian language being subordinated and of the gradual linguistic assimilation of the Latvians were irrefutable arguments in the adoption of this important decision and subsequent regulatory enactments. Facts about the ever narrowing use of the Latvian language were widely used in discussions and monographs.¹ At the same time, work was under way to develop a theoretical framework for language policy. The involvement of professional linguists in the drafting of legislation was a distinctive feature of Latvia, hence from the very beginning every step in language policy was grounded in scientific analysis.

The first language law (*Language Law of Latvian SSR*) in the newly-restored Latvia was adopted on 5 May 1989, after long discussions, which would be worth revisiting from a modern perspective, because – paradoxically – in 2020 there are still many arguments against the dominance of the Latvian language in Latvia. This law of the transition period was based on three pillars: 1) study of the language situation, 2) analysis of the language policy of the interwar period to ensure the continuity of the state, 3) studies of the theory of language policy and linguistic legislation of other countries.

It is worth dwelling on the last point in more detail as it reveals the stable roots of the basic principles of the Latvian language policy. When sociolinguistics as an autonomous branch of science began to spread from the United States throughout the world at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, its methods and findings did not pass unrecognised by Latvian linguists. Sociolinguistic schools were formed in the territory of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, which explicitly separated themselves from the “bourgeois pseudoscience” of the West, yet at the same time provided enough information about current research directions. The original studies themselves, available in the form of ‘samizdat’ (a clandestine publishing system within the Soviet Union) or ‘tamizdat’ (literature of the Soviet Union published abroad), as they were called at the time, were carefully read, summarized, and analysed, because the struggle for Latvian language rights took place throughout the Soviet years, albeit in a vague form and in the Aesopian language. Therefore, as soon as the opportunity arose to create a structural framework for the language policy of the newly-restored state, the most useful – according to the majority of language policy specialists – contribution of foreign sociolinguists was applied within the situation of Latvia.²

¹ E.g., Blinkena 1988, 1989, Bušs 1999, Hirša 1999, Veidemane 1988; see also the subsequent analysis of the language situation in the Soviet period, e.g. Riekstiņš 2012.

² These authors were mostly supporters of so called classical language policy theory. There were dozens of them, but at the time the first language laws were drafted the most influential were the works of John Edwards, Charles Ferguson, Joshua Fishman, Einar Haugen, Björn Jernudd, Peter Nelde, Uriel Weinreich (see Edwards 1985; Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1973; Haugen 1972; Jernudd 1968; Nelde 1986; Weinreich 1953); the approach of these authors was later continued by Robert Kaplan and Richard Baldauf, Bernard Spolsky, Christina Bratt Paulston [see, for instance, Bratt Paulston 1994; Kaplan, Baldauf 1997; Spolsky 2004, 2009].

Although alternative theories, such as the critical theory of language management, the theory of language as an instrument of power, etc., are also known in Latvia, the description of the language situation and the evaluation of the dynamics of sociolinguistic processes in Latvia are traditionally based on the principles of **classical language policy theory**.

Since 1989 the Latvian language policy has been based on the following fundamental postulates: the official language in Latvia is Latvian; the state guarantees the possibility to preserve, develop and use the minority languages of Latvia in certain functions. They include the concept of the coexistence of languages and the legal hierarchy of languages with the priority of the state language and are reflected in all legal acts concerning language, starting with the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and ending with the internal regulatory enactments of institutions and enterprises. According to the principles of the classical language policy theory, a certain structure of the description of the language situation has been strengthened in Latvia, which, since 1995, has been used with insignificant modifications both in the above-mentioned comprehensive sociolinguistic studies and in previous *Official Language Policy Guidelines*.³ In the *Guidelines* all three basic elements of the real status of the state language are also analysed, i.e. language skills, language use and attitude towards language.

In the subsequent *Official Language Policy Guidelines for 2015–2020* it is stated: **“The objective of the state language policy** is to ensure the sustainability of the Latvian language – the official language of the Republic of Latvia and an official language of the European Union – the linguistic quality thereof and competitiveness in the language market of Latvia and the world, and also the impact on the cultural environment of Latvia. Four action directions have been laid down for the achievement of the objective stipulated in the official language policy.

1. **Strengthening of the official language legal status.** To implement this direction, tasks have been defined aimed at the implementation of *State Language Law* and other related regulatory enactments and international cooperation, including translation of the regulatory documents in the institutions of Latvia and the EU.
2. **Official language education policy.** For the implementation of this direction, measures are planned related to the issues of Latvian language education and concerning the pedagogical aspect of the state language policy. This also includes reviewing Latvian language teaching methodologies, conformity, accessibility, attractiveness, as well as training of specialists and teachers in the field of strengthening the position of the state language.

³ For example, the first stage of the *Official Language Policy Guidelines* states: “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).” [OLPG 2005–2014, p. 5; see also Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010, 16–19]

3. **Scientific research and development of the Latvian language.** The implementation of this direction stipulated support for the analysis of the official language situation, scientific research and the Latvian language, and development of language technologies, including the establishment of databases and national corpora of the Latvian language, terminology development, and also publishing academic and popular scientific papers.
4. **Ensuring of the participation of the community in the official language policy implementation and Latvian language development.** The framework of this direction envisions the implementation of measures aimed at the formation of public opinion, involvement and participation of society, as well as the development of Latvian language culture and promoting the Latvian language and the Livonian language.” [Cabinet of Ministers, Regulations No. 630]

In order to be able to more accurately describe the dynamics of the sociolinguistic situation in Latvia, this traditional model of describing the language situation should be preserved by linking the mentioned language policy directions with their impact on three interrelated fundamental indicators – **language skills, language use and linguistic attitudes.**

1.2. Strengthening of the official language legal status

Compared to the previous reporting period (2010–2015), when the seemingly stable space of the Latvian language policy was shaken by a referendum on the status of the languages in Latvia⁴ and the subsequent adoption of the *Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia*⁵, in the years 2016–2020 no language-related amendments or

⁴ On 18 February 2012, a referendum was held on the status of languages in Latvia with the following question asked on the ballot paper: “Are you in favour of the adoption of the draft law ‘Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia’, which envisages determining the Russian language as the second official language?” As the Latvian language is closely connected with Latvian identity and statehood, the referendum affected not only the language, but also a more important issue – the sovereignty of the Latvian state. After extensive political debates in the Saeima, media etc., 1,098,593 Latvian citizens or 70.73% of the population went to the polls. An overwhelming majority – 821,722 or 74.8% – voted against the proposal to make Russian the second official language in Latvia. 273,347 or 24.88% voted in favour of this initiative, while 3,524 or 0.32% of the ballot papers were declared invalid. Thus, the Latvian language is and will be the only official language in Latvia. [See Druviete, Ozolins 2016]

⁵ The word “language” is mentioned three times in the introduction to the Latvian Constitution. This is unique in the context of the world’s constitutions and their preambles. It has, however, a clear rationale and purpose. Latvia is characterized by fierce language competition, therefore the strengthening of the status of the Latvian language both in several sections of the Constitution and in its preamble is logical. From the language policy standpoint, the preamble has more than a symbolic or political meaning. It strengthens the arguments for the development of specific norms and the provision of funding for the research, learning and protection of the Latvian language. [See Druviete 2015]

additions in the *Constitution* nor *State Language Law* (1999) were adopted. At the level of legal acts adopted by the Saeima, the most significant amendments were made to the laws concerning the education system (see the subsection “State Language in Education”).

On 20 June 20 2018, the amendments were made to the *Electronic Mass Media Law* that specify the concepts of “main audio language of a programme” and “language track”, determine the use of the state language in cross-border programmes, as well as the advantages in competitions related to the proportion of audiovisual works produced in Latvian.⁶

In 2018, the *Law on Administrative Liability*⁷ was adopted. It stipulated that administrative offence proceedings shall take place in the official language, and provided a possibility to use another language in certain cases. It entered into force on 1 July 2020 together with the *Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order, and Use of the Official Language*. Chapter IV provides penalties for administrative violations in the field of official language use.⁸

⁶ Section 32 of the *Electronic Mass Media Law* was supplemented with the fifth subsection as follows: “(5) If the electronic mass media outlet produces a transfrontier programme which is available also in the territory of Latvia, it shall ensure the programme has a language track in the official language. An electronic mass media programme which is not available in the territory of Latvia does not need to be ensured in the official language.” In Section 61, the following second paragraph was added: “[..] When organising the tender, preference shall be given to those electronic mass media programmes which ensure that at least 20 per cent of the weekly transmission time is reserved for European audiovisual works that are initially produced in Latvian. [...]”. The formulation of Section 24 was amended, which now stipulated that “the main audio language and format of the electronic mass media programmes shall be an unchangeable component of the principal conditions within the term of validity of the issued broadcasting permit. The language track may be changed during the term of validity of the broadcasting permit.” [Amendments to the Electronic Mass Media Law [online]. *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2018, No. 128, 28.06.2018 [accessed: 15.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2018/128.1>]

⁷ Section 35 states: “(1) Administrative offence proceedings shall take place in the official language. (2) A person to be held administratively liable, a punished person, a victim, an infringed owner of property, as well as a witness shall be provided with the possibility to use the language in administrative offence proceedings in which he or she is able to communicate, as well as to use the assistance of an interpreter free of charge. An official, a higher official or a court shall evaluate the need for interpreting and ensure the participation of an interpreter.[..]” Article 115 stipulates that among the officials who are entitled to conduct administrative offence proceedings are the officials of the State Language Centre. [Law on Administrative Liability [online]. *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2018, No. 225, 14.11.2018 [accessed: 15.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2018/225.1>]

⁸ Sections 14–28 of this Law provide for the liability for violations of the use of the official language, failure to produce the texts of seals, stamps, and forms in the official language or rendition thereof along with the official language also in a foreign language, failure to conform to the norms of the official language in public information, failure to form and use titles in the official language, failure to use the official language to the extent necessary for the performance of professional and work duties, disrespect for the official language, failure to provide a translation in events, etc. [Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order, and Use of the Official Language [online]. *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2020, No. 96, 20.05.2020 [accessed: 15.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2020/96.1>]

In relation to several sections of the *State Language Law* several Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers were drafted, and have been amended several times since their adoption in 2000. Special mention should be made of the amendments made in 2017, 2019 and 2020 in connection with the determination of the required level of proficiency in the official language⁹ in the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 733, adopted in 2009 in accordance with the *State Language Law* Section 6 Paragraph 1 and other Laws. Due to the review of the *Classification of Occupations*, these amendments specified the level of knowledge of language (level and degree of proficiency) of the state language for the professions whose actions affect legitimate public interests. For example, the amendments of 21 February 2017 stipulate that members of the board of associations must use the official language at the highest level 1 (C1) if their activities affect legitimate public interests or they perform certain public functions, in order to ensure equal treatment in equal situations and guarantee the linguistic rights of users of the official language. The current legal framework was found to be incomplete because it provided for an unjustified difference in the approach towards board members operating in a for-profit company and board members operating in a non-profit association. Making a profit (in capital companies) or not making a profit (in non-governmental organizations, foundations, etc.) cannot be a criterion for using or not using the official language. The criterion must be equal, i.e. public functions or legitimate public interest. Thus, for example, members of the board of associations that

⁹ Amendments to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 733 of 7 July 2009 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of Knowledge of the State Language and the Procedure for Testing the State Language Proficiency for the Performance of Professional and Official Duties, Obtaining a Permanent Residence Permit and Obtaining the Status of a Permanent Resident of the European Union and the State Fee for the State Language Proficiency Test". Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 95, Riga, 21 February 2017, protocol No. 9, Section 15 [online] *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 23.02.2017, No. 41 [accessed: 17.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2017/41.10>;

Amendments to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 733 of 7 July 2009 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of Knowledge of the State Language and the Procedure for Testing the State Language Proficiency for the Performance of Professional and Official Duties, Obtaining a Permanent Residence Permit and Obtaining the Status of a Permanent Resident of the European Union and the State Fee for the State Language Proficiency Test". Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 233, Riga, 4 June 2019, protocol No. 27, Section 8 [online] *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2019, 07.06.2019, No. 114 [accessed: 17.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2019/114.7>;

Amendments to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 733 of 7 July 2009 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language". Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 499, Riga, 29 October 2019, protocol No. 50, Section 13 [online] *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 31.10.2019, No. 221 [accessed: 17.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2019/221.5>;

Amendments to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 733 of 7 July 2009 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language". Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 402, Riga, 30 June 2020, protocol No. 42, Section 33 [online] *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 30.06.2020, No. 123A [accessed: 17.07.2020]. Available: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2020/123A.1>

provide management of residential buildings or the implementation of the educational curriculum must know and use the official language. The level and degree of proficiency in the official language of members of the board of minority cultural associations must be approved by the State Language Centre. Moreover, on 29 October 2019, at the initiative of the Ministry of Transport and JSC “Pasažieru vilciens” (national rail), the level and degree of state language skills required for a passenger train conductor (controller) was changed from C1 to B2, as such a high level of Latvian language proficiency is not required in this position.

A special role in ensuring the legal aspect of language policy in the Republic of Latvia is ascribed to the State Language Centre (*Valsts valodas centrs, VVC*), which has been restructured several times since its establishment in 1992 through the expanding and specifying of its functions. At present, it is a public administration institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice. It ensures the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language by implementing state policy, and by monitoring and controlling the observance of state language-related regulatory enactments [VVC statute]. The State Language Centre also provides public administration institutions and the public with official translations of legal acts and other documents issued by state and international organizations, and promotes the use of harmonized terminology in the legal acts of the Republic of Latvia and their translations.

Since 2015, the VVC has participated in 34 lawsuits related to the performance of the centre’s direct functions, i.e. the monitoring of the compliance with the *State Language Law*. Ten lawsuits were related to the regulations of Section 201.35 of the *Latvian Code of Administrative Violations* (in force until 1 July 2020) on the provision of information in foreign languages alongside information in the official language if the regulatory enactment provides for the provision of information in the official language only, for example, in a lawsuit with the members of the Board of SJSC “Latvijas dzelzceļš” regarding the provision of information in the official language alongside with the display of information in foreign languages on the informative boards of SJSC “Latvijas dzelzceļš” at railway stations where the regional court upheld the decision of the State Language Centre. Nine lawsuits were related to the commitment of the administrative violation stipulated in Section 201.26 Paragraph 1 and 2 of the *Latvian Code of Administrative Violations* (failure to use the official language to the extent necessary for the performance of professional and work duties). In almost all cases, both the court of first instance and the court of higher instance upheld the decision of the VVC. For example, three deputies had their powers revoked on the basis of the findings of an inspection of the use of the state language, which concluded that the persons did not use and were unable to use the state language to the extent necessary for the performance of their professional and official duties.

Legal proceedings have also been initiated for such administrative violations as the failure to provide translation into the state language at events organized by the municipality; non-compliance with the requirements for the name of a company established by a municipality; non-compliance with the valid Latvian literary language norms in public information; the provision of less extensive information in terms of form or content in the official language as compared to parallel information provided in a

foreign language. An unusual lawsuit referred to the transcription of a foreign personal name, when a person requested moral compensation from the VVC for a transcription that allegedly infringed their legal interests.

In court practice, in cases where one of the participants was the VVC, there is a tendency to bring proceedings in all instances – both to appeal against the decisions made by the officials of the centre in a higher instance, and to appeal in a district (city) court and then in a regional court. In some cases, appeals have also been filed by the VVC. In connection with the violation found by the VVC and the subsequent legal proceedings, there was one case that was brought to the Constitutional Court.

On 18 October 2017, the Constitutional Court in a written procedure heard a hearing in the case “On the Compliance of Section 18 Paragraph 1 and Section 21 Paragraph 1 of the State Language Law with Section 96 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia”.¹⁰ The applicant stated that she had affixed a building number plate to her real estate, on which, in addition to the official language, the street name was also presented in foreign languages, i.e. English and Russian. The applicant was held administratively liable pursuant to Section 201.35 of the *Latvian Code of Administrative Violations*, the applicant was fined for violating the requirement that such a building number plate must be compliant with the requirements of the State Language Law. The applicant considered that the prohibition to indicate the name of the street on a building number plate in a foreign language alongside with the name in Latvian disproportionately restricts her right to private life and inviolability of her premises.

The Constitutional Court acknowledged that Section 21 Paragraph 1 of the State Language Law does not affect the applicant as a private person and accordingly does not affect her fundamental rights specified in Article 96 of the Constitution, therefore decided to discontinue the proceedings in this part of the case [decision of the Constitutional Court, case No. 2017-01-01]. It should be noted that when drafting the State Language Law, in 1995–1999, the main discussions revolved around the interpretation of the terms *private*, *private person*, *private business* in relation to the spirit and purpose of the *State Language Law* [State Language Law 2008, 54–95]. Latvian language policy makers called for much stricter requirements for the use of the state language also in private business and in regards to private individuals, but due to objections from experts from international organizations, in the second revision of the law the current version was included (also in Section 21 Paragraph 1). Already at this stage, warnings were

¹⁰ “Everyone has the right to the inviolability of his or her private life, home and correspondence.” (Section 96 of the *Constitution*); “Place names in the Republic of Latvia shall be created and use thereof shall be in the official language.” (Section 18 Paragraph 1 of the *State Language Law*); “Information provided for public information purposes by state and local government institutions, courts and institutions of the judicial system, state and local government companies, and companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the state or a local government, shall be provided only in the official language, except for the cases determined in Paragraph 5 of this Section. This provision is also applicable to private institutions, organisations, undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons who perform, on the basis of laws or other regulatory enactments, specific public functions, if the provision of information is related to the performance of the relevant functions.” (Article 21 Paragraph 1 of the *State Language Law*)

raised regarding adverse consequences if the provision was to be restricted to persons entrusted with the performance of public functions related to public information. If it is not permissible to expand the range of rights holders specified by the law, it can be concluded that the exclusion of private persons from Section 21 Paragraph 1 is considered to be a weak point of the *State Language Law* that may have an adverse effect on the language environment in Latvia.

The Constitutional Court also decided to discontinue the proceedings on the compliance of Section 18 Paragraph 1 of the *State Language Law* with Section 96 of the Constitution (right to private life). The court concluded that the obligation specified in Section 18 Paragraph 1 of the *State Language Law* to use place names in the state language cannot be limited only to public authorities, and it also applies to private persons. The Constitutional Court pointed out that the obligation specified in Section 18 Paragraph 1 of the *State Language Law* of both a public authority and a private person to use a place name in the state language (in the Livonian coastal territory – also in the Livonian language) is a manifestation of the national state principle. Strengthening of the language in public visual information plays an important role in promoting language learning and public awareness of social unity. The Constitutional Court emphasized that place names are a part of Latvia's cultural heritage and the state has a duty to preserve and protect them. The Latvian language must be protected regardless of the extent of its actual use or the level of threat thereto. Street name signs are public information that is necessary for public communication. The Constitutional Court concluded that Section 18 Paragraph 1 of the *State Language Law*, insofar as it provides for a prohibition to indicate a street name on a building number plate in foreign languages alongside Latvian, does not violate the applicant's right to privacy and inviolability of her premises. The Constitutional Court also decided to discontinue the proceedings in this part [for more details, see Pošeiko 2018, 8–38]. It is significant that the decision of the Constitutional Court recalled that “the principle of the nation state imposes on the state not only a negative obligation to not perform any action that could weaken Latvian identity in Latvia, but also – and especially – a positive obligation to strengthen it in various manners. The state is obliged to use any means necessary to ensure that the Latvian language truly fulfils its function as a state language and is the common language of communication and democratic participation of society”. [Opinion of the Constitutional Law Commission 2012, 134]

1.3. Official language in education

The tasks of a purposefully organized national education system in our century are broad and comprehensive, i.e. to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for life and professional activity, to promote personal growth and to create a united society. Obtaining education is to a large extent carried out through language or languages, including the acquisition of thinking processes and problem-solving skills. Today, the knowledge and use of several languages has become a standard, but in every country there is a language

without which a full participation in a particular society is unthinkable. In Latvia, it is the constitutionally defined state language – the Latvian language – and the education system must ensure both its acquisition at a high level and the awareness of its use and symbolic value.

The pedagogical aspect of language policy is a central element of the *Official Language Policy Guidelines for 2015–2020* [VVPP 2015–2020]. This document is connected to the most important development planning documents¹¹ and reflects the guidelines of these documents in ensuring the integrative and instrumental status of the Latvian language.

In the last five years, the understanding of the different roles of the Latvian language in the education system – from pre-school education to lifelong learning – has strengthened. The organization of language acquisition, teaching methodology and motivation for language acquisition depend on whether the Latvian language is the *first language* (native language), *second language* or *foreign language* of a specific person; as the maintenance of the Latvian language in the diaspora has become more significant, *ethnic heritage language* learning methods are also used. Latvia is slowly but consistently progressing towards a unified and inclusive education system, in which pupils and students from families whose language of communication is different than Latvian acquire knowledge in Latvian, so the concept of Latvian as a language for acquiring knowledge is still an object of discussion.

Latvian as the first (native) language in the education system

The proficiency and use of several languages has long become a matter of course in Latvia, therefore we accept and support the global tendencies of individual multilingualism in recent decades. However, a first language will always have a special place in everyone's life, as it is the foundation of personal development and the acquisition of knowledge.

A child learns the first language to a large extent already in the family, however, in the acquisition of academic language skills, systemic studies in an educational institution in line with a professionally developed curriculum are indispensable. Latvian language acquisition in the school system has had a long and stable tradition since the 19th century; the content of programmes is constantly updated, new approaches and

¹¹ "Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030" (approved by the Saeima on 10 June 2010, available at: https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/Latvija_2030_7.pdf), "National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020" (approved by the Saeima on 20 December 2012, available at: https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/20121220_NAP2020_approved_by_the_Saeima_4.pdf), "Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018)" (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 542 of 20 October 2011, available at: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/KM_130515_Prec_Nac_ident_pilson_sab_un_itegr_polit_pamatnost_2012-2018.pdf), "Education Development Guidelines for 2014–2020" (approved by the Saeima on 22 May 2014, available at: <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv/documents/4781>), "Information Society Development Guidelines for 2014–2020" (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 468 of 14 October 2013, available at: https://www.varam.gov.lv/sites/varam/files/content/files/is_pamatnostadnes_2013-1.pdf) and others.

methodological techniques are used. For objective reasons, the problems and current developments in the acquisition of the Latvian language as a second language are much more present in the public space of Latvia. At the state policy level, more attention is paid to the Latvian language in minority education programmes (textbooks, teaching aids, methodological support for pupils, teachers and parents) as the school is rightly considered to be the most important force in the actual implementation of Latvian language learning and, consequently, the status of the state language and in the promotion of the integration of society.

However, the acquisition of the Latvian language as a native language must be given much more attention in the future. There is a worldwide decline in verbal intelligence (vocabulary, use of functional and stylistic possibilities of language, ability to perceive texts); due to the development of digital technologies, information that is easier to produce and visualize is playing an increasingly important role, as is the influence of languages of international communication. It is practically impossible to combat these trends, so national education systems need to adapt flexibly to the ever-changing reality. In Latvia, after long discussions, a new, improved basic education curriculum has been drafted, in which the field of languages is especially emphasized. The introduction of the new curriculum in schools will start on 1 September 2020 in grades 1, 4 and 7, on 1 September 2021 in grades 2, 5 and 8, and on 1 September 2022 in grades 3, 6 and 9 [Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 747]. The distinguishing of a common language field is based on the concept that “in the field of language learning, all languages to be learned, i.e. Latvian, minority languages and foreign languages, have common great ideas that reflect the most important regularities in language acquisition and use, emphasize language interactions and help students to understand more clearly what they are studying and where they will find this knowledge useful after finishing school” [School2030; see also Now2018]. The most difficult objective will be to motivate students to purposefully enhance their native language skills, but this will largely depend on the attitude of the society and especially its opinion leaders towards the Latvian language and its role in Latvia and in the world.

Latvian language in the diaspora – first language, second language, ethnic heritage language

On 1 January 2019 the *Diaspora Law*¹² came into force with an aim to strengthen both Latvian diaspora identity as an integral part of Latvian society and the sense of belonging to the state, to promote the preservation of the Latvian language and culture in the diaspora, as well as to support and promote diaspora civic and political participation and ensure favourable conditions for re-emigration. According to researcher I. Mieriņa, “at present, about 392,000 current and former Latvian citizens and those born in Latvia live in the member states of the European Union and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. However, if the broader definition of the diaspora is applied

¹² See also the information on the support for Latvian language learning in the diaspora: Latviešu valoda ārzemēs. Diaspora [online]. *Latvian Language Agency website* [accessed: 19.07.2020]. Available: <https://valoda.lv/latviesu-valoda-arzemes/>

to include people of Latvian origin, those who identify themselves as Latvians and their children, regardless of citizenship or country of birth, then the total number of the diaspora is 506,000” [Mieriņa 2020, 1].

The concept of the diaspora is expanding and now it applies to any group living outside the traditional territory for a period of time. It is estimated that 232 million or 3.2% of the world’s population now belongs to a diaspora. Unlike migrant communities, there is an often idealized historical memory or myth about the historical homeland in the diaspora and many of its members plan to return to it in the near or distant future. Maintaining the Latvian language in the diaspora is a general benefit as the stability and growth of the number of speakers increases the regional and global competitiveness of the Latvian language. The current situation cannot be considered satisfactory from the point of view of language preservation. Studies have shown that “in 2019, 70% of the representatives of the ‘new’ diaspora used Latvian at home, including 38% as the only language, 10% together with Russian and 22% together with English or another language of the host country. In turn, 27% of the respondents speak English or another language (mostly of their host country) at home. Among those who have spent more than 10 (and especially more than 15) years in their host country, the share of Latvian use is smaller, but the share of English use (or that of a different language, other than Russian) is higher. Thus, similarly to the USA, Canada and Australia, the Latvian language is gradually being replaced by the language of the host country” [Hazans 2020, 38]. Only 6% of diaspora children attend or have attended Latvian weekend schools [Mieriņa, Jansone 2019, 61].

In the last ten years, the concept of Latvian language acquisition that is necessary for the preservation of identity has also changed. However, it must be taken into account that Latvian will in many cases not be the first or dominant language of children. In the situation of the diaspora, the Latvian language can be treated as one of the components of individual multilingualism – it can be both a first language, second language, ethnic heritage language, and even a foreign language. In many cases, the Latvian language is a secondary component of individual bilingualism, and methodical acquisition of the Latvian language takes place in the context of multilingual education by using different motivations and methods. The real situation of the Latvian language in the diaspora as well as the recommendations for the future language policy in the diaspora are mentioned in Chapter 5 of the study.

Latvian as a second language

A second language is a term used to denote a language that is learned after a first language has stabilized. In the context of the Latvian education system, it is mostly applied to the state language – Latvian – which is a teaching aid for students whose families use another language [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 229–234]. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing overlap between the concepts of ‘second language’ and ‘language of schooling’.

The latest European Union document on the language of schooling is *Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages* [Proposal 2018] of the Council of the European Commission. The document states: “In 2006, the Recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament on Key Competences for

Lifelong Learning defined two competences related to language learning: “Communication in mother tongue” (with mother tongue often regarded as being equivalent with the language of schooling) and “Communication in foreign languages”. In the new *Skills Agenda for Europe* it was announced that the recommendation would be reviewed. The proposal for a new Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, adopted by the Commission on 17 January 2018, proposes defining competences such as “Literacy” and “Language competence” to offer a more flexible understanding of the relationship between the mother tongue and the language of instruction. The new approach addresses both the low levels of literacy in Europe and the lack of language skills. The strong link between literacy and languages stresses the view that competences need to be developed in the language of instruction, regardless of whether the language of instruction is the mother tongue or a foreign language for a learner. In addition, more active language learning is in line with the ideas set out in the Council recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching, “as it facilitates mobility, intercultural exchange and understanding, and supports the understanding of common values”. [Proposal 2018, 3]. This document also emphasizes the importance of learning an official language as a language of instruction: “Schools are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to make sure that all children, regardless of background and first language, acquire a very good level of the language of schooling through special support measures if necessary. This supports equity and equal opportunities, and reduces the risk of early school leaving.” [Proposal 2018, 12]

Since 1989, the Republic of Latvia has been implementing a gradual and well-thought-out transition to Latvian as the main language of schooling in all educational institutions and at all stages of education, ensuring the possibility to acquire the language and culture of national minorities as well. There is no alternative to this approach in the sociolinguistic situation of Latvia if we want to ensure the integration of Latvian society on the basis of the state language, equal access to the labour market and educational opportunities for all members of the society, as well as the stability and development of the Latvian language among fierce language competition. Therefore the *Education Law*, *General Education Law* and *Law on Higher Education Institutions* should be treated not only as legal acts that determine the systematized process of acquiring knowledge and skills and forming attitudes and its results, but also as a means for the implementation of the language policy of the Republic of Latvia.

The education system of minorities in Latvia developed gradually, involving vast amounts of Latvian and foreign funds, in close cooperation with the best experts in the world.¹³ Thus, the principle of successive steps has been consistently observed in the

¹³ Compulsory acquisition of the Latvian language in all educational institutions has been in force since 1989, the examination of the state language proficiency of teachers, and the teaching of two subjects in Latvian in primary school were introduced in 1995, and three subjects in secondary schools were introduced in 1999; the introduction of four minority education models was carried out in 2004, i.e. a 60:40 proportion of the language of schooling in secondary schools; in 2008 the uniform content of examinations in Latvian came into force, and 2018 marked the introduction of centralized examinations only in Latvian for 12th grade students, etc. (see Transition to teaching in the state language 2018)

education of Latvia's minorities. The strengthening of the state language in the minority education system has been comprehensively analysed in many publications.¹⁴

In order to ensure the continuity of policy development planning, the results of the previous planning period and its impact on the changes in the state language situation were assessed; the practice of successful implementation of measures and the possibilities of solving identified problems were analysed. The research data of the comprehensive regular study of the Latvian Language Agency [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 56] confirmed that the introduction of Latvian as the language of schooling and the language of state examinations ensured the acquisition of Latvian without compromising students' learning achievements. Almost 39% of Latvian minority young people know Latvian well according to self-assessment, the same number of young people know Latvian well, whereas 20% admitted that they had mastered Latvian at a basic level or know it poorly. In order to promote the integration of society on the basis of the state language, official language skills must be at a very high level, close to native speaker proficiency. The current bilingual education system has provided average Latvian language skills, which are not considered sufficient to ensure equal opportunities for all children in later professional life.

Since the member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union, in accordance with internationally binding legislation and guidelines, have exclusive competence for, *inter alia*, in the implementation of cultural and educational policies, there are various models of language policy in educational institutions. The latest available analysis on the use of languages in education "Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe" [Eurydice Brief 2017; Eurydice Report 2017]¹⁵ provides detailed information on the languages taught in European schools, but also indicates the main language of schooling. The PISA study provides comparable data on the member states of the Council of Europe. In most of the countries, the percentage of 15-year-olds who do not study in their family language is close to the EU average, e.g. Bulgaria, France, Slovakia, Norway and Turkey. In some countries this is different due to the historical development of the language situation (in Malta 87.7% of pupils learn English, although

¹⁴ Baltiņš, Druvietē, Veisbergs red. 2007; State Language Law 2008; Hogan-Brun, G. et al. 2009; Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010; Kļave, Šūpule, Bebriša 2013; Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015; see also Attitude 2020.

¹⁵ The dominant model is a unified education system in the official languages of the countries, with the exception of some regional or minority languages, which are officially recognized in a given specific country. The study indicates that students' family language is often different from the language of schooling. It is emphasized that in this case they develop abundant linguistic capital, but additional support is needed for learning the language of schooling and for specially educated teachers to work in a multilingual classroom [Eurydice Brief 2017, 19]. Students who speak Spanish, Turkish or Russian at home are most often educated in another language. According to internationally comparable studies, such as PISA (*Program for International Student Assessment*, 2015), 9% of the 15-year-olds in the study took tests in a language other than their family language, but no differences were observed in terms of the results. Most of these students were native speakers of Spanish (Valencian, Galician, Basque schools in Spain), Turkish (Germany, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Finland), and Russian (Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechia, Estonia, Finland and Poland). [Eurydice Report 2017, 19–24].

the family language is Maltese; in Luxembourg, the family language and the language of schooling is different for 84.5% of pupils: among them 21.8% of pupils speak Portuguese at home, although they study in either German or French). In Switzerland, 26.1% of pupils obtain education in another language. Belgium, Germany, Spain, Cyprus and Austria also have a high percentage of learners who are taught in different language (10–22%) and this trend is on the rise.¹⁶

In recent decades, children who have arrived in their respective host countries as a result of migration have also entered the education system alongside speakers of minority or regional languages, and Latvia must also prepare for such changes. In order to ensure the integration of society and further prospects in the labour market and higher education, the acquisition of the official language of the state for several decades has been recognized as an important issue in terms of children's human rights [Directive 77/486/EEC]. Since the adoption of the Directive, the system for official languages acquisition has been improved, with the main emphasis on so called integrated learning of language and content [see, for example, Lazdiņa ed. 2015; Burima red. 2019]. According to the study on the education of immigrant children in the European Union [Harte et al. 2016], due to the different situations of countries, it is not possible to establish a universal model for all countries, however, it is recommended that children who speak different languages at home are included in the common educational flow, with additional support provided if necessary. This finding is also reinforced by a study supported by the European Parliament on examples of best practices and pitfalls in the use of minority languages in education [Dongera et al. 2017].

The researchers analysed the practice in 13 countries and concluded that the most common practice was teaching in the official language, not always providing an additional opportunity to learn a minority language and culture as a subject. By stating that by recognising a language as official state language, the state commits itself to ensuring the development and protection of this language [Dongera et al. 2017, 11], researchers consider the acquisition of the official language of the state in the education system to be an integral objective of the education system. The choice of the most appropriate model for the use of minority languages in education must take into account a number of factors, such as “national laws and regulations, available budgets, the number of languages, language conflicts, language distance between the minority language and the national language, the official language situation, and finally the number of students” [Dongera et al. 2017, 27]. The most important conclusion is that when determining the language of schooling it is not possible to use a one-size-fits-all principle, i.e. the principle of the universal model. Depending on their language situation, each country can choose the model that best ensures the acquisition of the official language as a symbolic and instrumental mechanism for social integration. If we do not take into account the historical background, the consolidation and integration of society will not be promoted, but hindered [Veisbergs 2013]. Thus, the case of Latvia could provide some additional

¹⁶ Annex 3. Statistical data. Percentage of 15-year old students who mainly speak a different language at home to the language of schooling, 2003, 2015 [Eurydice Report 2017, 156–162].

aspects and nuances in the common body of knowledge about the coexistence and competition of languages.

Therefore, on 22 March 2018, the Saeima passed the amendments to the *Education Law* and *General Education Law* at its third and final reading, which envisaged a gradual transition to teaching in the official language at the secondary school level (effective from 2 April 2018). The transition to teaching in the state language began on 1 September 2019 and it is planned to conclude on 1 September 2021 [see *Transition to teaching in the state language 2018*]. At the same time, a new curriculum and learning approaches will be introduced. The enhanced curriculum in the field of state language and social integration will expand the opportunities for minority youth in vocational and higher education, where studies are conducted in Latvian, as well as increase competitiveness in the labour market.

Teachers will be provided with the necessary support to prepare for the implementation of the new curriculum and to further improve their Latvian language skills for the performance of their professional duties (ESF project “Competence Approach in Curriculum”¹⁷ section “Support for teachers in implementing the content of teaching in a linguistically heterogeneous environment”, where the support measures for teachers are provided by the Latvian Language Agency). The new standard is to be implemented in all educational institutions – both municipal schools and schools established by private and legal entities (private educational institutions). In the discussions on the future development of education policy it is useful to mention the report of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe [Venice Commission 2020] which emphasizes that increasing the proportion of the use of the Latvian language in minority education curricula in order to improve students’ language skills is a legitimate goal and it points to some possible improvements in the implementation of this system.

1.4. Language-related cases in the Constitutional Court

From 2016 to 2020, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia heard several applications related to the use of languages at all levels of education in educational institutions established by the state and local governments, as well as private and legal entities.

The assessment of the Constitutional Court as an independent and objective institution is important not only for examining of the compliance of a specific legal act,

¹⁷ For more about the project, see National Education Content Centre (VISC) website https://visc.gov.lv/visc/projekti/esf_831.shtml<https://valoda.lv/projekti/esf-projekti/projekts-kompetencu-pieejamacibu-satura/>, the project website www.skola2030.lv, as well as Latvian Language Agency website <https://valoda.lv/projekti/esf-projekti/projekts-kompetencu-pieejamacibu-satura/>

but also serves as an indicator in all fields, in this case for promoting the language and education policy. Several of the cases heard related to the strengthening of the official language **in the general education system** as discussed above.

On 23 April 2019, the Constitutional Court delivered a judgement in case No. 2018-12-01 [Constitutional Court judgement in case No. 2018-12-01]. The case assessed the legal framework for the language of education in state and municipal educational institutions that implement minority education programmes in primary and secondary education. The case was initiated upon the application of twenty members of the 12th Saeima. It indicated that previously the use of minority languages in the Latvian education system had been wider, but their use in educational programmes had been disproportionately restricted by the contested norms. The reduction of the use of minority languages deprives learners of an important precondition for the preservation and development of their national identity.

The Constitutional Court acknowledged that the right to education specified in Section 112 of the Constitution does not include the right of either the learner or their parents to choose the language in which education will be obtained in state or municipal educational institutions, if it contradicts the principle of unity of the state education system and does not promote such an approach to the national education system, which would allow the achievement of educational goals for each learner. The Court pointed out that Section 112 of the Constitution sets forth the obligation of the state to ensure access to education in the state language in order to facilitate the achievement of the goals of the education system. This right, however, does not include the right of the learner or their parents to choose the language in which the education will be obtained in state or municipal educational institutions. Section 112 of the Constitution also does not entail the obligation of the state to guarantee that at primary and secondary levels of the education system, in addition to the state language, the possibility is provided to obtain education in another language in the proportion desired by learners or their parents. Consequently, the court concluded that the contested norms did not affect the right to education.

On 13 November 2019, the Constitutional Court delivered a judgement in case No. 2018-22-01 [Constitutional Court judgement in case No. 2018-22-01]. The case assessed the legal framework of the language of schooling in private educational institutions. In the judgement, the court specified the content of the right to education, stating that it also includes the freedom of a person to choose to obtain general education not only in state and municipal educational institutions, but also in private educational institutions. The right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish and manage private educational institutions, the aim of which is the acquisition, preservation and development of the language and culture of the national minority, stems from Section 112, first sentence, and Section 114 of the Constitution. However, general education provided in such educational institutions can only be officially recognized if it meets the requirements of the general education standards set by the state. The court stated that the language of schooling is one of the essential elements of the general education process and that the state has the right to regulate it. A balance must be found between the need to ensure that everyone belonging to a minority has the opportunity

to learn the state language in general education at a level that makes it easy for them to integrate into national and societal life and the opportunity to learn the language of the minority concerned, as well as to obtain education in that language, in order to preserve their linguistic and cultural identity without causing language segregation. The Court concluded that the legal norms regulating the acquisition or use of minority languages in the general education process in private educational institutions restrict the rights of persons belonging to national minorities arising from the Article 112, first sentence, and Article 114 of the Constitution. However, such a restriction was recognized as compliant with the Constitution [ST report 2019].

Consequently, the amendments to the *Education Law* of 22 March 2018 were recognized as compliant with the Constitution, and the Latvian language is becoming increasingly stronger in general education. As stated by I. Ziemele, Chairperson of the Constitutional Court, “in case No. 2018-12-01 and case No. 2018-22-01 the Constitutional Court assessed the education reform and indicated that the implementation of minority rights must not be aimed at the segregation of society and endanger the unity of society. The resignation of people belonging to different identities in their own space of identity threatens the possibility of democratic discourse and possibility of common action in a united society. Thus, the Constitutional Court developed the idea and preconditions of a united society. Namely, the successful development of Latvia requires a united society that unites both the nation state and national minorities. This unity is ensured, *inter alia*, by the state language – the ability to use the state language freely is the basis for a person’s social activity and choices in regards to the available information space. A person who knows the state language has the opportunity to compare and critically evaluate information obtained and to properly participate in public discourse, which is an integral part of a democratic society” [Ziemele 2020, 9].

1.5. Language in higher education and science

The competitiveness of a language today and its future prospects will be largely determined by its use in the field that is most subject to globalization and internationalization, i.e. higher education and science. At present one can observe a clash of principled views in the world between those who support the liberalization of academic language (in practice – English monolingualism) and the strengthening of the role of national languages (in practice – multilingualism) [see, for example, Hultgren et al. 2014; Humar, Žagar Karer 2010, Stickel, Robustelli 2015, Wee et al. 2013]. The gap between higher education and science policy on the one hand and language policy on the other for the sustainability and development of official (state) languages is emerging in all non-English-speaking countries. These processes are also relevant in Latvia, especially in regard to the forthcoming changes in the management of higher education and science in Latvia.

On 7 November 2018 the *Riga Graduate School of Law* was adopted. Section 17(2) stated: “(2) The rector elected by the Constitutional Assembly shall be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The rector of the Graduate School must know and use the official language to the extent necessary for the performance of his or her professional duties, or the Graduate School must provide translation into the official language.” This aspect is also elaborated on in Section 25: “The requirements specified in regulatory enactments regarding the level of knowledge of the state language are not applicable to the staff of the Graduate School. The University ensures the circulation of documents and communication with state institutions and individuals in the state language” [Riga Graduate School of Law 2020]. A similar norm is also included in the special law *On Riga School of Economics* [On RSE 2018]. Studies at these higher education institutions are conducted in English, which is an acceptable exceptional practice, as long as the graduates wishing to work in Latvia have mastered the Latvian language, especially legal and economic terminology, at a high level. However, in the broader context of language policy, the norm on the language skills of university staff is problematic, especially in regard to the public official, i.e. the rector.

In accordance with the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* “the rector is the highest official of a higher education institution who implements the general administration of the higher education institution and represents the higher education institution without special authorisation”. *State Language Law* and Regulation No. 733 of the Cabinet of Ministers stipulates that the management of higher education institutions are required to have the proficiency in the state language at the C1 level. Persons who have not received education in the Latvian language must pass an examination in state language proficiency and obtain a relevant certificate of proficiency in the state language. The rector must not only manage the academic and other staff of a higher education institution, but also represent the university in relations with state institutions, sign financial documents, participate in collegial institutions and inform the public about the institution’s activities – this is not fully possible without having language skills, even if the services of an interpreter are provided. Therefore, there is no reason to allow derogations from the law that is binding on the entire administration of the higher education institution without serious reasoning. Exceptions in connection with these two higher education institutions are not merely isolated cases without far-reaching impact on the sustainability of the Latvian language as a whole. Such seemingly insignificant amendments, especially if they are presented together with derogatory statements on the Latvian language, may affect the most important promoter or disrupter of language stability – linguistic attitude.

Even more dangerous is the encouragement to extend such a norm to the management and even academic staff of higher education institutions, as well as to members of the councils of potential higher education institutions. Such a norm is stipulated by the extensive amendments to the *Law on Higher Education Institutions*

submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers on 12 May 2020.¹⁸ 487 representatives of the creative and academic sphere protested against it, pointing to the consequences of such an action [Protest letter 2020]. The letter emphasizes that “the role of rector is a high position, intellectual and prestigious; the rector performs not only administrative tasks of a technical nature, taking care of the high-quality work of the relevant institution in the narrow sense, but also embodies and develops the state and cultural values of Latvia through his or her activities [...]. Another step towards abandoning the Latvian language in the academic field would also be a significant and extremely undesirable signal to Latvian society, i.e. the state itself would declare that the Latvian language in Latvia is an obstacle on the road to quality and excellence. This may have unfavourable long-term consequences in relation to the prestige of the Latvian language, the linguistic attitude of society and the motivation to learn and use the Latvian language”. If such an unacceptable step is taken, the possibility to apply to the Constitutional Court should be considered, as the release of officials from the requirements of proficiency in the state language appears to be in conflict with the Preamble and Section 4 of the Constitution, as well as the *State Language Law*.

Constitutional Court on the language of studies in private higher education institutions

Section 5 of the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* (1995) originally stipulated the objective of higher education institutions to cultivate and develop science and art. In the *Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions* of 21 June 2018 Section 5, third sentence, was reworded as follows: “In their activities, they cultivate and develop science, art and the state language”. Section 56 was also amended. In the introductory part of Paragraph 3 of this Section, the phrase “of state-founded higher education institutions” was replaced by the words “of higher education institutions and colleges”. Thus, since 1 January 2019, when these amendments came into force, all higher education institutions, regardless of their founder, have been subject to the norm that “the study programmes of higher education institutions and colleges shall be implemented in the official language”. The law provides for the possibility to also implement study programmes in the official languages of the European Union, i.e. not in Russian. The Transitional Provisions stipulate that higher education institutions and colleges whose language of implementation of study programmes does not comply with the provisions of Section 56 Paragraph 3 of this Law have the right to continue the implementation of study programmes in the relevant language until 31 December 2022, yet the admission of new students after 1 January 2019 is not allowed.

¹⁸ “(8) A foreign citizen may be appointed to the position of the rector of a higher education institution. If a foreign citizen is appointed the rector, he or she must know and use the official language to the extent necessary for the performance of his or her professional duties, or the Graduate School must provide translation into the official language.” [Draft “Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions” [online]. Section 17. Rector. *Draft of legal acts of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia* [accessed: 19.07.2020]. Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40484842>]

On 18 July 2018, upon the application of 20 members of 13th Saeima of the party “Harmony”, case No. 2019-12-01 was initiated in the Constitutional Court [Constitutional Court judgement in case No. 2019-12-01]. The applicants pointed out that the contested norms introduce a mandatory objective for all higher education institutions to cultivate and develop the Latvian language and restrict the freedom of founders and lecturers of private higher education institutions in forming their academic activities, thus violating the right to education set forth in Section 112 of the Constitution. At the same time, the applicants considered that the contested norms violate the right to property specified in Section 105 of the Constitution in connection with the principle of legal confidence derived from the basic norm of a democratic state governed by the rule of law and Section 1 of the Constitution by restricting the right of private higher education institutions to implement licensed study programmes in foreign languages.

On 11 June 2019, the Constitutional Court decided to split the case and create a new case within the part “On the Compliance of the Section 5 Paragraph 1, Third Sentence, Section 56 Paragraph 3 and Transitional Provisions of the Law on Higher Education Institutions with Section 1 and 105 of the Constitution”, case No. 2020-33-01, to hear the case on the substance and consider the need to request a preliminary ruling to the Court of Justice of the European Union (“CJEU”).¹⁹

The Court found that Section 5 Paragraph 1, third sentence, of the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* insofar as it applies to private higher education institutions, their academic staff and students, complies with Article 112 and 113 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia. By stipulating the condition of cultivating and developing the state language, the legislator specified the positive obligation of the state, creating such a regulation of higher education that determines that higher education institutions must serve the public interest. On the other hand, Section 56 Paragraph 3 of the *Law on Higher Education Institutions* and Section 49 of the Transitional Provisions, insofar as these norms apply to private higher education institutions, their teaching staff and students, were declared incompatible with Article 112 and 113 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and invalid as of 1 May 2021. The restriction of fundamental rights created by the contested norms is suitable for achieving legitimate goals, as the contested norms improve students’ state language skills, as well as strengthen the role of the Latvian language in science and cultivate its use in various fields of learning. However, the Constitutional Court acknowledged that there are less disruptive means to achieve this legitimate goal. With regard to the other contested norms, the proceedings have been suspended until the CJEU ruling enters into force.

¹⁹ The CJEU was also asked a far-reaching question: “What considerations should be taken into account when assessing whether the legislation in question is justified, suitable and proportionate with regard to its legitimate purpose of protecting the official language as a manifestation of national identity?” [Constitutional Court decision in case No. 2020-33-01]

1.6. Scientific research and development of the Latvian language

In today's world, only functionally and stylistically developed languages that are acquired in well-thought-out education systems and whose use and protection are governed by national law can be competitive. The basis for a consistent language policy in all its directions is the academic research of the language, development of language technologies, development of terminology, as well as the publication of academic and popular science publications. Therefore, an integral part of strengthening the position of the Latvian language is the scientific research of the language, which also facilitates the enrichment and care of the language.

Latvian linguists both work in areas that contribute to global language metatheory, to some extent abstracting themselves from the problems of the existence and quality of the Latvian language, and produce research that has a direct impact on the competitiveness of the Latvian language in the current language situation. The aim of any systemic and creative activity, including language research, is to increase the body of human knowledge in order to find a new approach to solving practical problems. Due to historical circumstances in Latvia, traditionally, even historical and descriptive language research in most cases has had a conscious or unconscious additional task – to emphasize the importance of the Latvian language, thus promoting a positive attitude towards it. In this way, we also have a better understanding of language as a set of many seemingly unrelated elements that function in a specific context. Therefore, fundamental research of its history, structure, language phenomena at different levels, as well as in-depth research-based recommendations for the use of language at the level of society and the individual, are equally important in ensuring the sustainability of the Latvian language.

Latvian linguistics has rich traditions that are now being creatively developed in Latvian higher education institutions and research institutes.²⁰ At the current stage, the state research programme “Latvian Language” (2018–2021) [Program 2018], in which research takes place in ten directions, covering the most important sub-sectors and directions, is of special importance. The programme is implemented by more than 100 researchers, including about 20 students, from six Latvian higher education institutions, research institutes, as well as the Latvian Language Agency. The programme meets the *Official Language Policy Guidelines (2015–2020)*, and the results gained from its implementation will allow for a more targeted development of the relevant section of the guidelines for the next programming period (until 2027), thus ensuring that the overarching goal and objective of the research programme are met.

²⁰ The bibliography of Latvian linguistics in the period since 1997 is available on the website of the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia <http://lulavi.lv/valodniecibas-bibliografija>. Sk. also Bankavs, Jansone 2010.

Subproject No. 1. Language ontology. Research on language ontology, which focuses on linguistically constituted social reality, as well as the possibilities of transformation of this reality, and thematizes the boundaries of language, aesthetic quality and language in the context of political power, strengthens the sustainability, linguistic quality and competitiveness of the Latvian language. Language ontology research opens up interdisciplinary research opportunities in the analysis of Latvian language resources and the exploration of the creative possibilities of language, thus giving the deep connection of the Latvian language with national identity and statehood a deeper and substantiated value that is based on the latest in-depth philosophical research.

Subproject No. 2. Sociolinguistics. Under the influence of global sociolinguistic processes the situation of the Latvian language is constantly dynamic, setting new tasks in all aspects of language policy. Research on linguistic attitudes is of particular importance. The conclusions obtained in the implementation of the subproject task will be the basis for reviewing language policy measures, including language research, in the next Official Language Policy Guidelines (2021–2027), thus ensuring the achievement of the overarching goal and objective of the programme.

Subproject No. 3. Grammar. The project “Grammar and its Related Fields: Encyclopaedic Dictionary” is intended to be the first study in Latvian linguistics – an encyclopaedic dictionary of grammar, which will be both a nest-based hierarchical description of grammar concepts and a description of the Latvian grammar system in the general context of European grammars, i.e. the study of grammar, pragmatics, cognitive studies, stylistics, rhetoric and other related fields.

Subproject No. 4. Lexicography. Through cooperation with representatives of information technology in the development of dictionaries, the aim of the programme will be to expand the knowledge base in linguistics and its related fields on the research and development of the Latvian language, ensuring the availability of research results to the public. Theoretical research into issues of Latvian lexicology and lexicography and the practical development of dictionaries, as well as the developed digital resources, will also contribute to the development of European e-lexicography, supplementing the existing knowledge base with facts on the Latvian language.

Subproject No. 5. Onomastics. The subproject will implement one of the main thematic tasks of the state research programme “Latvian Language”, ensuring the research and development of onomastics. The research will concentrate on the most topical onomastics issues related to the origin and functioning of place names, Latvian personal names (forenames, surnames, nicknames), their history and contemporary functions, as well as marginal areas and topics (border place names, zoonyms, place names and personal names in socio-onomastic perspective).

Subproject No. 6. Terminology. The sustainability of the Latvian language among strong language competition is to be ensured by the systematic and planned development of terminology within the framework of a comprehensive state language policy, which includes both research on the history of terminology and the further development of terminology theory.

Subproject No. 7. Contact linguistics. Research in the field of translation studies, contact linguistics, comparative and contrastive linguistics, will have a significant impact on the linguistic quality and development of the Latvian language, its full functioning in the context of European and global multilingualism. The Latvian language is in a situation of strong language contacts – global contact with English, and internally with Russian. The results obtained in the subproject will affect both the linguistic quality and competitiveness of the Latvian language in the European and global context, and will provide new knowledge that will be used in the field of education and language acquisition, practical translation and public education.

Subproject No. 8. Language acquisition. Research on the acquisition of the Latvian language will strengthen the competitiveness of the Latvian language in the context of Latvia and the world as a whole as it will provide data analysis of the acquisition of Latvian as a native, second and foreign language (skills and influencing factors), and a new corpus of language learners will be prepared and supplemented; the subproject will also describe cases of the positive experience of preserving Latvian as a language of ethnic heritage, and recommendations in general didactics and linguistic didactics. Methodological recommendations for further action to improve the acquisition of the Latvian language will be provided and a teaching aid will be developed for a certain target audience, thus strengthening the sustainability and quality of the Latvian language.

Subproject No. 9. Regional studies. The results of the regional research of the Latvian language will most directly strengthen the Latvian language as a set of basic elements forming Latvian identity and national values. The results of the project will allow a wider range of users to get acquainted with the material of dialectical Slavicisms and Lithuanisms present in Selonian vernaculars, the peculiarities of vernaculars and language parallels in South Latgalia and Lower Courland, and their description will be the first of its kind to give every linguist in the world access to unique linguistic material that combines archaic forms and modern innovations. The Latgalian spelling tool as an online digital resource will help all members of the public who choose to write in the Latgalian written language.

Subproject No. 10. Livonian language. The Livonian language research and acquisition tools created in the subproject, i.e. Livonian language databases (vocabulary, onomastics and morphology databases, a modern corpus of the Livonian language) and a Livonian grammar overview, will ensure the development of Livonian language research and the availability of prepared resources, which in turn will promote the study of the heritage of the Livonian language in the Latvian language, and a better understanding of the development of the Latvian language.

The overarching goal of the programme is “to strengthen the sustainability, linguistic quality and competitiveness of the Latvian language as a basic element that forms Latvian identity and state values, in the context of Latvia and world languages” [Program 2018], expanding the knowledge base in linguistics and its related fields. If the transfer of knowledge in society is successful and promotes an understanding of the role and the contribution of research in strengthening the status of the state language, society will also be adapted to the conditions for maintaining the competitiveness of the Latvian language in ever-changing geopolitical, economic and demographic conditions.

Although at present the situation in Latvian language research can be viewed as satisfactory, the lack of confidence in the continuity of research poses a serious concern. The state research programme “Latvian Language” ends in December 2021; only a small part of the submitted projects receive funding in competitions for grants in fundamental and applied research from the Latvian Council of Science. In a country where the status of the state language is determined, its research must be systematic and continuous rather than based on the implementation of unrelated projects. The needs of society are changing, the language is changing, the language situation is changing, therefore

interruptions in language research must not be allowed. In this respect, we cannot count on funding from the European Union or other international funds; it is the responsibility and honour of each country to ensure research of its own language. The current science policy in Latvia is also unfavourable for the research that is necessary for Latvian society, since the policy does not promote the development of fundamental collective work and comprehensive monographs covering a given problem. The main objective of the researcher has become publications in internationally cited journals, usually in English, which prove the qualifications of an individual researcher and ensure individual career development, but have little effect on the development and sustainability issues of the Latvian language.

Latvian linguists also successfully publish their papers in publications included in international databases, however, it should be taken into account that Latvian language research is mainly relevant and interesting to Latvian speakers themselves. This problem affects both the humanities and the social sciences around the world. Reflecting on the obsession with publications intended for a narrow circle of specialists, the prominent Greek sociologist Yiannis Gabriel admits: “Never before in the history of mankind have so many written so much with so little effect or benefit to so few” [Gabriel 2017]. In order to fulfil the task set forth in the language guidelines of the state language policy, i.e. to involve the public in the development of the Latvian language, the popularization of the latest scientific findings and the creation of publications intended for a wide audience is considered to be a priority area of activity.

1.7. Ensuring the participation of the public in the implementation of official language policy

Language issues have always been topical in Latvian society, and the last five years are no exception, but the direction of publications and discussions has changed. Both in the media and on social networks, the suitability of certain words or forms in the Latvian language and the principles for forming new words and terms are discussed increasingly, yet less and less attention is paid to the most important basic principles of language policy.

Despite the 2012 referendum, the priority of the Latvian language in society is still not a matter of course. The language has strengthened mainly in the areas regulated by law. However, within Latvian society social bilingualism is becoming stronger, i.e. trends of parallel language use. From the point of view of language persistence the most dangerous aspect is the failure to see the problem in the parallel use of Russian (in municipal communication, advertisements and websites of some non-governmental organizations, in the work of business telephone operators, in pre-election campaigning) and in official communication.

The position of senior government officials and their consultative bodies is particularly important. In this regard, it is worth mentioning a strong erroneous signal sent to the public in April 2016 by a social cohesion policy expert group established by the President. The report, which aimed to promote social cohesion as a precondition for national security and national stability, stated: "...within political priorities the strengthening of the national (Latvian) media space dominates over the inclusive communication with national minorities – some policy-makers choose to speak only in Latvian, regardless of the language used by the interviewing media and its audience. Two-way communication with minorities is an important factor in national security, only such an approach gradually builds mutual trust. A good example is the policy-makers and officials who speak to the Russian-speaking media in the language of the majority of their audience" [Expert Report 2016, 10]. The authors of the report referred to the principle "to promote and maintain the bilingualism and multilingualism of every inhabitant of Latvia, and a positive attitude towards the Latvian language and linguistic diversity", concluding that "linguistic diversity is limited in practice". In the Official Language Policy Guidelines for 2015–2020, the following problem was formulated: "Discrepancy between the nominal and actual sociolinguistic functions of the state language and the minority (Russian) language. (...) The dynamics of the spread of the Russian language in Latvia, the aggressive entry of the Russian language information space into the Latvian language environment were identified as a negative aggravating trend" [Expert Report 2016, 18].

In fact, the authors of the report recommended a return to Latvian-Russian social bilingualism in the public and information space. This position resonated widely. Māris Baltiņš, Director of the State Language Centre, criticized the expert group's recommendation for officials to give interviews in Russian to Russian-speaking media, calling it ill-considered and wrong from the point of view of language policy [Leta 2016]. Jānis Valdmanis, Director of Latvian Language Agency, assessed it as irresponsible nonsense. The State Language Commission, under the auspices of the President, also expressed its consternation. In a conversation with the President, Andrejs Veisbergs, Chairman of the State Language Commission, pointed out: "It must be said, however, that attempts to crumble the position of the language from time to time and to reverse its development have not died away. This often requires a quick counter-reaction from the State Language Commission as well" [LV portal 2016]. In a radio broadcast dedicated to this topic, A. Veisbergs reminded listeners that the main reason why many Latvians tend not to learn the Latvian language is the awareness that it is possible to manage without it. If necessary, Latvians will speak Russian. The call to speak to the media in Russian only strengthens this view and weakens the position of the Latvian language. The objections of the State Language Commission were harsh and well-founded, but unfortunately the erroneous opinion was spread much more widely than its rebuttal.

It is the language of communication of officials, especially in the media, that is important. This is not about language skills or politeness, but about a lack of understanding of the basic principles of language policy and what it serves. It is not acceptable for officials to consider language only as a communication tool. The

symbolic role that is played by a public official through the use of his or her language must not be ignored. By focusing only on gaining the fondness of a certain audience, the principle of language hierarchy is lost. Recently there has been a dangerous tendency to believe that the position of the Latvian language has fully stabilized and that a strict position regarding the use of the Latvian language would be discriminatory, unfair, or Russophobic. An important discussion entitled “Latvian language in captivity” can be read in the magazine “Domuzīme”. According to Dzintra Hirša, a long-term director of the State Language Centre, “attacks on the Latvian language are currently taking place for seemingly humanitarian and economic reasons, but they are based on purposeful efforts to weaken the state language, ignorance of Latvia’s history, unrestricted liberalism based on the willingness of monopolies to subject everything to cash flows and provide a standardized workforce in the major languages. Latvia will always have to fight for the existence of its own language” [Domuzīme 2017, 61].

1.8. Conclusion

Regular sociolinguistic research and empirical observations confirm that in the last five years there have been positive trends in the dynamics of Latvian language skills; at least in the areas regulated by the state, the Latvian language is the priority language. However, legal mechanisms only affect the use of language in areas regulated by the state. As stated in Section 2 Paragraph 3 of the State Language Law “this Law does not apply to the use of language in unofficial communications of the inhabitants of Latvia”, and this norm is traditionally treated as broadly as possible. It is also not the status of the Latvian language that is questioned, but the monopolistic function of the Latvian language in socially important areas (public administration, public media, communication of public officials). Consequently, it must be acknowledged that the subjective factor, i.e. linguistic attitude, does not allow the use of the Latvian language in informal communication to be recognized as an appropriate language for the competitive situation.

The *Official Language Policy Guidelines for 2015–2020* acknowledge that “the Latvian language in our country is not only a linguistic and legal concept, but is also a symbolic one that is inseparably related with the state and community and also various aspects of the identity of the inhabitants of Latvia” [OLPG 2015-2020, 8]. The role of the language in the common identity of the state and its inhabitants is still insufficiently understood [see Druviete 2018a]. The third element of the triad *language skills – language use – linguistic attitude*²¹ is also problematic. There is a gap between the theoretical attitude towards the Latvian language and the practical evidence of action in

²¹ Linguistic attitude is a set of subjective factors that characterize the peculiarities of language perception of different ethnic groups, social groups and individuals, attitude towards different languages (language variants) and measures taken by state or public institutions to regulate the language situation. [VPSV 2007, 219]

the Latvian language collective. This applies primarily to the use of the Latvian language in informal communication, as well as to the assessment of the competitiveness of the Latvian language. Perhaps the key to understanding this phenomenon lies in the purely pragmatic approach to language as a communication tool and in the value system, as well as in the influence of traditions and stereotypes, reinforced by the views of the media and social networks. Therefore, in the process of evaluating progress and the development of state language policy guidelines for a certain period, it is necessary to identify the dynamics of processes in specific areas of language use, taking into account not only objectively measurable criteria but also linguistic attitudes related to psychological, economic and political factors. However, the basis for the sustainability of the Latvian language is the actual implementation of the constitutional status of the Latvian language as the state language and consistent adherence to the *State Language Law* and its implementing provisions, and critically assessing the benefits and risks of any language policy decision.

CHAPTER 2

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION AND MIGRATION TRENDS ON THE LANGUAGE SITUATION

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The number of speakers, the ethno-demographic composition of the language community, and migration trends today are important factors that influence the language situation [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 163]. Thus, the more speakers of a language, the more opportunities to communicate and also the greater the need to know the language; however, the use of a language may also be influenced by a nationally or internationally determined language status, language positions in an area, economic, social, demographic, geographical, cultural-historical and other circumstances.

Demographic factors determine the tendencies of language use and the possible nature of mutual relations, which are simultaneously influenced by the basic principles of language policy, guidelines, their implementation activities, as well as the prestige of languages in society and people's views on languages and their role [Stevens 1992, 172]. The ethno-demographic situation varies from country to country, it is determined by historical circumstances and present migration trends, it is closely related to the socio-economic changes in society, and ethno-demography is also influenced by country's policies in different spheres [Ó Riagáin 2002, 7].

Understanding of the development of ethno-demographic processes and the impact of these factors (including trends in the spatial and social distribution of a language community, development of the language situation, and results of previous policy implementation) on the language situation contributes to the development of targeted policies based on specific problems. The ethno-demographic situation, which includes current migration and globalization processes, certainly affects all aspects of language policy implementation, particularly the pedagogical one. In Latvia, too, we are increasingly faced with the need to teach the Latvian language to new target groups, which requires different practices and experience in teaching the Latvian language.¹

Latvian language skills and use indicators are positively influenced by its official language status, a sufficiently high position in the context of world languages (for more information, see the world language database *Ethnologue* [Language situation in Latvia in 2010–2015, 30]) and the implementation of language policy. At the same time, the population of Latvia continues to decline (Table 1). In recent years, both the net migration rate and the number of emigrants have been decreasing and the number of immigrants has slightly increased (Fig. 1), but the overall population of the country is smaller.

Table 1. Changes in the population of Latvia

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Population at the beginning of the year	2 570 030	2 668 140	2 500 580	2 381 715	2 249 724	2 120 504	1 986 096	1 919 968
Changes in population – total	17 686	-9 979	-31 049	-28 331	-21 850	-45 899	-17 139	-12 293
Migration balance	12 101	-13 085	-13 713	-16 428	-10 952	-35 640	-10 640	-3 360

Source: CSP ISG010

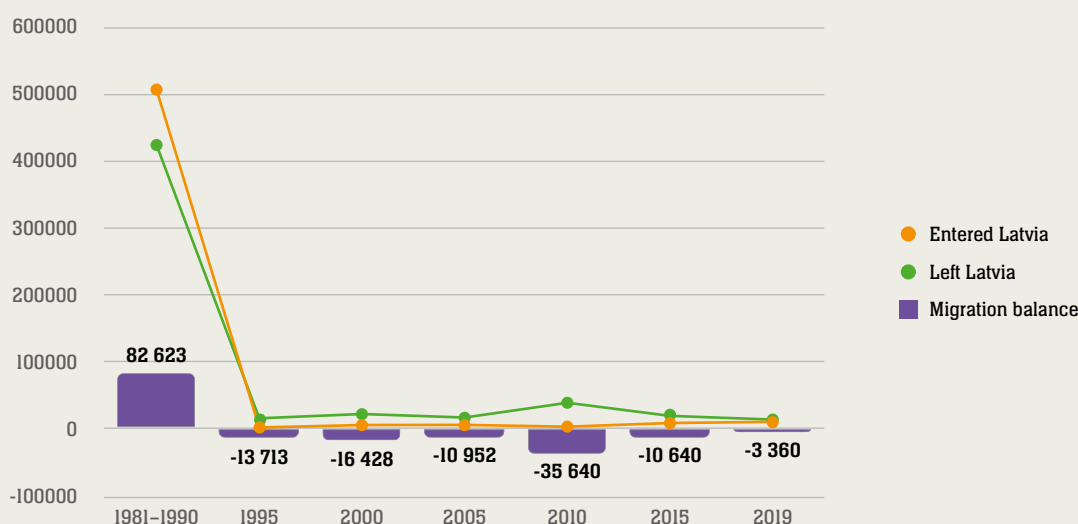


Fig. 1. Long term migration of the population in Latvia.

Source: CSP IBG010

¹ For more information on the new role of a Latvian language teacher, see more in Lazdiņa ed. 2016.

2.1. Ethnic composition, regional distribution of the population of Latvia and its connection with language policy

Analysing the changes in the ethnic composition of the population determined by birth and death rates and international migration (the overall indicators are still negative, i.e. the number of representatives of all ethnicities is decreasing, Table 2), it can be observed that the proportion of Latvians is slightly increasing (Fig. 2). It has increased by 4.5% since 2000, while the number of representatives of other ethnic groups continues to decline. At the same time, the percentage of the indicator “Other [ethnicity] / Others” continues to grow (from 1.2% in 2000 to 3.9% in 2018). This indicator numerically combines ethnicities that are not in the statistically largest group. This means that the cultural affiliation and ethnic diversity of the population in Latvia is also expanding due to migration [K]ava 2018a, 178].

Table 2. Population by ethnicity (at the beginning of the year)

	1935	1989	2000	2011	2020
Latvians	1 467 035	1 387 757	1 370 703	1 255 785	1 192 333
Russians	168 266	905 515	703 243	556 434	471 206
Belarussians	26 803	119 702	97150	73 781	60 097
Ukrainians	1 844	92101	63 644	49134	42 929
Poles	48 637	60 416	59 505	47 201	37 968
Lithuanians	22 843	34 630	33 430	26 924	21 938
Jews	93 370	22 897	10 385	6 495	4 436
Romani	3 839	7 044	8 205	6 643	4 891
Germans	62116	3 783	3 465	3127	2 476
Estonians	6 928	3312	2 652	2 085	1 607
Other	4 255	29 410	25 001	46 996	67 794

Source: *CSP national composition*

The number of inhabitants and the proportion of their ethnicity (comparing the data chronologically and regionally) reveal the historical conditions of the language situation and current issues in language policy. It should be remembered that the ethnic diversity of modern Latvian society is largely based on the consequences of the deliberately implemented migration policy in the Soviet Union, when the percentage of Latvians in the country was reduced from 77% in 1935 to 52% in 1989 (Fig. 3).

The context of the use of and proficiency in Latvian is also determined by the historically determined ethnic division of the society in the regions of Latvia: in Latgale and the largest cities of Latvia (Riga, Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Ventspils, Jelgava) the percentage of Latvians is lower than elsewhere in Latvia (Fig. 4). Today, however, migration is a major cause of demographic changes.

This means that in Latvia there are relatively large regional differences in the coexistence of languages, and the proficiency and use of the state language, which is determined by the historical demographic composition of the regions.

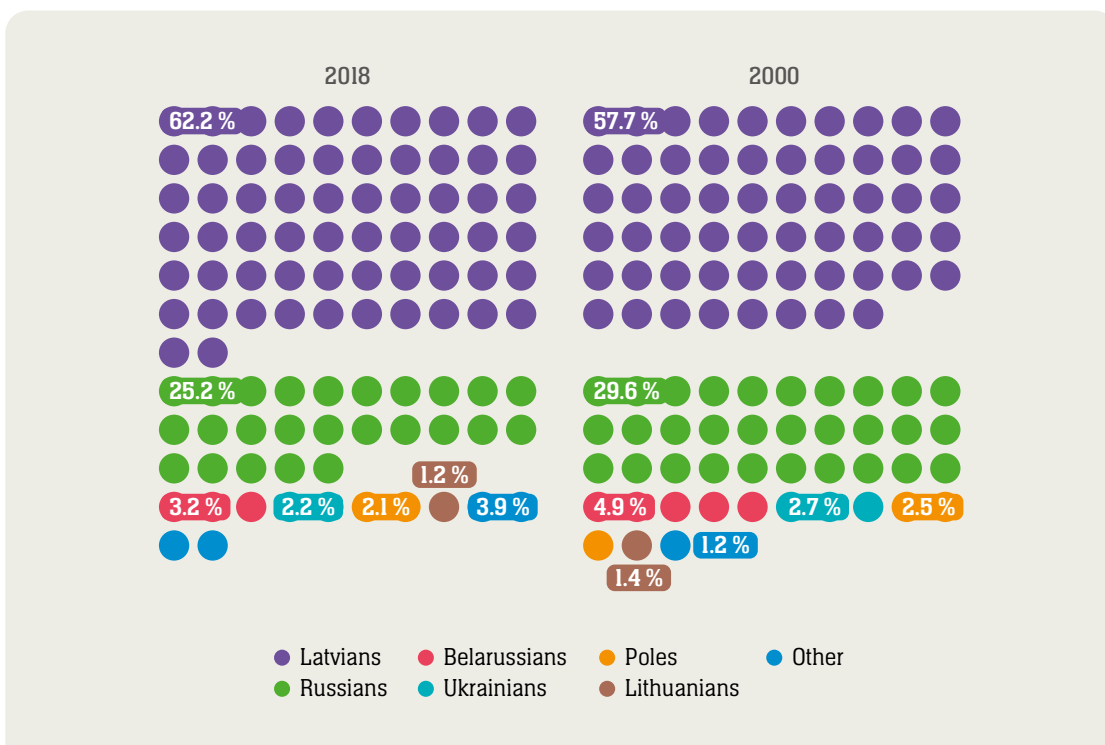


Fig. 2. Population by ethnicity (%).
 Source: GSP national composition

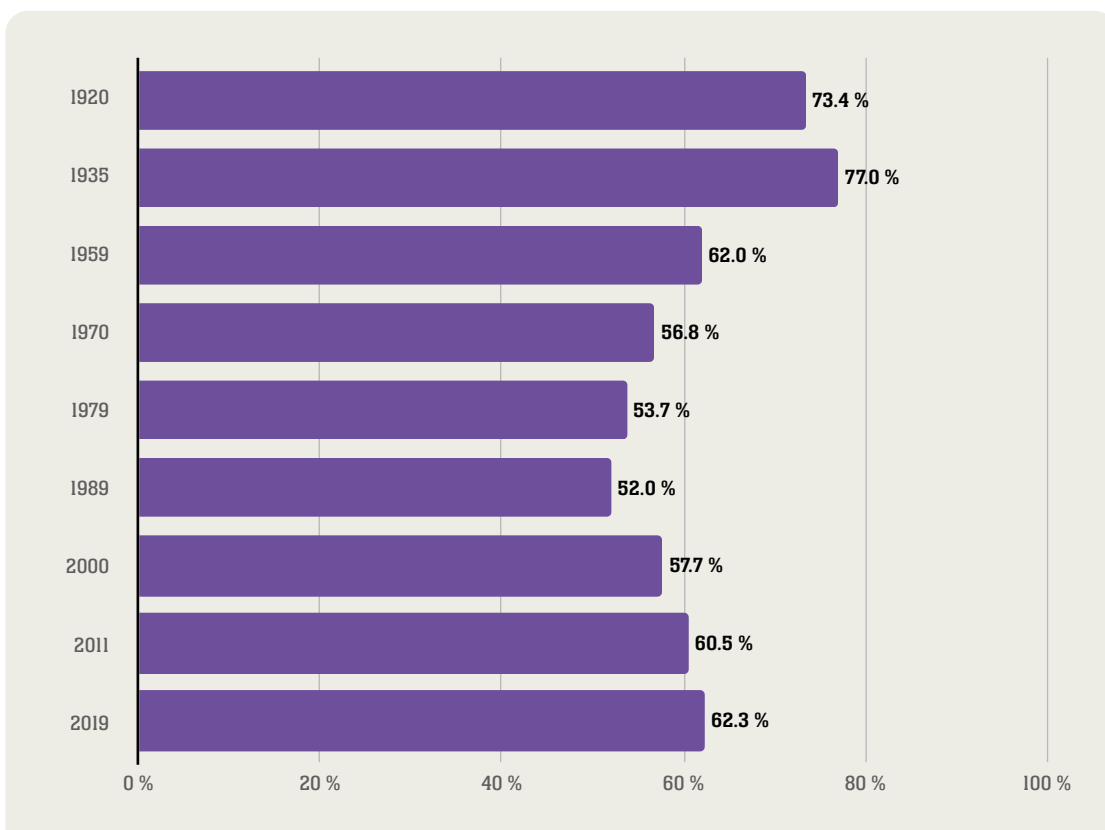


Fig. 3. Percentage of Latvians (% of total population).
 Source: GSP 2020, 21

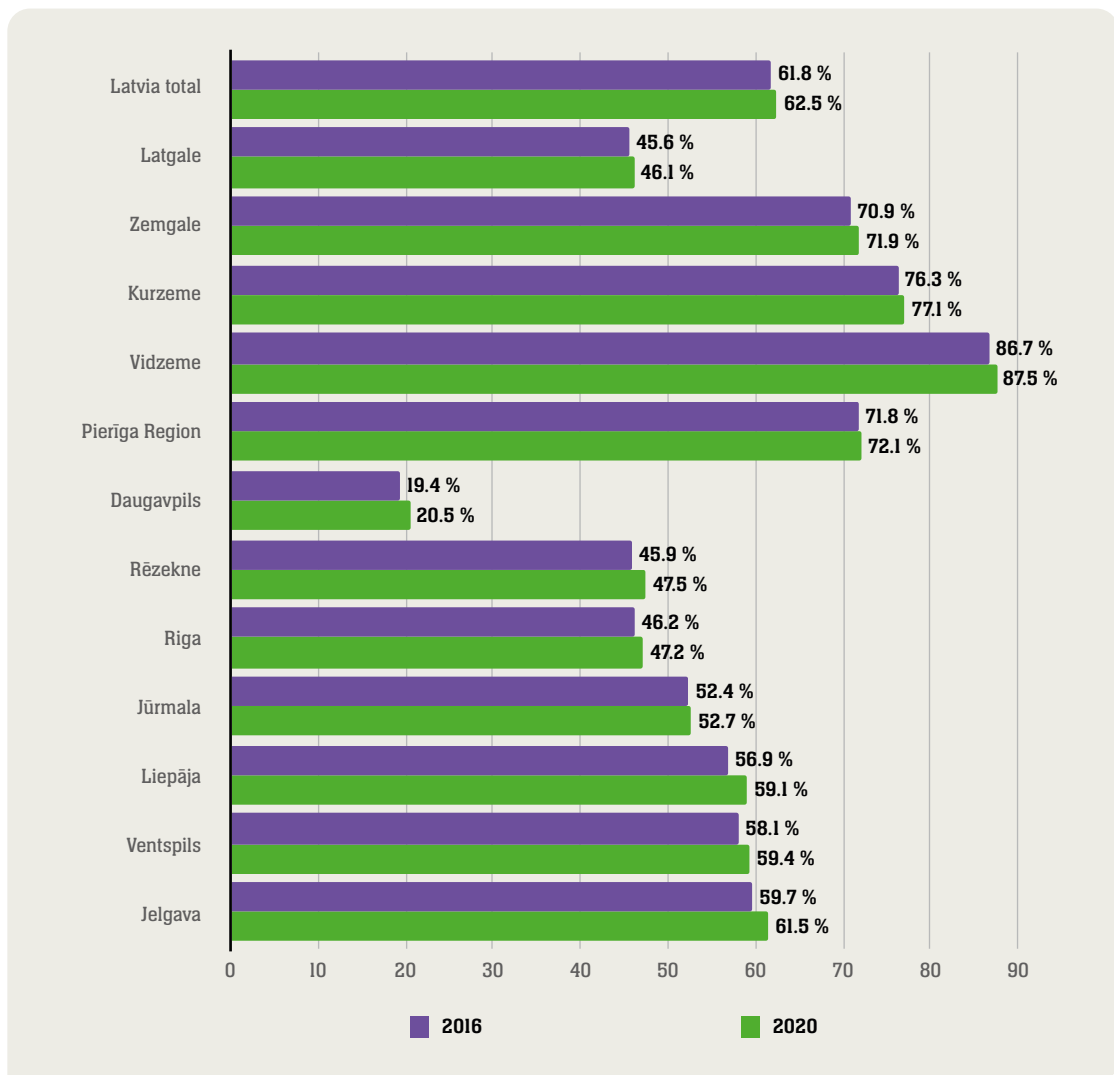


Fig. 4. Proportion of Latvians in the regions and largest cities of Latvia (%).

Source: CSP IRG080

The second largest ethnic group in Latvia is Russians (see Fig. 2), and the Russian language has also been the second most widely spoken language since Soviet times. According to the census data of various years [CSB census], the percentage of Russians and Russian language usage increased significantly during the Soviet years, e.g., in 1930, when the third census was conducted in Latvia, Russian was the mother tongue of about 13% of the population, 31% in 1959 and 42% in 1989. This increase was not due to natural population growth but to immigration.

The current situation in the use of Latvian and Russian and its regional differences is statistically most accurately shown by the data of the last census (2011). The visualization of language use developed by CSB [CSB 2016, 103] on the map of Latvia (Fig. 5) confirms the ethno-demographic factors described above, which determine and influence the language situation, mainly the language environment (i.e. which language is more often used in various sociolinguistic domains) as well as language policy and governance.

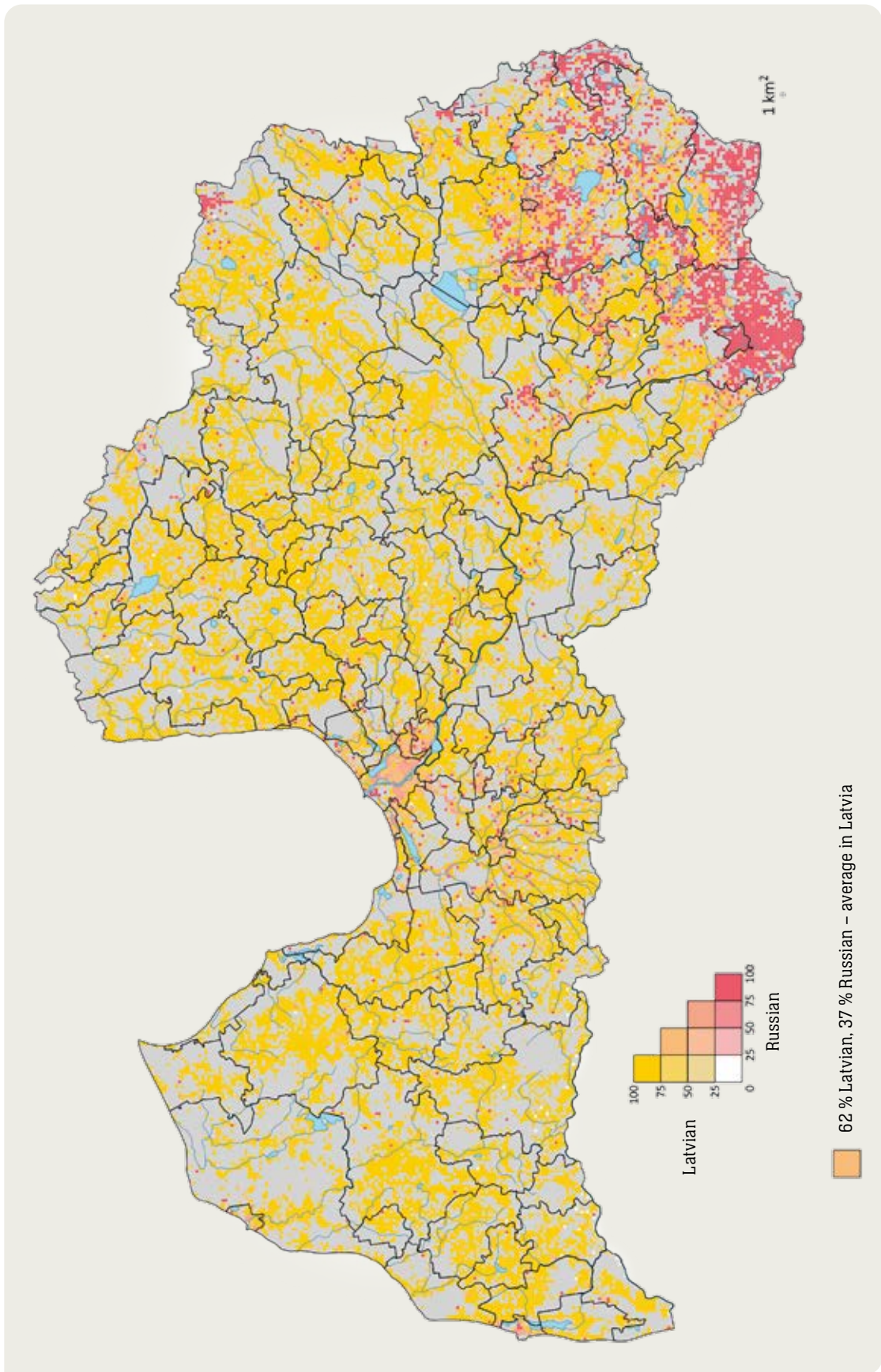


Fig. 5. Proportion of the Latvian population who mostly use Latvian or Russian at home.

Source: CSP 2016, 103

The analysis of the data of the last (2011) census, looking at the criterion “language used at home”, also allows a more accurate perspective of the situation in the largest cities, where it is possible to identify even the parts of a city where Russian is used more often (Fig. 6). Similar data have been obtained in this study of the language situation [2019 LVA Survey]: the use of languages is determined by the ethno-demographic indicators of the surroundings (i.e., not only the county or city as a whole, but also by certain parts of a city, parishes or parts of parishes, etc.), therefore the use and position of a language, for example, in Riga may not be equally applied to all residents of Riga, and the use of languages will differ in different parts of Riga.

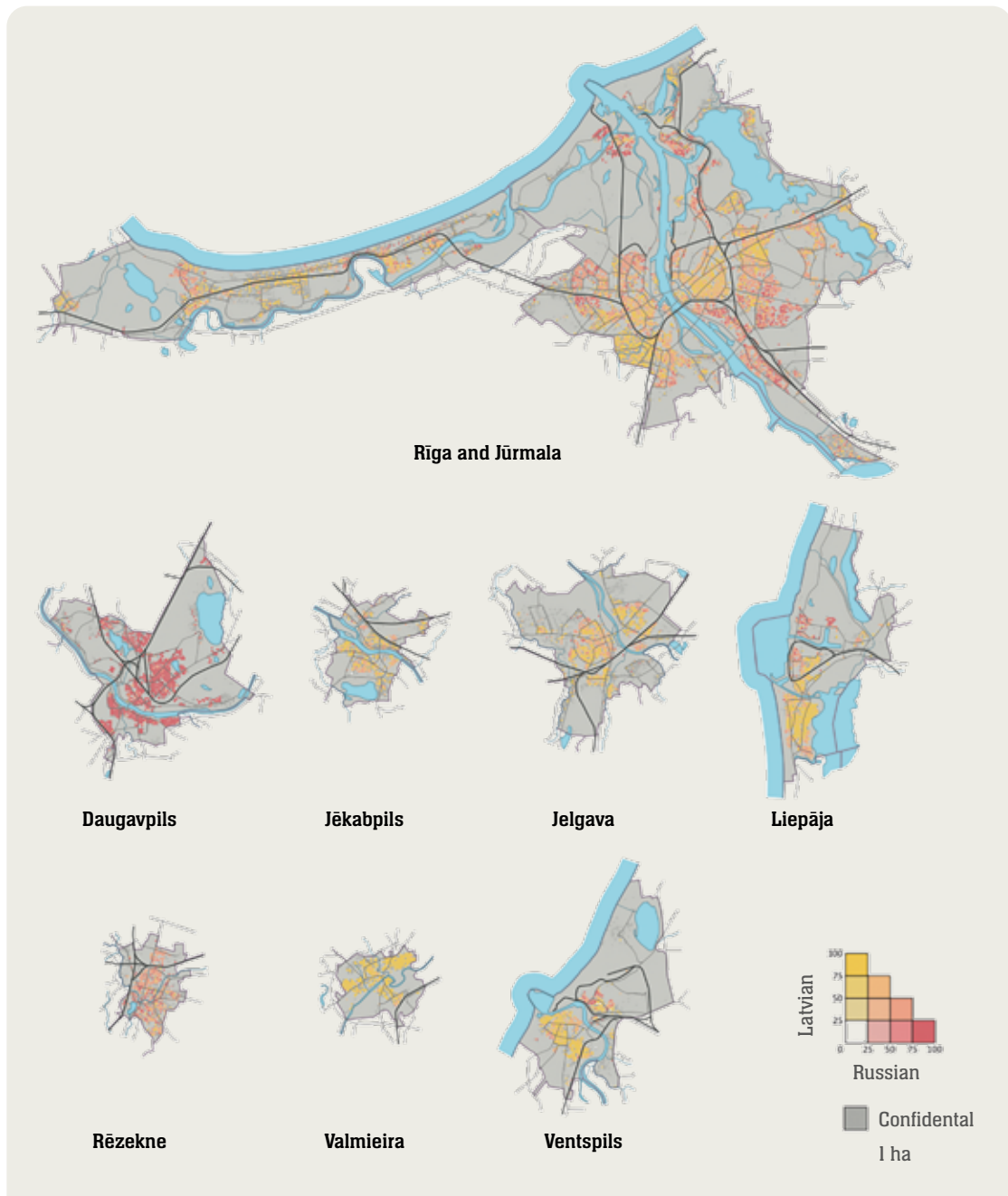


Fig. 6. Proportion of the population of the largest cities in Latvia who mostly use Latvian or Russian at home.

Source: CSP 2016, 104

The language used in the family/at home mirrors the linguistic behaviour of society in the sociolinguistic domain, which affects private communication and in which language policy does not directly interfere, but in language management there are complex interactions and links between different domains, and of course language policy indirectly affects this domain and vice versa [Spolskis 2011, 28]. Thus, the data on the use of language in the family in terms of language management in Latvia show certain geographical places where more attention should be paid, for example, to the provision of Latvian language skills and use in public communication.

The language skills and use in Latvian society are described in Chapters 3 and 4 of the study. Under the influence of ethno-demographic indicators, situations may arise in which the rights of users of the state language are violated. The research data summarized in Chapter 4 on the use of languages in various sociolinguistic domains and their correlation with the data by language spoken in the family show that inhabitants of Latvia who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family communicate only or mostly in Latvian in public sociolinguistic domains. In this group, regional differences are very small.

However, the use of languages of Latvian-speaking families living in Latgale in the public sphere is significantly different. In many sociolinguistic areas Latvian families living in this region of Latvia adapt to the environment where the Russian language is widely used. In the rest of Latvia, such a situation is not so pronounced. The use of languages by people living in Latgale and speaking Latvian in their families differs the most from the linguistic practice of the rest of the Latvian population in the informal public environment (on the street, in a shop and other similar situations, when addressing strangers), as well as on social networks; less pronounced differences are seen in terms of communication in health care facilities. In these domains, the residents of Latgale who communicate in Latvian in their families use both Latvian and Russian more often than those residents of Latgale who communicate mainly in Russian in their families. Thus, Latvian-speaking families in Latgale adapt their language use to the environment more than those who speak Russian in the family.

These data not only reflect the linguistic behaviour of the society, but also show the linguistic attitude and the importance of the language environment in the choice of language in speech situations. On the other hand, in Riga, where in terms of a respondent's native language the data are very similar (Latvian native language: 46.5% of the respondents in Latgale, 45.4% of the respondents in Riga), the situation is different. In Riga, the Latvian language is used more often and those who speak Latvian in the family do not switch to another language in public communication as often as in Latgale. Thus, the linguistic practice of the residents of Riga in public communication outside the home indicates the importance of the measures taken by the state to strengthen the official language, while the linguistic practice of the residents of Latgale shows the shortcomings of language policy implementation and need for future tasks in the region.

Another topical aspect of the changes in the language situation in terms of ethno-demographic and territorial distribution of the language community relates to current trends in active migration (both internal and external). Riga, as the country's capital and development centre, faces the consequences of migration the most, and this must be taken into account in the planning and implementation of language policy.

2.2. Immigration and emigration trends, their role in the language situation in the last five years

Latvian is not only spoken by Latvians, and the viability of the language is ensured by all language users who have learned it as a second or foreign language. Since regaining independence, the number of Latvian language speakers among minorities has increased significantly (for indicators of the proficiency in Latvian see Chapter 3 below). According to migration data (Table 3) emigration rates continue to decline, whereas immigration rates have increased slightly, which, from a regional perspective, shows that the largest numbers of people both entering from abroad and leaving for another country are in Riga and Pieriga Region. Also, Riga and the Pieriga Region are most often affected by internal migration, i.e. more and more people choose to move to Riga, Pieriga or other major cities. From the point of view of regions, the largest volume of emigration and greatest negative migration rate is in Latgale.

Table 3. International long term migration of population across regions

	2015			2019		
	immigration	emigration	balance	immigration	emigration	balance
LATVIA	9 479	20 119	-10 640	11 223	14 583	-3 360
Riga Region	4 137	6 840	-2 703	5 969	6 300	-331
Pieriga Region	1 876	2 913	-1 037	1 638	2 270	-632
Vidzeme Region	630	1 994	-1 364	695	1 148	-453
Kurzeme Region	950	3 016	-2 066	958	1 651	-693
Zemgale Region	874	2 236	-1 362	914	1 396	-482
Latgale Region	1 012	3 120	-2 108	1 049	1 818	-769

Source: CSP IBG100

In order to characterize modern migration, it is necessary to analyse the ethno-demographic indicators of immigrants. As already mentioned, the population of Latvia is mostly supplemented by persons from Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Thus, for instance, in 2018, 4% of immigrants were from European Union countries, but 37% from CIS countries (13% from Ukraine, 8% from Russia, 5% from Uzbekistan, etc.), 45% were Latvian remigrants [CSB 2020, 24]. A more precise breakdown of the countries of origin of migrants is provided by the compilation of PMLP statistics: In 2019, out of 841 first time residence permits, 593 were issued to citizens of Russia, and at the beginning of 2020, in Latvia there are 1,768,480 Latvian citizens and 216,682 non-citizens of Latvia (most of them are Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians) and the third largest group (53,052) are Russian citizens [PMLP statistics; PMLP Register].

These ethno-demographic indicators, along with the historical language situation in Latvia, have led to the situation in which the second most commonly used language is Russian, and this most likely means that the language of international communication of young immigrants in Latvia is Russian, despite Russian language skills continuing to decline in Latvia, especially among young people (see more in Chapter 3).

Although the ethno-demographic data on immigration in recent years show that the majority of newcomers are from the former Soviet Union, as mentioned above, the cultural affiliation and ethnic diversity of newcomers is increasing significantly (Table 4). This is evidenced by the small percentage, and lately the growing percentage of people who form the group “Other ethnicities, including non-selected and undetermined ethnicities” in the CSB annual population statistics – 2.6% in 2011 and 3.8% in 2020 (see also Fig. 2).

Table 4. Ethnic composition of international long term migrants in 2019

Tautiba	2011		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
	Immigration	Emigration	Immigration	Emigration
Latvians	4 965	48.5	3 078	27.4
Americans	10	0.1	31	0.3
English	36	0.4	32	0.3
Armenians	32	0.3	37	0.3
Azerbaijanis	14	0.1	129	1.1
Belarussians	379	3.7	442	3.9
Romani	73	0.7	72	0.6
Jews	44	0.4	44	0.4
French	24	0.2	57	0.5
Georgians	12	0.1	69	0.6
Estonians	31	0.3	40	0.4
Indians	16	0.2	737	6.6
Italians	35	0.3	29	0.3
Kazakhs	6	0.1	54	0.5
Russians	3 071	30.0	2 057	18.3
Chinese	16	0.2	65	0.6
Lithuanians	222	2.2	164	1.5
Moldovans	13	0.1	66	0.6
Poles	205	2.0	147	1.3
Finns	13	0.1	23	0.2
Tatars	16	0.2	23	0.2
Turks	45	0.4	64	0.6
Ukrainians	327	3.2	1 497	13.3
Uzbeks	15	0.1	505	4.5
Germans	35	0.4	94	0.8
Swedes	21	0.2	32	0.3
Other	200	2.0	640	5.7
Ethnicity not chosen/ mentioned	358	3.5	995	8.9

Source: CSP IBG041

Modern migration trends and the implementation of state policies in various fields (immigration, economics, education, etc.) affect the short and long term development of the language situation and the implementation of language policy. In addition to the traditional countries of origin of Latvian immigrants (countries of the former Soviet Union), the number of new immigrants from countries such as Bangladesh, Egypt, the Philippines, India, Cameroon, China, Nepal, Pakistan, Romania, Sri Lanka, etc. has been increasing in recent years, which reflects changes in Latvia's immigration policy and policy of attracting foreign students.

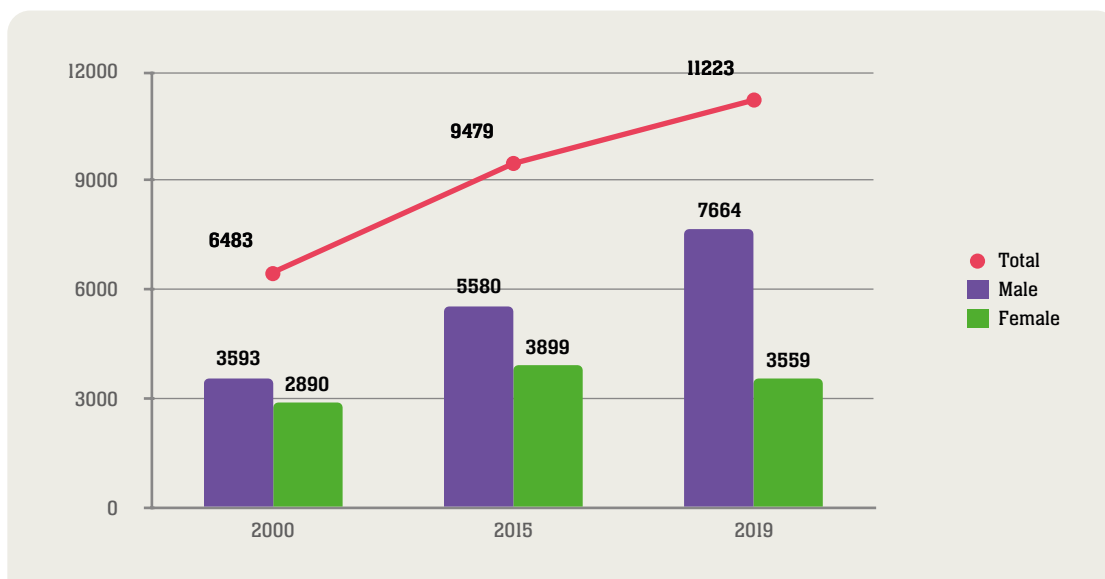
The impact of the state policies is evidenced, for example, by the increase in the number of people of one ethnicity in the context of changes in the proportion of other ethnicities: as shown in Table 4, the proportion of Indians has risen significantly from 0.2% in 2011 to 6.6% in 2019. According to PMLP data on the issuance of residence permits [PMLP statistics], in 2019 all Indian citizens came to Latvia for the purpose of studying, which was the basis for issuing residence permits. Thus, the increase in the number of Indians occurred by attracting foreign students to Latvian universities. The term *long term immigrant* is understood as “a person who comes from another country (international immigrant) or from another administrative territory of Latvia to settle permanently or for the duration of at least one year” [CSP terms]. Emigration rates of people coming from India are lower than immigration rates, which could mean that either Latvian universities and the attracting of students is used as a first stop for third-country nationals on their road to other EU countries (therefore there is a regular and growing flow of Indian citizens through Latvian universities), or these students stay longer in Latvia, which again accentuates the need to provide them with high quality acquisition of the state language, integration into society and the work environment.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of immigrants is driving change in traditional perceptions of foreigners and newcomers across the country and society; not all new residents of the country can use Russian or even English as a language of interethnic communication [K]ava 2018b, 72]. This means a greater emphasis on the availability of the acquisition of a common language of communication, i.e. the official language, which is understood as the opportunity for learning and use [K]ava 2018a, 178]. It should also be noted that during the last five years, most immigrants are economically active people of working age (Table 5). Thus, they participate in the daily life of society, where they cannot do without public communication (state language skills are first and foremost required at work).

Table 5. Age and gender structure of international long term migrants

	2000			2015			2019		
	Immigration			Immigration			Immigration		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total	6 483	3 593	2 890	9 479	5 580	3 899	11 223	7 664	3 559
0-4	412	213	199	1 097	589	508	655	357	298
5-9	365	193	172	430	233	197	442	213	229
10-14	257	101	156	194	103	91	287	131	156
15-19	264	132	132	153	83	70	314	202	112
20-24	351	178	173	635	372	263	1 256	966	290
25-29	559	318	241	1 438	812	626	1 720	1 204	516
30-34	651	396	255	1 419	798	621	1 646	1 173	473
35-39	573	363	210	1 033	623	410	1 263	931	332
40-44	472	317	155	880	600	280	926	680	246
45-49	406	268	138	612	426	186	802	624	178
50-54	386	236	150	460	320	140	562	406	156
55-59	308	168	140	426	270	156	505	360	145
60-64	377	214	163	284	172	112	327	197	130
65-69	251	133	118	149	89	60	216	118	98
70-74	236	139	97	63	31	32	101	49	52
75-79	232	99	133	72	25	47	51	17	34
80+	383	125	258	134	34	100	150	36	114

Source: GSP IBG040



In the context of emigration, one should consider the questions of the possibility to preserve and maintain Latvian language skills, which may also be the basis for a decision to return to Latvia [Kļave, Šūpule 2019], especially taking into account the age group composition of remigrants (see below). According to the CSB data, although the proportion of immigrants from other countries is increasing, the number of Latvian immigrants or remigrants still accounts for more than 40% of all immigrants (Table 6).

Table 6. Remigration of Latvian citizens and non-citizens

	Number		%	
	Latvian citizens	Latvian non-citizens	Latvian citizens	Latvian non-citizens
2011				
Immigration	7 373	1 054	72,0	10,3
2015				
Immigration	4 974	482	52,5	5,1
2019				
Immigration	4 578	327	40,8	2,9

Source: GSP IBG043

The survey conducted by the CSB on external migration in 2017 and 2018 [CSB remigrants] concluded that the group of remigrants consist of a high percentage of children (up to 14 years old) and young people aged 25–34. The reason mentioned is the return of families with pre-school and school-age children so that the children can learn in Latvia.

As already mentioned, the second largest group of remigrants are young people who continue their education, gain work experience abroad, travel and often change countries, but this age group is equally active in terms of emigration rates. The percentage of remigrants is decreasing among the elderly; however, a small increase is observed in the pre-retirement age group of 55–64, when the population is most likely to return to Latvia for permanent residence. However, remigrant families with children who need to be

included in the education system, where sufficient Latvian language skills are an essential condition for obtaining high quality education, reveal the bilateral nature of the problem, i.e. children's opportunities to preserve and learn Latvian when living abroad and learn and improve Latvian at school in Latvia.

The language situation in the diaspora was studied in depth [2019 Diaspora Survey], which is described in more detail in Chapter 5. The study of the language situation in the diaspora provides valuable data on the results of the implementation of language policy in Latvia. The regularities of emigration in recent years show that Latvian language skills in the diaspora have improved: In 2014, 59% of respondents knew the language very well and fluently, whereas in 2019 this figure was 72% of respondents. The increase in the level of Latvian language skills in the diaspora can probably be explained not by measures of acquiring and preserving the Latvian language, but by the increasing emigration of the younger generation of working age people (with Latvian as a native language or good Latvian language skills among minorities) from Latvia (Fig. 7). These data indirectly show the positive results of minority education programmes in Latvia.

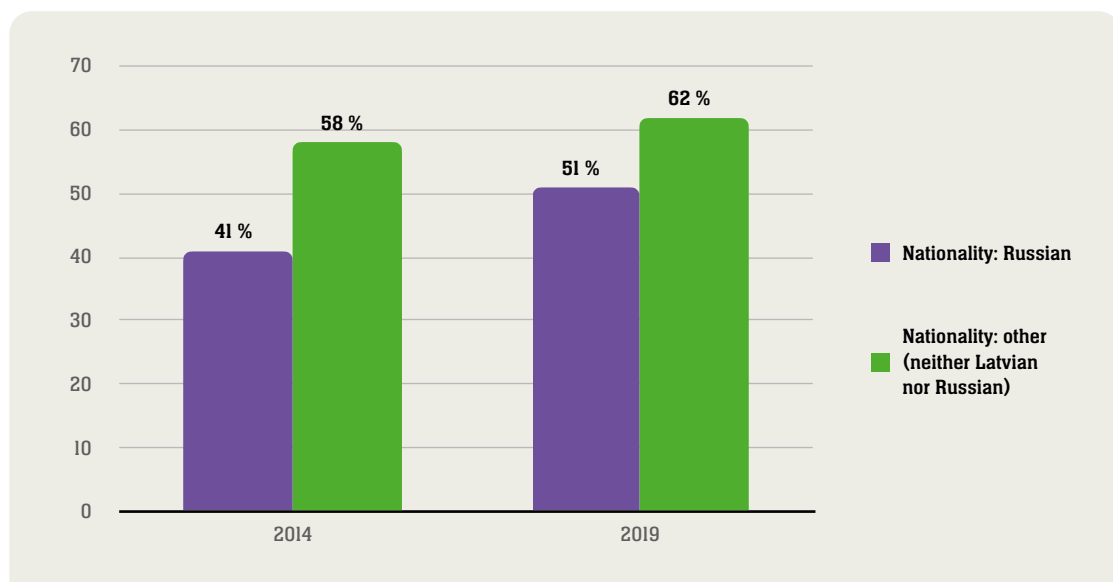


Fig. 7. Comparison of self-assessment of Latvian language skills in 2014 and 2019 (% , proficiency level "very good, native language level" and "good"). Respondents: citizens of Latvia living abroad who are not Latvians by ethnicity. Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

2.3. Conclusions and recommendations

Ethno-demographic trends show that the provision of an environment for the acquisition and use of the Latvian language for both the population of Latvia and the representatives of the diaspora will continue to be an objective.

Changes in the population, proportion of ethnicity, regional distribution of society, together with language skills, use and linguistic attitudes, determine the sustainability of language in society. Ethno-demographic indicators are related to several aspects of the implementation of language policy: the possibilities of acquiring and preserving the Latvian language in the diaspora, the provision of Latvian language acquisition for immigrants, and the use of the Latvian language in accordance with its status in the territory of the country.

The most important ethno-demographic indicators influencing the language situation:

- a decrease in the number of inhabitants, i.e. the number of language speakers;
- an increase in the percentage of Latvians, which in the future could promote the expansion of the use of the Latvian language (this indicator should be viewed together with the data described in other chapters and the developments in language competition in society in the future);
- differences in the use of the Latvian language in the regions and cities of the country, which are historically determined by the ethnic division of the population; insufficient environment for the use of the Latvian language does not allow the rights of speakers of the state language to be ensured;
- migration trends:
 - ▶ impact of immigration indicators:
 - ▷ for several years now, a large percentage of immigrants have come from the countries of the former Soviet Union, and their language of interethnic communication is Russian;
 - ▷ the diversity of immigrants is increasing: different countries and languages of origin, ethnicity and cultural diversity;
 - ▷ almost half of the immigrants are Latvian remigrants, who do not have any special language problems when integrating into society, but their children, whose Latvian language skills may not be sufficient to enter school, are in a more adverse situation;
 - ▶ emigration rates continue to exceed immigration rates, and people of working age with good Latvian language skills mostly leave the country. This has positively changed the language skills indicators in the diaspora; however, this does not mean that the preservation and acquisition of the Latvian language is less important, on the contrary – in the so called historical diaspora and among the children of new emigrants, Latvian language skills are rapidly declining.

The results of the research show the close relationship the historical development of the language situation and ethno-demographic processes (also in the historical perspective) have with the planning and management of language policy today (which takes place both in administratively larger areas of the country and in smaller communities

of speakers such as cities, city districts, etc.). Therefore, the language skills, use, and linguistic attitude of the Latvian population and other research data are also described in the regional perspective, thus supplementing and clarifying the analysis of the impact of language skills and ethno-demographic factors.

Changes in the ethnic composition of the population (increase in the proportion of Latvians, ethnic diversity), determined by modern migration processes, on the one hand, can theoretically expand the Latvian language environment, but on the other hand they accentuate new aspects in Latvian language acquisition and language use due to differences within target groups.

The proportion of newcomers from the former Soviet Union indicates that Russian will continue to be used as a language of interethnic communication. On the other hand, the high percentage of remigrants in the total amount of immigration and the problems mentioned by the respondents, which are more related to the inclusion of children in school or pre-school due to insufficient Latvian language skills, indicate the need to continue offering Latvian language opportunities to this target group. The difficulties of remigrants in preserving and teaching the language to children are most directly related to the measures for teaching and preserving the Latvian language in the diaspora, which are described in Chapter 5. The effectiveness of the implementation of diaspora measures is one of the current challenges of language policy and other policies implemented by the state.

The connection between ethno-demographic processes and language skills and use is very close, especially the connection with the pedagogical aspect of language policy implementation, i.e. language acquisition. The scale of these activities depends on the ethno-demographic characteristics of society: certain groups of society and certain areas of the country; it plays a cardinal role in the integration of these groups into society [Ó Riagáin 2002, 8].

Insight into the changes in ethno-demographic processes in recent years allows one to determine the current target groups and tasks of language policy implementation:

- provision of Latvian language acquisition for new language speakers: immigrants for whom Latvian is a foreign language and who may not have a common language of communication with the rest of the society, including remigrants, especially children;
- ensuring preservation and acquisition of the Latvian language in the diaspora;
- provision of Latvian language acquisition for Latvian citizens and non-citizens in certain regions of the country, where the Latvian language is still not used to a sufficient extent in public communication situations and domains;
- ensuring consistent use of the Latvian language throughout the country, where both the pedagogical and legal direction of language policy implementation, as well as public involvement and co-responsibility are important.

Ethno-demographic factors are one of the conditions that help us to understand the changes in society's language skills, prestige and use, and outline possible trends in language competition. This is the basis for changing the focus of language policy implementation in the future.

CHAPTER 3

STATE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN LATVIA

Gunta Kļava
Nadežda Kopoloveca

Today, much of the world's population is multilingual, and multilingualism is seen as a benefit to society and to the individual. Latvia is also one of the countries where multilingualism is a traditional phenomenon, and it is largely determined by the ethno-demographic indicators of the society described above. Language skills and use affect the situation of the state language and the implemented language policy, yet the most significant changes, at least in recent decades, have occurred in linguistic attitudes, views and beliefs about languages: multilingualism is seen as a public good and value.

By conducting regular research on the language skills of the country's population, it is possible not only to understand the role of languages in society, but also to find out how language competition affects the position of a language in society and how the situation develops. It allows one to determine the necessary directions of action, plan actions and implement language policy [Druviete ed. 2018a, 46].

This chapter analyses the Latvian language skills of the Latvian population, their acquisition and also proficiency in other languages. The data show the results of the implemented language policy and outline the linguistic views and beliefs of contemporary society. It also examines the linguistic behaviour and attitude of the younger generation, in which one can see an awareness of the value of both skills in the state language and foreign language skills – English is emerging as a *lingua franca* of the modern world.

This means that language policy-makers, implementers and the general public need to pay more attention to the fact that multilingualism is not just about the proficiency in the most popular foreign language(s) in society. On the contrary, multilingualism is principally a concern for lesser-used, endangered and disappearing languages (as D. Crystal has said, the day all the world's languages become extinct and only one remains will be the most tragic moment in human history [Crystal 2003, 20]).

Several languages are relevant in the daily life of Latvian society, as evidenced by the *PISA*¹ 2018 study [OECD 2020, 129] by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (*OECD*). In Latvia, more than 90% of the surveyed pupils communicate in two or more languages on a daily basis (group of respondents – 15-year-old pupils), and by this criterion, Latvia is in the same group as countries such as Hong Kong, Croatia, Estonia, Macau (special administrative region of China), Malta, Singapore and other countries. Similarly, *PISA* 2018 data show that parents of multilingual students are also multilingual, which means that language skills are perceived as a value and passed on from generation to generation, and that language skills are given a certain value in today's world [OECD 2020, 129]. However, the situation differs from one member state to another, based on the history and evolution of the language situation over time. In such large-scale studies, such data are not detailed, thus the causes of multilingualism are not always fully revealed, for example, the problems of the state language in post-Soviet countries are not sufficiently presented, the consequences of modern migration are not fully described, etc. However, they provide a good insight into general trends in language acquisition and use and an understanding of the role of language skills today.

Compared to the other countries included in the *PISA* 2018 study [OECD 2020, 129–131], Latvia's indicators are high (99% of students learn two or more foreign languages). The situation is quite similar in countries which, in terms of the number of speakers of the official language, cannot compete with so called large languages. What is more, most of these countries have so far not been a part of the English-speaking world for a long time, either economically or culturally (such as Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Hungary). In contrast, in the countries where English is the main language of communication and schooling, far fewer pupils learn a foreign language at school – from 20% to 60% of students not learning a foreign language. The role of English is growing; it is becoming *lingua franca* studied by most of the world. The dominance of one language is linked to economic factors; a situation arises which does not correspond to the verbally expressed symbolic idea of multilingualism, which can only be achieved if each country first protects its own language(s), especially if it is (or they are) on the list of endangered languages.

Language learning and the language situation are also influenced by different social contexts and factors. States' views on languages, their value, and national policies influence and shape public opinion and the beliefs of individuals or groups [McKay, Rubdy 2011, 10]. Moreover, this influence exists not only when actions are taken to preserve and

¹ *The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)*.

develop a language, but also when actions are not taken, or they are considered irrelevant. On a daily basis, we can best observe this in the settings and actions of the state language policy, which is perceived as a message to the public, for example, the use of language in the media, the choice of foreign languages in education, the use of languages in higher education, etc. A clear example of Latvian language policy could be the designation of Latvian as an official language after regaining independence (1988–1990); and more recently, in late 2019 and early 2020, in discussions on the proposal of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) to increase the role of English in higher education. The MES, which is responsible for both the official language and higher education policy and development, proposed the use of English as a mandatory language for doctoral theses (not just the summary; internationally cited publications are also usually written in English). Extensive information on this discussion is available on the Internet [see Zanders 2019].

Although the transition to teaching in the state language in minority schools began in 2018 [Education Law, General Education Law, Report 2017], at the same time there was a discussion that the position of the Latvian language in higher education may not be as important in the future as English. Such often contradictory actions and information provided to the public can affect an individual's motivation to learn or not to learn a particular language [McKay, Rubdy 2011, 10]. This does not mean that no solution can be found: according to the principles of multilingualism, no other language is considered inferior compared to the world's most widely used languages; and when developing language policy the conditions for the coexistence and hierarchy of languages, the close link between language and identity, and the conditions for the development of each language are understood and taken into account.

The country's language policy is also the basis for indicators that show language positions. As a result of globalization, proficiency in English has become almost a basic skill (just as much as we cannot do without digital or media literacy, etc.), and it is only thanks to national language policies that each language can remain on the world language map [Phillipson, Skutnabb-Kangas 2011, 37]. The multilingualism of the Latvian population and also the high positions of student achievements in the *PISA* 2018 study in terms of language skills and daily use are related to the fact that the acquisition of the state language has been ensured in minority education curricula: the level of state language proficiency has increased, especially among the representatives of the younger generation of the minorities² and in terms of the number of language users; a similar increase can also be observed in English language skills among the younger generation.

Based on Latvian public survey data [2019 LVA Survey, CSP data etc], this section provides an overview of the state language proficiency of the Latvian population, which languages dominate the language "basket" of the Latvian population, and what tendencies have been observed in recent years in language acquisition both at school and in lifelong learning.

² Language proficiency levels are understood as the language proficiency levels defined in the document of the Council of Europe entitled "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" - A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 [CEFR 2006, 26].

3.1. Proficiency in the state language

Proficiency in the state language, unlike proficiency in other languages, at an individual level is closely linked to the social aspect – it is the basis for public security, unity and equal opportunities for every citizen, even in a multilingual reality. It is the duty of the state to ensure the acquisition of the state language for every citizen who does not speak the state language. Latvia has committed a lot of work and resources in this field, and the quantitative indicators of state language proficiency are high enough.

The data on the study of the language situation, obtained over several years, show an increase in the number of Latvian speakers in various non-native Latvian groups: In 1989, only about 23% of the representatives of national minorities spoke Latvian; this number increased to about 90% in 2019 and has remained fairly stable over the last ten years (Fig. 8). On the other hand, the changes in the ethno-demographic situation in the last few years mark new current directions and target groups for state language learning.

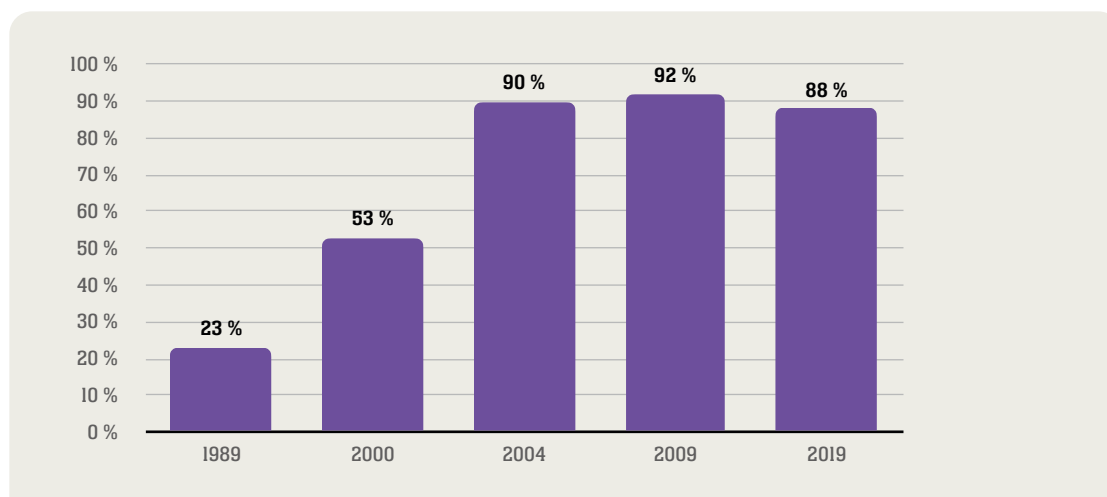


Fig. 8. Latvian language skills in the group of minorities (1989-2019, A1-C2 level; respondents: 18-74 yrs)

Source: 2019 LVA Survey, *Language situation in Latvia 2010-2015*

Latvian is the native language of about 60% of the respondents [2019 LVA Survey], and this has not changed significantly since 2017 (60.8%) [CSP 2017]. Since, unfortunately, no data on the native language of the population were obtained in the 2011 census, the latest accurate data on proficiency in Latvian as a native language can be obtained from the 2000 census, where 58% of the population indicated their mother tongue as Latvian [CSP 2000]. The data on proficiency in Latvian as a native language of the 2016–2017 CSP survey “Adult Education”, which inquired into the language skills of the respondents, are similar – 61.6% [CSP Adult Education]. As the ways and methods of data collection in the census will continue to change [CSP 2021], it will not be possible to obtain data on language skills and the native language of the entire population for the time being. It is therefore important to conduct regular specific representative surveys and monitoring of the society. This is conducted by the CSP and other institutions and organizations.

Although it may initially appear that the number of native speakers of Latvian is increasing, due to the declining population, the percentage of native speakers of Latvian

is increasing only slightly, and in terms of numbers it is in fact declining. This is one of the additional reasons why the provision of Latvian language learning, as well as the development of a positive attitude towards, and the expansion of, the Latvian language environment should be ascribed an important role.

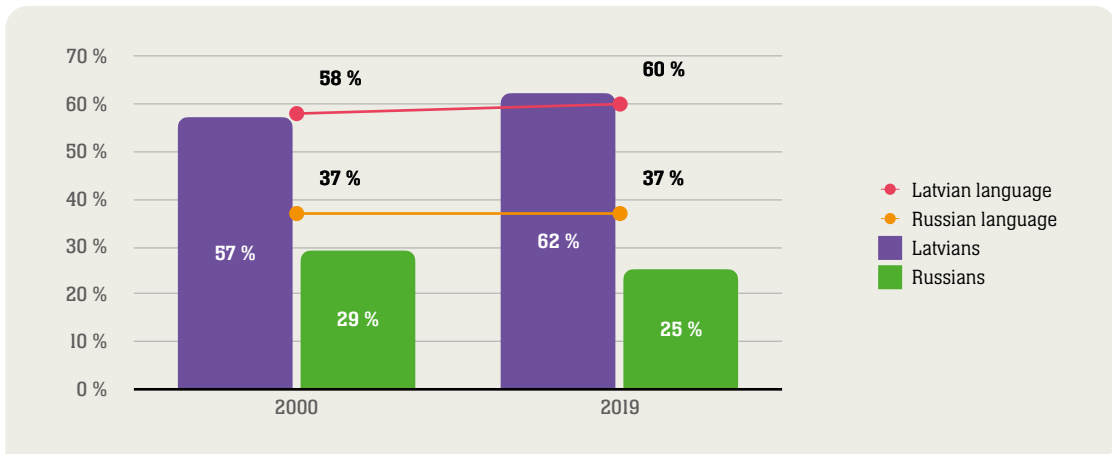


Fig. 9. The main groups of the Latvian population: ethnicity and native language (2000, 2019).

Source: 2000 CSP and 2019 LVA Survey

Taking into account the conclusions of the previous research phase about the improvement of the Latvian language proficiency level of the Latvian population and positive changes in the younger generation [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 119], and in order to obtain more accurate language proficiency indicators for different age groups, in this survey [2019 LVA Survey] the number of respondents of the younger generation (18–34 years) was expanded. Comparing Latvian language skills in different age groups and groups by native language, it can be observed that proficiency in the state language is better among the younger generation of the respondents, but slight differences can be observed in groups by native language (Fig. 10).

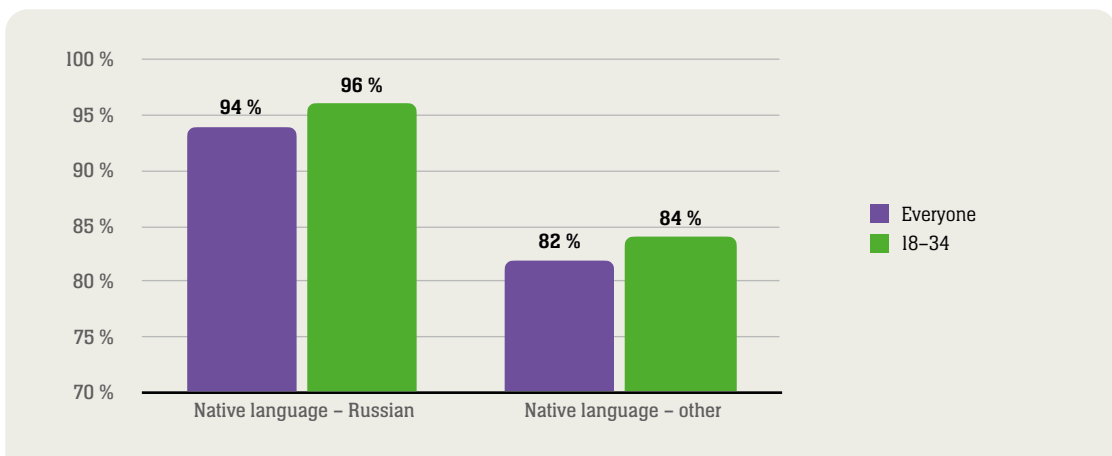


Fig. 10. Latvian language skills in age groups of respondents and groups by native language (respondents: non native Latvian speakers,%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

For the population whose native language is neither Latvian nor Russian, proficiency in Latvian is generally slightly lower, but taking into account the percentage of this group of respondents, a larger statistical error is also possible. About 1% of the respondents indicated several native languages, mostly Latvian and Russian, or another traditional minority language in Latvia (Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian) and Russian (less often – Latvian).

Differences in age groups are also shown by various other studies and surveys, for instance, the data of the External Migration Survey conducted by the CSP in 2017 and 2018 [CSP External Migration] reveal that Latvian is a native language most often among younger people (approx. 69% to 24 years, 64.5% from 25 to 34 years, 60.6% from 35 to 44 years, 58.7% from 45 to 54 years, 53.5% from 55 to 64 years, 55.8% from 65 years of age and older). The data of this survey also show the continuation of changes in language skills and, possibly, the prestige and hierarchy of the languages, which was described in the previous publication of the results of the language study [Language Situation in Latvia 2016, 55], i.e., while so far the population of Latvia has spoken Russian more often than Latvian, this is no longer the case and not only in the younger generation. Although this difference is not very large yet, the survey of several language skills in recent years clearly reveals a decline in the proficiency in Russian in society. The data of the CSB External Migration Survey also reveal that, while comparing the Latvian and Russian language skills of all the respondents (regardless of their native language) by age groups among residents over 65 years old, a total of 94% of the population speaks Russian and 80% speaks Latvian. On the other hand, in the group of the respondents aged 15 to 64 the knowledge of Latvian is more common than of Russian – 94.5% speak Latvian and 92.9% speak Russian [CSP External Migration].

The data of the 2019 LVA Survey also show other native tongues of the respondents, and, taking into account the representative sample of the study, they quite closely reflect the ethnic division of the population. Thus, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Polish are followed by other languages, i.e. the languages of smaller traditional ethnic communities of Latvia such as Roma, Estonian, Moldavian, but other languages were also indicated, e.g. Italian, Kalmyk, Finnish, which will most likely change in the future survey due to the survey sample. The diversity of the native languages of the Latvian population is also reflected in the data of other surveys, for example, the respondents of the adult education survey conducted by the CSP indicated Azerbaijani and Turkish as their native languages [CSP Adult Education]. (For more information on the ethnicity of the population, see Chapter 2, as well as the PMLP Register, PMLP Statistics.)

Taking into account the stability of the number of language speakers in recent years, the indicators of self-assessment of Latvian language proficiency are also important as they indicate an increase in the level and use of language skills. In the youngest generation, the self-assessment of Latvian language skills is higher (Fig. 11).

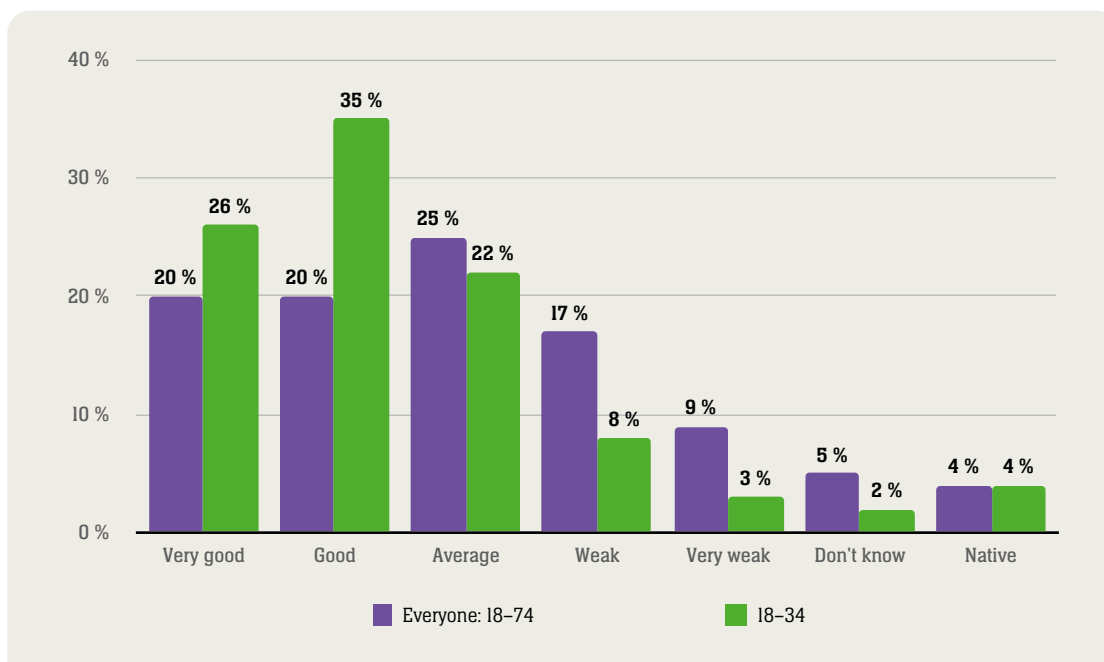


Fig. 11. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills (respondents: non-native Latvian speakers, %).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The data on the youngest age group reveal the results of proficiency in Latvian in minority education programmes (83% of the younger generation of the respondents indicated that they learned Latvian in school), which also confirms that the number of Latvian speakers may have reached its maximum of about 90% of the population, as the indicator has not changed significantly since 2004 (see Fig. 8), which could mean that the rest of the population is no longer really attainable, but it will not significantly affect the situation in the future, especially taking into account the Latvian language skills in the group of young people [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 88].

Assessing Latvian speaking, writing, listening and reading skills, 66% of all the respondents and 81% of the younger generation (18–34 years) indicated that Latvian language skills are sufficient in all types of language activities. Here again the data on the younger generation indicate better proficiency in Latvian (Fig. 12), which can be related to such factors as language learning motivation, learning opportunities, language use environment, etc. The younger generation of respondents has not only better Latvian language skills, but also a higher percentage of the respondents for whom Latvian language skills are fully sufficient in all types of language activities. Similarly, the self-assessment of this group's writing skills, which are considered to be the most complex of all the language activities [Richards, Renandya 2002, 303], even when the answers "completely sufficient" and "rather sufficient" are compared, show the former has a significant prevalence. On the other hand, in the group of the respondents of all ages, the data indicate insufficient language skills in this type of language activity.

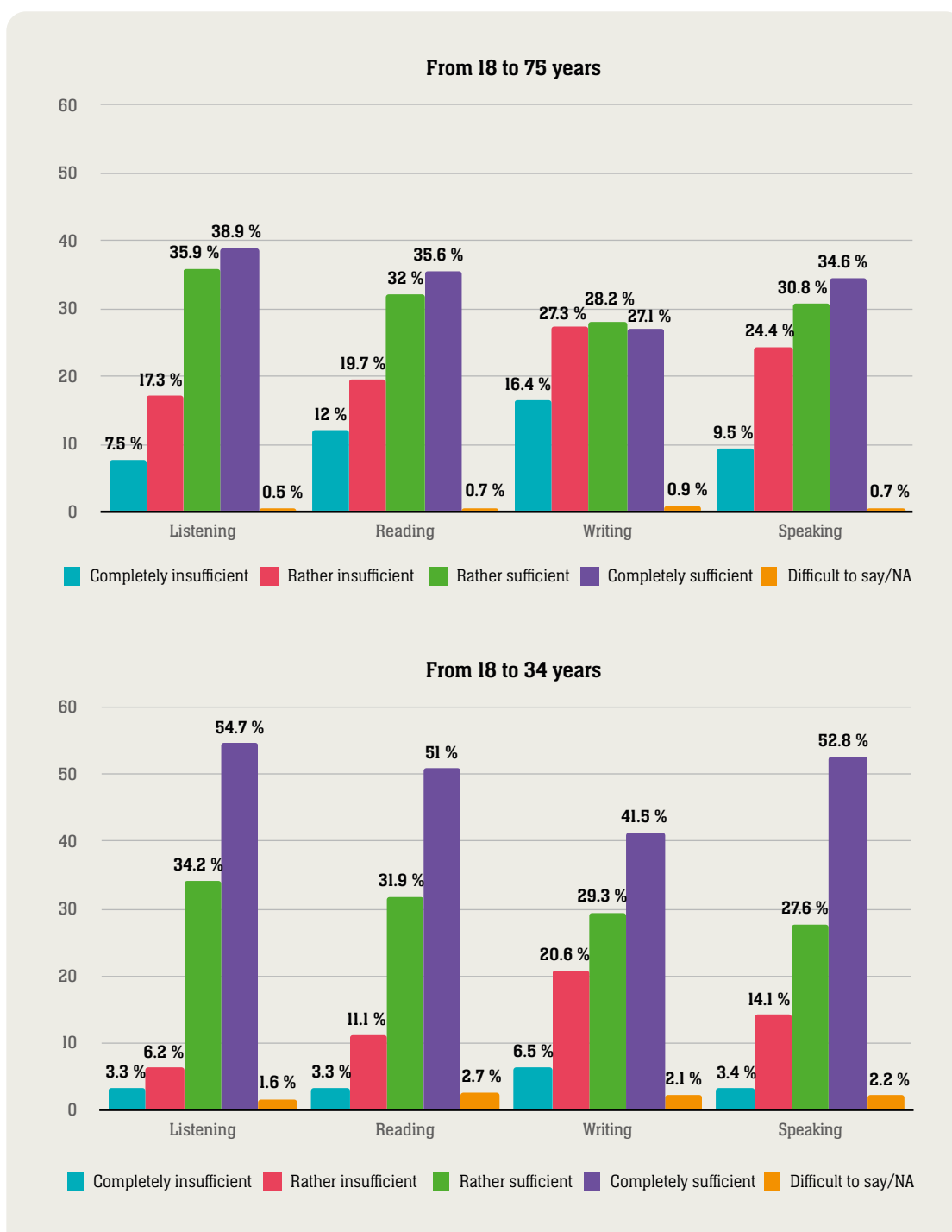


Fig. 12. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills of minority respondents by types of language activities (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

When creating a general portrait of a respondent whose mother tongue is not Latvian and whose Latvian language skills are completely sufficient in all types of language activities, it can be concluded that most often they are residents with higher education under the age of 34, are employees of state or municipal authorities, managers, specialists, civil servants or students, have a high income, and live in Vidzeme or Riga.

Additional information on the Latvian language proficiency of the non-native Latvian population is provided by the study on the results of the Latvian Language Proficiency Exam for adult Latvian language learners (2015–2017) “Latvian Language Proficiency Exam: the results of the participants of the state language proficiency exam” [Latvian Language Proficiency Exam results 2019]. The participants of the state language proficiency exam indicated that the writing test was the most difficult of all, i.e. the respondents rated their writing skills as the weakest [Latvian Language Proficiency Exam 2019, 65]. The results of the exam also show that the lowest score obtained at all language proficiency levels is in the writing test. C level examinees show a high self-assessment of writing skills, but they also have the lowest average score obtained in this part of the examination (see Fig. 13 for the data collected on the results of the exams in 2016). This would most likely could be explained by the shortcomings of the state language acquisition system [Quality of Latvian Language Skills 2019, 109].

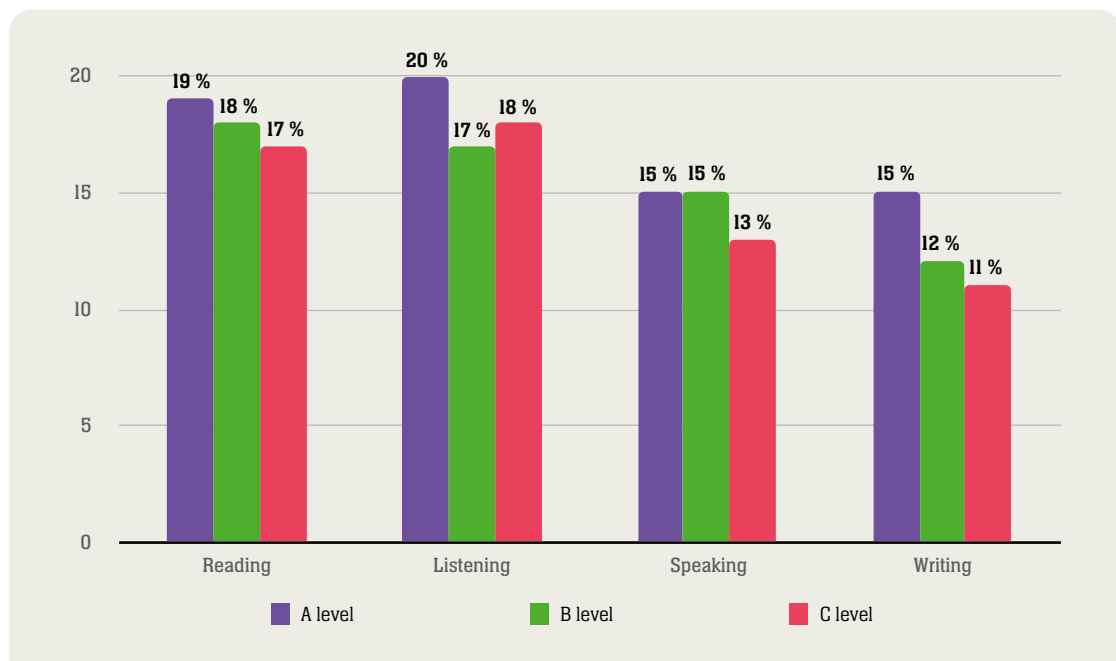


Fig. 13. Results of the participants of the state language proficiency exam: the average number of points obtained in language skill groups at A, B and C level in 2016.

Source: *Quality of Latvian Language Skills 2019*, 67

When planning and implementing the language policy in Latvia, the regional perspective, which is both ethno-demographic and historically determined, is important in the context of state language skills. The percentage of lower proficiency in the state language is still higher in Latgale and Riga (Fig. 14), where there is also the smallest population with native Latvian language, which also means the lack of an environment in which the Latvian language is used.

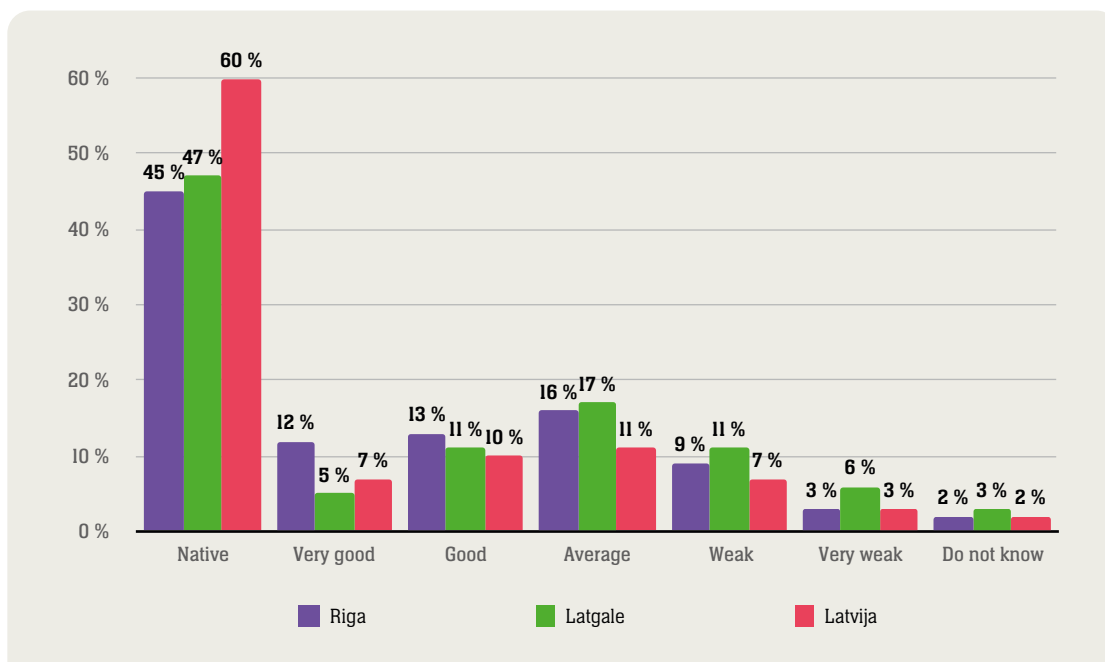


Fig. 14. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills across regions (Latvia, Latgale, Riga).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

In Latgale, the indicators of proficiency in Latvian are mostly determined by demographic indicators, the historical national composition of the population, and also the impact of economic and social conditions. In Riga, on the other hand, alongside other factors, the processes caused by globalization play an important role. Most of the newcomers, who do not know the Latvian language, at least initially arrive and live in Riga. Opportunities and accessibility to learn the Latvian language for these people are very important for a truly meaningful life in the country. This is also evidenced by the rapid increase in the number of young immigrants who have taken the state language proficiency exam in recent years (organized by the State Language Proficiency Testing Division of the VISC). For example, in 2015, about 26% of all examinees were foreigners, but in 2017 they were already 36%. Most language proficiency exams are held in Riga and Latgale [Quality of Latvian Language Skills 2019, 37, 51].

In Vidzeme, for 83% of respondents the Latvian language is native, whereas those for whom Latvian is not a mother tongue, most speak Latvian very well or well (66%). In Kurzeme, Latvian is a native language of about 72% of the respondents, 70% in Pierīga, 65% in Zemgale, 47% in Latgale, and 45% in Riga.

Analysing the self-assessment of Latvian language skills in the group of respondents for whom it is not a mother tongue, it is possible to distinguish the most topical issues for improving the state language proficiency in each region. There are enough Latvian native speakers in Vidzeme, thus the possibilities for using the language are much wider, which also means better proficiency in Latvian as a second language. Although 44% of the respondents in Kurzeme know Latvian very well or well, taking into account the language situation in Soviet-era industrial cities, there is a relatively large percentage (32%) of speakers of Latvian as a second language who speak Latvian poorly or very poorly. In Pierīga, the percentage of very good or good speakers of Latvian as a second language also does not exceed a half

(47%) of the respondents whose native language is not Latvian, and 29% of the respondents know it poorly or very poorly. In Zemgale, the percentage of good and very good speakers of the state language (36%) does not exceed the percentage of the intermediate (30%) and weak or very weak (31%) speakers of Latvian for whom the language is not native. In Latgale, however, as indicated above, there is the smallest number of respondents (non-native Latvian speakers) who know Latvian very well and well (30%), moreover, more than a half of the population in this region are not a native speakers of Latvian, which also affects their environmental characteristics of language use. Riga, where the percentage of native speakers of Latvian (45%) is the lowest in Latvia, but the economic situation of the population is better and employees are most widely involved in the sociolinguistic and employment domains (for example, state institutions, educational institutions) where the need for obligatory language proficiency is legally required [Cabinet Regulation No. 733], the percentage of very good and good Latvian language speakers is relatively high – 46%, while 29% of the respondents assessed their Latvian language skills as intermediate, and 15% of them as weak, and a relatively small percentage of the respondents (6%) rated their Latvian language skills as very weak. However, also in Riga and Latgale, the quantitative indicators of Latvian language proficiency in the younger generation group do not differ from the overall indicators of the Latvian respondents, – in general only about 2% of the respondents do not speak Latvian and about 3% of the respondents speak it very poorly. This again indicated the changing language situation, which is largely based on language and education policies, despite the complexity of the process and its trends that are sometimes misunderstood by society.

The historical conditions of the language situation, as well as modern economic and social trends are also reflected in the indicators of the use of Latvian as a native language and proficiency in the official or second language, which reveal the opposition city/rural areas. In Latvia, the largest number of native speakers of Latvian live in rural areas (74%), in other cities (except Riga) – 61%, and in Riga – only 45%. In rural areas there are also the most respondents (whose native language is not Latvian) who know Latvian very well or well (46%), 30% know it at a medium level, and 18% speak it poorly or very poorly.

Comparing the self-assessment of Latvian language skills for residents of other cities and Riga, it can be observed that the respondents whose native language is not Latvian assess their language skills as very good or good in Riga (46%) more often than in other cities (36%), despite the fact that in other cities in general (except, for example, Daugavpils with a particularly small percentage of native Latvian speakers), Latvian is spoken as a mother tongue more often than in Riga. But, as mentioned above, in Riga, which is the capital and the centre of the country, in various areas, where a better knowledge of the Latvian language could be a condition for a better quality of personal life, the percentage of very good or good Latvian speakers is higher than in other cities: in Riga – 46%, in other cities – 36%, and the proportion of weak or very weak Latvian language speakers is lower than in other cities: in Riga – 21%, in other cities – 35%.

In order to obtain more detailed data on the language situation in the regions, it is necessary to conduct broader research by expanding the population of non-Latvian speakers. However, the data obtained in the general public survey present trends and problems in Latvian language acquisition and use as well as regularities of functioning in certain territories of Latvia.

3.2. Proficiency in foreign languages

The state language is in contact with other languages, and in order to find out the positions of the Latvian language, identify the most important competing languages now and possible future changes in the situation, it is also necessary to evaluate the proficiency in foreign languages of the Latvian population. In general, the residents of Latvia still speak Russian most often, followed by English and German (Fig. 15). Looking at the dynamics of foreign language skills over the last ten years, it must be acknowledged that foreign language skills have not changed much in society, with the exception of German, whose percentage of speakers in Latvian is declining faster.

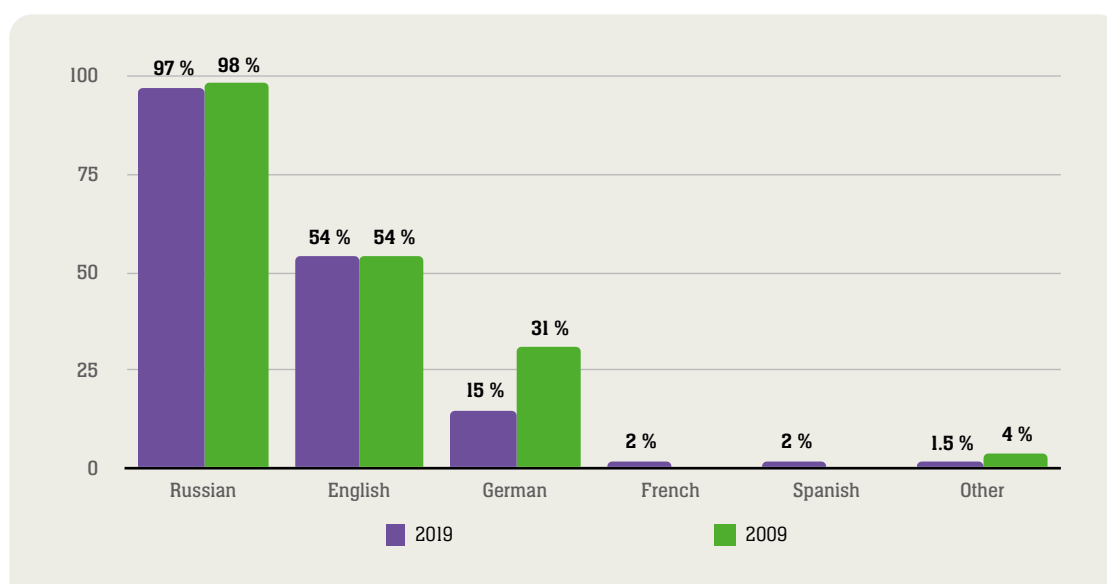


Fig. 15. Foreign language skills of the Latvian population (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey (no data on French and Spanish language skills in 2009)

Insights into foreign language skills in the younger generation group show significant changes, where, as described above, not only better Latvian language skills are observed, but also an increase in the proficiency in English. This means that the position of this language in the world also has an impact on the language situation in Latvia (Fig. 16). These results are also confirmed by the analysis of the data on the need for language skills and their role in the labour market provided in the next section. The dynamics of the language situation show changes in foreign language skills and use: until ten years ago, the use of English in everyday life was mostly necessary in certain areas (tourism, international business, higher education, youth subcultures, etc.), but now in terms of the number of English speakers, the growth of language skills, and prestige, it is becoming the second most important language in Latvia among the younger generation of the respondents.

Traditionally, Russian language skills in society have been very high, which is determined by the proportion of Russian speakers in society (historical legacy of the Soviet era and the result of new migration trends) and there is still a significant percentage of Russian speakers among Latvians and other native speakers. The data show that 64% of Latvians know Russian very well or well, 23% at a medium level, 12% poorly or very poorly, and 1% do not know it. On

the other hand, 46% of the representatives of other nationalities (except Russian) are native speakers of Russian, 46% speak Russian very well or well, 7% at a medium level, and 1% do not know it. Russian language skills in society do not differ much across regions and groups by occupation or sector of activity (public, private), or in groups by income. The only difference that also justifies the conclusion of a gradual change in the position of languages in society is Russian language skills in different age groups, i.e. the younger a non-native Russian respondent, the less likely he or she speaks Russian very well, and more often at a medium level or well. On the other hand, the opposite trend is observed among speakers of English – the younger a person, the more often he or she speaks English well or very well. These data show that the prestige and use of languages are changing in the life of society.

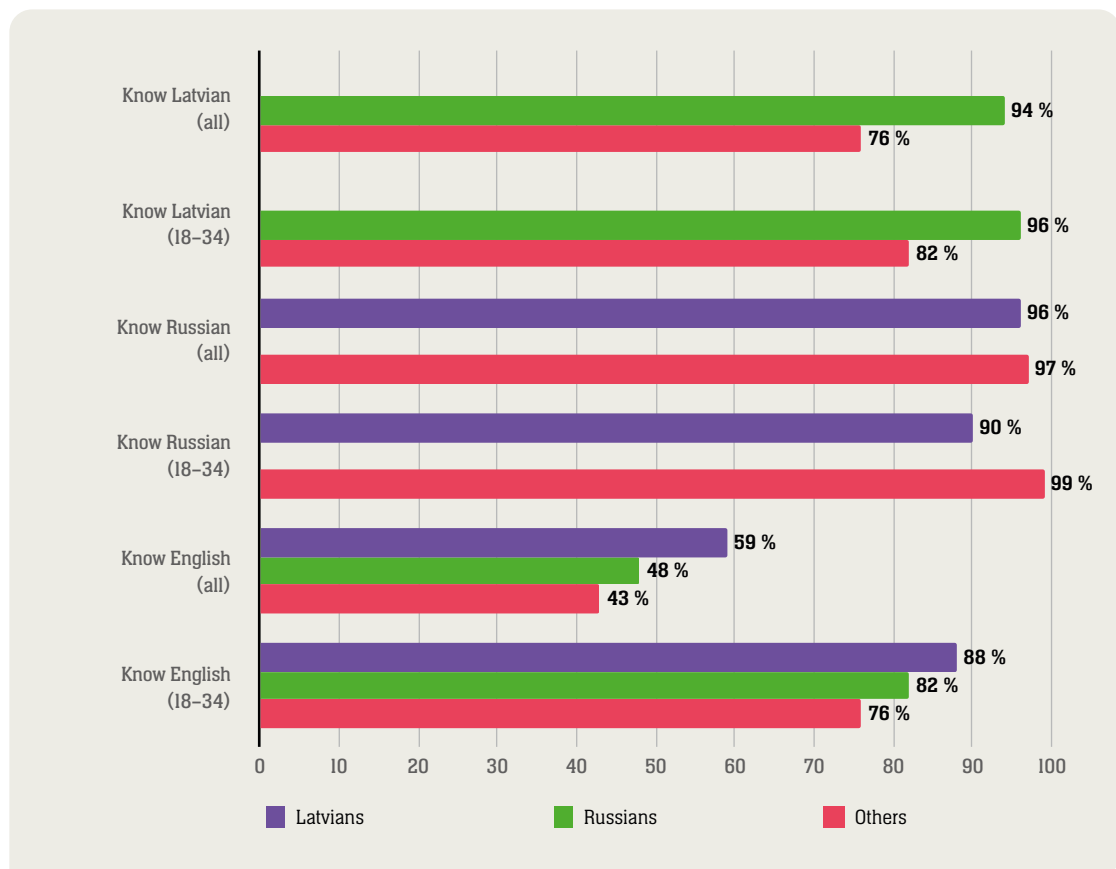


Fig. 16. Proficiency in Latvian and the most popular foreign languages by nationality and age group (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

As mentioned before, self-assessment of English skills is significantly higher in the younger generation (18–34) and has risen very rapidly over the last decade compared to the total population (Fig. 17). In the LVA surveys on the language skills of the population, data are obtained using quantitative data collection methods, thus the obtained indicators are the subjective assessment of the population's own foreign language skills (individual perception of the level of proficiency), which is also influenced by the general understanding of good language skills, and this understanding may change when one or another language is encountered more frequently in practice. According to the respondents' assessment of the need to use English, the popularity of English and the

need to use it is growing, therefore people have more opportunity to fully assess their ability to communicate in the language (for more information on self-assessment of language skills and related problems, see Geraghty, Conacher 2014; Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 58).

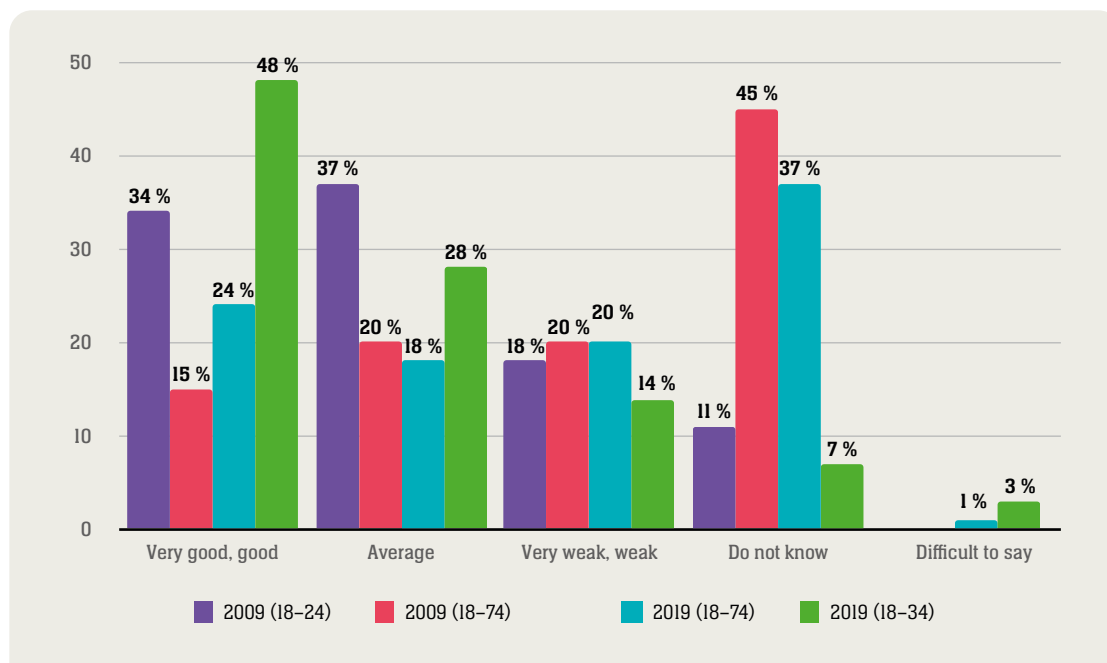


Fig. 17. Self-assessment of English language skills in the group of young respondents and in general in 2009 and 2019 (%).
Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Thus, in addition to the state language, English and Russian, which are also two of the largest languages in the world, are relevant both in terms of skills and use in Latvia; and the prestige and economic value of English in particular has led to a rapid increase in English language skills and use. Along with the tendencies of globalization in the world, it has contributed to a rapid decrease in the percentage of historically significant German speakers in Latvia, as well as a decrease in the number of speakers of traditionally spoken minority languages (except Russian). However, as international communication expands and becomes more diverse, various other languages supplement the family of foreign languages in Latvia; this could promote awareness of the attitudes and significance of multilingualism of both society and the individual.

The set of respondents with other less popular languages is insufficient to draw general conclusions, however, in addition to English, Russian, German, French, Spanish (in recent years), other less common foreign languages are emerging in Latvia which are learnt and known at least at the basic level, e.g. Swedish, Japanese, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Estonian, Finnish, Georgian, Romanian, etc. The list does not include the traditional minority languages of Latvia, which still exist despite the declining proficiency of their speakers, e.g. Belarusian, Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Roma, Moldavian, etc.

Latvian society is linguistically diverse, and multilingualism at an individual level is the norm, therefore it should continue to be used in the implementation of language

policy, promoting understanding of the relationship between society and the individual's multilingualism and state language, strengthening confidence in the role and importance of the state language.

3.3. Latvian language acquisition: experience and needs of national minorities

The acquisition of the Latvian language in the educational process is traditionally provided in two ways: through formal education (children and young people in pre-school, general education institutions and higher education institutions) and through the lifelong learning process (adults). The education process implemented in the formal stages of education, including the higher education stage, has ensured an increase in the number of Latvian language speakers and also in the level of language proficiency, which is evidenced by the results in the group of the younger generation described above.

The respondents – especially the younger generation – most often indicated that they had learned Latvian at school (Fig. 18); this figure over a five-year period (2014–2019) increased by about 10% (in 2014 it was 70%).

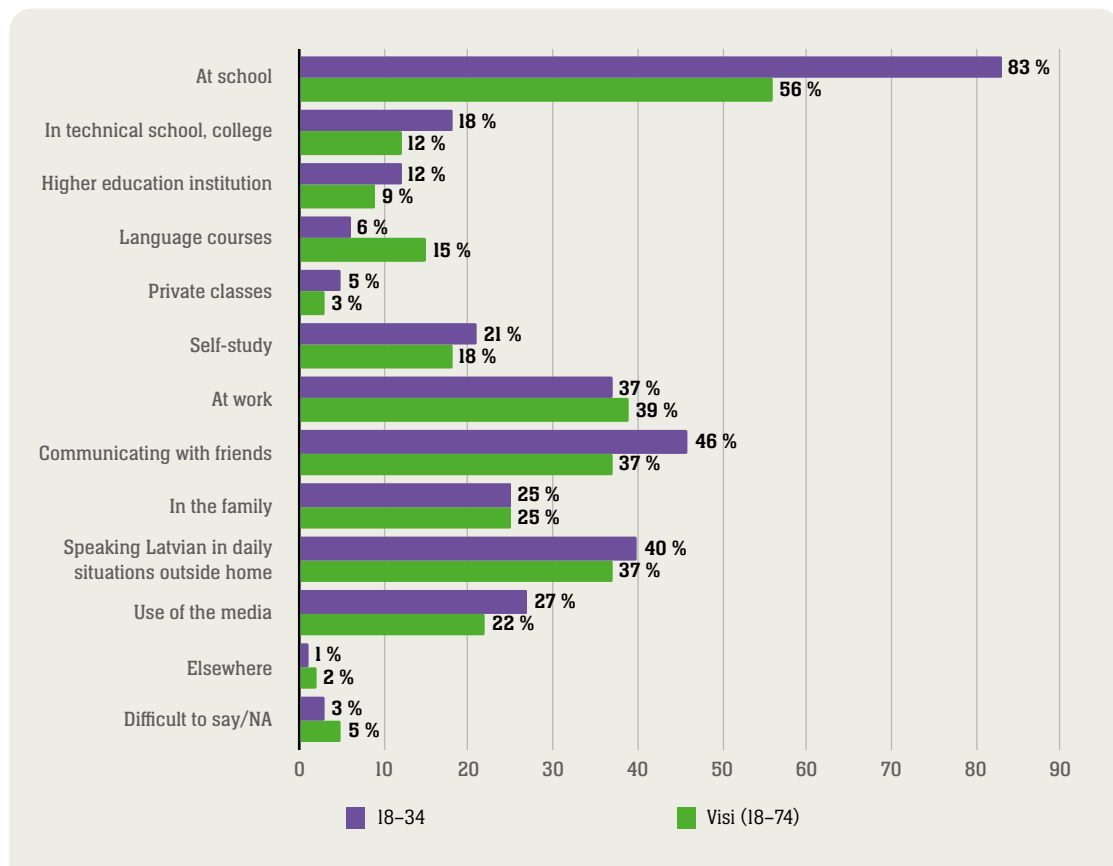


Fig. 18. Types and forms of Latvian language acquisition in the group of young people and in the group of all respondents together (respondents: representatives of national minorities, %).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The respondents in the youngest age group more often use opportunities and improve their language skills outside formal education: learning Latvian with friends, communicating in Latvian outside the home, using the media in Latvian. This indicates both the expansion of the use of the state language as the language of common communication of society and the increase of the integrative motivation for language acquisition and improvement.

Only a half of the representatives of the older generation learned Latvian at school, but in this group there are more respondents who learned the language in courses and also at work. Thus, lifelong learning opportunities should be considered particularly when organizing language learning for newcomers. On the other hand, the improvement of Latvian language skills in the work team is mentioned equally often in all age groups; it is also the second most frequently mentioned form of language development among respondents aged 45 and over, which further reveals the need for language skills for the economically active population.

In the LVA survey in 2019, a new criterion was distinguished: Latvian language acquisition in a technical school or college, and 12% of the respondents chose this answer option. This indicator is important because it shows that not all respondents succeeded in acquiring the Latvian language to a sufficient level at the primary education level. The survey data also show that this is a trend that has emerged in the last ten years, as this option was mostly chosen by younger respondents – 15.8% aged 18–34 and 15.9% aged 35–44. More than a quarter of the respondents from Vidzeme and Latgale indicated language acquisition at technical school, while in Riga this indicator is only 7%, which could reflect the role of vocational education institutions in the acquisition of the state language in the regions. The percentage of respondents who indicated that they studied Latvian at a higher education institution has decreased (9.3%), which reveals a natural change of generations (the younger generation of the respondents learned Latvian at a sufficient level already at school; studies in a higher education institution require knowledge and skills, including Latvian language proficiency, of a certain level. This means that the acquisition of the Latvian language or the improvement of skills in vocational secondary education institutions and colleges must be strengthened. This is not an unknown fact, among other issues relevant to this level of education, but it is not emphasized enough in the context of learning and using the Latvian language [Latvian language use in vocational education 2010, 41].

Comparing the data on the types and forms of language acquisition in different regions, Latgale also differs from the others in the period covered by the study. In the other regions, more than half of the respondents indicate that speaking Latvian on the street, in a shop and other everyday situations, as well as communicating with friends and colleagues, helped them to learn and/or improve their Latvian language, while in Latgale these answers are rarely mentioned (about one in five of the cases). Latgale does not provide a sufficient Latvian language environment – people learn the language at school, while in practice there are often insufficient opportunities to speak Latvian.

The results of the survey show a correlation between the level of income and the diversity of the forms of language learning – the more language learning opportunities the respondents have used, the better their language skills, the more opportunities they have to use the language and the higher their income. The starting position (Fig. 19) is similar for all the respondents – the number of the survey participants who learned Latvian at school is almost the same in all the groups of respondents by income level: 53% of respondents with average income, 54% of respondents with high income and 56% of respondents with low income. An equal number of respondents also indicate language learning in language courses – 13% of high-income respondents, 14% of average-income respondents and 15% of low-income respondents. But, further, there are already quite large percentage differences among the respondents by income groups – 43% of high-income respondents and 53% of average-income respondents learned Latvian at work, but only 24% of low-income respondents used this opportunity. Even in cases where self-initiative is required in the language learning process, the same trend is observed: only 11% of low-income respondents, 22% of average-income respondents and 34% of high-income respondents chose to learn the language through self-study.

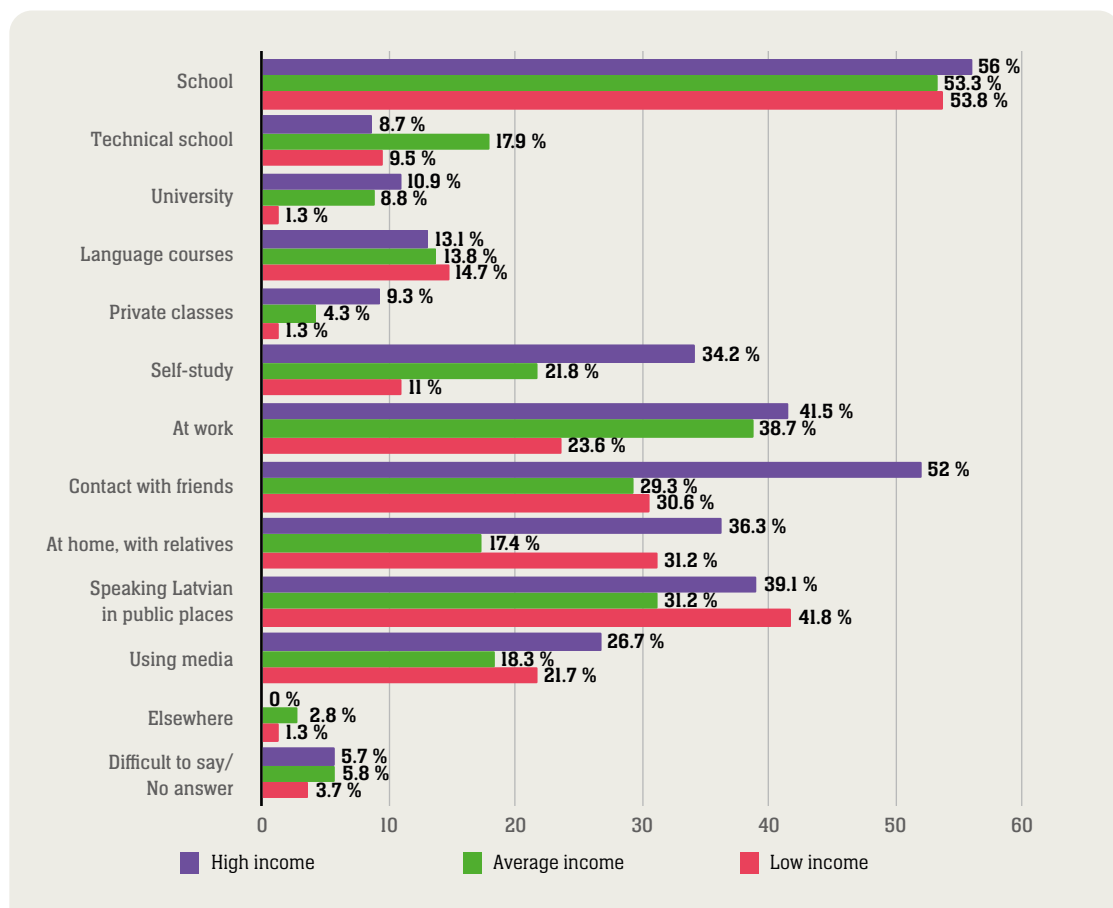


Fig. 19. Use of language acquisition types and forms in groups of respondents by income level (respondents: representatives of national minorities, %).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

18% of average-income respondents, 22% of low-income respondents and 27% of high-income respondents have used the media as an opportunity to acquire language skills. On the other hand, communication with friends was indicated as a means of language learning by 29% of average-income respondents, followed by 36% of high average-income respondents, and the percentage reaches 52% among high-income respondents.

Looking at the types of Latvian language acquisition in the groups of respondents by employment (Fig. 20), it can be observed that all the respondents recognized educational institutions as the main type of language acquisition: 61% of the respondents working in the public sector, 60% of the respondents working in the private sector and 50% of the unemployed indicated that they learned the language at school. Comparing the indicators of other types and forms of learning, the answers of the respondents working in both the public and private sectors are the same, while the data of the unemployed differ. For example, they have less often had the opportunity to learn the language in a work team – 48% of respondents employed in the public sector and 48% of respondents working in the private sector, as opposed to 24% of unemployed respondents. Among the unemployed, fewer people have attended language courses (23% and 17% vs. 10%), and have less often attended private lessons (20% and 22% vs. 13%); the group of the unemployed also has a lower tendency to learn the language through self-study (20% and 22% vs. 13%).

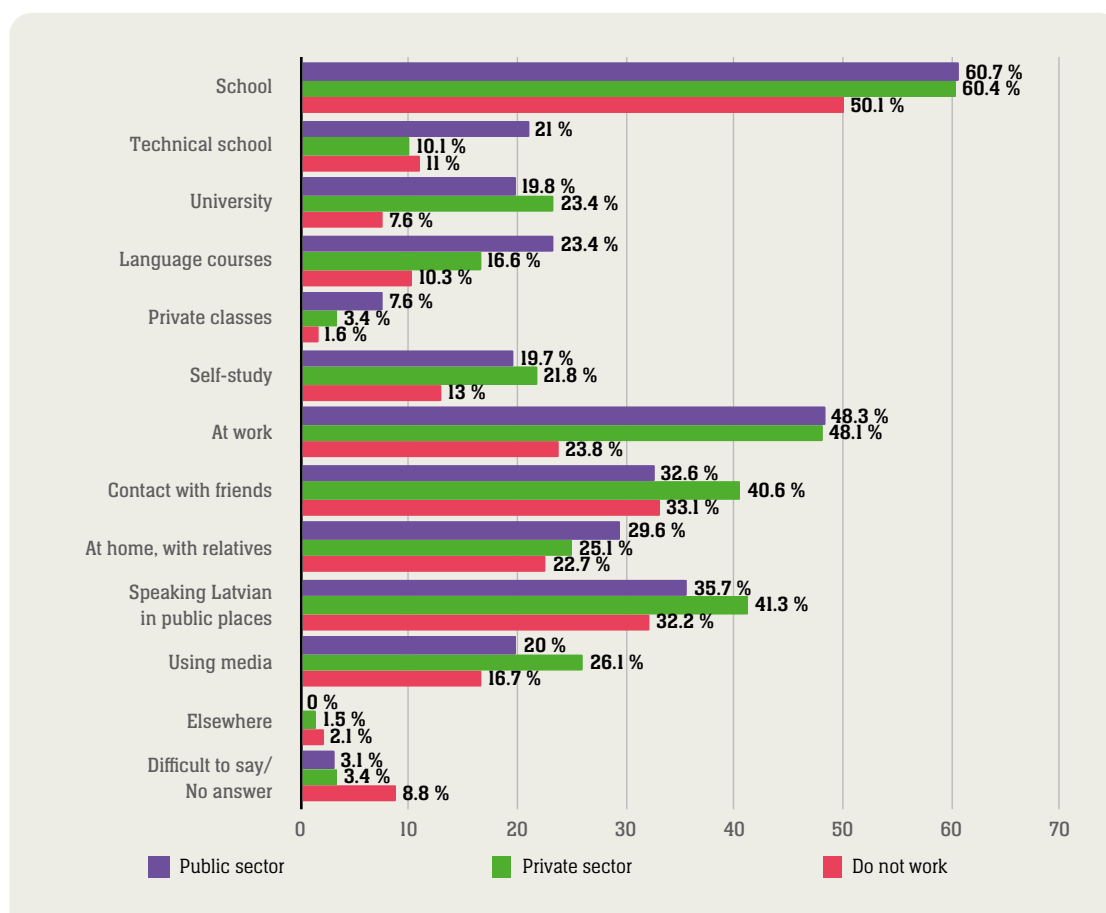


Fig. 20. Types and forms of language acquisition in groups of respondents by employment (respondents: representatives of national minorities, %).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Regarding the types of language learning that do not require one to attend a work place or language school, the statistics in all the three groups of respondents are similar – 33% of respondents working in the public sector, 41% of respondents working in the private sector, 33% of unemployed respondents have learned Latvian by communicating with friends; 30% of respondents working in the public sector, 25% of respondents working in the private sector and 23% of unemployed respondents have learned Latvian in the family and in communication with relatives.

An important indicator in the improvement of Latvian language acquisition and skills in the informal environment is communication with friends and family, and conversations in Latvian outside the home – informal and private communication shows an increase in the function of integrative language. Although these data have not changed significantly in the last five years, compared to the situation in 2004 (when the implementation of the education reform was launched),³ [Language situation in Latvia in 2004–2010, 86–100]), these indicators have increased (Fig. 21).

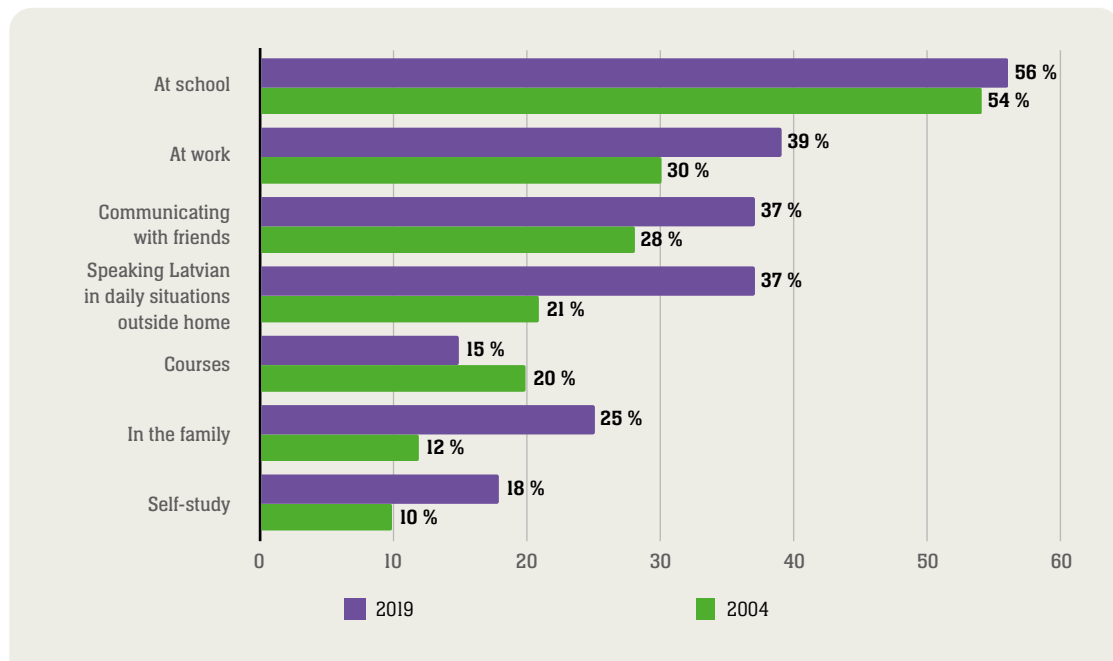


Fig. 21. Types and forms of Latvian language acquisition in 2004 and 2019 (respondents: representatives of national minorities, %).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The improvement of Latvian language skills and the expansion of the use of Latvian indicate a positive trend in the language situation and the strengthening and/or emergence of an environment for the use of the Latvian language, the strengthening of the integrative language function, as well as the need to continue expanding the use of the Latvian

³ From the 2004/2005 school year, secondary schools that implement minority education programmes launched the transition to a proportional distribution of the language of schooling – 60% of the curriculum was taught in Latvian, but 40% in a minority language.

language in all sociolinguistic domains. Whether this trend will continue will depend on a large number of factors (such as language prestige, language management, etc.).

In the previous research period of the language situation it was concluded that with the change of generations, the role of formal education in ensuring the acquisition of the Latvian language is increasing [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 88], and the 2019 LVA Survey provided additional data on the experience of younger respondents (up to 34 years) in Latvian language acquisition at different levels of education – in primary school, secondary school, technical school and/or college, or higher education institution. The self-assessment of Latvian language skills shows that the highest indicators of language proficiency are seen when respondents whose native language is Russian (this analysis does not include the data on respondents whose native language is neither Latvian nor Russian due to their small number) continued education after primary school at a secondary school, technical school/college or higher education institution, i.e. the primary school stage is still insufficient for acquiring very good and good Latvian language skills (Fig. 22). When evaluating the Latvian language skills acquired in primary school, only one of all the indicators shows that only basic knowledge was acquired (10%); self-assessment rating “very good” and “good” language skills after leaving primary school are also less common compared to subsequent levels of education; the majority of the respondents (47%) believe that they have acquired Latvian language skills at an average level by the end of primary school. The level of language proficiency acquired in the next stages of education is rated higher, i.e. the indicators are “medium”, “good” and “very good”. There are no significant differences between the Latvian language skills acquired in secondary school, technical school and/or college or higher education institution in terms of the indicator “very good”, but a relatively large percentage of the respondents (25%) chose the answer “difficult to say” (perhaps the level of Latvian language skills acquired in secondary school was sufficient since they chose to study in a higher education institution).

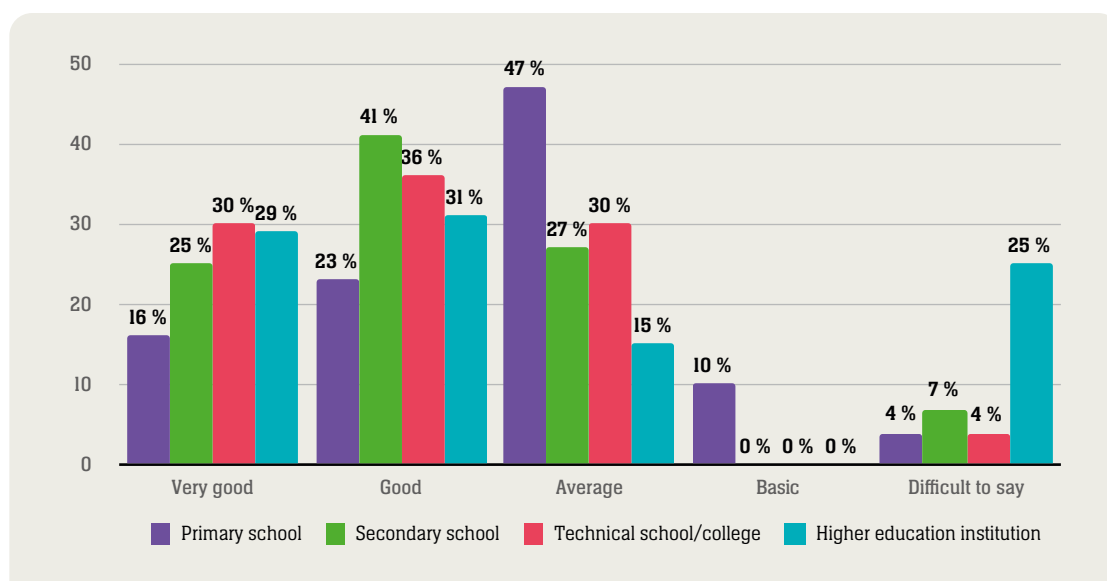


Fig. 22. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills acquired at different stages of education (after completion of the respective stage of education, %). (Respondents: 18–34 years, native language – Russian)
Source: 2019 LVA Survey

These data do not mean that students whose native language is not Latvian will not learn Latvian to a good level in primary school. The language learning situation should be assessed in the context of age, attitudes and learning motivation, as well as the period in which the respondents attended primary school, what learning approaches and methodologies were used during this period, at which stage of education reform, and other factors.

This is also shown, for example, by the overview of the results of the oral part of the 2018/2019 school year centralized examination in Latvian for the 9th grade students of minority education programmes prepared by the VISC, which also describes the total assessment obtained by language proficiency levels. Thus, the majority of minority primary school graduates (74%) obtained a score from 50 to 84.99% in the exam, which is equivalent to B level or intermediate language proficiency level, and in general from 2014 to 2018 one can observe an increasing trend in language proficiency level [VISC 2018, 7]. These results also reflect the increase in Latvian language skills in the minority youth group, as confirmed by other studies and data. However, these data must also be viewed in the context of other factors. First of all, it is necessary to take into account – probably significant enough – the percentage of minority students who attend schools with Latvian as the language of schooling, which are not identified in the general statistics in groups by schools and whose Latvian language proficiency is tested and assessed according to Latvian as a native language test criteria (the centralized examination in the Latvian language for 9th grade class differs in minority education programmes and schools with Latvian as the language of schooling), which in turn is likely to increase the proportion of good Latvian language speakers. Another important aspect that avoids a direct comparison of data (for example, the percentage distribution of Latvian language exam results between minority curricula and schools with Latvian as the language of schooling) with the results that in terms of methodology were obtained in a different manner are the principles of preparing centralized examinations based on a certain curriculum. In addition, at a certain stage of education, the results will be influenced by the peculiarities of age development, level of the development of (not language-related) learning skills, competences, students' different life experiences, etc.

Such an approach was used in the LVA study "Attitudes towards the Latvian language and its learning process: 2017–2020" [Attitude 2020], which attempts to reveal the factors influencing the acquisition of the Latvian language at the primary and secondary school level. The aim of the research was to determine the attitude of teachers and students towards the Latvian language learning process: how it is – or should be – organised, what hinders and promotes the acquisition of the Latvian language (both as a native and second language). The research concluded that at the level of confidence students have a positive attitude towards the Latvian language and they do not question the need for Latvian language skills, but motivation is lost during the learning process, which affects the quality of the acquired knowledge and skills. The research data show that in order to increase the quality of Latvian language skills, many elements of the learning process and education need to be changed: from the creation of a good and student-friendly psychological environment to the improvement of teachers' professional competence and parents' responsibility and involvement.

The quantitative data of this study show, however, that the surveyed students (both Latvian as native and second language learners, in grades from 8 to 12) generally rate

their Latvian language skills as good or very good (in the study, the evaluation is expressed on a point scale so that it is easier for the students to answer the question): 74% of the students rated their Latvian language skills with 6–8 points, 11% with 9–10 points. There are, of course, small differences depending on the native language, but they are visible in the highest indicator, where 16% of students whose native language is Latvian, and 5% of students whose native language is Russian, rated their Latvian language skills with 9–10 points, and in the lowest indicator, where 7% of students whose native language is Latvian and 20% of students whose native language is Russian, rated their Latvian language skills with 3–5 points. However, the majority of students (74%) in both groups indicated that they know Latvian well (6–8 points), regardless of whether they study in primary or secondary school. This study is continued, and in the next phase more attention will be paid to the factors that affect the quality of students' Latvian language skills.

The provision of Latvian language learning in formal education for those whose native language is not Latvian is continuing, gradually implementing the transition to general secondary education only in the state language, which started in the 2019/2020 school year and continued the previous measures (see Fig. 23 of the infographics prepared by "Education, Culture and Innovative Projects Association", for more information see Education in the state language 2021). Acquisition of the curriculum in the state language is implemented in several stages and from the 2021/2022 school year their milestones are: in 1–6 grade – models of bilingual education, in 7–9 grade – 80% of the curriculum in Latvian; in 10–12 grade – schooling in Latvian [Education in the state language 2021].

Opportunities to learn and develop a language outside of formal communication are also increasing, and this trend now seems to be indicative of the results of the language policy. Consistency in setting language policy goals and implementing tasks is a way to maintain the results achieved in the long term (as early as in 1996, the State Programme for Latvian Language Acquisition was established [Regulations No. 42; The Language Situation in Latvia 2004–2010, 88–90]) and to move forward in ensuring the stability of the Latvian language in the conditions of modern language competition. Although, in terms of numbers, Latvian language proficiency in society is high enough, no extensive research has been conducted on the quality of language proficiency in the context of Latvian as a second language from the perspective of lifelong learning and non-formal education; while the results of the centralized examination (9th grade, 12th grade) to some extent indicate the results of formal education, some more sociolinguistic research would be needed in this matter as well.

Qualitative research methods have been used to analyse the results of the language proficiency test for adult Latvian language learners (for non-native Latvian speakers) in 2015–2017: one of the LVA studies summarizes and analyses the mistakes made in the written tasks, identifying the main difficulties in learning Latvian in terms of linguistic competence [Quality of Latvian Language Skills 2019]. The quantitative analysis of the data of this study confirms the above-mentioned issue and highlights other trends in the language situation.

The largest number of state language proficiency tests (*valsts valodas prasmes pārbaude*, VVPP) are taken at the basic or A proficiency level, due to the increase in the number of foreigners (approximately 30% of those who take the language proficiency test at this level), as well as the availability of the VVPP outside Latvia (including in the Latvian

diaspora). The data show a small but stable decrease in the number of Latvian citizens in the share of VVPP participants. Most likely, skills in the state language among citizens have improved and the majority of representatives of professions whose language proficiency level is specified in regulatory enactments [Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 733], speak Latvian in accordance with the requirements.

The results of VVPPs of each population group – citizens, non-citizens and foreigners – reflect the language situation achieved in this area. First of all, Latvian language learning is ensured for permanent residents of Latvia (citizens and non-citizens), who most often choose to take the Latvian Language Proficiency Test at the B or C proficiency level [Quality of Latvian Language Skills 2019, 37]. The majority of foreigners take the test at the basic level (68%), a quarter (25.4%) take the VVPP at the intermediate level. Almost 80% of Latvian citizens have the highest proficiency level. It could be assumed that their language proficiency meets the test requirements and they want to obtain documented confirmation of the highest level of language proficiency; however, the analysis of the data of the VVPP participants by employment and profession reveals that language proficiency level may not correspond to the language proficiency level required for a profession.

There has been a slight increase in the number of B and C language proficiency test takers who failed the test. Analysing the data by employment, they are most often unemployed, i.e. the VVPP is taken by a large number of the unemployed who have learned a language on courses organised by the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūras*, NVA), but their language skills do not correspond to the level they are applying for (it should be noted that the unemployed cannot attend the NVA courses of the same language proficiency level twice). Most likely, there are shortcomings in the organization of non-formal Latvian language learning and its financing regulations, which need to be eliminated, for example, by creating a course offer adjusted to the pace of language learning in terms of time and quality, as well as by improving the Latvian language learning system in general.

It is of great importance to inform the public, Latvian language teachers and other lecturers about the requirements of the VVPP, and changes in examinations and the procedure, which is also specified in the Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment [EALTA 2006; Quality of Latvian language skills 2019, 107]. According to the study, the respondents who took the highest or C level language proficiency test most often evaluate their speaking skills as good, which does not correspond to the results. Perhaps, while preparing for the language proficiency test, participants of the highest language proficiency level (including their teachers) did not fully acquaint themselves with the requirements of the test or overestimated their productive language skills. This situation is also facilitated by the system of free of charge Latvian language courses, where a person's performance when applying for the next level of language courses is not assessed according to the achieved results, but according to the level of courses the person has previously attended. As the pace of language learning varies from person to person, it would be desirable to adapt the duration and scope of language courses to a person's abilities and outcome. There is yet another aspect – teachers should carefully read the descriptions of Latvian language proficiency levels [Šalme, Auziņa 2016a; Šalme, Auziņa 2016b], which clearly and comprehensively define the requirements that can facilitate and help in the development of the study content [Quality of Latvian language skills 2019, 109].

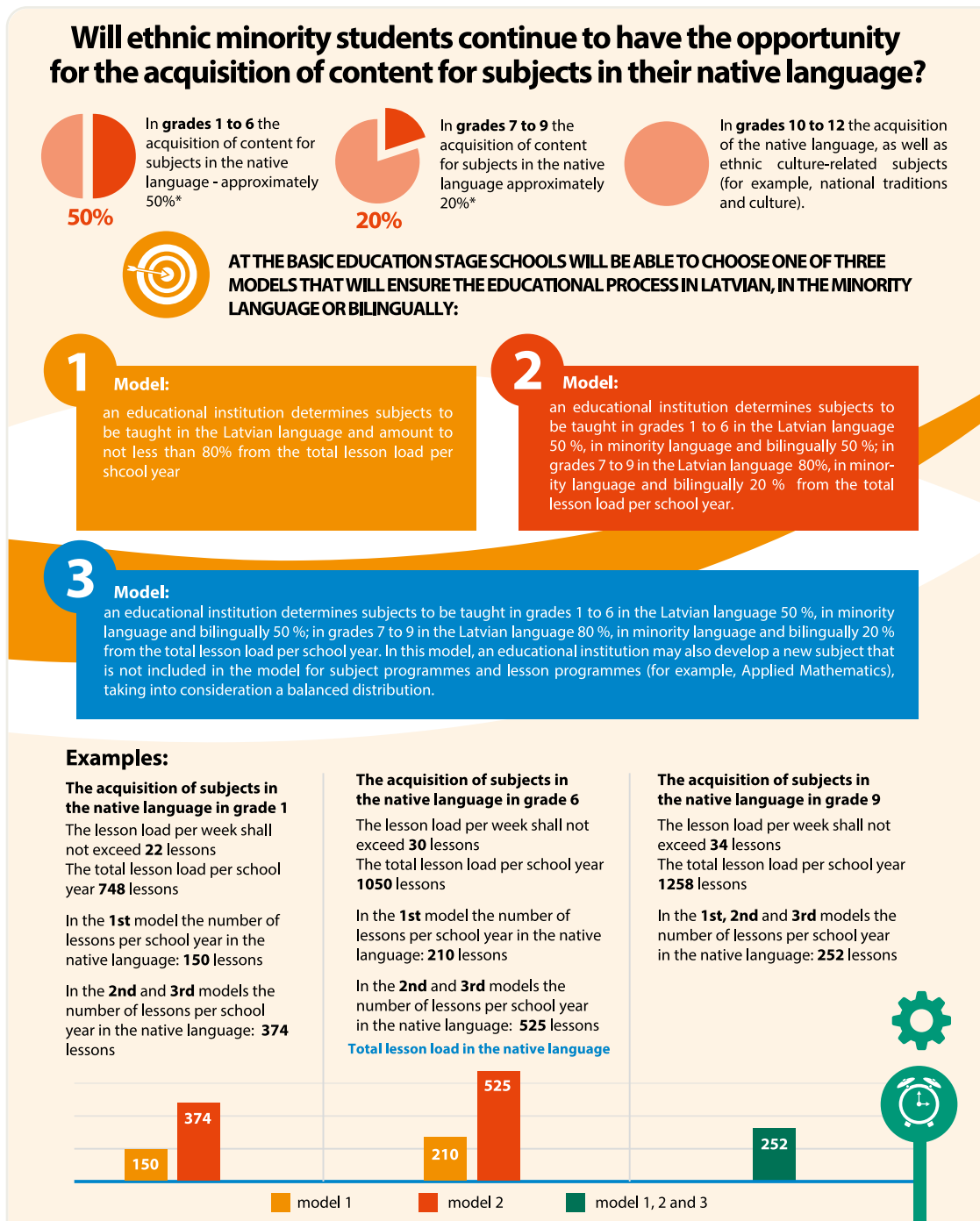


Fig. 23. Information on the transition to acquisition of study content in the state language.
Infographics: Education in the state language 2021

Will the transition to studies in the state language take place gradually?

The entire transition period will be performed gradually in order to allow teachers and students to adapt it in a better way.



School year 2017/2018

All 12th grade students take centralised examinations in the state language.

School year 2018/2019

Studies from pre-school to grade 9 are organised bilingually, in grades 10 to 12 – in Latvian and in minority language.

The content of state examinations for 9th grade students will be in Latvian. Students may choose the language of reply - Latvian or Russian.

School year 2019/2020

In grades 1 to 6 – three models of bilingual education.

In grade 7 – 80 % of the curriculum is in Latvian.

In grades 10 to 12 – the curriculum is in Latvian and in minority language.

The language of state examinations for all 9th grade students is Latvian.

School year 2020/2021

In grades 1 to 6 – three models of bilingual education.

In grades 7 and 8 – 80 % of the curriculum is in Latvian.

Studies in grades 10 and 11 – in Latvian.

The language of state examinations for all 9th and 12th grade students is Latvian.

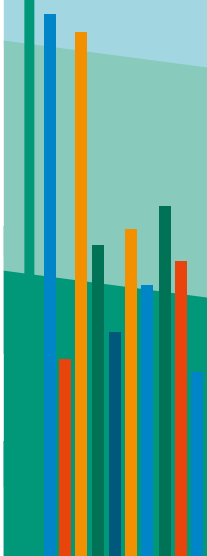
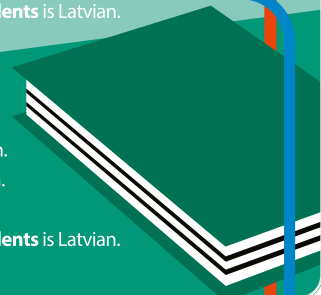
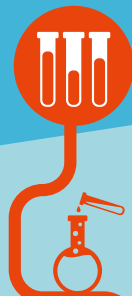
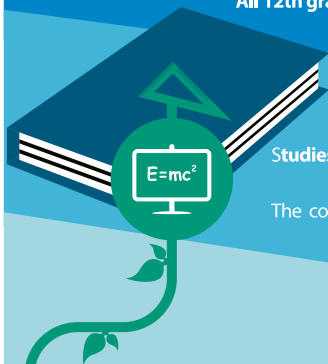
School year 2021/2022

In grades 1 to 6 – three models of bilingual education.

In grades 7 to 9 – 80 % of the curriculum is in Latvian.

Studies in grades 10 to 12 – in Latvian.

The language of state examinations for all 9th and 12th grade students is Latvian.



The study identified the needs of the state language proficiency test takers for the acquisition of the Latvian language [Quality of Latvian language skills 2019, 109]: Latvian language textbooks (63%), electronic teaching aids (34%) and exercise books (21%) are most needed. Thus, the materials for teaching Latvian as a foreign language are and will continue to be relevant; most language learners lack textbooks, and it must be underlined that there are not many materials for adult learning.

2020 also marked new conditions – in order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic [On the declaration of a state of emergency in 2020; Information on Covid-19 2020], adults were also taught through distance learning, which required the use of a variety of digital tools and resources. The development and offer of online materials should be considered not only in such situations, but should also be prepared for use in normal learning conditions. The society is changing rapidly, digital skills are evolving, and the need and demand for high-quality products is growing. The development of textbooks and teaching aids cannot take place without competent specialists, and sufficient financial resources are also required – these are important factors that influence and lead to the search for solutions in all areas of language policy implementation.

The level of Latvian language skills of the employees of the education system is still a relevant issue. The examinations of language use organized by the State Language Centre [Quality of Latvian language skills 2019, 14] show that in the group of educators (teachers and other education specialists – administrative staff, school staff) there is still a relatively large number (for example, in 2015 about 25% of the examined employees in this field, about 30% in 2016) of persons who are not able to use Latvian at the required C level, especially in Latgale and Riga. Perhaps the transition to education in the state language, which has been implemented in minority education programmes since 2019, and the introduction of education based on the new competence approach will promote an increase in Latvian language skills among educators [Education Law; General Education Law; School 2030]. Evidently, it is necessary to continue thinking about how to offer even wider opportunities to certain target groups that most directly affect the public interest, and also to raise awareness about the obligation to acquire and improve Latvian language skills. The results of the examinations performed by the VVC show the need to carry out regular monitoring of state language skills and their use among participants in these sociolinguistic fields. This is necessary not only to provide high-quality services to the public, but also to ensure that each participant understands their attitude towards the state and the importance of actions in terms of language policy. Those who work in the field of education are one of the groups whose knowledge of the state language must be sufficient for the performance of work duties. The reasons for, and problems in, language use and skills persist in educational institutions are often not related to or solvable by language policy (e.g. lack of teachers in some regions, salary issues, professional training, etc.).

The results of Latvian language acquisition in adult education (lifelong learning) are best measured by analysing the state language proficiency tests (the test has been prepared in compliance with certain language proficiency criteria). The analysis of qualitative data of the written tests of the state language proficiency test takers (for the

purpose of the research a corpus of written works was created in cooperation with the researchers of the Laboratory of Artificial Intelligence of the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics at the University of Latvia, for more information see *Quality of Latvian Language Skills 2019*, 75–79) reveals mistakes made by test takers and common problems related to language use. The mistakes were summarized by frequency, which allows one to identify the language elements that need to be addressed more in the learning process (the information is useful not only for teachers in the development of the content of lessons, but also for authors of teaching materials).

The analysis of the errors of the test takers shows that in total 22% of the text units are erroneous or do not comply with the norms of literary language; however, the higher the level of language proficiency, the smaller the number of erroneous text units (29% at A level, 25% at B level, 19% at C level). Although the amount of grammar knowledge for each language proficiency level is described in the descriptions of Latvian language proficiency levels [Šalme, Auziņa 2016a; Šalme, Auziņa 2016b], and it might seem that there should be other types of errors in the works of higher language proficiency test takers, i.e. they should appear in more linguistically complex cases, the corpus data show that Latvian learners of all proficiency levels have some specific difficulties; for example, there is a lack of understanding of the phonology of the Latvian language, which also affects the performance of the language user in the written part of the test. Diacritical marks, which are often misused in all levels of work, pose the greatest difficulties for language learners. This highlights the necessity to pay attention to the pronunciation of words in the learning process, which would also promote the development of writing skills. These results also indicate an insufficient amount of pronunciation exercises in the language learning process, which should be taken into account by both teachers and authors of teaching aids. In terms of the acquisition of the sound system of the Latvian language, it would be useful to develop an appropriate methodology and also to emphasize its comprehension and acquisition strategies in the learning process. Apparently, teachers lack knowledge about the influence of the native tongue of Latvian language learners and lack the skills to use this knowledge to promote the acquisition of the Latvian language [Quality of Latvian language skills 2019, 111–112].

Other seemingly simple grammar problems are repeated in the tests at all levels (word matching, use of the locative case, etc.). These are the issues that are taught a lot and intensively in language courses; however, the obtained results suggest that it is necessary to prepare teaching aids based on the difficulties of language learners and also to adjust methodological tools for teachers. In the language situation research surveys [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015; 2019 LVA Survey, etc.] the respondents usually name the acquisition of Latvian grammar and the use of vowel length marks as the main difficulties in the language learning process (33% in 2014, 12% in 2019). Persons involved in language learning should, first and foremost, understand the causes of these difficulties and overcome them skilfully in the learning process, because it is clear that language skills cannot be improved when there is a belief that Latvian is difficult (the language we do not know and we are trying to learn is always difficult [Jeremiah 2005, 27]).

The analysis of the quantitative data of the 2019 LVA Survey shows that along with the acquisition of grammar, the use of vowel length marks, and the peculiarities of pronunciation, there are other problems that are caused by the lack of a language use environment (Fig. 24). It should be noted that the percentage of such factors as reluctance, problems with the quality of teaching, lack of courses, peculiarities of linguistic attitude, etc., was insignificant in the study. Similar data can be observed in the study of the language situation of the previous stage [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 76], i.e. the main difficulties are related to grammar, vowel length marks and other challenges of the acquisition of language structure, as well as the lack of a language use environment.

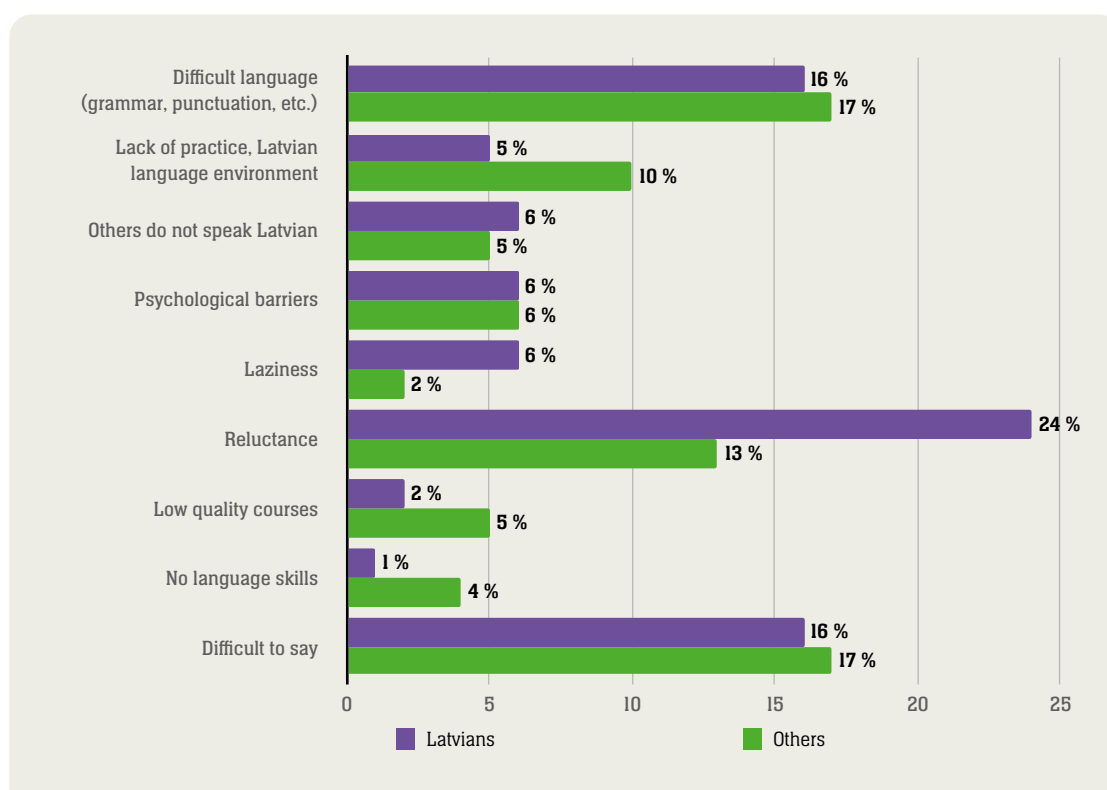


Fig. 24. Difficulties in learning Latvian for minorities indicated by the respondents (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Fig. 24 presents the beliefs and views of all the respondents regarding the reasons that, in their opinion, hinder the acquisition of Latvian among non-native Latvian speakers. In addition to the language acquisition difficulties justified by the answer “Difficult language”, the percentage of the answer “Reluctance” is high, and it is also relatively high in the group of minority respondents (in the group of Latvian respondents the opinion that minorities do not want to learn Latvian has always been relatively high; however, it has decreased compared to previous studies – 46% in 2012 [Language situation in Latvia in 2010–2015, 76]). This could mean that beliefs of an existing practice that are predominant in society affect the beliefs of all its different groups. This assumption is also supported by the data presented in Fig. 25 on the

answers of the minority respondents to the question about their experience in learning the Latvian language, i.e. what difficulties the respondents have personally faced while learning Latvian.

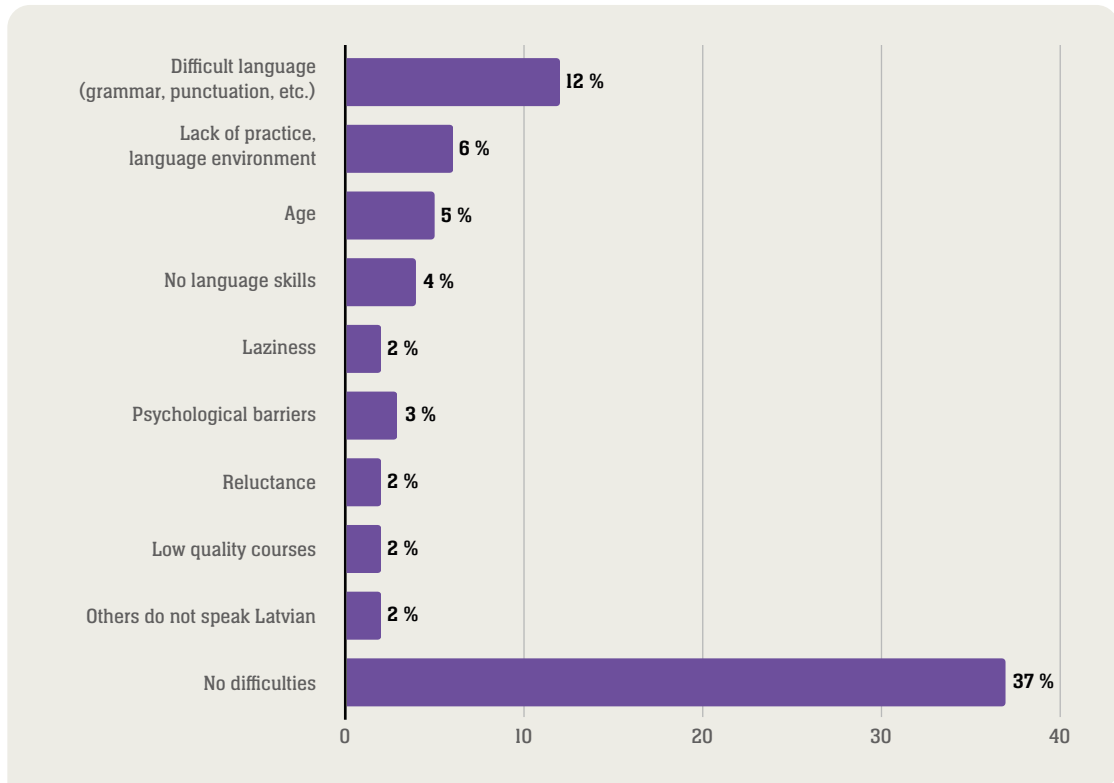


Fig. 25. Difficulties the respondents have faced in the process of language learning or improvement (%). (Respondents: non-native Latvian speakers)

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Awareness of society's linguistic practices, beliefs and assumptions, despite emotional and/or political discourse about the language (which is a daily part of various societies, including Latvia), is the basis for balanced, era-appropriate language management based on national values, which is one of language policy components⁴ that determines, influences and can change and affect other components.

⁴ Components of language policy implementation – linguistic practice, language confidence and language management [Spolskis 2011, 21].

3.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Proficiency in the state language and other languages in the society is one of the components that form the language situation or set of conditions for language functioning [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 161] and which is closely related to and interacts with other elements of this set (linguistic attitude, language status, use of languages, etc.). Over the last five years, the trends in language skills have been determined and influenced by language competition, in particular by the rapid spread of one language – English. New directions in language learning could be shaped in the future by the development of migration, which is temporarily limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but this situation has already created new experiences in the context of learning the state language and other languages, namely, the use of language learning methods and digital tools has expanded, and the need to prepare new online teaching materials and prepare teachers for work remotely has become more important.

Comparable data on language skills in Latvia have been regularly obtained since the 1990s [Drižule, Gerentoviča 1990; Druviete ed. 1995]. They help one to better assess the development of the language situation and to identify trends, and now, as mentioned before, the most relevant issue is the spread of English and its impact on language prestige, language skills and, consequently, linguistic behaviour. This is very often the subject of public debate, in which views that are traditional in Latvia appear, e.g. the threats to the Latvian language, the low-quality Latvian as a native language among the youngest generation, etc. [e.g., Boša 2021; Domuzīme 2017].

In order to find out the current trends in this research stage, the data of the 2019 LVA Survey were compared with the evaluation of the previous stage of the language policy [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 121] and two additional special studies were conducted: on the quality of adult language learning [Quality of Latvian language skills 2019] and attitude towards Latvian language learning at school [Attitude 2020].

Regular research into language skills in society also reveals publicly less visible developments that may change the language situation, such as increasing linguistic diversity, which – thanks to smart language management – will probably increase the role of the national language as a common language of communication as well as public awareness of it, and affect changes in the language learning process. A multilingual society and a multilingual individual are currently perceived in language policy as an advantage for understanding the coexistence and hierarchy of languages [van Hoorde 2020].

The understanding of the importance of multilingualism will also increase the understanding of the value of each language, as well as the state language, the regularities of language functioning, and the role of languages. Linguistic practice (rather than publicly politicized assumptions about language) shows that the younger generation in particular no longer perceives the existing linguistic diversity as a problem; Latvian language proficiency and language acquisition experience proves that society has clear and pragmatic ideas about how the language acquisition process takes place and what it should look like. A major challenge is to maintain a modern perspective of languages, their acquisition, their interrelationships and the role of language policy within them. From the

point of view of language learning in Latvia, the important issue is the target audience of adults, which should be considered by both language policy implementing institutions, all stakeholders and language policy makers.

The indicators of Latvian language proficiency in society continue to increase, ensuring the dominant position of the Latvian language in the competition of two other strong languages that are present in society (English and Russian). The most important tasks in the future are related to the pedagogical direction of language policy implementation:

- professional development of teachers of Latvian as a native language and as a foreign language (including second language) who work in pre-school education, general and vocational primary and secondary schools in fields of modern pedagogy, didactics and methodology, as well as in grammar and general linguistics of the Latvian language;
- professional development of teachers of Latvian as a foreign language who work in the field of adult education in the methodology of teaching Latvian language as a second language, especially in conducting of different types of language lessons and teaching basic language skills;
- development of modern teaching aids and tools that can be easily adapted to different learning situations and which would help in language learning not only during the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but would also help in solving the problem of the availability of teaching materials for Latvian language learners outside Latvia, as well as diversify teaching in the classroom, etc.;
- improving the Latvian language learning system for adults is one of the most urgent tasks. In order to acquire one or another level of language proficiency, first and foremost, a different number of lessons is required for both objective and subjective reasons. At present, a language course at one level usually comprises of 100-160 academic hours (as shown by publicly available information on the number of hours of a language course at one level in different schools and courses). If an adult learner enrolls to a next level language course after not having sufficiently mastered the previous level of proficiency, problems usually occur in the higher level state language proficiency test (mistakes and inaccuracies are made which are normally seen at the beginner level);
- explaining the principles of coexistence and hierarchy of languages, and the nature of multilingualism to the public, including those involved in the language learning process and especially the parents of pupils.

On the other hand, the analysis of language proficiency indicators correlates with the conclusions of the previous stage of the study of the language situation. Firstly, the younger generation shows better quantitative indicators of Latvian language skills and also higher scores in self-assessment.

Secondly, there are changes among the learners of Latvian as a second/foreign language, with an increase in the percentage of basic level (A) learners and VVPP takers, as a result of immigration, which shows the development of Latvian language learning methodology, the organization of the learning process, as well as the overall indicators of state language proficiency (slightly increasing the percentage of those who do not speak the language or those who speak it at a lower proficiency level).

Thirdly, in the situation of state language skills in some regions – Latgale and Riga – where they have been traditionally lower than in other regions, small changes can be observed, which have been largely determined by the economic development of the region, making it yet another interesting factor influencing the language situation. In Riga, where the number of representatives of other (non-Latvian) nationalities is slightly higher, the indicators of Latvian language proficiency are higher than in Latgale. These data show the importance of the language use environment: in the capital there is a greater need to use the state language in formal communication situations (which indirectly promotes its use in informal communication) and the economic value of the language.

Fourthly, the use and role of English has increased and will continue to grow – the more often English is used in international communication, the faster the proficiency in other hitherto relatively popular foreign languages (e.g. German, Russian) will decrease. As a result, the positions and skills of the second most popular language in Latvia (Russian) are gradually changing, especially among the younger generation.

Fifthly, the increase in the role of the Latvian language in informal communication situations in various sociolinguistic fields, as well as the opportunities, forms and types used to improve language skills or acquire language, indicate changes in public opinion. This could be considered the most important aspect in strengthening the position of the Latvian language. As the younger generation, compared to other age groups, makes more use of non-formal ways of enhancing and learning a language (language use in everyday situations, with family, with friends, etc.), this may lead to smaller linguistic segregation or division in society in terms of ethnicity. In this context, the most difficult task of language policy is to make well-thought-out decisions and to provide consistent information to the public, which can have a positive effect on the development of linguistic attitudes.

The linguistic behaviour of society is determined by the proficiency in language(s) of individuals and society [Spolskis 2011, 23], while the size of the group of language users today is influenced by ethno-demographic factors. Of course, there are also boundaries between the linguistic quality of Latvian as a native language and as a foreign language, which is the subject of other separate and necessary research.

According to the data of the study “Attitudes towards the Latvian language and its learning process” [Attitude 2020], it seems that the problem at school (also more broadly in society) is not the assumption about Latvian as a complex, difficult-to-learn language, but the question of (not only linguistic) attitudes of participants of linguistic situations: a positive attitude towards each other, a serious and professional attitude towards one’s work and subject, avoidance of prejudice, etc. In addition, in society there are differences in views and beliefs about languages between different generations (see the next section, which analyses the use of language in different sociolinguistic fields and provides an insight into society’s linguistic attitudes).

Language proficiency indicators reveal the results of long-term language management, so what is being done and what is happening can be evaluated in a number of years. The hierarchy and role of languages in society is determined by the official status of these languages in a given country, but this does not mean that languages are more or less

valuable. However, the lack of understanding of the levels of existence and functioning of a language creates enough prejudice, including stereotypes in society and, unfortunately, among language policy makers and implementers. It is essential to provide the public with explanations that are based on sociolinguistic theory and research data rather than that reflect political or any other biased interests. This task is also emphasized in the theory of sociolinguistics of recent years, for example, when talking about so called language prestige planning in language policy [Ager 2005; Baldauf 2006], and it was also included in the Official Language Policy Guidelines 2015–2020, but remains a major challenge for language policy.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY: LANGUAGE USE IN DIFFERENT SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOMAINS

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The concept of sociolinguistic domains in linguistics was formed in 1960s-1970s by American scholar J. Fishman [Fishman 1972]. Later, as a result of theoretical and empirical research carried out by many scientists, the theory developed and became one of the basic concepts of the research on language situations. This concept covers the social context of communication, i.e. behaviour, that the actions of a group of certain language speakers are determined and influenced by the areas of human activity in which its social life takes place. Enough has been written in Latvian about the importance of sociolinguistic domains in society and the functional aspect of language [Druviete 1998; Spolskis 2011; Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010, 70–126; Druviete 2013, 396; Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 93–121; Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 170 and others].

Although the division of sociolinguistic domains may differ depending on their level of detail, the most important ones are usually singled out as follows: family, religion, education, professional life – including business and the public information sphere, as well as law enforcement, health care, the military [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 172]. In the context of language policy, a more detailed division of these areas is less significant. What is important, though, is a generalized view of the use of language in public and private communication. In this respect attention should be paid to the data on language skills and acquisition described in Chapter 3, which show an increase in the significance of the Latvian language (the state language) in private or informal communication (see more in this chapter).

The concept of sociolinguistic domains is closely related to the functional aspect of language. Functional analysis of language use allows one to describe the real status of languages in a country. Also, in this aspect the division between private and public areas of human activity prevails, and the use of language is usually examined in more detail [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 175]:

- 1) public authorities,
- 2) armed forces, police,
- 3) municipal authorities,
- 4) transport and communications,
- 5) industry, agriculture,
- 6) health care and public services,
- 7) science, higher education,
- 8) primary education,
- 9) culture, mass media,
- 10) religion,
- 11) everyday life, informal contact,
- 12) family and private life.

When describing the situation of languages in the world, it should be taken into account that there are languages whose use is not strictly limited nationally – their sociolinguistic functions are broader, therefore such areas as international relations (a language is examined through its functioning in different international unions, organizations, etc.) and regional relations (i.e., a so called lingua franca, the use of a foreign language as a common language of communication worldwide) are distinguished.

Various external circumstances and conditions, the collective experience of a language, attitudes and beliefs, etc. may affect not only the persistence of language but also, in a narrower sense, the awareness instilled by language policy of what is public and official, what is private and unofficial, and where the boundaries between the two concepts lie (especially in the context of legitimate public interest). In Latvian language policy, one of the most striking examples of the aforementioned seems to be the complicated and prolonged process of drafting of the State Language Law (adopted in 1999, unlike in Estonia and Lithuania, which adopted similar laws in 1995), in which the biggest struggles against the drafted bill, among other more political factors, were based on the ability to shift the understanding of private and public sociolinguistic domains and functions in one direction

or another [State Language Law 2008, 54–95]. The questions of a public-private divide are still used in regards to language policy in education (reactions to the growing role of the state language in minority education programs, discussions on the use of languages in higher education, etc.; see Chapter 1 for more details).

As already pointed out, the sociolinguistic study of language use reveals the actual positions of languages in society [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 173] and allows one to determine the factors that determine the place and role of languages in a country. Thus, the data on the development trends of the language situation are an important basis for the development of language policy and the implementation of governance (i.e. policies). Due to the fact that several languages are usually used in a society, in certain conditions of multilingualism special groups of communication situations with a certain set of features are formed [Fishman 1979, 19]. Thus, the study of the use of languages reveals the linguistic behaviour of society as a whole (not just the habits of a group or individual participants of a situation in regards to the choice of language).

The term “language positions” does not mean the evaluation of languages in the categories “good and/or bad” (this view is more related to the stereotypes about languages that exist in every society [Druviete 2018b, 8]). Today, both ideologically and governance-wise, language policy emphasizes the symbolic value of language(s) (which is closely linked to the concept of identity) and the functional value of language(s) as an effective means of communication [Spolskis 2011, 213], which is reflected in language policy in the form of a legally determined hierarchy and the different status of languages. Therefore, states exercise their responsibility, i.e. take care of the preservation and functioning of the state language and other languages relevant to the state (for example, languages of indigenous people, historical minorities, etc.) within a certain system. However, global language competition, the prestige of the language and public perception (for instance, the rapid spread of English in the world) can influence and change the language situation; language persistence is also affected by people’s beliefs and linguistic attitudes.

When analysing the use of the Latvian language, one must take into account both individual opinions of the members of society and the conditions created by language competition, where economic preconditions of the use of Latvian are not comparable with such languages as English and Russian, both of which are present in the linguistic landscape of Latvia. However, these risks posed by language competition can be mitigated through a systemic language policy [Language Situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 94]. It is important to strengthen in the state language policy the sociolinguistic functions that relate to the interests of the state and society, i.e. the language in the public space, various institutions, media, education, the workplace, etc.

The survey on the language situation in the last five years showed respondents’ experience in choosing languages in private communication (family, among friends, etc.). This is an area that cannot be regulated by the state, but which provides additional information on the position of languages in society. Detailed data on the use of languages in the work environment, where people with different mother tongues meet, were described in detail, and, since this it is not an area of private communication, the use of languages is regulated (the normative aspect of language policy).

In the context of language practice and language confidence, linguistic attitudes play an important role. Respondents' views on languages and their use were also clarified in this public survey. Although a wider public survey would be more desirable, these data also help to identify the factors that influence the linguistic behaviour of individuals and society.

The chapter on the use of the Latvian language provides basic data on which, and how often, languages are used in different sociolinguistic domains and communication situations; it contains data analysis correlated with the everyday language used in respondents' families (family here is a highly private and informal communication environment). The exploration of such relationships is interesting and useful because this perspective can show and prove the link between language practice, language confidence and language management within language policy (although the results of language policy can be achieved over a longer period of time, it can also change; for instance, in language practice if a positive linguistic attitude is formed, etc.).

One should bear in mind that due to the historical ethno-demographic situation, the native language and the everyday language of the Latvian population mostly overlap: 96% of the respondents who answered that their native language (or one of their native languages) is Latvian indicated that their family's main everyday language is also Latvian; 90% of the respondents whose native language (or one of their native languages) is Russian also indicated that they communicate mainly in Russian within their families. The set of the respondents in other mother tongues is statistically too small, therefore the results are not included in the data analysis.

Thus, the analysis of the survey data presents a more in-depth examination of the differences in the use of languages in different sociolinguistic domains. Firstly, between the respondents who mainly communicate in Latvian and those who mainly speak Russian in the family. Secondly, across regions, if there are more pronounced differences in other indicators. Thirdly, the survey data show changes in language proficiency and use among different generations, therefore the results are compared by the age groups of the respondents.

4.1. Use of Latvian, Russian and English in society

The data analysed in the present 2019 LVA Study, as well as in previous sociolinguistic surveys [Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010; Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015], show that the use of languages in Latvia is most influenced by the environment: the language used for family communication (native or another language), as well as the language of communication of the surrounding society (place of residence, region); another factor is language skills (see chapter 3).

The analysis of the data of the 2019 LVA Survey shows that the language use habits of the Latvian population, especially the proportion of Latvian and Russian language use, in the analysed sociolinguistic domains have not changed significantly since 2014, when the last such survey was conducted. The role of the Latvian language in the society has stabilized, and the obtained indicators do not show as striking changes as before [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 96].

However, it is possible to see a trend, which had already emerged in the previous phase of the language study – namely, that the second most popular language, i.e. Russian (which is also the native tongue of a large part of the population), is beginning to be replaced – at least in terms of proficiency, but not yet in terms of use – by English, especially among the representatives of the youngest generation. In general, Latvian is the most widely used language in everyday life (taking into account regional, age and other differences), followed by Russian, with English in third place – at the moment it is used (therefore here we are not merely talking about language proficiency indicators) in some areas and in specific communication situations, such as business, higher education, but not in everyday communication.

Almost all respondents communicated in Latvian during the last year (see Fig. 26). 93–97% of all the respondents who have used the Latvian language in communication during the last year, have used it in situations at work, in state and municipal institutions, educational institutions, health care institutions, everyday situations on the street, in a shop, etc.; the percentage of the respondents who used the Latvian language on social networks (90%) and in private life during the last year is slightly lower, i.e. 83–87% in communication with family and friends. During the last year, most respondents used the Latvian language in official communication as well as in the public informal environment, but less in private communication.

As shown in Fig. 26, the second language most widely used by the population is Russian. The largest percentage of the respondents used it in public informal communication (on the street, in a shop and other everyday situations – 66%) and while addressing strangers in Latvia (59%), as well as working with customers and partners (66%) and with colleagues (57%). Last year, in the private sphere, i.e. while communicating with friends, more than half of the population of Latvia used Russian (59%). Less than a half of the respondents also communicated in Russian on social networks, with family members, in health care institutions, at work during discussions and meetings. Throughout the period of last year, the Russian language was least used in official communication in state and municipal institutions as well as in educational institutions.

Although English language skills are improving, the language is not necessary in everyday communication and therefore it functions more as a popular foreign language (with high prestige in society). While Latvian and Russian are used in all sociolinguistic domains analysed in the survey, English is less common in communication and its use is functionally limited to certain sociolinguistic domains (Fig. 26). The majority of the respondents used English in the last year on social networks (17%), as well as while working with clients and partners (17%), working with colleagues and during meetings (8%); English was used less frequently in educational institutions and in public informal communication. In the other analysed areas English was used very rarely. Currently, the spread of English in Latvia is much narrower than the spread of Latvian and Russian, but as the results of this and previous LVA surveys (2009, 2012, 2014) show, the popularity of the language is likely to increase rapidly (English language skills in the population are improving and the language is used more often).

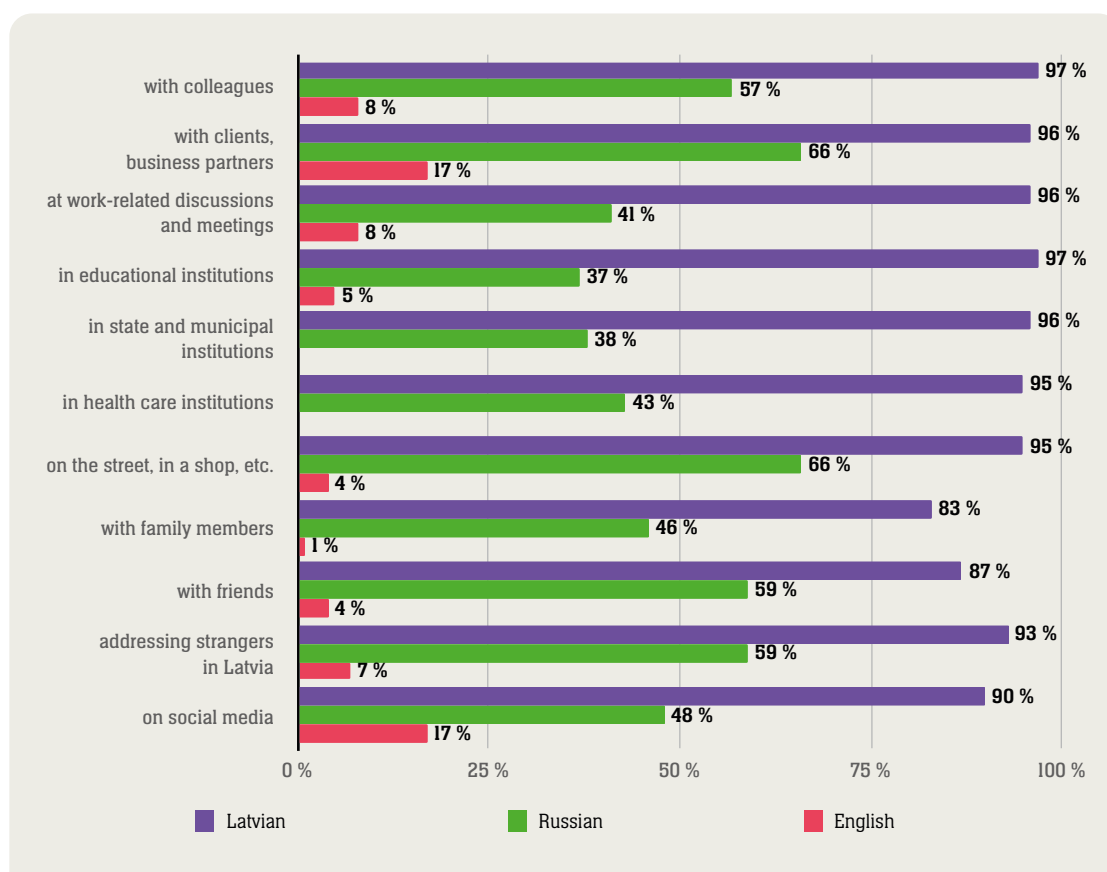


Fig. 26. Percentage of respondents who communicated in Latvian, Russian and/or English in the indicated situations during the last year.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The position of the Latvian language can also be viewed in terms of the frequency of its use, and is represented by the answers the respondents provided to questions about which languages they use in certain situations, and to what extent. The survey included questions about the respondents' language use practices during the last year. The answers offered in the survey were "only Latvian", "mainly Latvian", "Latvian rather

than another language”, “equally Latvian and another language”, “another language rather than Latvian”, “mainly another language”, “only another language”. In the analysis of the data, the first three answer options were combined in a group for which communication took place “only or mostly in Latvian”, and the last three answer options were combined in a group for “only or mostly in another language” (emphasizing the respondents’ main language of communication in the proposed situations). The respondents who did not use only Latvian in a specific communication situation were asked an additional question: in which (other) language(s) did they communicate.

Almost all the respondents used Latvian in the situations indicated in the survey during the last year, however, the percentage of the respondents who would communicate only or mostly in Latvian in these situations is smaller. The respondents communicated only or mostly in Latvian if the communication was official by its nature (see Fig. 27): in educational institutions (83% of those to which this question applies), in state and municipal institutions (80%), at work-related meetings (78%), and in healthcare institutions (76%). The fact that in these situations (almost) four in five persons communicate only or mostly in Latvian means that Latvian is preferred not only by those who speak Latvian in their family, but also by those who communicate in (an)other language(s) in their family.

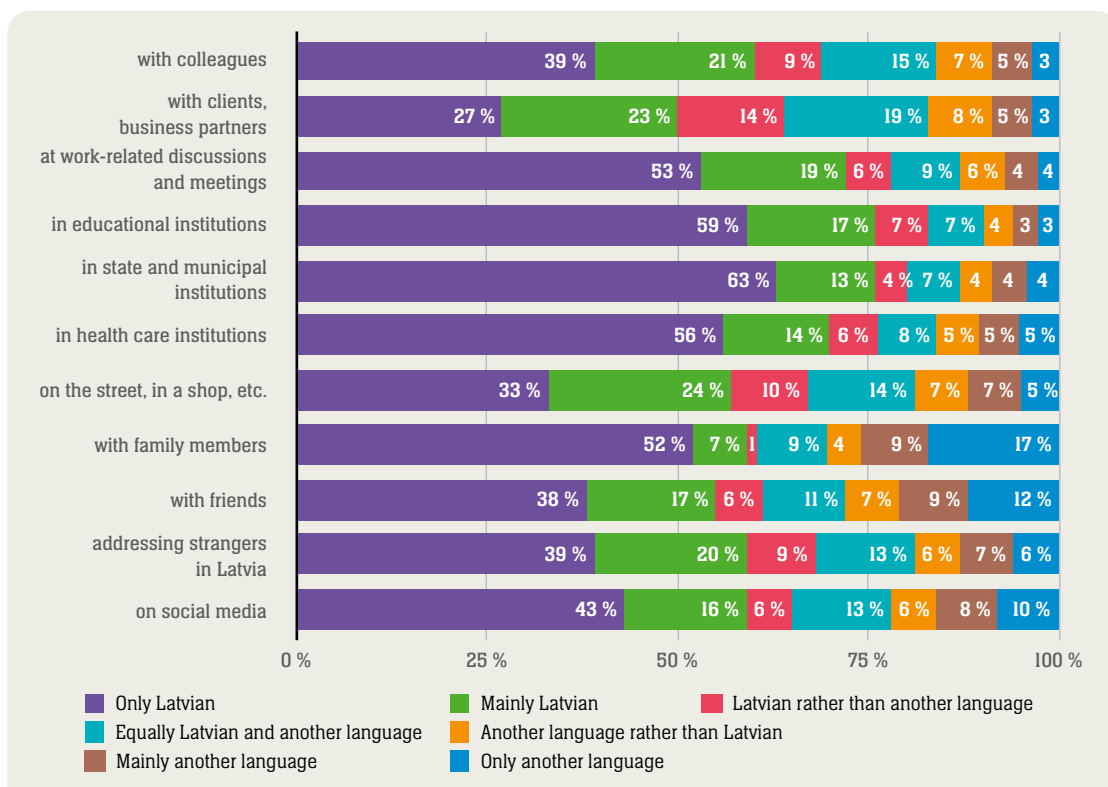


Fig. 27. Use of Latvian and other languages in various communication situations.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

During the past year, about two thirds of the Latvian population communicated only or mostly in Latvian in the following everyday situations: working with colleagues (70%), working with customers and business partners (65%), on the street, in a shop and other

similar places, as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia (67%). The respondents most rarely used only or mostly Latvian in private communication, i.e. while communicating with friends (61%) and family members (60%) as well as online through social networking sites (64%).

As indicated above, most respondents used only or mostly another language in private communication; and the least did so in official communication in educational institutions, state and municipal institutions, as well as at work-related meetings.

The fact that the choice of language of the Latvian population in different communication situations is influenced by a respondent's native language/family everyday language was also found previously [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 95]. The analysis of the data of the 2019 LVA Survey confirms that the language in which a respondent communicates in their family is still the main factor that determines the choice of language for performing communication functions.

While determining the dispersion¹, it must be concluded that the everyday language of the family (Latvian or Russian) correlates most closely with which language(s) and to what extent (i.e. only Latvian; mostly Latvian; both Latvian and another language; another language) the respondents use within their family ($r = 0.923$), friends (0.814), when addressing strangers in Latvia (0.700), in health care institutions (0.692), on the street, in a shop and other similar situations (0.670), state and municipal institutions (0.632), educational institutions (0.628) and at work with colleagues (0.611). The closer the correlation, the more often those who communicate in Latvian in the family use only or mostly Latvian in these spheres, and those who communicate in Russian in the family use only or mostly another language. However, the correlation between family everyday language and the language of communication at work-related meetings (0.497) and when working with clients and business partners (0.482) is moderately close. This means that during work-related meetings, as well as when working with clients and partners, the inhabitants of Latvia tend to adapt more to the official working language and/or the language chosen by clients and partners. In these cases, less than in other areas of communication, the respondents are likely to speak the language which they mainly speak in the family.

Those who speak mainly Latvian in the family used Latvian in all the analysed sociolinguistic domains during the last year (99–100%, see Fig. 28), moreover, they used only or mostly Latvian (88–99%, Fig. 29). In this group, the lowest use of only or mostly Latvian is in communication with clients and business partners (80%). Very rarely those inhabitants who communicate in Latvian in their family used only or mostly another language in the analysed sociolinguistic spheres during the last year (~0–6%; most often at work with clients and partners). There have been no significant changes in these data since the 2014 survey [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 95–96].

¹ Dispersion – the tendency of data to deviate from the average of a set. The dispersion indicator is r , i.e. the range or difference between the highest and lowest values of a feature.

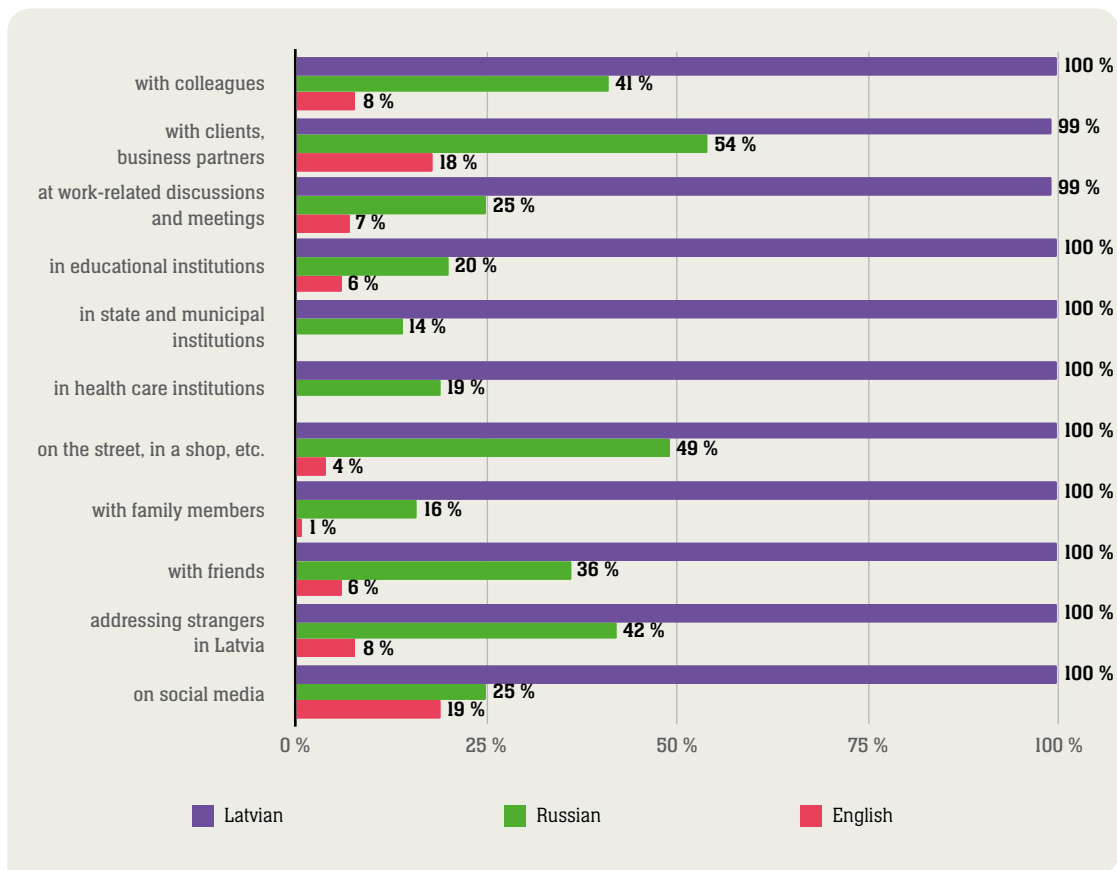


Fig. 28. Use of Latvian, Russian, and English in various communication situations (respondents: persons who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

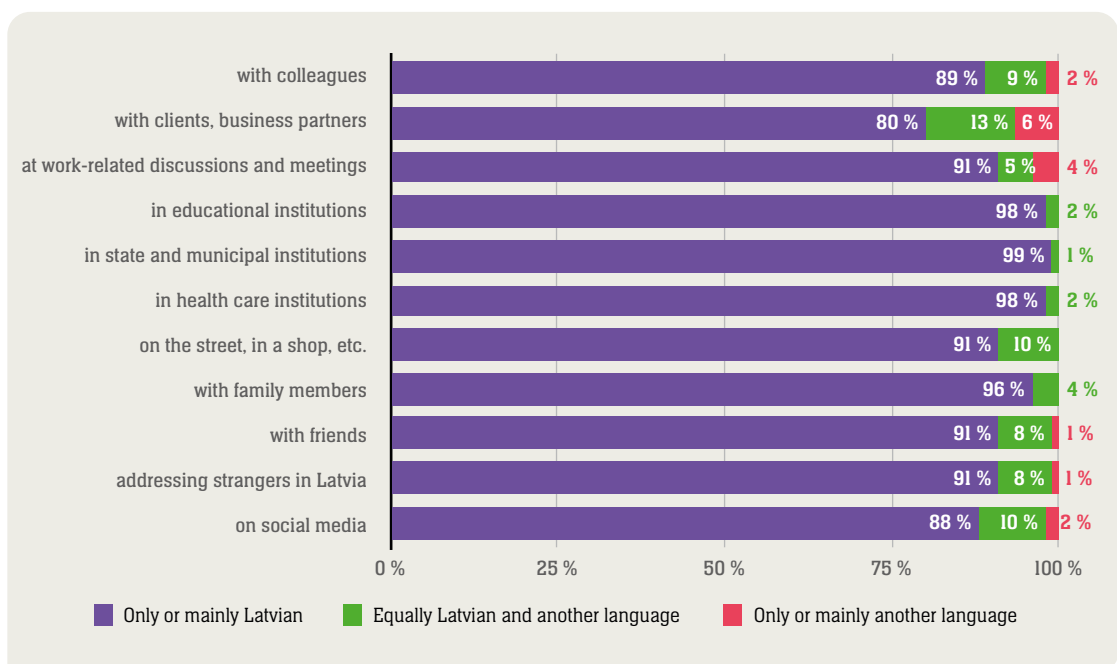


Fig. 29. Use of Latvian and other languages in various communication situations (respondents: persons who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The majority of the respondents who communicate mainly in Latvian in their family during the last year used Russian at work (mostly when communicating with clients and partners – 54%, but also with colleagues – 41%) and in informal daily communication in the public environment (on the street, in shops and other everyday situations – 49%, when addressing strangers in Latvia – 42%; see Fig. 28). The previous study of the language situation [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 95–96] also shows that these are the spheres in which Latvians also use Russian relatively frequently.

The data of the 2019 survey show that about a third of the people who communicate in Latvian in their family communicated with friends in Russian during the last year; a quarter – on social networks, as well as at work-related meetings. The respondents of this group (who communicate in Latvian in their family) rarely used Russian in official communication in educational institutions, health care institutions, state and municipal institutions, as well as in the family.

The use of languages for those who communicate in Russian in the family is significantly different from those who communicate in Latvian in the family. The data of the 2019 LVA Survey show (see Fig. 30) that the majority of Russian-speaking people used the Latvian language at work during the last year (91–92% of those to whom this question applies), educational institutions (90%), in state and municipal institutions (89%), as well as in health care institutions (86%), on the street, in a shop and other everyday situations (86%). Slightly less often these respondents addressed strangers in Latvian and used Latvian less often on social networks as well as to communicate with friends and family members. Thus, the respondents who speak Russian in the family use Latvian the most at work and in the public environment, and least in the private life sphere.

Only 9–14% of those who communicate in Russian in their family (and to whom this question applies) during the last year did not use the Latvian language in communication at work, in institutions or in everyday situations on the street, in a shop, etc. While the choice of language of communication at work, in educational institutions and other similar places does not apply to all the respondents, almost all the respondents answered the question about communication on the street, in a shop, etc. This means that only 14% of those who communicate in Russian in their family did not use Latvian in this sphere in the last year.

Of course, there is a difference between whether the respondents communicated in Latvian in the last year in any of the above situations, or whether they do so regularly only or mostly in Latvian. As shown in Fig. 31, in the official communication situations, about half of the population of Latvia whose language used in the family is mainly Russian used only or mostly Latvian for communication in the last year (52% at work meetings, 52% at educational institutions, 49% at state and municipal institutions). Slightly more than a third of the Russian-speaking respondents during the last year communicated only or mostly in Latvian in health care institutions, as well as in meetings with clients, business partners and colleagues (Fig. 31). Although many of the representatives of this group of respondents used Russian during the last year (Fig. 30), there are more respondents who communicated in Latvian in these situations.

On the other hand, there are more respondents who prefer Russian to Latvian in public everyday communication on the street, in shops and other similar situations, when addressing strangers in Latvia, in private communication with family members and friends and on social networks (Fig. 30).

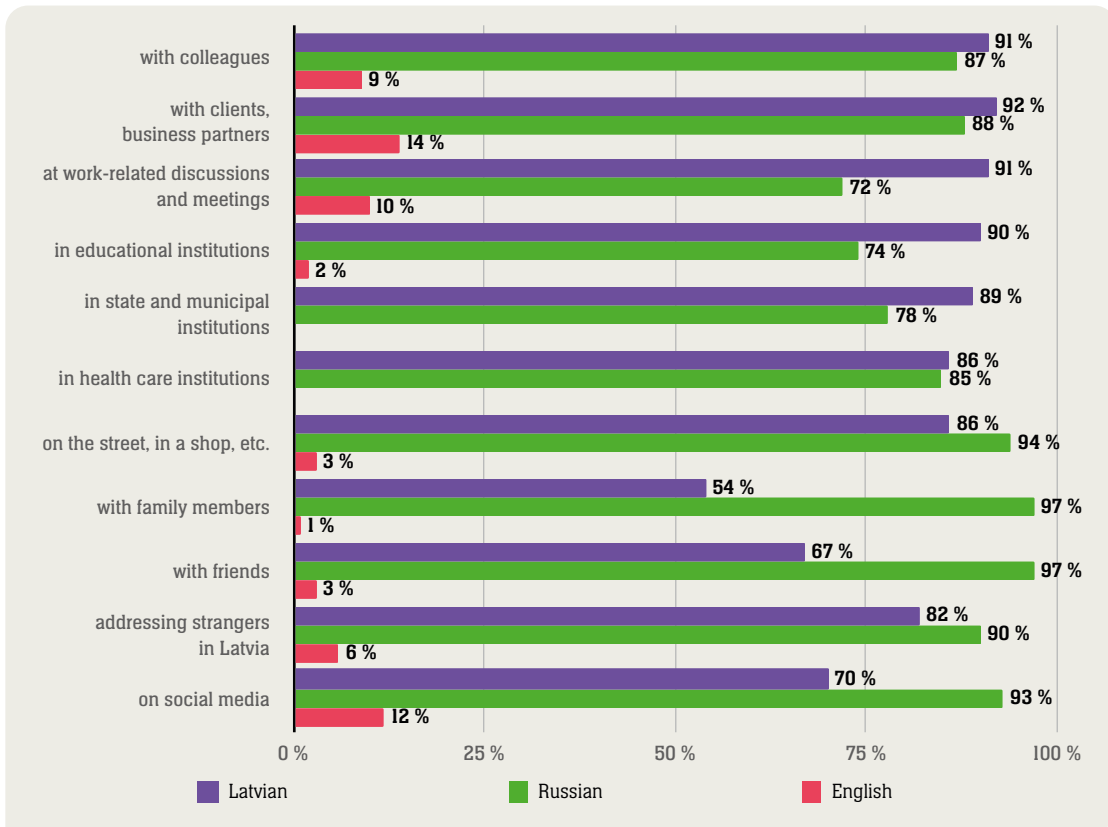


Fig. 30. Use of Latvian, Russian, and English in various communication situations (respondents: persons who communicate mainly in Russian in the family).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

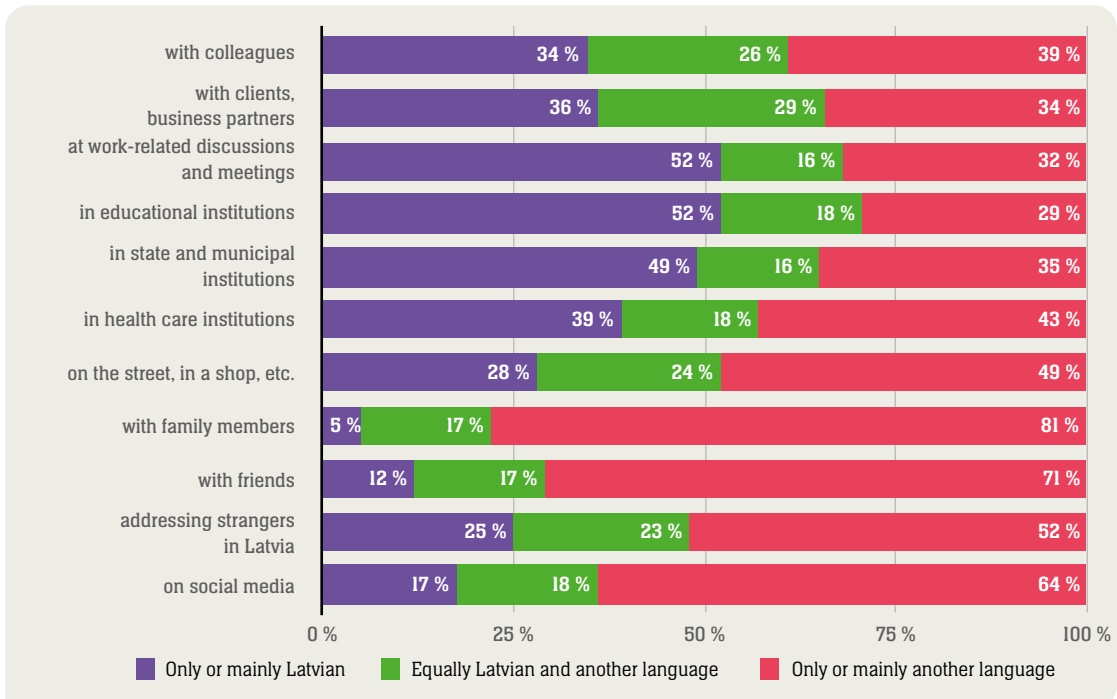


Fig. 31. LUse of Latvian and other languages in various communication situations (respondents: persons who communicate mainly in Russian in the family).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

About half of the respondents used only or mostly another language in the last year (Fig. 31) to address strangers in Latvia (52%), on the street, in a shop and other daily situations (49%); the percentage is even higher in private communication.

The previous study [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 96] showed that the use of Latvian in the respective communication situations of the respondents whose mother tongue is Latvian has not changed much when compared to the data from 2004 and 2009. The study also indicates that, although Latvians mostly use Latvian, the role of Russian has not diminished significantly. Analysing the results of the last survey, which was conducted in 2019, it can be concluded that there are still no significant changes in the extent and domains in which the inhabitants of Latvia use Latvian and Russian (except for the younger generation of the respondents).

The use of English among those who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family and those who communicate mainly in Russian in the family does not differ significantly (see Fig. 28 and 30). There are more people in both groups who used English on social networks during the last year (19% of the respondents who communicate in Latvian with their family and 12% of those who communicate in Russian with their family), as well as at work with clients and partners (18% and 14% respectively), and less in other work-related situations, when addressing strangers in Latvia, in educational institutions, when communicating with friends, on the street, in a shop, and other everyday situations.

The data of the 2019 LVA Survey allow one to conclude that the use of Latvian and other languages in sociolinguistic domains is largely determined by the level of Latvian language proficiency of the respondents. The level of Latvian language proficiency most closely correlates with the extent to which the respondents use Latvian and other languages (only Latvian; mostly Latvian; both Latvian and another language; mostly another language; only another language) in everyday public communication (on the street, in a shop and other similar situations – $r = 0.610$; addressing strangers in Latvia – $r = 0.509$), as well as in state and municipal institutions ($r = 0.510$) and health care institutions ($r = 0.516$). This means that the better a respondent speaks Latvian, the more likely he or she is to use only or mostly Latvian in the above situations. In other communication situations the correlation is medium ($r = 0.3–0.5$), except for educational institutions where the correlation is weak ($r = 0.236$), i.e., the level of Latvian language proficiency in the school environment has the least effect on the extent to which respondents use Latvian. Those who are connected with educational institutions in Latvia must use the Latvian language, regardless of how well they know it.

In general, respondents use both Latvian and another language or other languages at work (in communication with customers and business partners, as well as with colleagues) and in public everyday situations (on the street, in a shop, and other similar situations as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia). Here, the communication is most often between those who communicate in Latvian in the family and those who communicate in Russian in the family. It should be mentioned that those who communicate in Russian in the family use both Latvian and another language more often in all communication situations than those who communicate in Latvian in the family.

Looking at the use of languages through regions, the survey data show that the inhabitants of Latvia who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family communicate only

or mostly in Latvian in the analysed sociolinguistic situations, i.e. there are no significant regional differences. However, the use of languages of Latvian-speaking families living in Latgale differs significantly from the rest of Latvia. In many situations, they adapt to the Russian-speaking environment. The biggest difference is observed in the use of languages in the public informal environment (on the street, in a shop and other similar situations, when addressing strangers in Latvia), as well as in private communication with friends and on social networks, as well as a little also in health care institutions, in which in Latgale both Latvian and another language (mostly Russian) are used. On the other hand, those inhabitants of Latgale who communicate mainly in Russian in the family use the Latvian language less often in these situations.

Latvian-speaking families in Latgale adapt their language use to the environment more than those who speak Russian in the family adapt to Latvians living around them. The use of languages by those inhabitants of Latgale who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family differs the least from the rest of Latvia in terms of communication with family members, at work, in state and municipal institutions, as well as in educational institutions, where those who speak Latvian in the family in Latgale use only or mainly Latvian as much as those who speak Latvian in the family in other parts of Latvia.

When assessing the use of the language of the inhabitants of Latgale in general, Russian is used more than Latvian in public everyday communication on the street, in shops and similar places, when addressing strangers, on social networks, and in private communication with friends. Elsewhere in Latvia, the Latvian language dominates, even in Riga, where there is also a significant percentage of Russian speakers (of course, it should be taken into account that there may also be micro-environments in Riga where the proportion of the use of Latvian and Russian is different, but specific research is needed here). Moreover Latgale has the largest number of people in Latvia who did not use Latvian at all, or mostly used another language (mostly Russian) during the last year.

As elsewhere in Latvia, the residents of Latgale communicate only or mostly in Latvian in official institutions (educational institutions, state and municipal institutions, health care institutions) and at work. In these institutions and at work, only or mostly Latvian is used more often than only or mostly (an)other language(s). In other domains the situation is the opposite: more inhabitants of Latgale use only or mostly another language (Russian) than Latvian. Thus, in private and public informal communication, the inhabitants of Latgale are more likely to use Russian rather than Latvian. Although the Latvian language is mostly used in schools and in official communication at work (during discussions and meetings), here too only two thirds use only or mostly Latvian for communication. Latgale is the only region in Latvia where in all sociolinguistic domains and situations, except official institutions and work, communication takes place more or mostly in another language (mostly Russian) than only or mostly in Latvian.²

² It should be noted that the information presented and gathered in the study relates to larger regions – lands and cities, it does not examine how the language is used in specific places, such as different districts of Riga or individual parishes, which may differ significantly in terms of demographic composition.

In some sociolinguistic situations, the language use of the residents of Riga who speak Latvian in the family also differs from the general indicators, especially in work-related communication. At work during discussions and meetings, as well as in communication with clients and business partners, those residents of Riga who communicate mainly in Latvian in their family use only or mostly Latvian less and use only or mostly another language (Russian, English) more than the average respondents of this group in Latvia. In Riga, in addition to Latvian and Russian, English is also used in business communication, which is very rarely used elsewhere in Latvia. Thus, the working environment in Riga is more multilingual than in the rest of Latvia, and residents of Riga who speak Latvian in their families more often use (also) another language at work in discussions and meetings, in conversations with clients and with business partners than the respondents living elsewhere in Latvia.

There are many Russian speakers living in Riga, but Riga differs from Latgale and the rest of Latvia in terms of language use. The residents of Riga use the Latvian language in official institutions, at work, as well as on the street, in a shop, etc. and when addressing strangers about as much as the inhabitants of Latvia on average, but less frequently with friends, family members and on social networks. The residents of Riga use the Russian language slightly more than the population of Latvia on average in communication situations in all sociolinguistic domains. Moreover, the residents of Riga use English more than the residents of Latvia on average, especially at work, but also on social networks, when addressing strangers in Latvia and on the street, in a shop, etc., as well as when communicating with friends.

The use of languages of the respondents whose language of communication in the family is Russian is more regional than the use of languages of the respondents who speak Latvian in the family. For example, in Vidzeme, where the Latvian language is used almost exclusively in all fields, in all the analysed areas, the respondents who speak Russian in the family use much more only or mostly Latvian and much less only or mostly another language than elsewhere, especially when compared to the situation in Latgale and Riga, where the Russian language is used more often in the environment.

The use of Latvian and other languages also depends on people's age, because, first of all, Latvia's demographic indicators show that among young people there are more of those who communicate in Latvian in the family; secondly, the survey data convincingly show that the level of Latvian language skills of younger people is higher than that of older people. In the group of the respondents who speak mostly Russian in the family, there is a moderately close correlation between age and the use of Latvian in state and municipal institutions ($r = 0.3-0.5$), i.e. the older the person, the less often he or she uses the Latvian language or does not use it at all in these communication situations. The correlation in the use of languages, when addressing strangers in Latvia and communicating on the street, in a shop and similar situations, on social networks, in educational institutions, in communication with clients, business partners, with friends, with family members, and at work with colleagues, is also weak ($r = 0.1-0.3$). Also in this respect younger people who communicate in Russian in their families use only or mostly Latvian more than older people. At the same time, in the group of the respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family, there is a weak negative correlation between age and the use of Latvian

in some domains: at work with clients and business partners, during discussions and meetings, as well as on social networks ($r = -0.1 - -0.3$), i.e. the younger the people who speak Latvian in their families, the more likely they are not to use only or mostly Latvian in these domains (although Latvian is used the most, other languages are used more often – mainly Russian, but it is in these groups of the respondents that the use of English is increasing, especially on social networks).

Similarly to the previous studies, the data of the 2019 LVA Survey show that older people are most likely to communicate in Russian. In the last year, in the age group 64–75, more than two thirds of the respondents used Russian on the street, in a shop and in similar situations, on social networks, when addressing strangers, working with clients and colleagues, and communicating with friends. On the other hand, in the 18–35 age group, a smaller percentage of the respondents used Russian during the last year: while working with customers (60%), on the street, in a shop, etc. (58%), with colleagues (52%) and with friends (51%).

English showed the opposite trend and is used more by younger people. The respondents aged 18–35 use English most often when working with clients, business partners (31%) and on social networks (27%), as well as when communicating with colleagues (15%), at work during discussions and meetings (14%), when addressing strangers in Latvia (11%), on the street, in a shop, etc. (7%) as well as with friends (7%).

Thus, the Latvian language is mostly used in official communication situations, however, the use of the language is expanding (and the level of language skill is increasing, see Chapter 3) in informal communication (especially among the younger generation).

The analysis of language use shows that it is the work domain in which the respondents often come into contact with speakers of different native languages and people who use different languages of communication in the family, moreover, the use of language at work may be more or less formal or informal (e.g., use of language when communicating with clients or in a business meeting will differ from that used when communicating with colleagues in everyday situations). The domain of work is what motivates those whose native language is not Latvian to speak Latvian. The following subsection presents a more in-depth analysis of the use of languages at work, describing the general positions of languages in this domain and outlining the economic value of languages in Latvia.

4.2. Languages in the work environment

Almost all employees in Latvia speak both Latvian and Russian: 99% speak Latvian and 98% speak Russian; these data include both those who speak Latvian and Russian as their native language (62% and 35%, respectively) and those who speak it at least at a basic level (by respondents' self-assessment). The proficiency in both Latvian and Russian as a second language/foreign language is similar: 97% of employees for whom Latvian is not a native tongue speak Latvian as a second language/foreign language at a basic level; similarly, 97% of employees for whom Russian is not a native language speak it at least on a basic level.

The percentage of employees who are fluent in Latvian and Russian is also similar: 81% of employees speak Latvian as their native language or know it very well or well, and 79% of employees speak Russian as their native language or know it very well or well. The difference between Latvian and Russian language skills manifests itself in terms of levels of proficiency in second language/foreign language skills: Russian as a second language/foreign language is spoken very well or well by more employees (67%) than Latvian as a second language/foreign language (50%). Thus, there are more employees whose native language is Latvian and who know Russian very well or well than employees whose native language is another language, mostly Russian, and who know Latvian very well or well. Similarly, more often the Latvian language is not spoken or spoken poorly by employees who are non-native speakers of Latvian (23%), whereas the Russian language is less often not spoken or spoken poorly by employees who are non-native speakers of Russian (13%).

English language skills are less common than Latvian and Russian language skills, and 63% of employees know it at least at the basic level of proficiency, 29% of employees know it very well or well, and 21% on an intermediate level. English language skills are better among employees of Latvian nationality (32% of Latvian employees speak English very well or well), among the rest of the group the level of English language skills is lower (24% of non-Latvian employees speak English very well or well). Employees speak other languages to a much lesser extent: 17% of employees know German at least at a basic proficiency level; 3% of employees speak Lithuanian, 2% speak Spanish, French, Belarusian, Ukrainian or Polish.

Although it was pointed out above that the current indicators of good Latvian and Russian language skills among employees are similar and good Russian as a second language/foreign language skills are slightly more common than good Latvian as a second language/foreign language skills, these relations may change in the future. The survey data indicate that in the group of employees for whom Latvian is not a native language, there is a medium correlation between age and Latvian language proficiency level, i.e. the younger the respondent, the better the Latvian language proficiency. In general, young employees aged 18–34 speak Latvian much better than Russian employees: 90% of employees in this age group speak Latvian as their native language or know it very well or well, whereas only 67% of young employees speak Russian as their native language or know it very well or well. The comparison of the indicators of the language skills of speakers of Latvian and Russian as a second/foreign language confirms that good Latvian language skills are more common among young employees than good Russian language

skills: 62% of employees aged 18–34 who do not speak Latvian as their native language know it very well or well; 52% of employees aged 18–34 who do not speak Russian as their native language speak Russian very well or well.

The data on the language skills of employees aged 18–34 differ significantly from the above data on employees in general and indicate that young people are mostly trilingual: 99% of employees in this age group know Latvian at least at a basic proficiency level, 98% know Russian, and 91% know English. Consequently, in the future the number of employees who speak English, i.e. those who know English very well and well, will increase in the Latvian labour market. 91% of young employees aged 18–34 speak English very well or well (51%); on an intermediate level (28%), weakly or very weakly (12%). It should be noted that Latvian employees aged 18–34 have a slightly better command of English than Russian: 55% of Latvian employees in this age group speak English very well or well, and 52% speak Russian very well or well. As already mentioned in other chapters, the survey data reveal a tendency for English and Russian to change their position in the language hierarchy among young people. There are also slightly more Latvian employees aged 18–34 who do not speak Russian or speak it poorly or very poorly (21%) than those who do not speak English or speak it poorly or very poorly (17%).

There are also differences between the language proficiency of those whose native language is Latvian and those whose native language is another language. Latvian employees aged 18–34 speak English better than non-Latvian employees of the same age group: 55% of Latvians indicate that they know English very well or well, whereas the same was indicated by 45% of non-Latvians. Only 5% of Latvian employees aged 18–34 indicate that they do not speak English at all and the same is stated by 15% of non-Latvians in the same age group. Other young employees, like other employees generally, know other languages less often: 14% of the respondents have at least basic knowledge of German, and rarely other languages; in this aspect there are no significant differences between the representatives of different nationalities.

In general, employees in Latvia are mostly bilingual, as an equal number of employees speak both Latvian and Russian. The analysis of data on young respondents shows that in the future employees will increasingly be trilingual as they will also speak English (Fig. 32). Although at present the indicators of Latvian and Russian language skills among employees are similar, the data on young employees allow the conclusion that in general they know Latvian better than Russian. This shows that in the future, the number of employees with good Latvian language skills will increase in the Latvian labour market, but good Russian language skills will become less common, while English language skills will increase.

Compared to other social groups of non-Latvians, non-Latvian employees more often believe that their Latvian language skills are sufficient (more often than pensioners, the unemployed, pupils and students). In total, 42% of the respondents in this group of employees believe that their Latvian language skills are sufficient in all cases (types of language skills): both listening and reading, as well as writing and speaking. Another 40% believe that their skills are sufficient in some cases. Only 4% believe that their Latvian language skills are insufficient in all cases, and other 14% believe this is so in some cases.

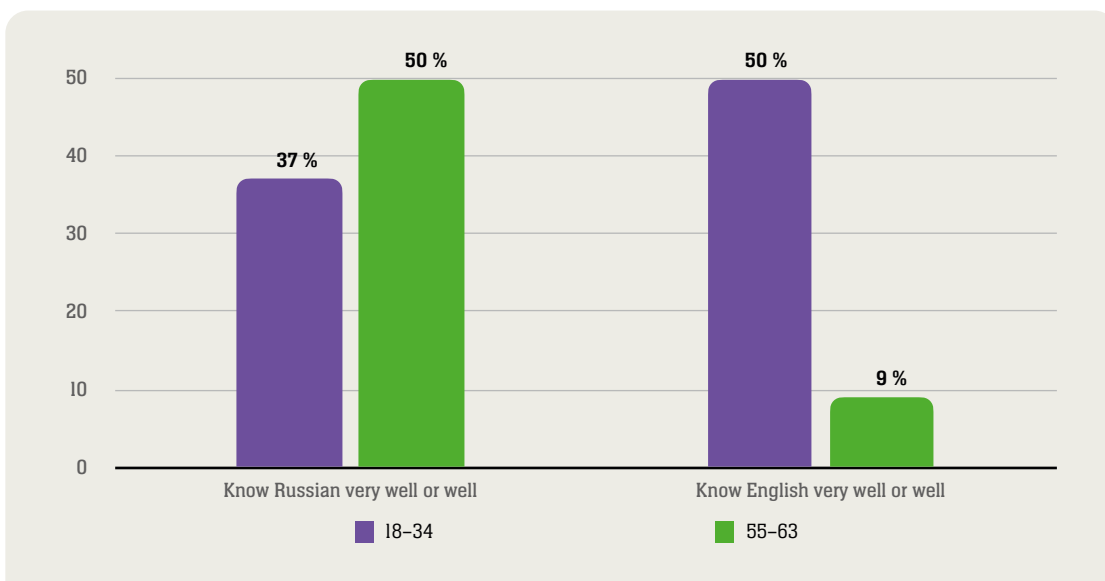


Fig. 32. Self-assessment of English and Russian language skills in the youngest (18-34) and oldest (55-63) generations of the respondents, self-assessment indicators – ‘very good’ and ‘good’ (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Employees most often consider their receptive Latvian language skills to be sufficient: 82% of non-Latvian employees consider listening skills to be completely or rather sufficient, and 76% of them stated so about their reading skills (Fig. 33). Productive Latvian language skills are considered to be sufficient a little less often: 72% of non-Latvian employees consider their speaking skills to be completely or rather sufficient, and 62% consider their writing skills to be sufficient. Non-Latvians employees aged 18-34 are more likely than employees on average to consider their Latvian language skills to be sufficient, and a quarter of non-Latvians in this age group indicate that their writing skills are still insufficient.

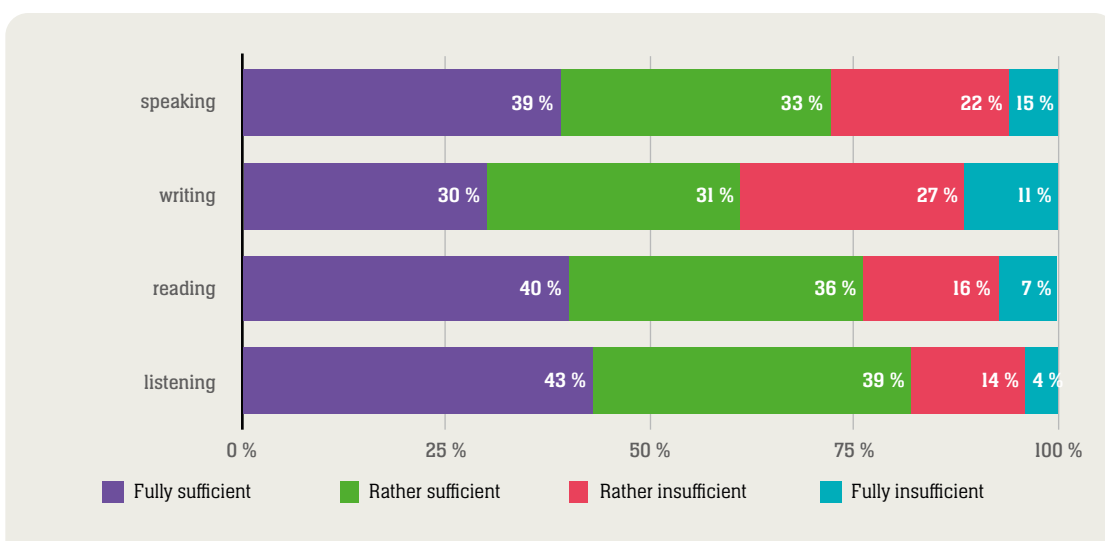


Fig. 33. Sufficiency of Latvian language skills among non-Latvian employees (acquisition of language skills).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

As mentioned above, almost all employees in Latvia speak both Latvian and Russian; and the indicators of them having good Latvian and Russian language skills are also similar. However, the data on the use of languages in communication in various work-related situations show that, in general, in the work environment in Latvia the Latvian language is used more often than any other language (Fig. 34). Almost all employees use Latvian in business communication: both in communication with colleagues, clients and business partners, and during work discussions and meetings (97% of employees use Latvian to communicate with colleagues, 96% – with clients, business partners, 96% – in work-related discussions, meetings).

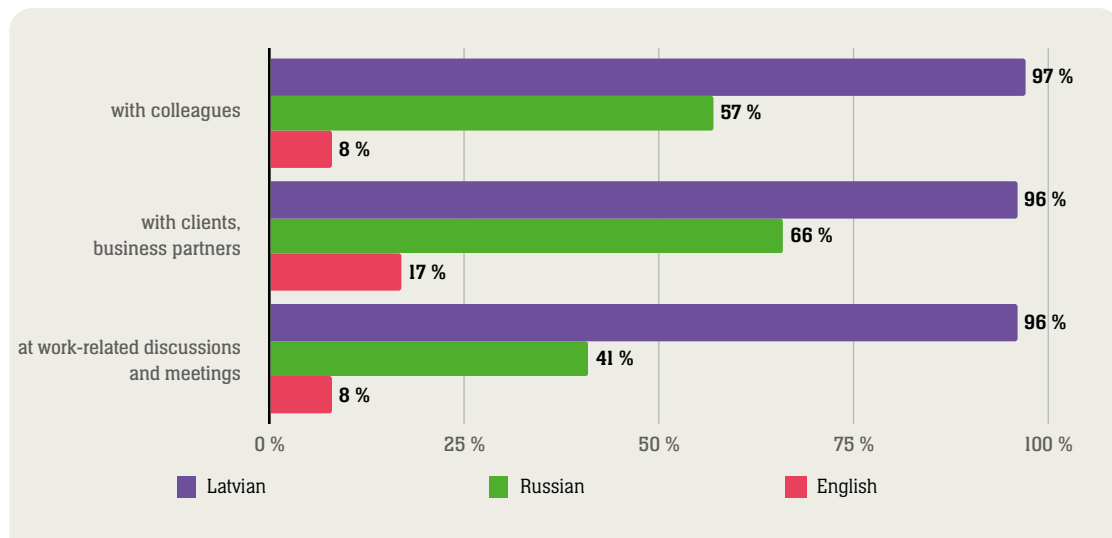


Fig. 34. Use of Latvian, Russian, and English in various work-related communication situations (respondents – employees).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Most people use several languages for communication in the workplace (Fig. 35). In addition to Latvian, Russian is spoken – it is used by about half of the group of employees to communicate in the work environment (Fig. 34). Fewer respondents indicate that they also communicate in English at work (approximately one tenth). Other languages are used for communication too infrequently and are therefore not included in this analysis.

Both Russian and English are most often used in communication with clients and business partners: Russian is used for this purpose by two thirds of employees (66%), English much less often, i.e. by 17% of employees. Russian is also quite often used to communicate with colleagues: more than a half of employees (57%) communicate with colleagues in Russian, while English is used relatively infrequently in these situations (8%). In the workplace, Russian and English are used least often during discussions and meetings: 41% of employees use Russian for this purpose, and 8% use English.

Thus, other languages are most often used in the work environment to communicate with clients and business partners, but least often during discussions and meetings. On the other hand, during work-related discussions and meetings, employees most often use only Latvian (53%), while about a quarter of employees (27%) communicate with customers and partners only in Latvian (39%) (Fig. 35).

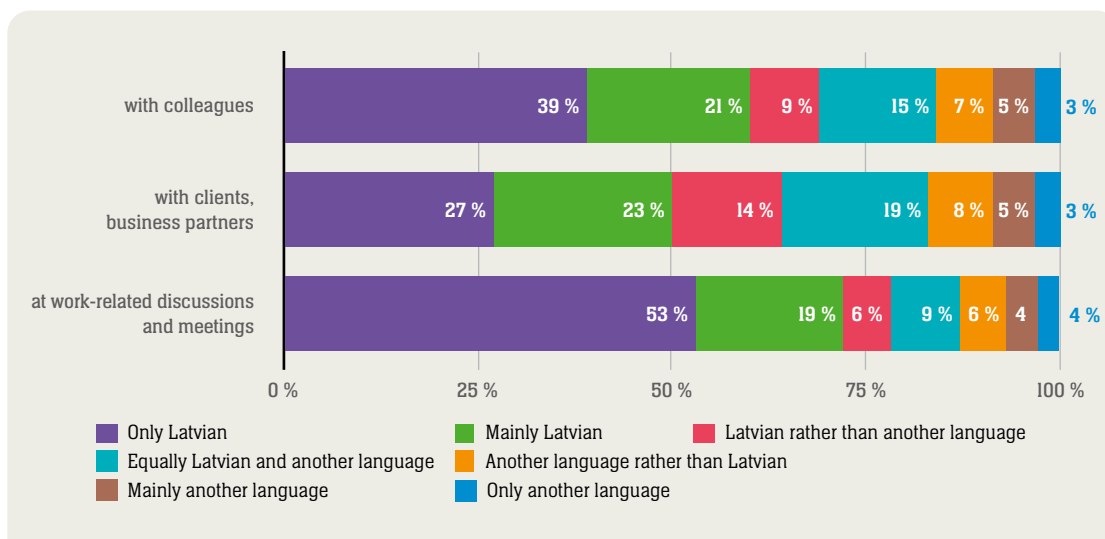


Fig. 35. Frequency of the use of Latvian and other languages in various communication situations (respondents – employees).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The data presented in Fig. 35 show more precisely that in the work environment in Latvia, communication most often occurs only or mostly in Latvian. In rare cases, respondents use another language to communicate in during these work-related situations. In total, there are about 15% of employees who either do not use Latvian at all or mostly use another language in such situations. Many of those who communicate only or mostly in another language at work have little or no knowledge of Latvian.

The use of languages at work is related to the age of the respondent and the surrounding linguistic environment, i.e. the use of languages in the family and in the region of Latvia in which a person lives. The use of languages at work is to a lesser extent related to education.

As indicated before, there are no differences in the use of language at work in different age groups (almost all employees use Latvian), and most people use several languages at work, regardless of age (Fig. 36). In all age groups, at work, Russian is used much more often than English: the older a person is, the more Russian and the less English they use at work. Respondents aged 18–34 use Russian slightly less often than other age groups, while young people use English more often than the representatives of other age groups.

Young people aged 18 to 34 communicate only or mainly in Latvian (about 75%) more often than employees in other age groups and less often in another language than the representatives of the other age groups (approximately 12%, Fig. 37). People in the 63–75 age group communicate only or mainly in another language at work the most often: about one person in five in this age group communicates only or mainly in another language at work.

The majority of the respondents who communicate in Latvian with colleagues, clients and business partners, as well as during discussions and meetings, are aged between 45 and 63 years. Thus, bilingualism and multilingualism in work-related communication are the least pronounced in this age group. Those who are older than them use Russian more often in addition to Latvian, but those who are younger, besides Latvian, use both Russian and English at work. However, respondents aged 18–34 and 64–75 are more likely to use two or three languages when communicating with colleagues than respondents aged 35–63. Work-related meetings show some similarity: in the 18–34 age group and in the 64–75 age group, two or three languages are more likely to be used than in the 45–63 age group. However, there is a difference in this aspect: younger people use both Russian and English (more Russian, less English), while older people use Russian. People in the 45–63 age group are least likely to use two or three languages in work-related discussions and meetings. Communication with clients and business partners is different from other communication situations: the younger a person is, the more he or she communicates with clients and business partners in two or three languages. In general, the 18–34 age group has the largest percentage of employees who use only or mostly Latvian for communication, but also the largest number of people who use other languages (both Russian and English).

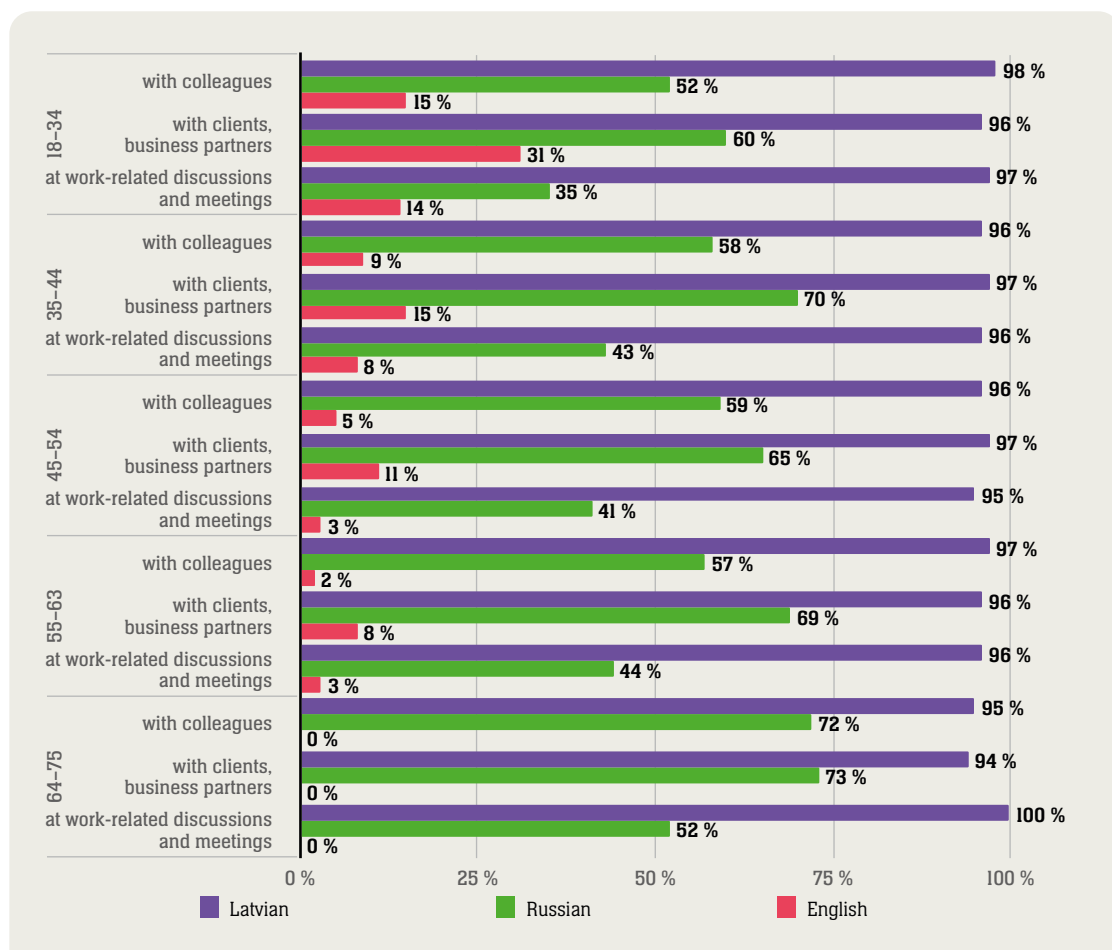


Fig. 36. Use of Latvian, Russian and English in the work environment in different age groups (respondents – employees).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

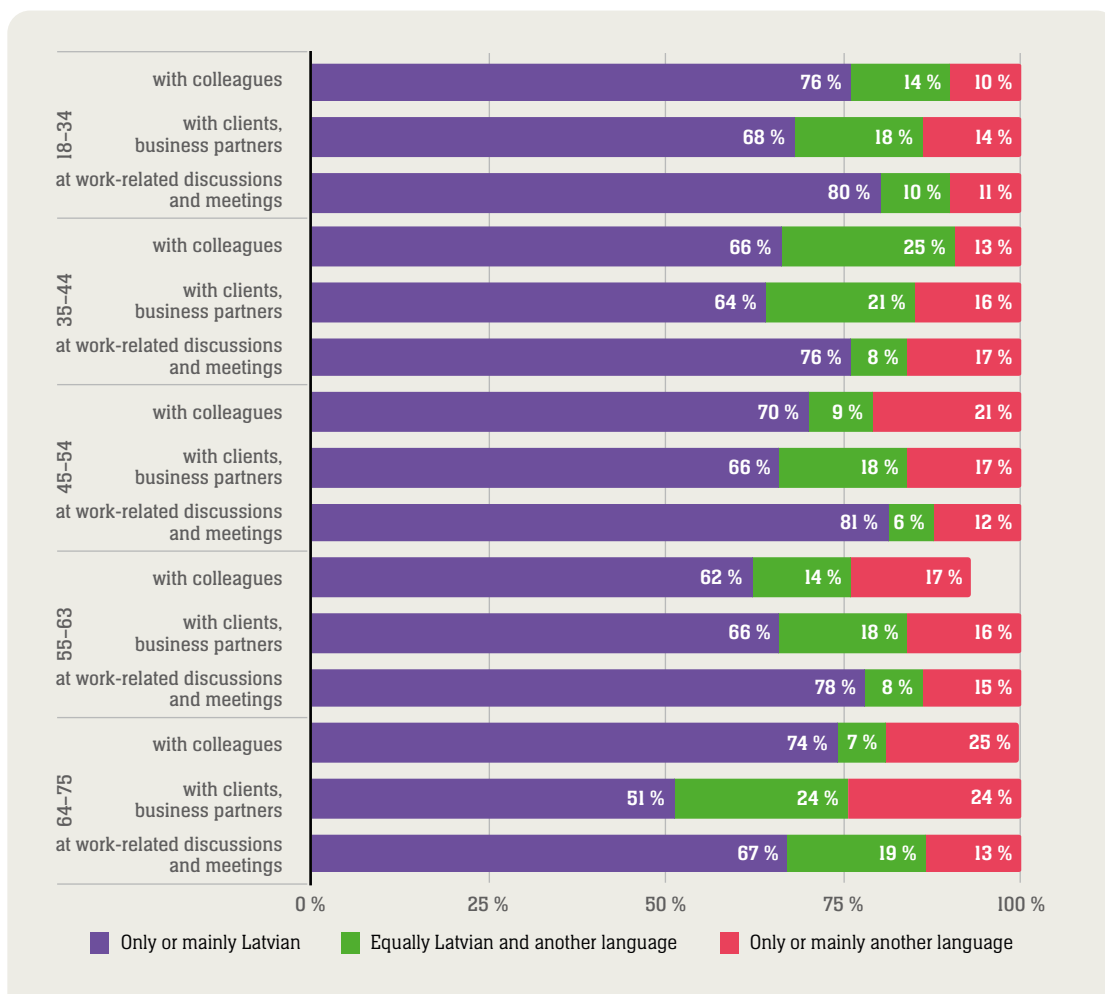


Fig. 37. Use of Latvian and other languages at work in different age groups (respondents – employees).

Source: Source: 2019 LVA Survey

In the group of non-native Latvian respondents, there is a small correlation between age and frequency of use of Latvian: the younger a person, the more likely he or she uses only or mostly Latvian with clients and business partners ($r = 0.177$), as well as with colleagues ($r = 0.127$). On the other hand, in the group of respondents whose native language is Latvian, there is a slight negative correlation between age and the frequency of using Latvian in communication with clients and business partners ($r = -0.173$), and the same is valid for the use of language during work-related discussions and meetings ($r = -0.133$), i.e. the younger the employee whose native language is Latvian, the more likely it is that he or she will use only or mainly Latvian less often in this situations.

In general, the Latvian language has a stable position in the work environment: almost all employees, regardless of age, communicate in Latvian. The frequency of use of Russian in the work environment is likely to decrease slightly in the near future as it is more common among older people, while the use of English is likely to increase as it is more commonly known and used by younger people for communication at work. The survey data show that the use of English is growing faster than the use of Russian.

Almost all employees, regardless of the language in which they communicate in the family, use Latvian at work: those who speak mainly Latvian in the family use Latvian at work to communicate with colleagues, clients and business partners, and during

discussions and meetings (99–99.8 %, Fig. 38); similarly, almost all those who speak Russian in the family use Latvian for communication at work (91–92%). Russian is used at work mainly by those who speak mainly Russian in their families (Fig. 38): 88% of them communicate in Russian with clients and business partners; 87% with colleagues, and 72% use Russian also during work-related discussions and meetings. However, those who speak mainly Latvian in the family are less likely to use Russian at work: half of them (54%) communicate in Russian with clients and business partners; 41% with colleagues and a quarter (25%) use Russian also during work-related discussions and meetings. The use of English in business communication does not differ significantly between those who speak mainly Latvian and those who speak Russian in the family.

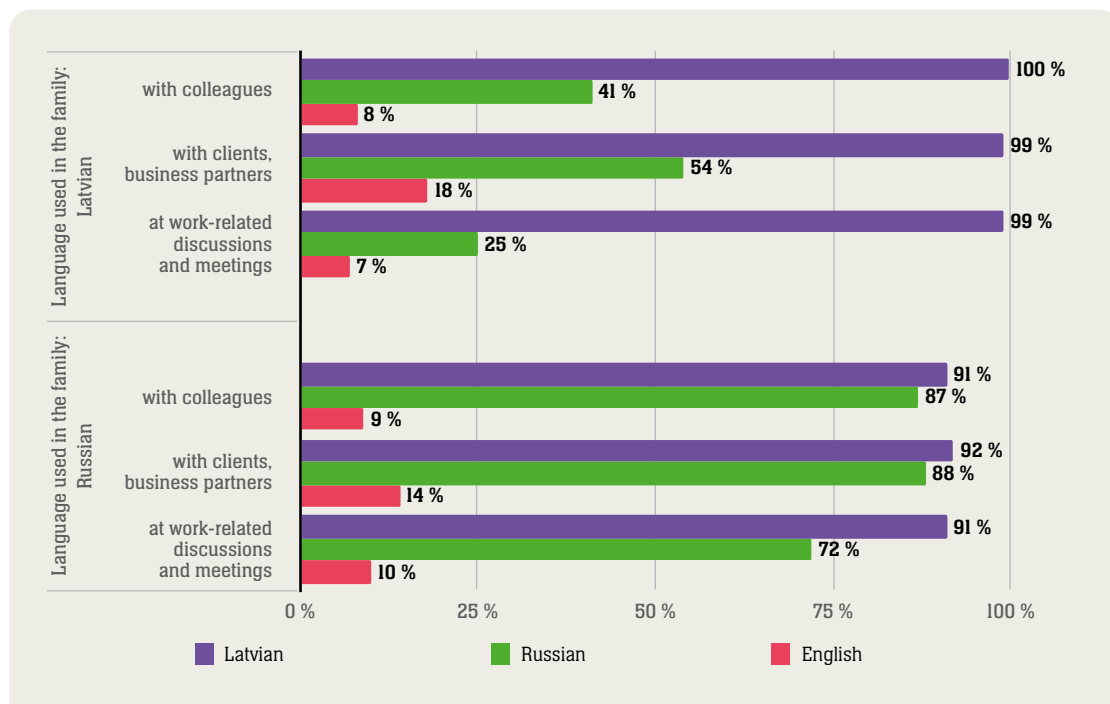


Fig. 38. Use of Latvian, Russian and English in the work environment in groups of respondents defined by the language used in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The majority of people who speak Latvian in the family use only Latvian (68%) or mostly Latvian (22%) at work during discussions and meetings; similarly, 54% of them communicate with colleagues only in Latvian and 30% mostly in Latvian; with clients and business partners only in Latvian – 38%, mostly in Latvian – 37% (Fig. 39). Those who speak mainly Russian in their family less often use only or mostly Latvian for work-related communication: 22% communicate only in Latvian during discussions and meetings, 30% mostly in Latvian; 10% communicate with colleagues only in Latvian, and 23% mostly in Latvian; 7% communicate with clients and business partners only in Latvian, 29% – mostly in Latvian. The respondents who speak mainly Russian in their family are more likely to use two or three languages for communication at work.

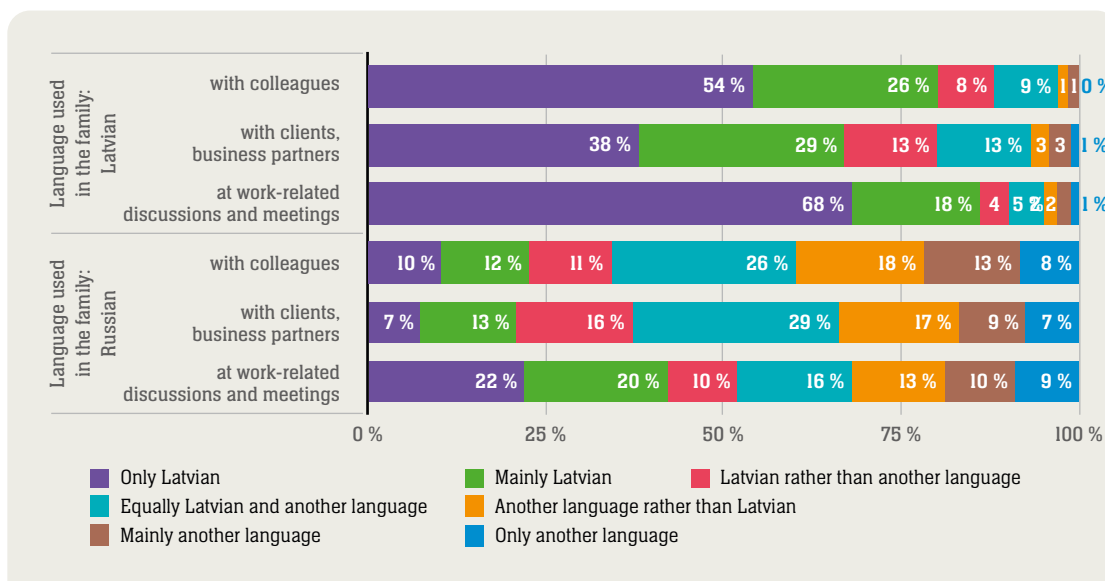


Fig. 39. The use of Latvian and other languages for communication at work in groups defined by the language used in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Among the employees who speak mainly Latvian in the family, there are few people who would communicate only or mostly in another language at work (2–7% depending on the communication situation, more often with clients and business partners); on the other hand, about a third of those employees who speak mainly Russian in the family communicate only or mostly in another language at work (39% of employees communicate only or mostly in another language with colleagues; 33% with clients and business partners, and 32% in discussions and meetings).

The biggest differences in language use between those who communicate in Latvian in the family and those who communicate in Russian in the family are the choice of language of communication with colleagues: the language(s) of communication in the family (Latvian or Russian) has the greatest influence on which language(s) – and to what extent – the respondents communicate with colleagues ($r = 0.611$), a slightly weaker but still moderate correlation is observed between the use of family language of communication and the language of communication with clients and business partners ($r = 0.482$), as well as during work discussions and meetings ($r = 0.497$).

When it comes to communication with colleagues, clients and business partners, and in work-related discussions and meetings, employees in the 18–34 age group use only or mostly Latvian more often than employees on average and use only or mostly another language slightly less often than other employees on average. As already mentioned, this increase in the use of Latvian is due to the use of languages other than Latvian in work-related communication, as Latvians aged 18–34 in communication in all these situations use only or mainly Latvian less often than Latvians on average, i.e. in comparison with other age groups there are more Latvians in this age group who are more likely to use different languages to communicate at work.

The percentage of Latvians in the 18–34 age group who use only or mostly another language for communication at work does not differ significantly from the average

indicator of the Latvian group of the respondents and is very small (Fig. 40). However, non-Latvians in the 18–34 age group much more often use only or mostly Latvian for communication in these work-related situations and much less often use only or mostly another language than non-Latvians on average.

These indicators mark possible future trends in the use of languages in the work environment: in the near future, the percentage of those who communicate only or mostly in Latvian at work could increase; the proportion of those who use more than one language at work could also increase; but the proportion of those who use only or mostly other languages at work is likely to decline.

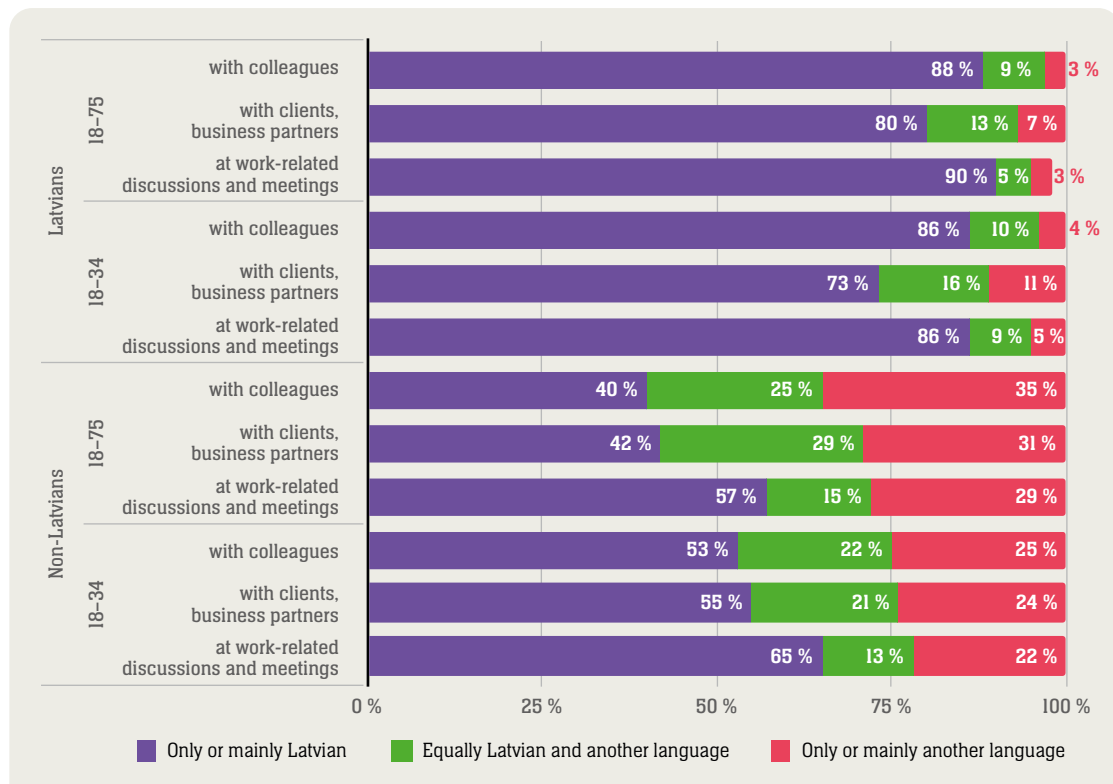


Fig. 40. Use of Latvian and other languages for communication at work in groups of respondents by nationality and age.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

In general, almost all employees in all regions of Latvia communicate in Latvian (Fig. 41). There are more employees who do not use Latvian at work in Latgale and Riga, but the percentage of these people is relatively small. The biggest regional differences are in the use of Russian and English. Firstly, Riga and Latgale have the largest number of employees who use both Latvian and another language in work-related communication. Secondly, Latgale, Zemgale and Riga have the largest number of employees who also communicate in Russian at work. Thirdly, the use of English for work-related communication is more noticeable around Riga, i.e. in Riga and Pierīga Region; in the rest of Latvia English is rarely used in communication at work.

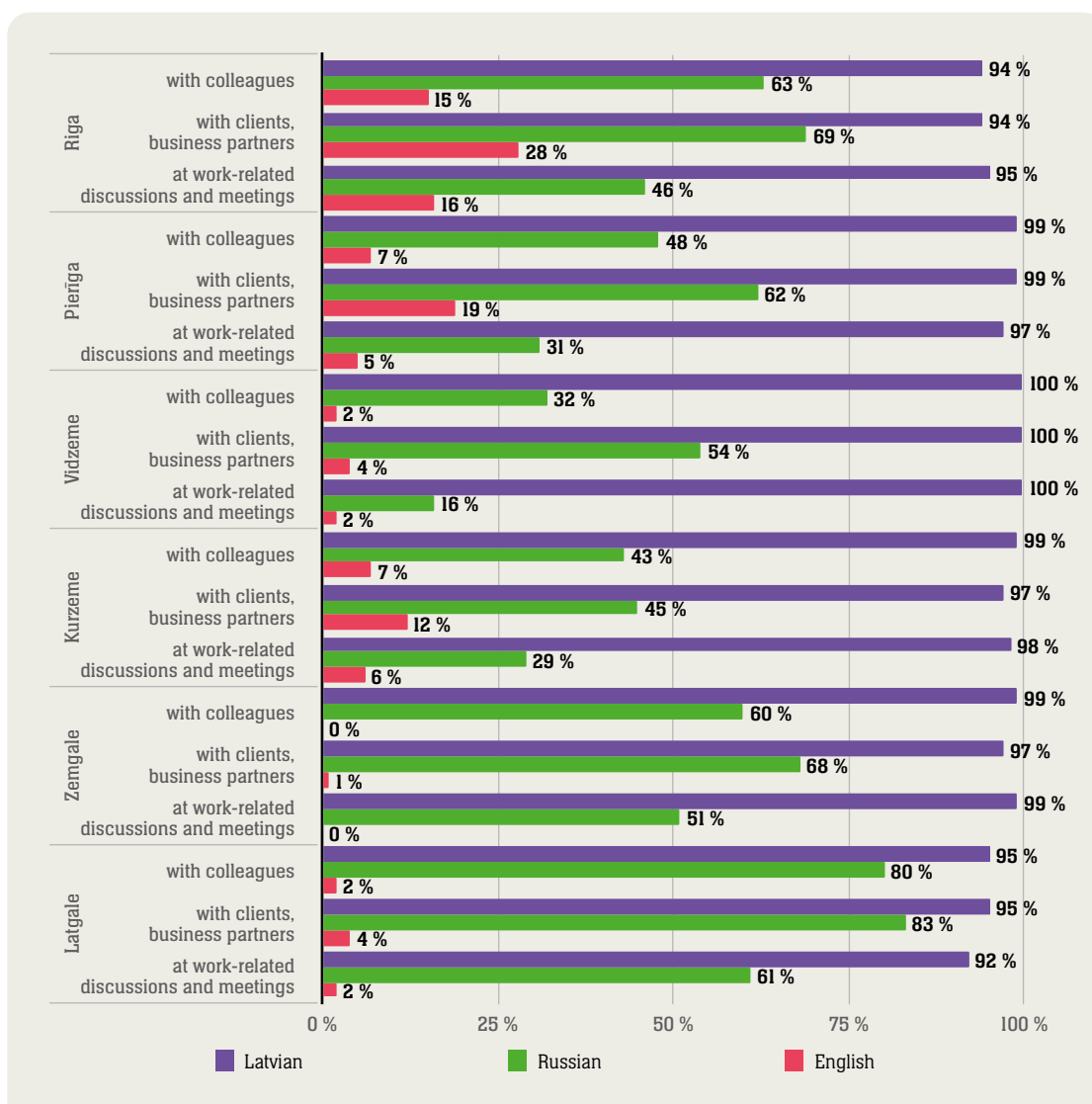


Fig. 41. Use of Latvian, Russian, and English in work-related communication in different regions of Latvia and in Riga.
Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Although employees in all Latvia use Latvian for communication at work, the extent of its use varies: in Vidzeme, Pierīga Region, Kurzeme and Zemgale, about four in five employees communicate only or mostly in Latvian at work, while in Latgale and Riga this is only a little more than half (Fig. 42). Approximately one in four employees in Latgale and one in five employees in Riga communicate at work only or mostly in another language. In addition, as indicated above, there are more employees in Riga and Latgale than elsewhere in Latvia who communicate at work both in Latvian and in another language(s), e.g. 64% of employees in Riga interact with colleagues in several languages, and the number is even higher in Latgale, at 75%.

Those who speak Latvian in the family use Latvian in work-related communication in all regions of Latvia (97–100% depending on the communication situation); 82–97% of employees communicate only or mostly in Latvian during work-related discussions and meetings (indicators differ by region), as well as with colleagues (81–95%) and when communicating with clients and business partners (71–93%). Those who speak Latvian

in the family, very rarely in Riga, but especially in Latgale, communicate with colleagues only or mostly in another language. In Riga and Latgale, communication with clients and business partners also takes place a little more often only or mostly in another language. Communication during work-related discussion and meetings only or mostly in another language is rare, and occurs most often in Riga.

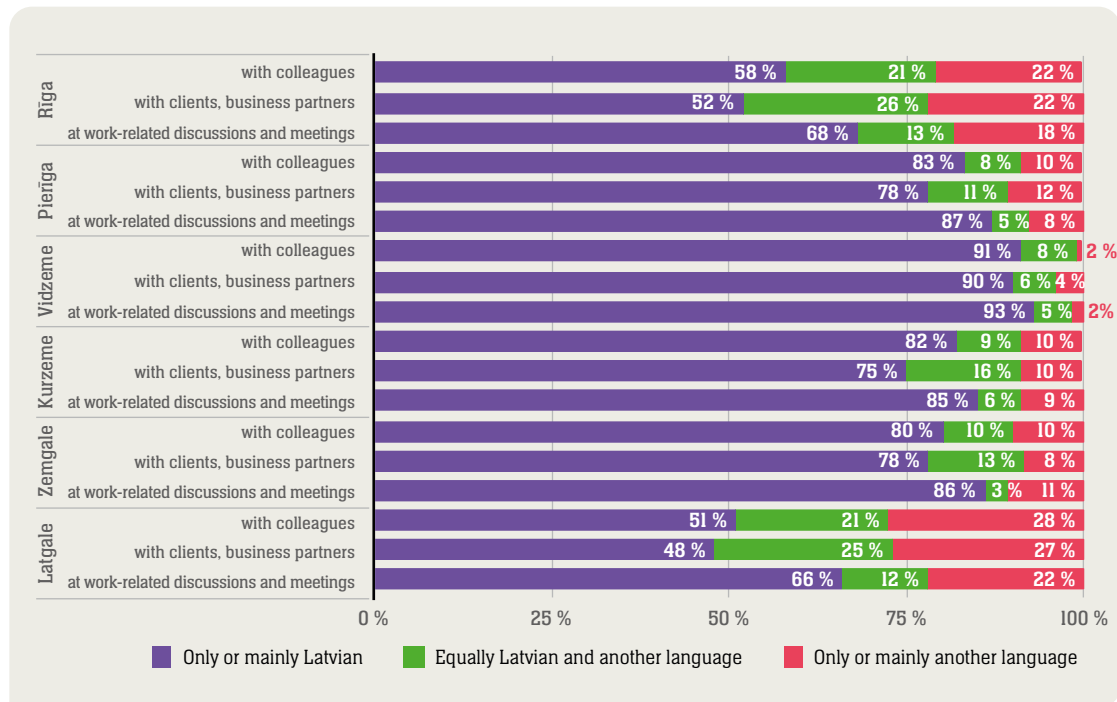


Fig. 42. Frequency of the use of Latvian and other languages for communication at work in different regions of Latvia and in Riga.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The analysis of the data indicates that those who speak Russian in the family communicate in Latvian at work in different parts of Latvia (85–100% depending on the communication situation); the majority of the employees in this group of respondents who do not use Latvian at work are in Riga, Latgale and Kurzeme (approximately 10% of Russian speakers). Although most of those who communicate in Russian in the family use Latvian at work, the frequency of use varies from region to region. As mentioned before, Latvian is used more frequently in more formal communication situations, i.e. during work-related discussions and meetings. In Vidzeme, almost every person who communicates in Russian in the family communicates only or mostly in Latvian during work-related discussions and meetings, less than a half of them in Latgale and Kurzeme, and about a half in Riga and Zemgale.

Those who communicate in Russian in the family use only or mostly Latvian when communicating with colleagues, clients and business partners less often everywhere in Latvia. It should be noted that in Latgale only 17% of employees who use Russian in the family use only or mostly Latvian when communicating with colleagues and 21% of them use only or mostly Latvian when communicating with clients and business partners; in Riga 32% of employees who use Russian in the family use only or mostly Latvian in both communication situations.

The highest percentage of respondents whose native language is Russian and communicate with colleagues, clients and business partners only or mostly in Latvian is in Vidzeme.

Depending on the region, a third to a half of the respondents who speak Russian in the family use only or mostly another language to communicate at work with colleagues, clients and business partners; most often this is noticeable in Latgale (more than half of all employees communicate with colleagues only or mostly in another language, mostly in Russian). In the rest of Latvia this is about a third, except for Vidzeme, where almost no one communicates with colleagues only or mostly in another language. In Latgale, those who speak Latvian in the family communicate in Latvian with colleagues less often, and more often in another language; this tendency is much more pronounced here than in other parts of Latvia. This shows that in Latgale, those who communicate in Latvian in the family adapt to the Russian-speaking environment.

The aforementioned analysis of the survey data indicates that in the work environment in Latvia communication takes place mostly in Latvian, but a proportion of employees communicate only or mostly in another language (mainly Russian).

The data allow further description of this group (i.e. employees who communicate only or mostly in another language at work, mainly in Russian):

- 13% of employees communicate only or mostly in another language during discussions and meetings, i.e. they work in companies or institutions in which the working language is only or mostly a language other than Latvian;
- 11% of the employees communicate only or mostly in Russian during discussions and consultations, and 3% in English;
- those who use Russian in work-related discussions also communicate in Russian with colleagues (87%), as well as with clients and business partners (75%), i.e. they work in a Russian-speaking environment;
- half of those who communicate only or mostly in Russian during work-related discussions and meetings live in Riga (49%) and almost a quarter in Latgale (23%);
- they mostly speak Russian in their families (87%), are Russians by nationality (67%) or are representatives of other nationalities (23%), and only in very rare cases are Latvians;
- 60% of them have citizenship of the Republic of Latvia (40% do not);
- half of them do not understand Latvian or know it poorly or very poorly (49%), they also do not understand English very well or know it very poorly or poorly (68%);
- 60% are currently not improving their Latvian language skills, and 52% of them do not plan to improve them in the near future, and without knowing Latvian and English they have less opportunities in the Latvian labour market than those who know these languages (i.e. than the majority of the employees);
- almost half of those who communicate only or mostly in Russian during discussions and meetings have special secondary or vocational education (46%), 28% have higher education;
- 81% work in the private sector as blue-collar workers (45%) or specialists (37%);
- almost half (47%) have a high income; whereas a quarter (25%) have a low income.

The majority of respondents who communicate only or mostly in English during work-related discussions and meetings live in Riga (56%) and Pieriga Region (21%); they are young people aged 18–34 (61%) and 35–44 (23%), Latvians (66%) rather than Russians (28%) by nationality; they communicate in Latvian in the family (66%) rather than in Russian (34%), and are citizens (94%). They work in the private sector (82%), almost half of them (45%) have higher education, work as specialists (49%), and the majority have high incomes (72%). Those who communicate in meetings only or mostly in English, also communicate only or mostly in English with clients and business partners, and, to a lesser extent, with colleagues (67%).

The economic value of languages can be marked by the correlation of data between income and language skills and use. According to the data of the 2019 LVA Survey, monthly income does not differ significantly between those whose native language is Latvian and those whose native language is Russian. There are slightly more native Latvian-speaking respondents with a high income than native Russian-speaking respondents. There are also slightly more native Russian speaking respondents who have a low income compared to native Latvian speakers. The differences, however, are not significant and the correlation between a native language and income is not relevant.

The survey data show that the basic Latvian language skill level for those whose native language is not Latvian does not increase income. On the other hand, among native Russian-speaking workers who know Latvian very well or well or speak it as their native language, there are significantly more high-income respondents compared to native Russian speakers who do not speak Latvian or speak it at a low or intermediate level. Accordingly, those who speak Latvian have a higher income to those who do not speak Latvian as well. It must be admitted that the correlation of the level of Latvian language proficiency with income is weak, and it cannot be claimed that the better the Latvian language proficiency, the higher the income. Only those who know Latvian well and very well have a higher income.

The data also show that Russian language skills are not related to income level, i.e. those who speak Russian (well) do not have higher incomes than those who do not speak Russian or speak it poorly. However, the level of income of the employed is mostly influenced by English language skills. All those who have basic English language skills, regardless of whether their native language is Latvian or Russian, have a higher income than those who do not speak English at all. A more detailed analysis of the results reveals that income differs significantly for those whose native language is Latvian and who speak English very well or well (62% of this group of respondents have a high income) compared to those whose native language is Latvian, but who do not speak English or speak it at a low or intermediate level (only 36% have a high income). Even those whose native language is Russian and who speak English very well or well have a higher income than those whose native language is Russian but who do not speak English or speak it at a low or intermediate level. The correlation coefficient between English language proficiency and income is moderately significant both in the group of Latvian native speakers ($r = 0.352$) and for those whose native language is different from Latvian ($r = 0.307$), i.e. the better the English language proficiency, the higher the income.

The survey data do not show a significant correlation between income and the frequency of the use of the Latvian language in communication with colleagues, clients and business partners, as well as during work-related discussions and meetings. On the other hand, there is a moderately significant positive correlation between income and the use of English at work, both in communication with colleagues ($r = 0.335$), clients and business partners ($r = 0.343$), and during work-related discussions and meetings ($r = 0.319$). Thus, employees who use English at work tend to have higher incomes, and are more likely to be the ones who communicate with clients and business partners in English. The data also show a small negative correlation between income and the use of Russian at work in all of the following communication situations: employees who use Russian at work in communication with colleagues ($r = -0.282$), clients and business partners ($r = -0.215$), as well as during work-related discussions and meetings ($r = -0.283$) tend to have lower incomes, but less often this also applies to those who use Russian to communicate with clients and business partners.

There are also significant differences in the use of English/Russian at work and in the correlation of income between employees whose native language is Latvian and those whose native language is not Latvian. This correlation is more pronounced in the group of respondents whose native language is Latvian – in this respect the correlations between the use of English at work and income are moderately significant in all communication situations, while for non-native Latvian employees these correlations are insignificant: with colleagues ($r = 0.453$ – Latvian as a native language, $r = 0.173$ – native language other than Latvian), clients and business partners ($r = 0.413$ – Latvian as a native language, $r = 0.211$ – native language other than Latvian), as well as during work-related discussions and meetings ($r = 0.468$ – Latvian as a native language, $r = 0.119$ – native language other than Latvian). Thus, in the group of Latvian native speakers the use of English at work increases income to a larger extent than in the group of other respondents.

What is more, in terms of the use of Russian, the correlations are more significant in the group of employees whose native language is Latvian, i.e. their income and the use of Russian at work are more related: in communication with colleagues ($r = -0.358$ – Latvian as a native language, $r = -0.142$ – native language other than Latvian), with clients and partners ($r = -0.262$ – Latvian as a native language, $r = -0.112$ – native language other than Latvian), during discussions and meetings ($r = -0.365$ – Latvian as a native language, $r = -0.142$ – native language other than Latvian). In other words, in the group of native Latvian speakers, income is lower among those who use Russian at work compared to the other group of the respondents.

Those with low incomes use Russian more than others to communicate at work; those who have high incomes use English more than others to communicate at work (Fig. 43). Higher incomes are shown in the group of 62% of the employed who also use English at work during discussions and meetings, 60% of the employed who also communicate in English with colleagues, and 58% of the employed who also communicate in English with clients and business partners. As mentioned above, those who also communicate in English at work live mainly in Riga and in the Pierīga Region. Those with low incomes most often use Russian for communication with colleagues and during work-related discussions

and meetings. Those who have high incomes, in these communication situations, but especially in communication with clients and business, use Russian less often and use English more frequently.

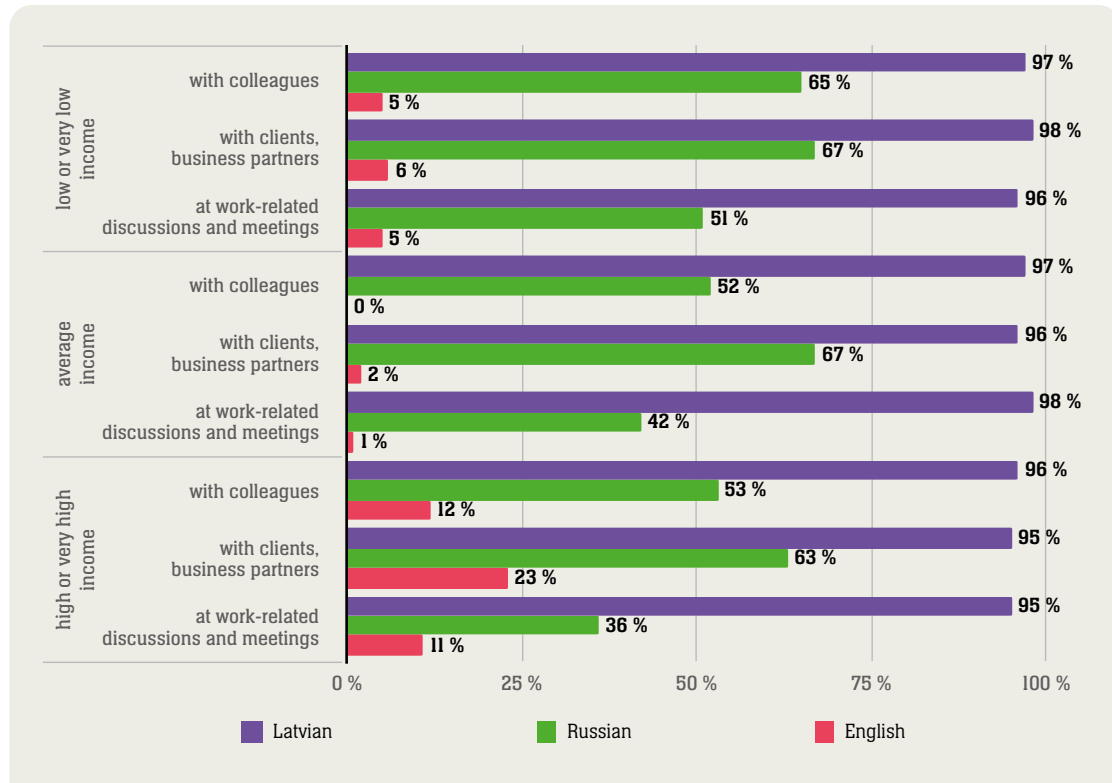


Fig. 43. Use of Latvian, Russian, and English in work-related communication and the relationship between language use and income.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

It must be admitted, however, that language skills are certainly not among the various skills of an individual that would generally affect the position of respondents in the labour market. 75% of respondents have not felt that their language skills (including insufficient or non-existent skills) have affected their situation in the labour market in the last five years, 13% of respondents have experienced a positive effect of language skills on their situation in the labour market, and only 6% of the respondents have experienced a negative effect.

The comparison of the indicators in the main groups of the respondents is as follows: 15% of employees whose native language is Latvian and 11% of employees whose native language is another language have felt that their language skills have had a positive effect on the situation in the labour market. On the other hand, 9% of employees whose native language is not Latvian and 5% of those whose native language is Latvian have experienced more negative effects. Respondents whose native language is not Latvian and who have felt the negative impact of (insufficient, non-existent) language skills on their situation in the labour market do not speak Latvian (10%) or English (53%), or they speak them poorly or very poorly (45% and 30% respectively). In comparison, one third of respondents whose native language is Latvian and who have felt the negative impact of

(insufficient, non-existent) language skills on their situation in the labour market, do not speak English and/or Russian, or speak them poorly or very poorly.

The respondents who have felt that their language skills have been positively perceived in the labour market are more likely to be people with higher education (25% of the people with higher education stated they have felt positive effects of language skills on their situation in the labour market); people with high incomes (25% of this group of respondents); people who work as specialists, civil servants (26%), managers (21%) and entrepreneurs (20%); people aged 18–54 (approximately 18% of the respondents in this age group); and especially residents of Riga and Latgale (19%).

Latvian, English and Russian language skills are most often mentioned as a factor that has positively influenced the situation of respondents in the labour market in the last five years: 61% of the respondents who felt that their language skills have had a positive effect on their situation in the labour market indicated that it was their Latvian language skills; 57% of the respondents ascribed it to English language skills and 45% of the respondents to Russian language skills. 7% of respondents indicated other language skills. There are significant differences between respondents with different native languages. Those who speak Latvian in the family most often indicate that their English language skills have had a positive effect on their situation in the labour market (66%, Fig. 44). On the other hand, those who speak Russian in the family most often mention that their Latvian language skills have had a positive effect on their situation in the labour market (87%).

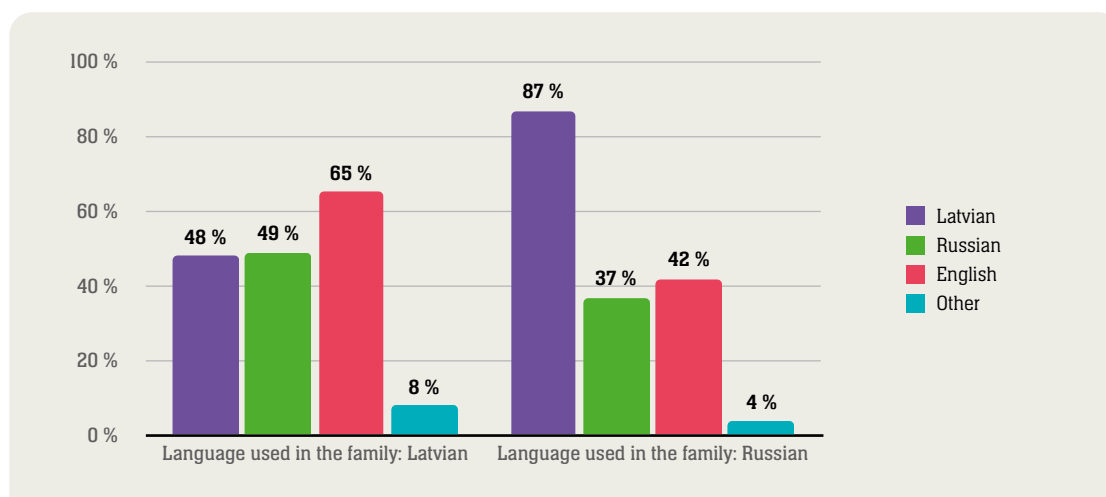


Fig. 44. The impact of language skills on the situation of employees in the labour market in groups of the respondents defined by the language used in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The respondents in the 18–34 age group and 35–44 age group most often indicate that their English language skills have improved their situation in the labour market (69% and 65% respectively, Fig. 45). This proves that an advantage of younger people in the labour market is their good English language skills. Respondents aged 18–34 also more often than respondents in other age groups indicated that their Russian language skills have had a positive effect on their situation in the labour market. Since good Russian

language skills are less common among young people than in the other age groups, the results are understandable. They also less often than others emphasize the importance of their Latvian language skills, as good Latvian language skills are more common among young people.

Latvian language skills as a positive impact factor are especially emphasized in Latgale (in total, 83% of those residents of Latgale who have felt that language skills have improved their situation in the labour market admit that it was thanks to Latvian language skills, Fig. 46). In addition, in Latgale this was indicated both by those who communicate in the family in Russian and by those who communicate in the family in Latvian. Elsewhere in Latvia, respondents whose language used at home is Latvian do not emphasize Latvian language skills as much. The influence of English language skills was more appreciated by the residents of Kurzeme and Riga (especially those who communicate in Latvian in the family); on the other hand, the evaluation of Russian language skills in Latvia is approximately the same; it is less emphasized by the residents of Latgale, where the Russian language is used more often than elsewhere in all communication situations.

Employees of the public sector most often admit that their Latvian language skills have improved their situation in the labour market (73%); this is followed by English (51%) and, to a much lesser extent (29%), Russian language skills being a factor that positively influenced their position in the labour market (Fig. 47). In the private sector, the distribution of the importance of language skills is more even: the positive effects of English language skills (60%) are most pronounced, followed by Latvian (57%) and Russian (53%). Latvian language skills are more important in the public sector, whereas Russian is more important in the private sector than in the public sector.

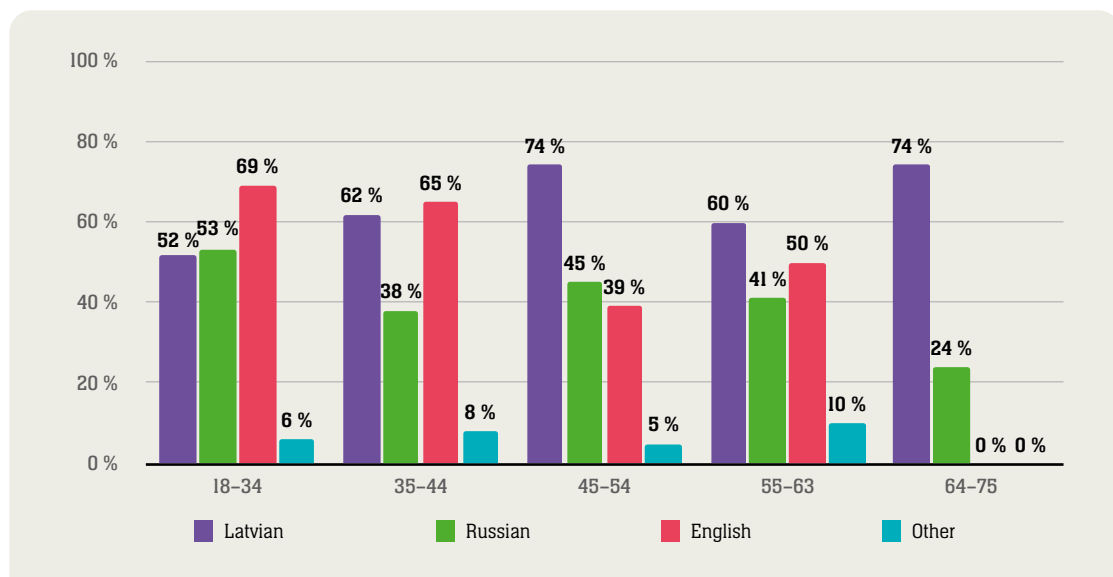


Fig. 45. The impact of language skills on the situation of employees in the labour market in different age groups.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

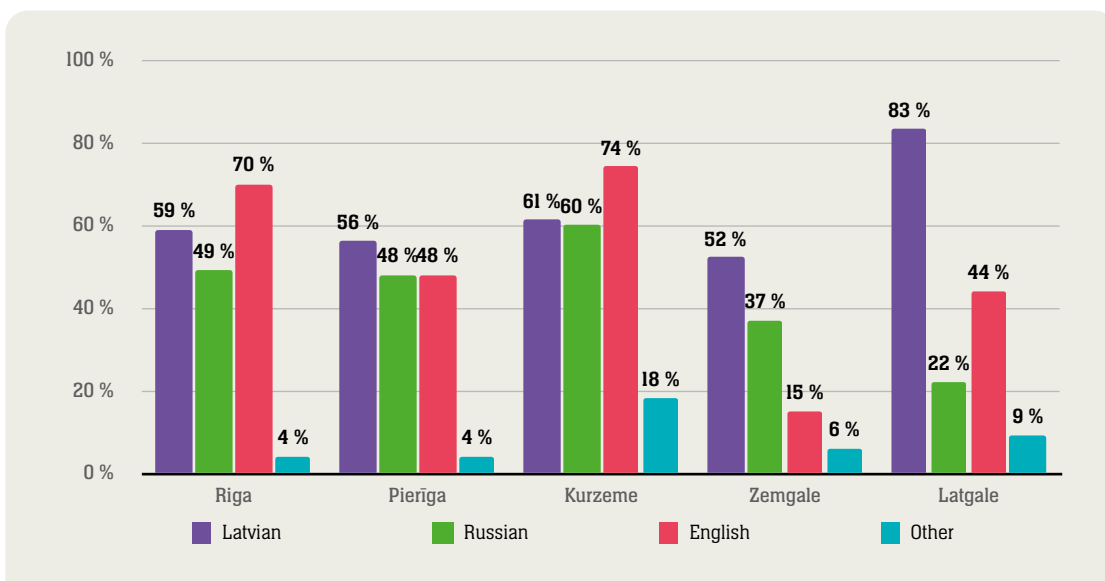


Fig. 46. The impact of language skills on the situation of respondents in the labour market across Latvian regions³
 Source: 2019 LVA Survey

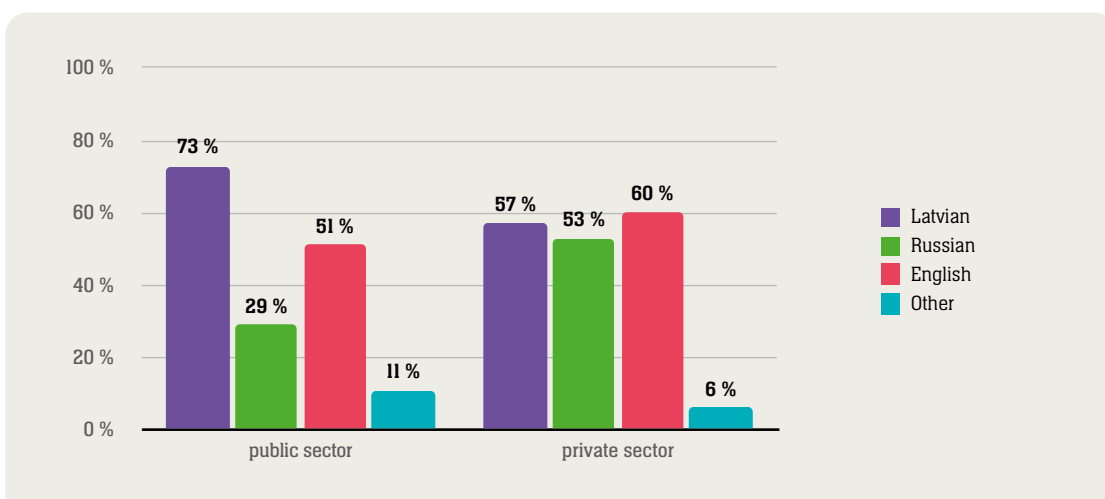


Fig. 47. The impact of language skills on the situation of respondents in the labour market in the public and private employment sectors.
 Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Respondents who have felt that their language skills (or, rather, insufficient language skills) have had a negative impact on their situation in the labour market are more likely to be aged 18–54 (6–8% of this age group), have completed primary education (10%); are of Russian (9%) or of another nationality (7%), but not Latvians; are stay-at-home parents, unemployed (10% in the group of Russians and other nationalities), but there are also entrepreneurs and specialists, civil servants (9%); they are more likely to be people living in Rīga or the Pierīga Region (8%). Respondents who have felt the negative impact of insufficient or non-existent language skills on their situation in the labour market most

³ Vidzeme is not included – due to the language situation in the region, the number of answers to this question was insufficient.

often indicate Latvian language skills (52%). 32% of these respondents admitted the negative impact of insufficient or non-existent English language skills, and 30% mentioned a lack of Russian language skills.

Those who mainly speak Latvian in the family most often indicate insufficient Russian language skills (59%), but insufficient English language skills have also had a negative effect on their situation (55%, Fig. 48). On the other hand, those who speak Russian in the family most often mentioned insufficient Latvian language skills as a factor that had a negative impact on their situation in the labour market (90%).

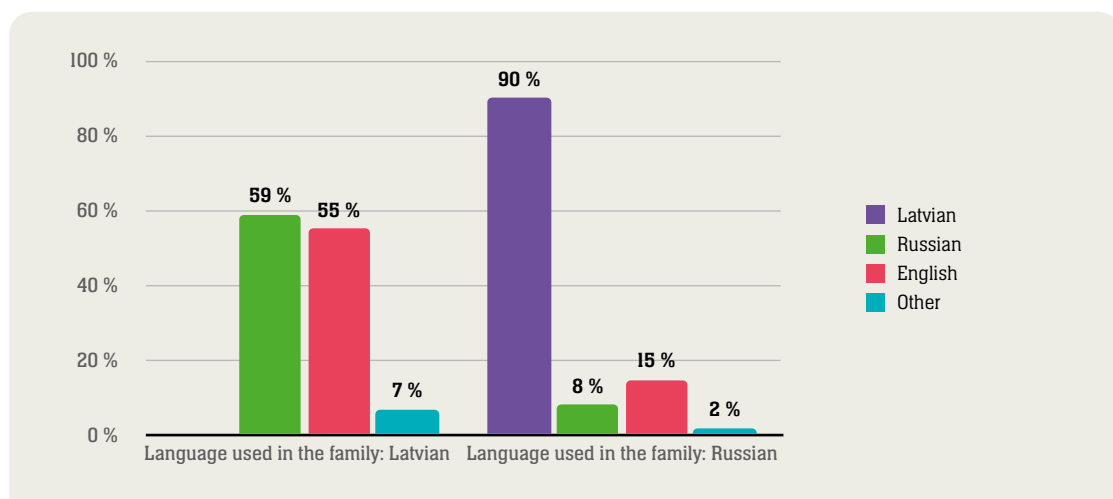


Fig. 48. The impact of insufficient language skills on the situation in the labour market in groups defined by language used in family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Respondents aged 18–34 most often admit that their situation in the labour market is negatively affected by insufficient Russian language skills (55%, Fig. 49). Young people have the lowest proficiency in Russian and think that better knowledge of Russian is necessary to improve their situation in the labour market. Thus, weaker Russian language skills among young people may not indicate a trend that the use of Russian at work in Latvia will decrease in the future. However, it may also signify that the lack of Russian language skills is felt because others know it, though in reality it is possible to do without Russian, as evidenced by the data on the increase in the use of the Latvian language in the work environment. It has thus led to a situation in which young people aged 18–34 are less likely than representatives of other age groups to mention the lack of Latvian language skills as a factor that has negatively affected their situation in the labour market.

There are also differences across regions – for example, in Latgale all respondents who admitted that insufficient language skills have negatively affected their situation in the labour market indicated a lack of, or insufficient, Latvian language skills (100%, Fig. 50), and all these respondents communicate mainly in Russian. The analysis of the data presented above shows that in Latgale, Latvian language skills are the weakest among employees in Latvia, but the results concerning the negative impact of the lack language proficiency confirm that Latvian language skills are still needed in the work environment in this region. In Kurzeme, insufficient English language skills as a negative impact factor are

mentioned more often than in other parts of Latvia. The fact that s lack of, or insufficient, English language skills have affected respondents' situations in the labour market is indicated in all regions of Latvia by those who communicate in Latvian in their families, rather than those who communicate in Russian in their families. Non-existent, insufficient Russian language skills have been mentioned as a similar factor by the residents of Riga and the Pierīga Region who communicate in Latvian in their families.

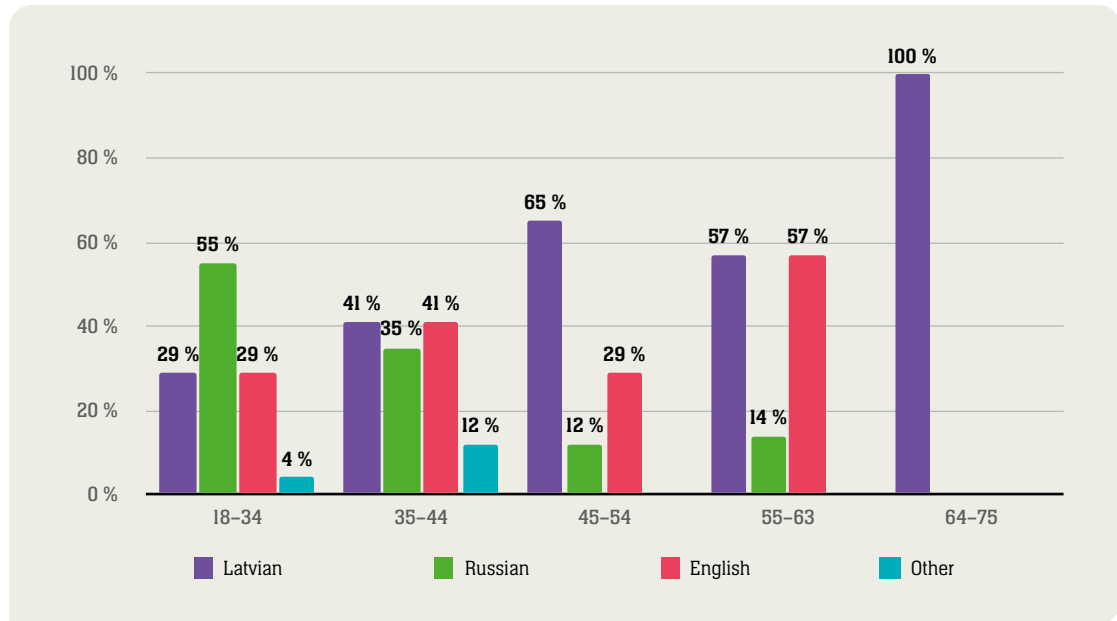


Fig. 49. The impact of insufficient language skills on the situation of respondents in the labour market across different age groups.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

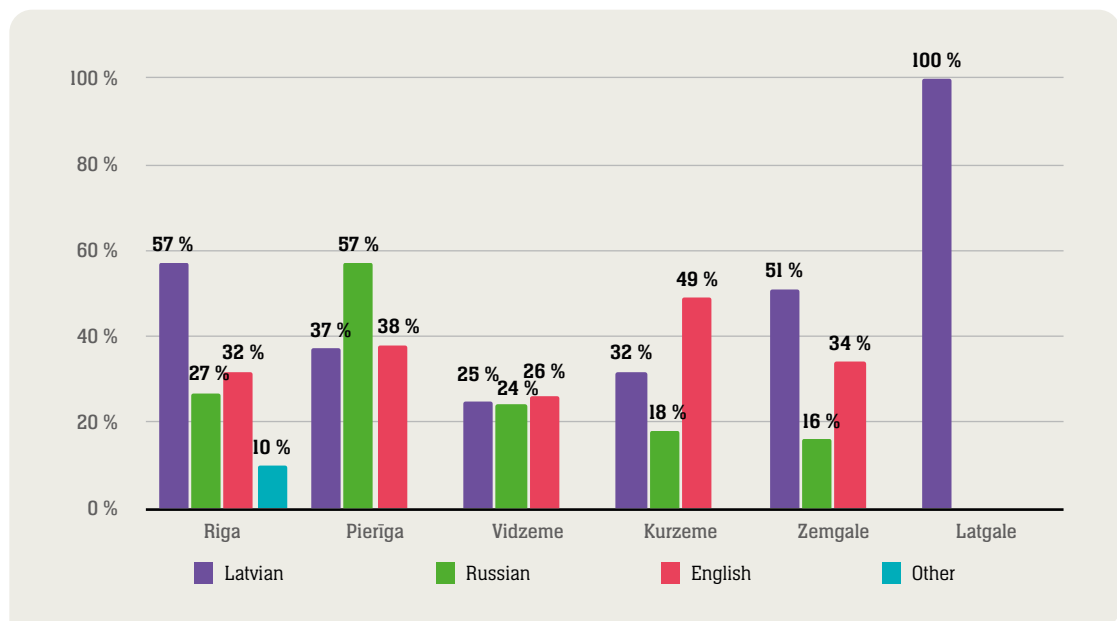


Fig. 50. The impact of insufficient language skills on the respondents' situations in the labour market across Latvian regions.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Public sector employees most often mention that their insufficient English language skills have negatively affected their situation in the labour market, whereas private sector employees emphasize the impact of insufficient Latvian language skills (Fig. 51).

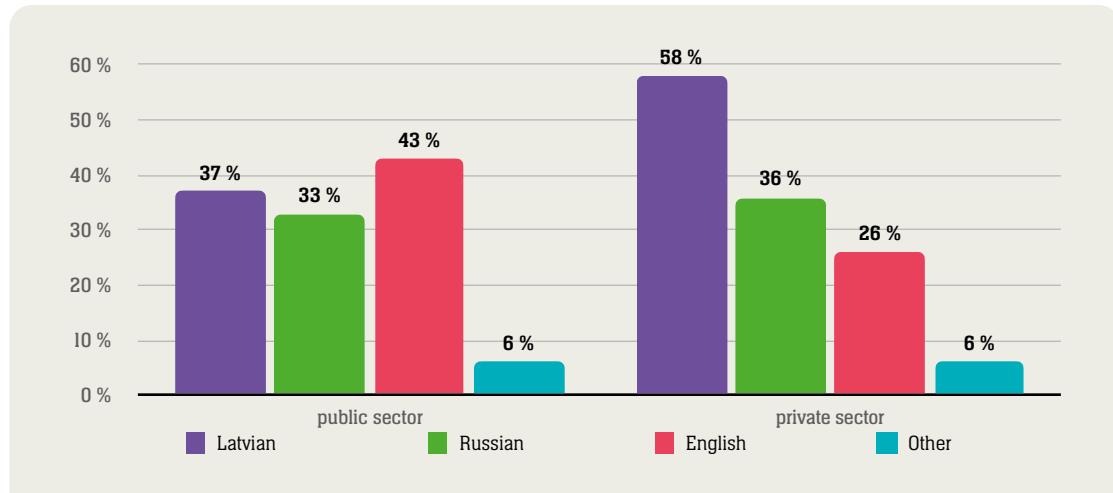


Fig. 51. The impact of insufficient language skills on respondents' situations in the labour market in the public and private employment sectors.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The survey also identified what language skills would be needed to improve a respondent's situation in the labour market. About a half of respondents (51%) think they need a better command of a language: a third (33%) say a better command of English would be necessary, a quarter (23%) indicate a better command of Latvian, one fifth (19%) indicate better Russian language skills (respondents had the opportunity to name several languages in the survey). Knowledge of other languages is mentioned very rarely (5% of the responses). 43% of respondents admit, however, that they do not need better language skills for the purposes of the labour market. The older the respondents, the more common the perception that they do not need better language skills (Fig. 52); the younger the respondents, the more often they mention different languages that would be useful in the labour market. The respondents in the 18–34 age group are more likely than other age groups to believe they need a better command of English, Russian or another language. In almost all the age groups, the respondents most often indicate the need for better English language skills, followed by Latvian and Russian. The need for knowledge of another language is most often mentioned in the 18–34 age group.

The language skills needed for the improvement of a respondent's situation in the labour market vary according to a respondent's education level. While better Latvian and Russian language skills are needed in all the groups approximately equally, better English language skills, as well as better other language skills, seem more relevant to the respondents with higher education (Fig. 53). Similarly, more than half of the respondents with a basic education (54%) believe that they do not need better language skills to improve their situation in the labour market, as compared to only a third of respondents with a higher education (32%). The reasons for these answers are likely to be quite different in the groups of respondents indicated.

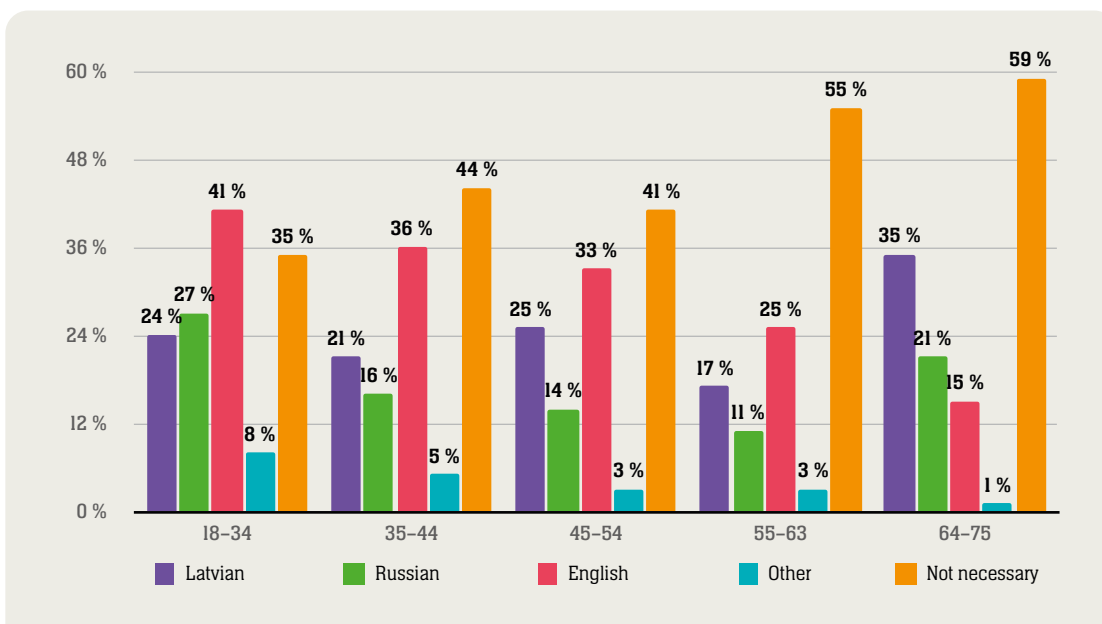


Fig. 52. Language skills necessary for respondents to improve their situation in the labour market across different age groups.
 Source: 2019 LVA Survey

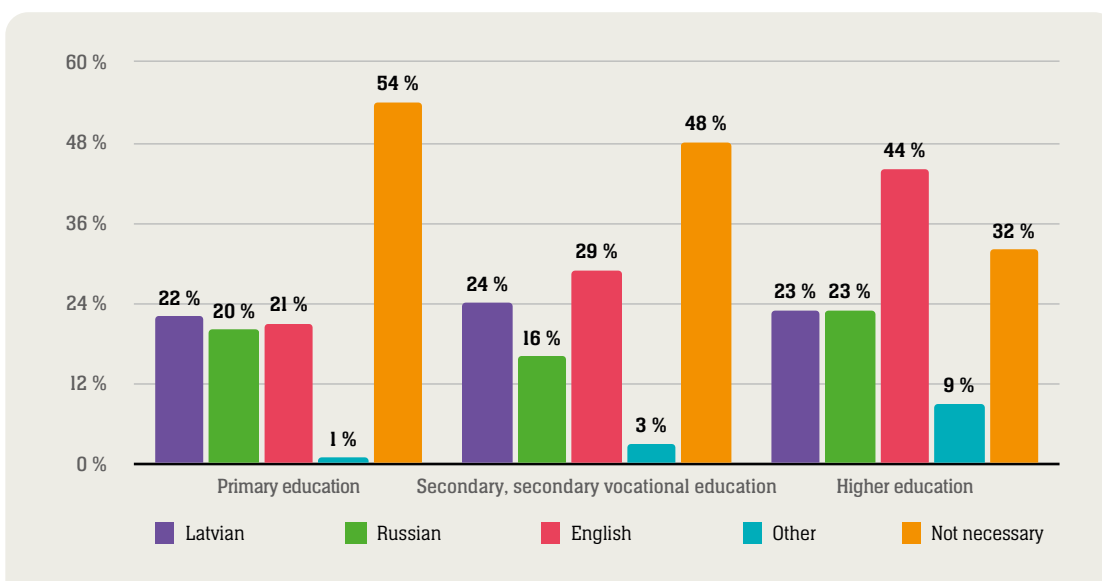


Fig. 53. Languages whose better skills are needed to improve a respondent's situation in the labour market. (by level of education).
 Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Respondents who speak mainly Latvian in their families, more often than those who use mainly Russian in their families, believe that they do not need better language skills for the purpose of the labour market (47% and 38%, respectively; Fig. 54). If any language is specified, the respondents most often indicate the need for better proficiency in English (35%), while 22% of respondents who speak Latvian in the family mentioned that they should have better proficiency in Russian. In turn, 39% of respondents who speak Russian in the family indicate that they need better Latvian language skills, and 30% of them

indicate better English language skills. Those who speak mainly Latvian in the family more often emphasize the need for better English language skills than those who communicate mainly in Russian in the family (cf. 35 % and 30 %).

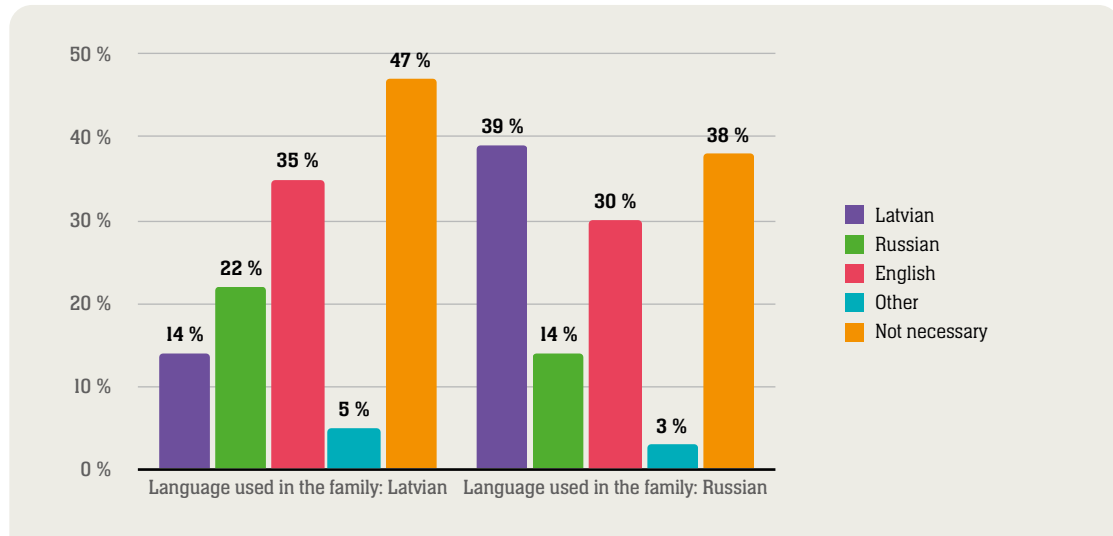


Fig. 54. Languages whose better skills are needed to improve a respondent's situation in the labour market. (in groups by family language).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Vidzeme has the highest number of people who believe that they do not need better language skills to improve their situation in the labour market (66%), whereas in Riga this number is the lowest (35%, Fig. 55). Respondents highly value the importance of better English language skills everywhere in Latvia (but less so in Vidzeme and Latgale). The need for better Latvian language skills is more emphasized in Latgale (33%), but it is also relevant for a quarter of the respondents in Kurzeme, Zemgale and Riga, and less so in the Pieriga Region and Vidzeme. The need for better Russian language skills is recognized almost equally everywhere, except in Latgale, where Russian language skills are already good among the population, and in Vidzeme, where the use of the Latvian language predominates.

The 2019 LVA Survey also revealed whether, and how, language skills have affected respondents' salaries. 26% of respondents acknowledge that language skills have had a positive effect on salary (14% – English language skills, 13% – Latvian language skills); in 12% of cases the impact was negative (6% of respondents had insufficient Latvian language skills, 5% had insufficient English language skills). Russian language skills are mentioned as a factor affecting the salary of employees in the Latvian labour market less often than Latvian and English language skills. Knowledge of other languages is mentioned very rarely. There are no significant differences in salary between different age groups or respondents grouped by employment in the private or public sector.

However, a difference in the answers appears in the groups of respondents defined by level of education (Fig. 56): respondents who have obtained higher education indicate more often than others that their language skills have had a positive effect on their salary, especially English language skills (23%). The respondents with primary education most often mentioned Latvian language skills (16%), and English is mentioned rarely.

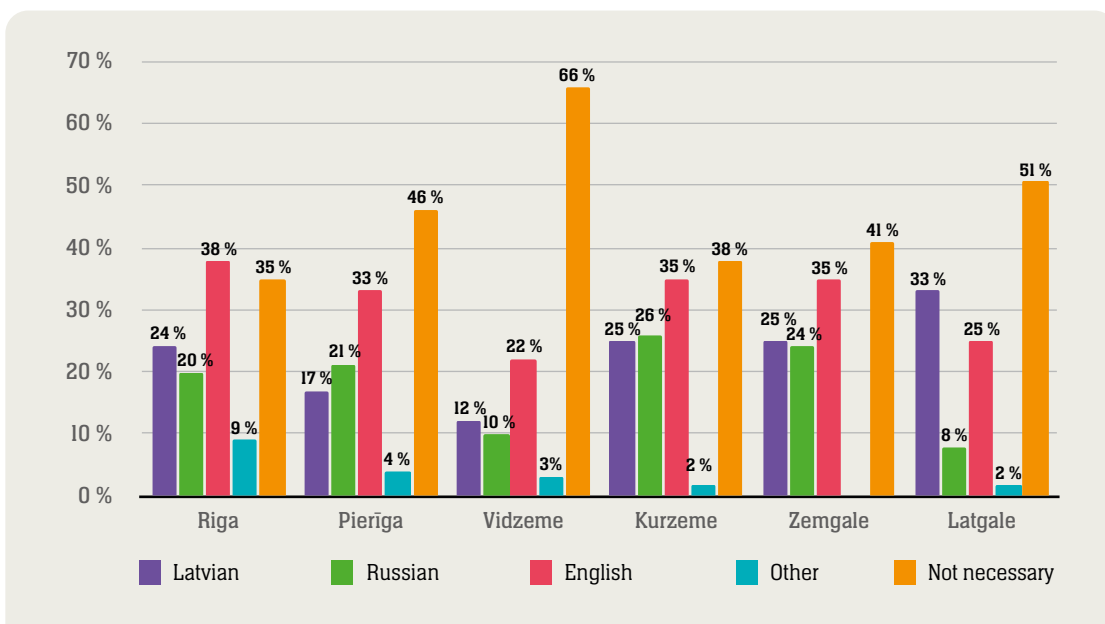


Fig. 55. Languages whose better skills are needed to improve a respondent's situation in the labour market.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

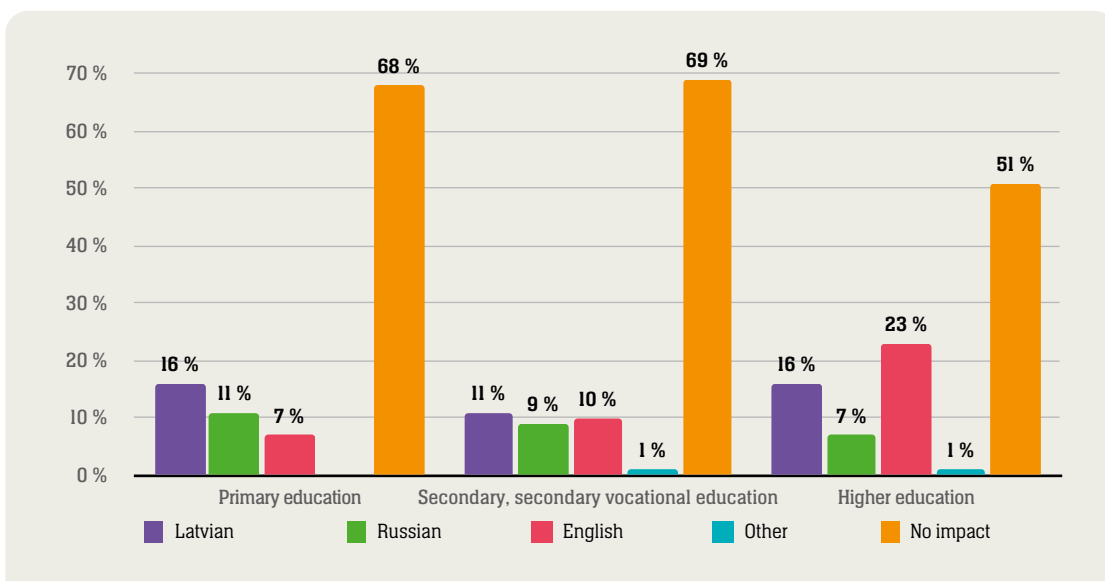


Fig. 56. Language skills and their positive impact on an employee's salary (by level of education).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

There are also differences in the answers to the question of whether insufficient or non-existent language skills have had a negative effect on salary: those with primary education more often than others believe that insufficient Latvian language skills have had a negative effect on their salary, whereas people with higher education more often than others believe that insufficient English language skills have adversely affected their salary.

The respondents who mainly speak Latvian in the family are much more likely than those who speak mainly Russian in their family to admit their language skills have not had a positive effect on their salary (70% and 51% respectively, Fig. 57). Those who speak

mainly Russian in the family mentioned that their salary was increased by their proficiency in Latvian (21%), English (18%) and other foreign languages (17%). Those who speak mainly Latvian in the family most often mentioned English among the group of languages with a positive impact (11%).

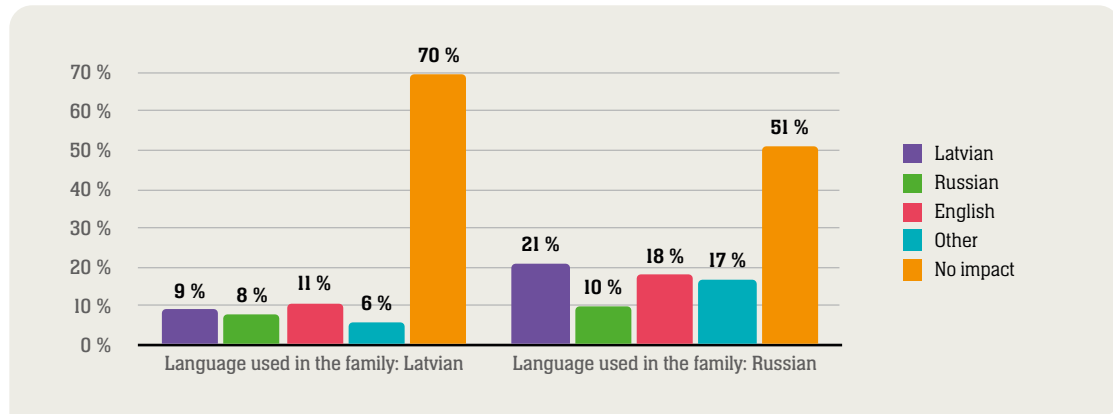


Fig. 57. Language skills and their positive impact on an employee's salary (in groups of respondents by the language used in the family).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

It should also be noted here that only 8% of respondents who speak Latvian in the family mentioned that their language skills have had a negative effect on their salary. On the other hand, one in five (20%) of respondents who speak Russian in the family gave this answer, and for 15% of respondents insufficient or non-existent Latvian language skills have had a direct negative effect on their salary. Those who communicate in Russian in the family also more often stated that their lack of English language skills has had a negative effect on their salary.

The monolingual work environment in Latvia is in Vidzeme, therefore in this region there is the highest number of people whose language skills have not affected their salary either positively or negatively (Fig. 58). The residents of Riga most often mention English language skills as a factor that may have increased their salary (21%), because in Riga English is more often used in the work environment than in other regions. In Latgale, in this respect Latvian language skills are mentioned most often (21%) because the lack of good Latvian language skills in Latgale is the most pronounced across Latvia in the work environment. Similarly, the residents of Latgale more often than the respondents of the other regions feel that a lack of, or insufficient knowledge of, the Latvian language has negatively affected their salary (9%).

In general, the respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family most often indicate English and Latvian language skills as a factor that has a positive effect their level of salary: English is especially relevant for respondents living in Riga who communicate in Latvian (18%), whereas Latvian is relevant for respondents living in Latgale who communicate in Latvian in the family (14%). This again shows that in the work environment of Latgale good Latvian language skills are highly valued. Among those who communicate in Russian in their families, most respondents mention Latvian language skills as a factor that has had a positive effect or a negative effect on salary in the case of insufficient or non-existent language skill (mostly in Kurzeme and Latgale).

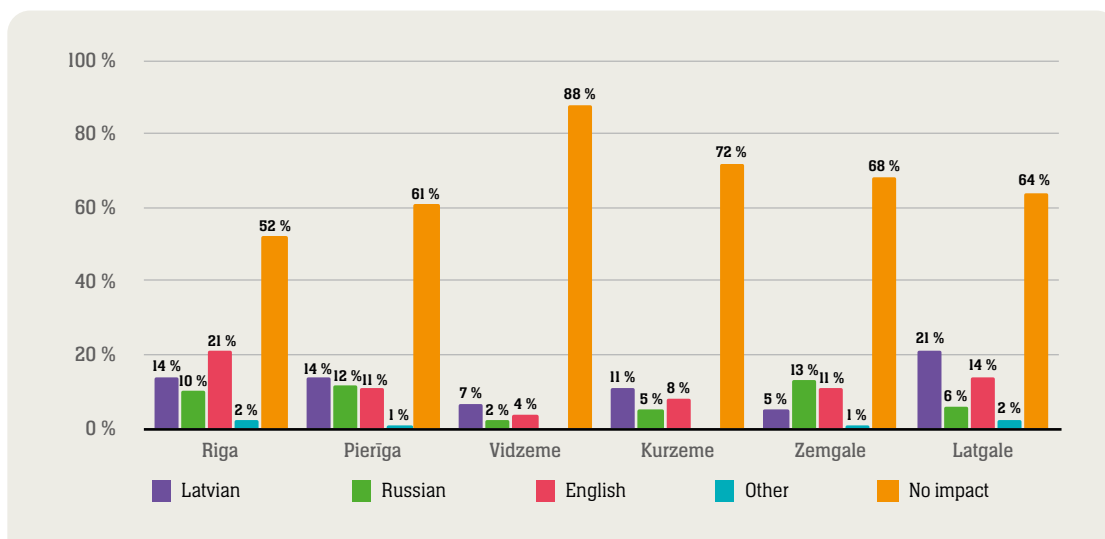


Fig. 58. Language skills and their positive impact on an employee's salary (across Latvian regions).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The importance of the use of the Latvian language at work is also evidenced by the data on the improvement of respondents' Latvian language skills in the work environment (see Chapter 3). To the question of where and/or how you have learnt Latvian, the most popular answer in the group of respondents whose native language is not Latvian is at school (56%), followed by at work (39%), by talking in daily situations (37%) and interacting with friends (36%). Almost half of employees (49%) answered that they have learnt Latvian at work. 43% of respondents who have learned Latvian at work did not mention that they had learned it also at school, and about a half of respondents who had learned Latvian at work indicated that they knew it very well or well. It must be concluded that the work environment can play a major role in improving the Latvian language skills of non-Latvians. The analysis of the data in the 18–34 age group shows that the role of the work team is slightly less important in the process of learning the Latvian language than in other age groups of employees: 78% of non-Latvian employees aged 18–34 have learnt Latvian at school, 43% by interacting with friends, 43% at work, 43% by speaking Latvian on the street, in a shop and in other everyday situations.

As already mentioned, the majority of respondents indicated that language skills do not play a significant role among the indicators of professional competence, however, the answers indicating that language skills have played a role in the labour market allow one to point out some current trends. Firstly, the most important language in the work environment is Latvian. Secondly, the use of Russian is declining (for a small part of the younger generation in particular, proficiency in Russian could improve their situation in the labour market, which probably reveals the stereotypical public opinion about the importance of languages that was outlined at the beginning of the chapter). Thirdly, the role of English in work-related communication will increase in the future, and for the time being its role is more valued by those who know English better, are younger, hold higher positions and have obtained higher education. However, it is the prestige and value of English in the labour market (among other domains) that may lead to a faster prevalence of English over Russian, which has so far been the second most important language for communication at work.

4.3. Linguistic attitude, beliefs about the importance of languages and their influence on the use of the Latvian language

The analysis of the use of languages in different areas of society's daily life, sociolinguistic functions and situations reveals which languages are used in society, as well as some changes in the language hierarchy and possibly changes in society's linguistic views and attitudes.

The Latvian language's status as official language was restored [Latvian SSR Language Law 1989; Law on Languages of the Republic of Latvia 1992] along with the restoration of independence (on 4 May 1990). This means that in addition to this symbolic value, the official language is mandatory in certain functions [Spolskis 2011, 175]. Nevertheless, historical and political events, various ethno-demographic considerations, globalization trends and migration processes in modern society affect people's linguistic attitudes and beliefs about languages.

Multilingualism in society requires a multilingual individual, but the essence of the status of an official language is related to the state, national identity, and in the case of Latvia also to internal security and stability, the opportunity for all citizens to participate in political and economic life, obtain all necessary information, equal education and employment opportunities, etc. [Baltiņš, Druviete 2017, 214]. Multilingualism, by its very nature, does not mean a threat to languages in a more or less secure status and situation, on the contrary, it should be used as a guarantee of the existence of any language.

The analysis of the LVA survey data shows that the indicators of state language proficiency continue to increase, which is also an important basis for the wider use of the language. However, the use of any language is also influenced by other components, such as views and beliefs about the role of language(s) in society and the linguistic attitude that underlies the linguistic behaviour of the individual and society, it is not only a choice of which word or pronunciation variant to use, but it also touches on a much broader aspect, namely language stability [Garrett 2010, 11]. The status of an official language should ensure the long-term vitality and development of the language, but it is not that simple: it is not in vain that the assessment of language stability includes many influencing factors that may change the status of one or another language [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 24].

The use of language in public sociolinguistic domains and communication situations is closely related to the implementation of the concept of "official language" or language, i.e. in these areas and functions the state determines and ensures the mandatory use of the official language, and the domains include public administration (municipalities, administration, security and other institutions, etc.), education, media and public communication [Spolskis 2011, 176]. Thus, the legal mechanisms of language policy (e.g. laws and other regulatory enactments on the use of the state language) can better strengthen the use of the official language in public sociolinguistic functions or spheres of public communication, emphasizing the instrumental role of language and the utilitarian benefits of the individual.

At present, the Latvian language is the most widely used language in society, all the respondents use the Latvian language most often especially in public communication in state and municipal institutions, educational institutions, health care institutions and at work (see the previous chapter). However, language functions fully if the second role of attitude and language learning motivation is realized, i.e. the integrative role, which includes the individual's belonging to the community, state and culture, and which is determined by many factors that form linguistic beliefs at the individual and societal level.

In the analysis of the language situation, taking into account the ethno-demographic indicators of the Latvian population, the group of respondents is divided into two main groups according to ethnicity or native language, which most often coincide with ethnicity, respectively, Latvians and other nationalities where the highest percentage is made up of Russians or the Russian-speaking community. When describing the survey data, of course, one must take into account the connection of each group with the official language and the different needs of each group at least in the language learning process. The survey data show that in general the percentage of Latvian speakers is increasing, but in a quantitative survey it will not be possible to determine exactly what quality and literary language standards (also European Language Proficiency Levels A1-C2 [Šalme, Auziņa 2016a; Šalme, Auziņa 20216b]) each individual's language skills meet. Nevertheless, the data obtained show linguistic relationships, interpersonal attitudes, language prestige – factors that affect or may affect the linguistic behaviour of speakers of the official language as a native/foreign or second language. What is more, the survey data once again prove the conclusion of many other studies conducted in the world: that the improvement of language skills leads to the formation of a positive linguistic attitude, increases the tendencies of language use and strengthens the integrative significance of the linguistic attitude [Khanna et al. 1998, 32; Lasagabaster, Huguët 2007].

Until now, the 2019 LVA Survey and other surveys aimed at identifying social cohesion have shown that the majority of Latvians feel that they belong to Latvia [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 115]. For some it may be belonging to one's own village, for others the sense of belonging may be triggered by sport achievements, etc. [Participation of national minorities 2017, 16–30]. The indicators of a sense of belonging to Latvia have been high for a long time, and it has become more pronounced among minorities in recent years: in 2013, 69% of minority respondents indicated that they feel strong belonging to Latvia (close, very close), and in 2017 the percentage rose to 83% [Minority participation 2017, 17].

In order to find out whether the language has any connection with the sense of belonging to the state, in the 2019 LVA Survey a question was asked as to whether, according to the respondents, proficiency in the Latvian language promotes a sense of belonging to the state (Fig. 59). These data indicate the need to ensure the proficiency and use of the state language and justifies Latvian society's belief in the importance of the symbolic role of language, thus confirming the theoretical principles of language policy on the role of individual and societal beliefs in language coexistence [Spolskis 2011, 21], and also explaining why language issues in Latvian society are so sensitive and topical [Druviete 2018b, 15].

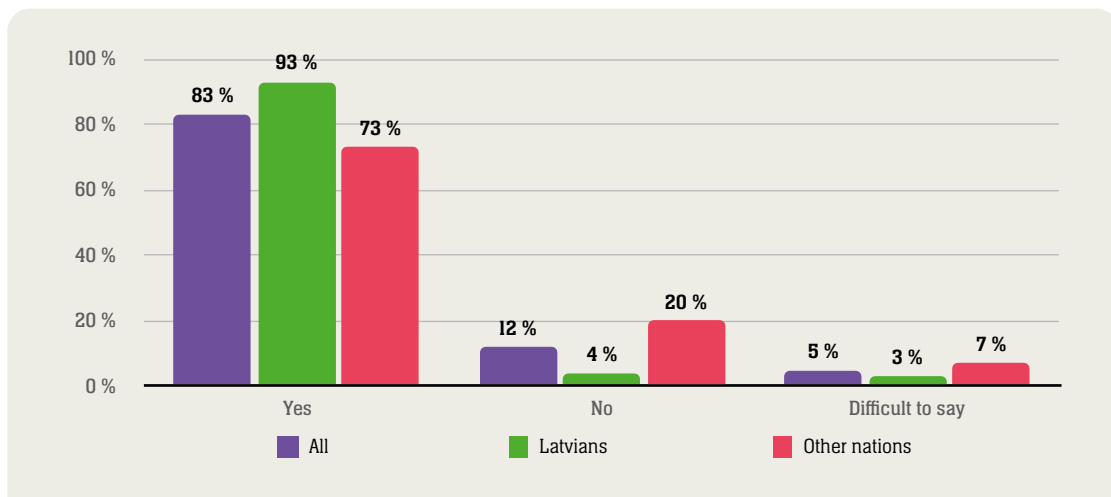


Fig. 59. Respondents' answer to the question "Do you think that proficiency in Latvian promotes a sense of belonging to the state" (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

In order to find out the role of language in an individual's identity, the respondents answered the question of whether they consider language to be one of the characteristics of nationality. The symbolic value of a language is an indicator of the vitality and persistence of a language, which in turn allows one to estimate the degree of endangerment to the language [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 22]. As shown in Fig. 60, language plays a key or important role in respondents' sense of belonging to a nationality. Previous public surveys have also identified various aspects of belonging (asking differently worded questions, which means they are therefore not directly comparable with the data in this survey), but family nationality, language, traditions, place of birth, etc. are the aspects mentioned in all such questions, e.g., in a survey conducted in 2009, when answering the question of which of the following determines nationality the most, the distribution of respondents' answers was as follows: 27.5% – parents' nationality, 20% – native language, 13.5% – place of birth, less than 10% also mentioned culture, traditions, mentality, place of permanent residence [Data Serviss 2009].

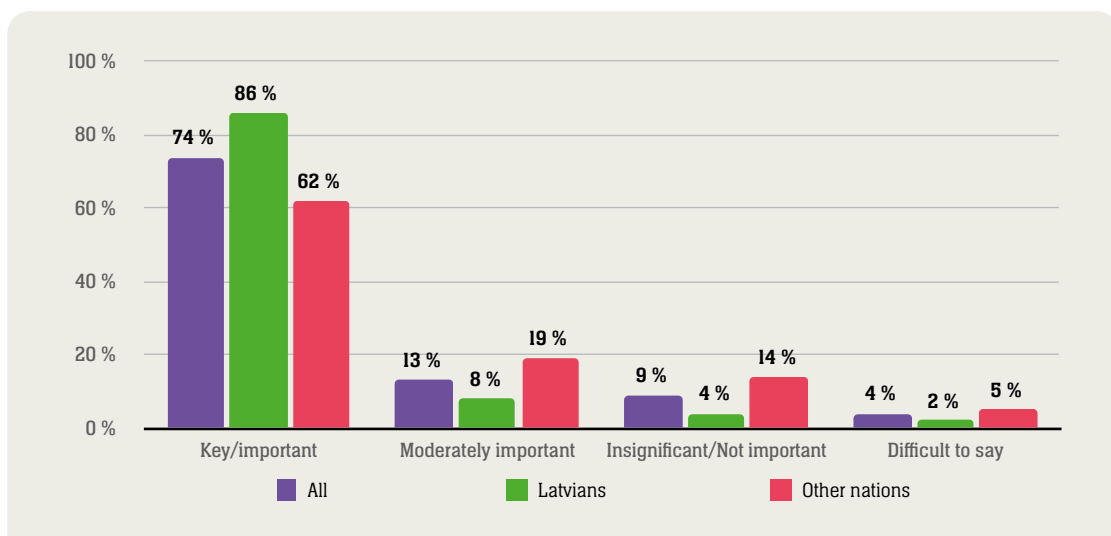


Fig. 60. Importance of native language for individual's nationality (%).

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

However, the public belief described above that the native language is a determining factor in considering oneself to belong to one nationality or another does not mean that it is the only and/or always the main element of an individual's identity and that it cannot change. Today, language policy (see, for example, Preece 2016) at the micro and macro level of language functioning concentrates more and more on the links between several languages and their coexistence within an individual's identity and in daily life in a multilingual society, thus revealing the distinction between different roles in society.

In a broader perspective, at level of language and national identity and the sense of belonging to the state of one's society, one must analyse the respondents' assessment of the need for language proficiency and other indicators related to the linguistic attitude.

Irrespective of ethnicity, society's beliefs on the need for state language proficiency for all citizens (similarly to the indicators of language proficiency and sense of belonging) have been high for many years: In the 2019 LVA Survey, 88% of respondents (by ethnicity – 96% of Latvians, 76% of representatives of other nationalities) agreed that everyone living permanently in Latvia should know the Latvian language; also in the 2004 LVA Survey, the majority of respondents (92%) indicated that all residents should know the Latvian language [Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010, 45]. However, although Latvian language skills in society have increased quantitatively over the past few decades, for example, from 23% of Latvian speakers among minorities in 1989 to about 90% today [Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010, 94], the increase in Latvian language use is slower, for example, when looking at the use of language in one of the areas – communication in the workplace: in 2004 about 22% of respondents whose native language is not Latvian spoke mainly or only in Latvian at work, in 2014 this figure was 27.5% [Language situation in Latvia 2004–2010, 97] and, according to the data of the 2019 Survey, approximately 35% of the respondents whose native language is not Latvian spoke mainly or only Latvian in this field [2019 LVA Survey]. However, the steadily growing trend proves the strengthening of the Latvian language use environment.

Respondents' answers to the clarifying open-ended question⁴, why they agree that all citizens should know the Latvian language, reveal society's awareness of the symbolic, instrumental and integrative significance of the official language. For the purpose of clarity, the answers provided by respondents were grouped into uniform sets of answers by their contents (Fig. 61, the number of answers exceeds 100%, as the respondents indicated several answers).

A small part of the respondents (13%) do not agree that all residents of the country should know Latvian. The reasons mentioned are: the right of people to choose which language to speak (a quarter of that 13% of respondents), it is not necessary and it is possible to do without Latvian language skills (one fifth of this group), older people may not know (one tenth of the 13%), other reasons were not numerous. The argument that the residents of the country must speak Latvian was contested by respondents who are not Latvians by nationality, are non-citizens, live in Riga or Latgale, work in the private sector or do not work, but in general the percentage of these respondents is small.

⁴ When answering the open-ended question, the respondents express their thoughts, i.e. no answer options are offered.

Consequently, the wording of the answers may vary different, but they are grouped by content for the purposes of the analysis.

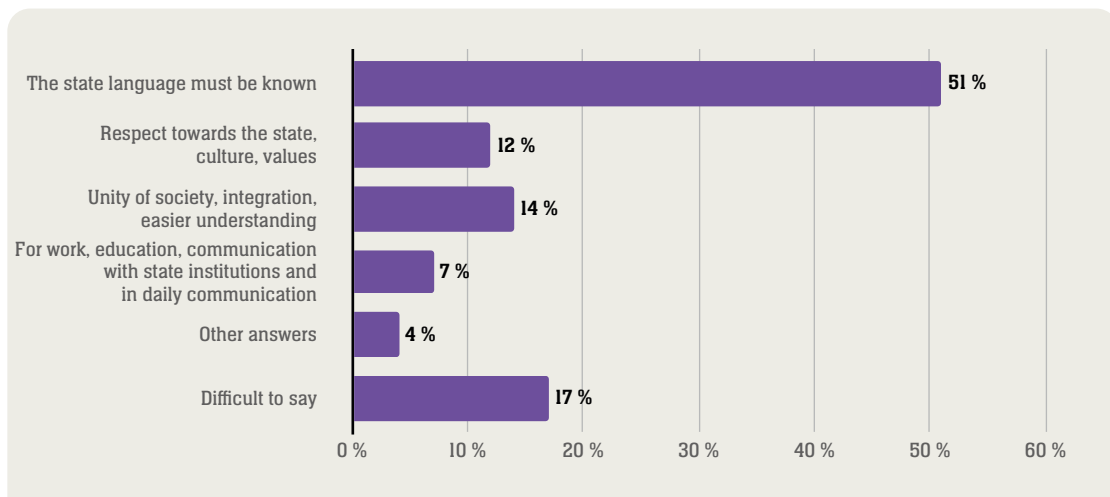


Fig. 61. Respondents' answers to the question: "Why do residents of Latvia need to know the Latvian language?" (%). Respondents: all. Possibility to give multiple answers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

In terms of this question the most important issue is the characteristics of those respondents who agree that one must know Latvian: there are no significant differences in the groups of the respondents by nationality, gender, age group, education or workplace.

From the point of view of language policy, more attention should be paid to one target group, whose answers differ more – namely, non-citizens. Compared to the respondents who are citizens, non-citizens more often (29%, citizens only 6%) indicate that Latvian language skills are not important. Similarly, the respondents who are non-citizens more often than citizens admit that proficiency in the Latvian language does not promote a sense of belonging to Latvia (32%, only 8% of citizens). Moreover, it is non-citizens who form the group of respondents who do not know Latvian at all (10%, 0.3% of citizens) or know it very poorly (16%, 2% of citizens). At the same time, the majority of respondents who answered that their Latvian language skills have had a positive effect on their situation in the labour market are non-citizens (86%, 60% of citizens), they also more often than citizens think that better Latvian language skills are necessary to improve one's situation in the labour market (32%, 17% of citizens). This means that in this group of respondents a greater role is ascribed to the instrumental value of language, but at the same time due to some, probably not language-related, reasons the attitude towards the Latvian language and its role is quite negative, which could limit their opportunities and hinders the sense of belonging to society.

Another question that helps to identify the instrumental and/or integrative aspects of language acquisition and use is the willingness of respondents to improve or not improve their Latvian language skills. When asked about the reasons why the respondents plan or do not plan to learn or improve their Latvian language skills, an open-ended question was offered in order to discover more precisely the respondents' reasons. At the time of the survey, 39% of the respondents whose native language is not Latvian were improving their language skills (61% were not doing so); 37% of this latter group were planning to improve their Latvian language skills in the near future, and 63% were not planning to do

so. 55% of respondents of the younger generation (up to 34 years of age) were improving their Latvian language skills, while 23% of the older generation (from the age of 64) were not doing so.

The respondents who were improving their Latvian language skills at the time of the survey most often indicated that they knew Latvian well (55%) or at an intermediate level (37%), those who assessed their Latvian language skills as very weak and who did not speak Latvian at all also improve/learn it less often – 25% and 23%, respectively. Also, the willingness to improve Latvian language skills was more often indicated by the younger generation of respondents (51%), less often by the older generation (15%). Those respondents who do not plan to improve their Latvian language skills mostly indicated that their language skills are good (41%), there is no need to improve them (26%), do not plan to do so due to age or health (17%), lack of time and willingness (14%), difficult language (5%), already learning by speaking everyday (4%), etc. (the respondents had the possibility to give several reasons).

The 37% of respondents who were planning to improve their Latvian language skills in the near future indicated reasons that were related to either the pragmatic or symbolic aspect of language skills and belonging to society (Fig. 62).

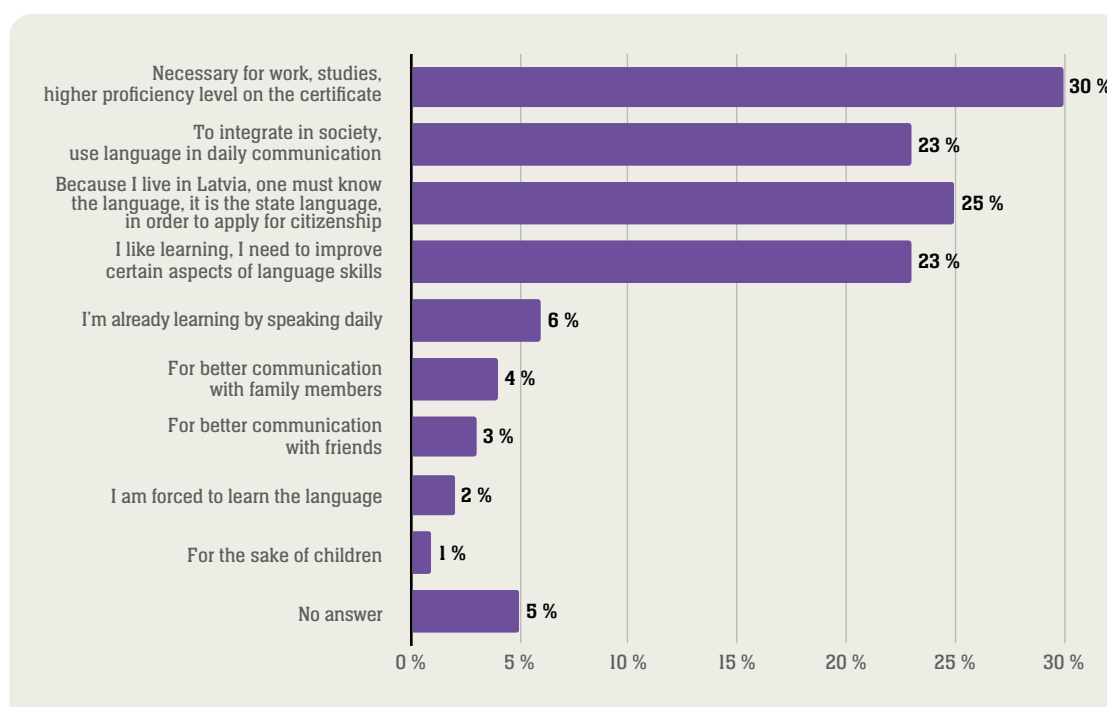


Fig. 62. Respondents' answers to the question "Why do you plan to improve your Latvian language skills?" (%). Respondents: native language not Latvian. It was possible to give multiple answers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The willingness to improve Latvian language skills was more often indicated by employees and students (54%), stay-at-home parents (63%), less often by the unemployed (25%) and pensioners (14%). The answers of employed respondents provide a broader insight into the process of language development and the needs of language learners. 44% of employees (slightly more than the total number of the respondents) whose native

language is not Latvian were improving their Latvian language skills at the time of the survey (by attending classes or through self-study, by talking, watching TV, listening to radio in Latvian). Employees in the public sector (50%) were improving their Latvian language skills more often than those working in the private sector (43%). The majority of employees who admitted that they were still improving their Latvian language skills already knew Latvian well (38%), at an intermediate level (26%) or even very well (18%). Similarly, 44% of employees plan to improve their Latvian language skills in the near future: they often work in the public sector – 50%, in the private sector – 42%.

One of the main reasons why the respondents plan to improve their Latvian language skills is for work (this answer was given in 27% of cases). This was indicated by 47% of those employed in the public sector and 25% of those employed in the private sector. In the youngest age group (18–34 years), about 52% of employees stated that they were already improving their Latvian language skills at the time of the survey, and about 50% indicated that they also plan to improve their Latvian language skills in the near future.

Similar factors are mentioned in the answers to the question about what motivates respondents to speak Latvian. The answers to this open-ended question highlight the pragmatic and integrative meaning of Latvian language skills (Fig. 63). In the majority of cases the respondents indicated work, status of the Latvian language, everyday life, integration into society, the willingness to improve Latvian language skills, and other reasons. A very small percentage of respondents (2%) indicated another reason (each mentioned only once), but these answers provide insight into people's experiences (successful or unsuccessful) and the reasons for a positive or negative linguistic attitude and the development of linguistic behaviour. Some of the reasons mentioned by this small group of the respondents that motivate or do not motivate to speak Latvian: I am committed, but no one in the surrounding society tries to speak Latvian; I don't know Latvian, but the surrounding Latvians help and give support; the more you know, the better language skills are required; difficult to learn; language skills can only be improved in practice, but I am ashamed to use them; people need to know many languages in general, especially the official language; does not matter what language you speak; to make children and grandchildren proud; discomfort when you do not know the language; I like the Latvian language, and "other".

Thus, in general, the use of the Latvian language is promoted both by the need to use it in various communication situations and functions, and by the willingness to prove one's belonging to a society through the language – these answers mark a positive linguistic attitude. Unfortunately, without additional research, it is not possible to characterize the attitude of part of the respondents (most likely some negative aspects), which has no special motivation (17%). However, this group of respondents is characterized by the following socio-economic indicators: more often there is no special motivation or nothing encourages the speaking of Latvian among those who belong to the older generation (older than 64 years – 24% compared to persons up to 34 years old – 11%), they are non-citizens (24%, compared to 11%) and unemployed (19%, compared to 9%).

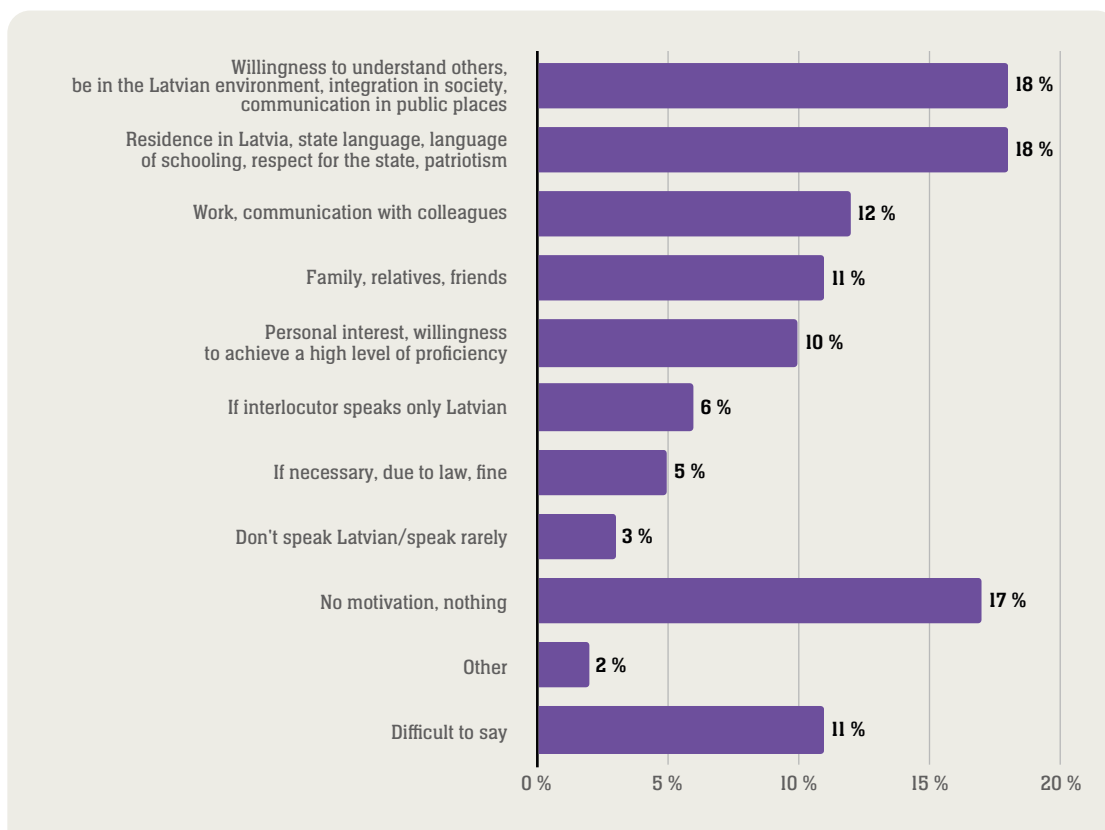


Fig. 63. Respondents' answers to the question "What encourages and motivates you to speak Latvian?" (%). Respondents: native language not Latvian. It was possible to give multiple answers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The role of the Latvian language in society is also shown by the choice of language in communication situations. In the 2019 LVA Survey, in order to find out language use habits, a question was asked about what language(s) respondents received a response in when starting a conversation in Latvian in selected situations. Almost all the respondents indicate that they received a response in Latvian to their questions or requests expressed in Latvian in state and municipal institutions, health care institutions, educational institutions, also on the street, in a shop and other similar situations, and when addressing strangers in Latvia (Fig. 64).

The data on language choice reveal both the dominant role of the Latvian language in public communication and especially in official communication in various institutions, as well as the quite frequent use of the Russian language in informal public communication situations and the emergence of English in everyday communication. For example, the data obtained in the 2014 LVA Survey reveal that, in general, the indicator of choice of the Latvian language in the communication situations suggested in the question was already high (more than 90% in all the cases), but the biggest differences are in the increase in English use (in 2014, English was indicated for communication only in certain cases [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 99]).

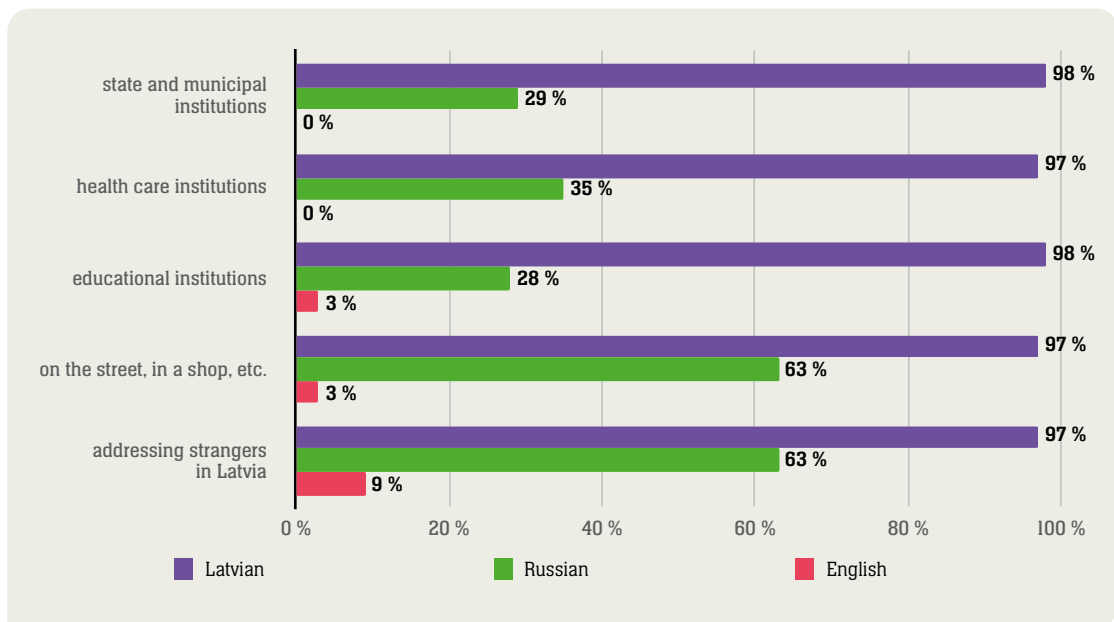


Fig. 64. Respondents' answers to the question "In which language (Latvian, Russian and/or English) did you tend to receive a response to a question or request expressed in Latvian during the last year?" (%). Respondents: all those who have been in such communication situations.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

In addition to Latvian, Russian is also used quite often. A total of 28–35% of the respondents have experienced situations where their question or request expressed in Latvian in state and municipal institutions, health care institutions, as well as educational institutions was answered in Russian. In this case there are no data on the native language of the interlocutors and the level of Latvian language proficiency, all of which may influence the choice of language, but the data and their correlation with the respondents' native tongue shows another traditional tendency – lack of linguistic self-confidence among Latvian language speakers [Druviete 2018a, 50]: upon hearing that Latvian is not a person's native language, Latvians switch to Russian. This is also shown by the data on the use of languages in state institutions, i.e. in situations when the respondent asked a question in Latvian in communication with a state institution, the language of the answer is often determined by whether or not the native language of the person asking the question (survey respondent) is Latvian. Thus, 99% of respondents whose language of communication in the family is Latvian are always answered in Latvian in these situations, but only 56% of the respondents whose language of communication is Russian are always answered in Latvian and 11% of them are answered in Latvian slightly more often than in Russian.

The respondents whose native language is not Latvian indicate that the possibility to use the Latvian language in all life situations is one of the ways to improve their language skills. For many years, the prevailing trend to switch to Russian when answering questions has raised the issue in language policy of public involvement by explaining and educating people about the aspects of language persistence, language acquisition and language use.

As has been pointed out several times before, the choice and use of languages in the field of public communication is also determined by the degree of formality of the communication situation. According to the data of the 2019 LVA Survey, the answers in Russian were much more frequent on the street, in a shop and other similar situations, as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia, where approximately two thirds of the respondents have experienced that their question or request expressed in Latvian was answered in Russian. A question or request expressed in Latvian during the last year has been answered only or mostly in Latvian in the following situations: among 90% of respondents who started a conversation in Latvian in educational institutions; 89% of respondents experienced it in state and municipal institutions, and 85% of them in health care institutions. Answers only or mainly in Latvian were received on the street, in a shop and in other everyday situations (74%), as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia (72%). On the street, in a shop, and other everyday situations, as well as when addressing strangers, more often than in official communication situations, answers are received both in Latvian and in another language, or only and mostly in another language. Whereas in state and municipal institutions, health care institutions and educational institutions, a large percentage of respondents who expressed a question or request in Latvian always received an answer only in Latvian (64–72%); however, several languages are used more often in communication on the street, in a shop and other everyday situations, as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia (Fig. 65).

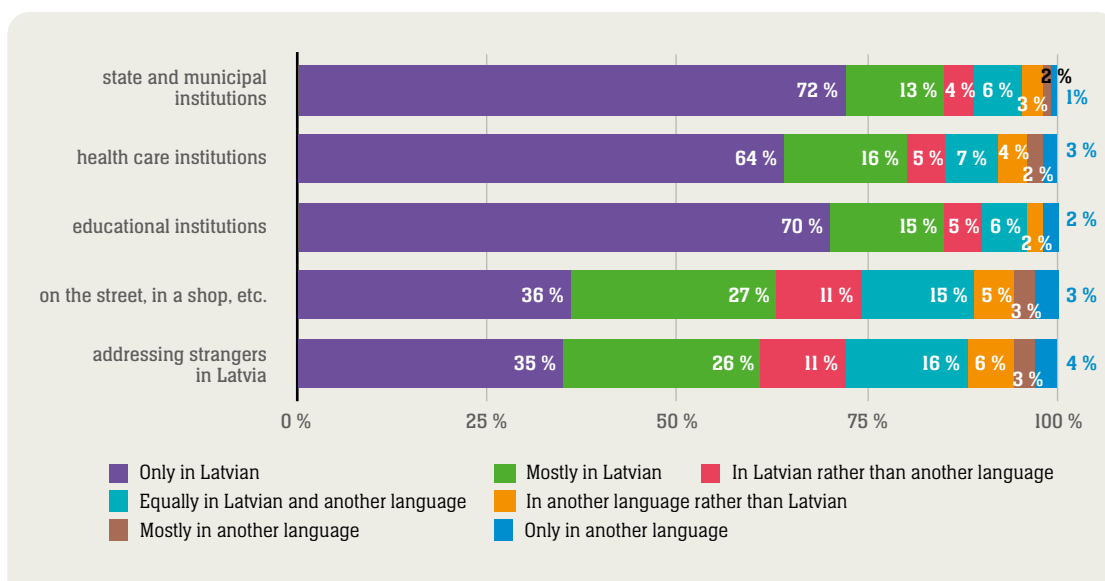


Fig. 65. Respondents' answers to the question "How often during the last year have you received an answer in Latvian and/or another language to your question or request expressed in Latvian?" (%). Respondents: all those who have been in such communication situations.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The language of an answer to a question or request expressed in Latvian in all the analysed sociolinguistic situations is closely correlated with the language in which the respondent mainly speaks in the family (which in turn mostly coincides with the respondent's native language, $r = >0.5$). In other words, those who communicate in the

family in Latvian receive answers in Latvian to their questions and requests expressed in Latvian much more often than others. The choice of the language of an answer is slightly less influenced by the level of Latvian language proficiency of the respondents ($r = 0.4\text{--}0.5$), except for communication in state and municipal institutions, where the correlation is close ($r = 0.552$). This means that respondents' higher proficiency in Latvian determines that they will receive answers in Latvian most often in state and municipal institutions (less so in other analysed situations).

The correlation between age and choice of language of an answer to the questions and requests asked by the respondents in Latvian ($r = 0.1\text{--}0.3$) is weak, but still exists in the group of the respondents where the family does not communicate mainly in Latvian, i.e., the youngest respondents of this group more often receive answers only or mostly in Latvian than older people. This is due to the respondents' proficiency in Latvian, which is significantly higher in the younger generation, thus the willingness to use the Latvian language and confidence in their language skills is also higher, which impacts on the choice of the language of an answer.

Comparing the data of the 2014 Survey [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 98] and the 2019 LVA Survey, it can be concluded that the use of the Latvian language in state and municipal institutions, health care institutions and educational institutions is a priority: during the last year almost all the respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family and the majority of those who communicate in Russian in the family were answered only or mainly in Latvian (in the latter group, 68% of the respondents were answered only or mainly in Latvian in educational institutions, 67% of the respondents in state and municipal institutions, and 59% of them in health care institutions, Fig. 66 and 67).

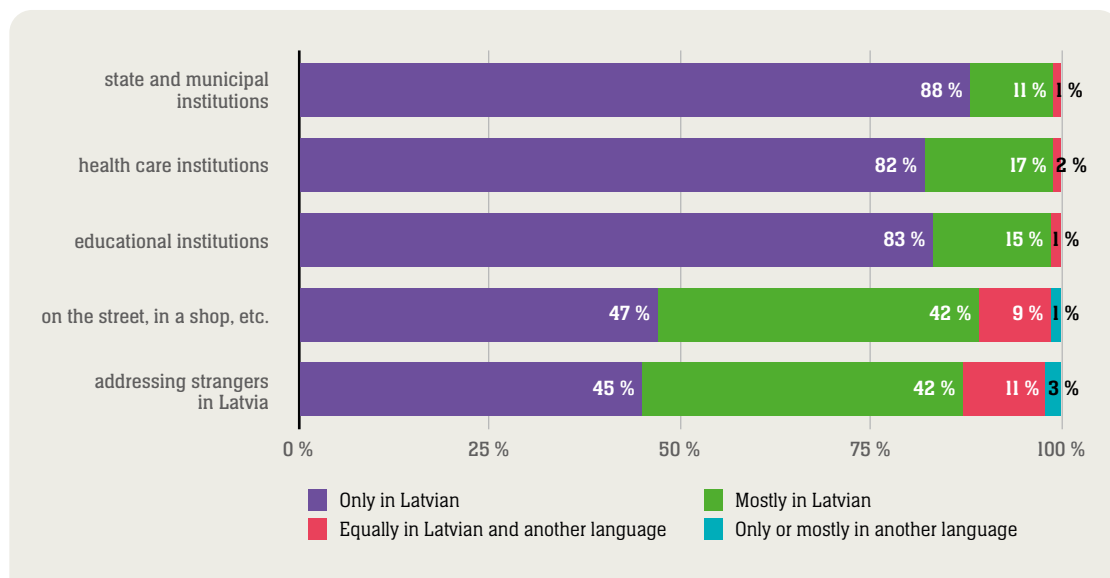


Fig. 66. Respondents' answers to the question "In which language do you tend to receive answers to questions or requests expressed in Latvian in the indicated situations?" (%).

Respondents: persons who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

It should be noted that the answer to a question or request expressed in Latvian was received only or mostly in another language by about one fifth of the Russian-speaking respondents in state and municipal institutions (Fig. 67). A much smaller percentage of the respondents (both those who speak Latvian and those who speak Russian in the family) received answers only in Latvian to their questions or requests expressed in Latvian on the street, in a shop, as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia, and less than half of the respondents who speak Latvian in the family have experienced that they were replied to only in Latvian during the last year.

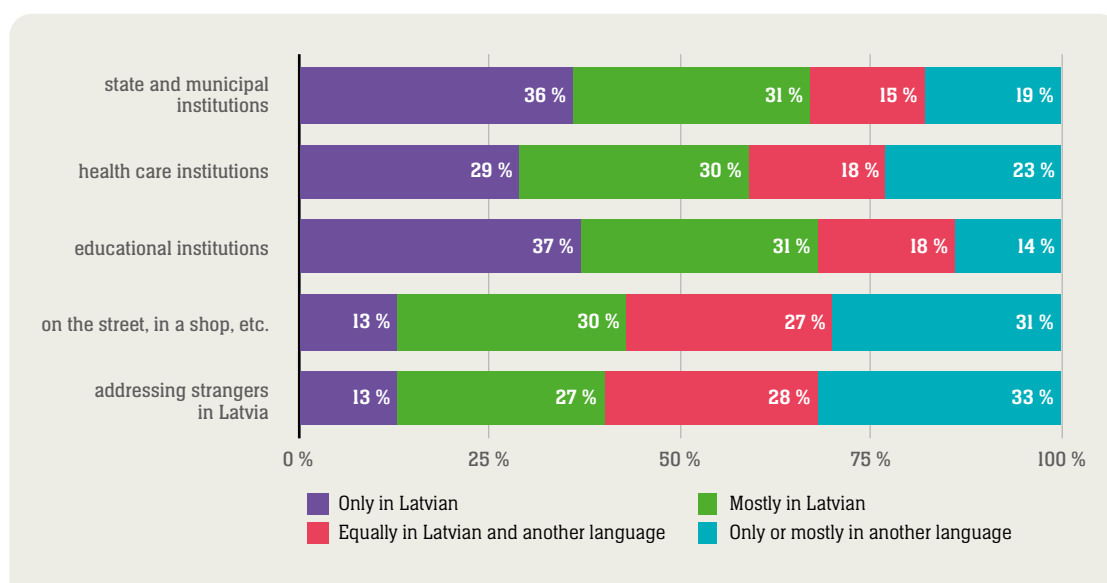


Fig. 67. Answers to the question “In which language do you tend to receive answer to questions or requests expressed in Latvian in the indicated situations?” (%). Respondents: persons who communicate mainly in Russian in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The answers to this question show regional differences that are similar to those identified above. In Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Zemgale and Pieriga, in state and municipal institutions the respondents almost always received answers to their questions expressed in Latvian only or mostly in Latvian (93–99%), but in Riga and Latgale this was less often (80% and 73% respectively). Of course, this is related to ethno-demographic regularities, as Riga and Latgale have the largest number of residents whose native language is Russian, and the survey data show that the choice of the language of an answer depends on the respondent’s native language or the language mainly used in the family. In health care institutions in other parts of Latvia, answers are almost always received only or mostly in Latvian (93–99%), whereas in Riga and Latgale the frequency is lower than in state and municipal institutions (75% and 66%). Among all the communication situations, the answers only or mostly in Latvian were most often received in educational institutions, also in Riga and Latgale, although the percentage is smaller than in the rest of Latvia (83% in Riga and 92% in Latgale, while in the rest of Latvia – approx. 100%). On the other hand, when communicating in the street, in a shop or other similar situations, as well as when addressing strangers, answers only or mostly in Latvian were received less often

than in the above-mentioned cases (74–95%) in Latvia, especially in Riga and Latgale (62–64% depending on the communication situation; 45% in Latgale). In Latgale, about a quarter of the respondents received answers only or mostly in another language on the street, in a shop, and other similar situations, whereas in Riga this was about one-fifth of the respondents. Together with the aspects of Latvian language proficiency and use described in the previous chapters, these data once again highlight the role of language proficiency in expanding language use and developing a positive linguistic attitude, as well as the importance of specific language policy implementation in certain regions of the country.

What is more, different difficulties in language use may arise depending on the degree of formality of the communication situation and the level of language proficiency. The 2019 LVA Survey data on respondents whose native language is not Latvian show that good language skills also correspond to a more frequent willingness to speak Latvian (Fig. 68).

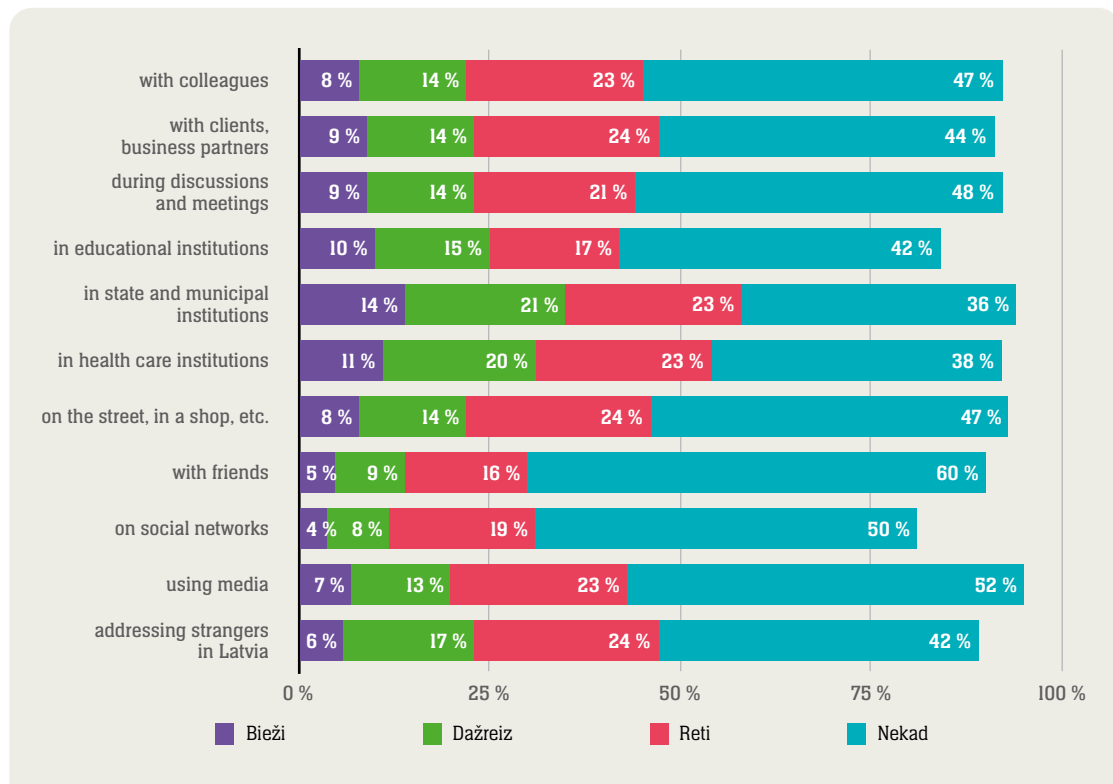


Fig. 68. Respondents' answers to the question "How often during the last year did you experience difficulties in using the Latvian language in the indicated situations?" (%). Respondents: non-Latvian language speakers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The respondents who know Latvian very well or well have experienced difficulties in everyday communication: 65–76% (depending on the communication situation) have never experienced difficulties. On the other hand, those who speak Latvian well, poorly or not at all are much more likely to have difficulties: only 12–48% of this group of respondents have never experienced communication problems (more often they face such difficulties in

official communication, but less often in communication with friends). The level of Latvian language proficiency correlates most closely with the difficulties in using the Latvian language in educational institutions, as well as in state and municipal institutions ($r > 0.5$). The weaker the respondent's proficiency in Latvian, the more they feel uncomfortable. At the same time, as the previous data analysis shows, in these domains and situations where communication is usually formal, the respondents generally use Latvian the most, despite the insufficient level of Latvian language skills. In other communication situations the correlation is medium ($r = 0.3-0.5$), except for communication with friends and on social networks, where the correlation is weak ($r < 0.3$). Thus, when communicating with friends and on social networks, the respondents do not experience such difficulties due to the level of Latvian language skills.

Therefore, the degree of formality of the communication situation is not only based on whether the respondents face language difficulties, but also generally determines the choice of language or languages in communication. This is revealed by the correlations between the use of the Latvian language and the difficulties experienced, i.e. in some domains there is a moderately close correlation between how often the respondents use the Latvian language and how often they experience difficulties. In state and municipal institutions and health care institutions ($r = 0.3-0.5$), i.e. official communication situations, it is observed that the more the respondents use the Latvian language, the less often they experience difficulties. There is also a weak correlation between these indicators in communication at work (with colleagues, clients and business partners, during discussions and meetings), communication on the street, in a shop, and other everyday situations, when addressing strangers in Latvia, and in educational institutions ($r = 0.1-0.3$). This means that in these domains and situations, the more often respondents use Latvian for communication, the less difficulty they experience. In informal situations, e.g. in communication with friends and on social networks, there is no such correlation, and the extent to which the respondents use only of mostly Latvian or the extent to which they use (an)other language(s) is not related to how often in these domains the respondents experience difficulties in using the Latvian language.

On the other hand, the respondents' answers to the question of whether the Latvian language has been used more often in their place of residence during the last five to six years indicate not only an increase or decrease in language use, but also respondents' opinions and subjective feelings about Latvian language and its daily use. In total, about a half of the respondents believe that now, compared to the situation 5-6 years ago, the Latvian language is used just as often in their village, town, or neighbourhood (in large cities). This opinion is more common in Vidzeme, where almost three quarters of the respondents gave such an answer (the sufficient Latvian language environment in this region must be taken into account). In total, 35% of the respondents believe that Latvian is used more often in their place of residence than 5-6 years ago. In the group of the respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family, this was indicated by those who live in Latgale (52%) and Riga (40%). In the group of the respondents who communicate in Russian in the family, this answer was indicated mostly by the residents of Kurzeme, Pieriga and Latgale. In total, only 7% of the respondents admitted that Latvian is used less often in their place of residence. There is no correlation with age, but there is a small correlation

between the respondents' level of Latvian language skills and how often they think Latvian is currently used at their place of residence compared to 5–6 years ago ($r = 0.109$), in other words, the better proficiency in Latvian, the more likely respondents tend to believe the Latvian language is used more often in their place of residence. Thus, the improvement of language skills leads to an increased willingness to use a language and to changes in the linguistic behaviour of society, which in turn is influenced by the linguistic attitude as a public manifestation of one's beliefs and views about languages and language use [Baker 1992, 29], although the relationship between linguistic behaviour and linguistic attitude is not straightforward and simple.

Looking at the linguistic behaviour of the respondents and the changes in the frequency of choosing the Latvian language during the last 5–6 years, a total of 55% of respondents state that they use the Latvian language as often as they did 5–6 years ago; slightly more than a third think that Latvian is used more often now, and only a small part of the respondents (7%) believe that Latvian is used less often. Comparing these data with the results obtained in the previous research period (2014), it can be observed that the proportion of respondents who use Latvian less frequently has decreased; in 2014, in general, 14% of respondents used Latvian less frequently [Language situation in Latvia 2010–2015, 101].

There are regional differences in the answers of respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family and those who communicate in Russian in the family. Those who use mainly Latvian in the family – most often residents of Vidzeme – answered that Latvian is used in communication with representatives of national minorities as often as 5–6 years ago (74%); such an answer was rarely indicated by the residents of Riga (39%). In Riga, almost half of the population (48%) who communicate in Latvian in the family believe that they currently communicate in Latvian with members of national minorities more often than 5–6 years ago. In the group of the respondents who communicate mainly in Russian in the family, the largest number of people who believe that they communicate with Latvians in Latvian more often than 5–6 years ago is in Vidzeme (54%), and the least in Latgale (24%), where only a quarter believe that now Latvian is used more often in communication with Latvians than 5–6 years ago. Among the respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family, there are very few people who use Latvian in communication with representatives of national minorities less often than 5–6 years ago. On the other hand, in the group of the respondents who communicate mainly in Russian in the family, there are approximately 8–15% of respondents (depending on the region of Latvia, except in Vidzeme) who answered that they use Latvian less often than 5–6 years ago. There is also a small correlation between the level of Latvian language proficiency of the respondents and the frequency with which non-Latvian respondents use Latvian compared to 5–6 years ago ($r = 0.256$): the better the Latvian language proficiency, the more often the respondents claim that currently Latvian is used more often in communication with Latvians.

Taking into account the conclusions of the previous research periods about the increase in language proficiency, language use and also a positive attitude towards the Latvian language, the 2019 LVA Survey for the first time asked the respondents what part of the population they often encounter (e.g. friends, colleagues, neighbours, etc.) are people with different native languages. It provides insight not only into the results

of social integration, but also reveals the role of Latvian language skills in the formation of a united society. The data show that the majority of Latvians often come into contact with people whose native language is Latvian and those whose native language is Russian: 96% of respondents often come into contact with people whose native language is Latvian, including 85% of them who also often come into contact with people whose native language is another language, mostly Russian; 90% of respondents often come into contact with people whose native language is Russian, and 86% of them also often come into contact with people whose native language is not Russian. Inhabitants of Latvia are less likely to come into contact with people whose native language is neither Latvian nor Russian, but more than half of the respondents do not come into contact with such people at all.

Those who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family most often come into contact with those whose native language is Latvian: 18% of the respondents come into contact with only Latvian native speakers; 70% of the respondents have such contact in most cases; yet another 10% of the respondents come into contact with Latvian native speakers in half of the communication cases. (Fig. 69). People who communicate in Latvian in the family are less likely to have frequent contact with those whose native language is Russian: for 71% of respondents such contacts make for the smallest share, for 13% of the respondents – this is so in a half of communication situations.

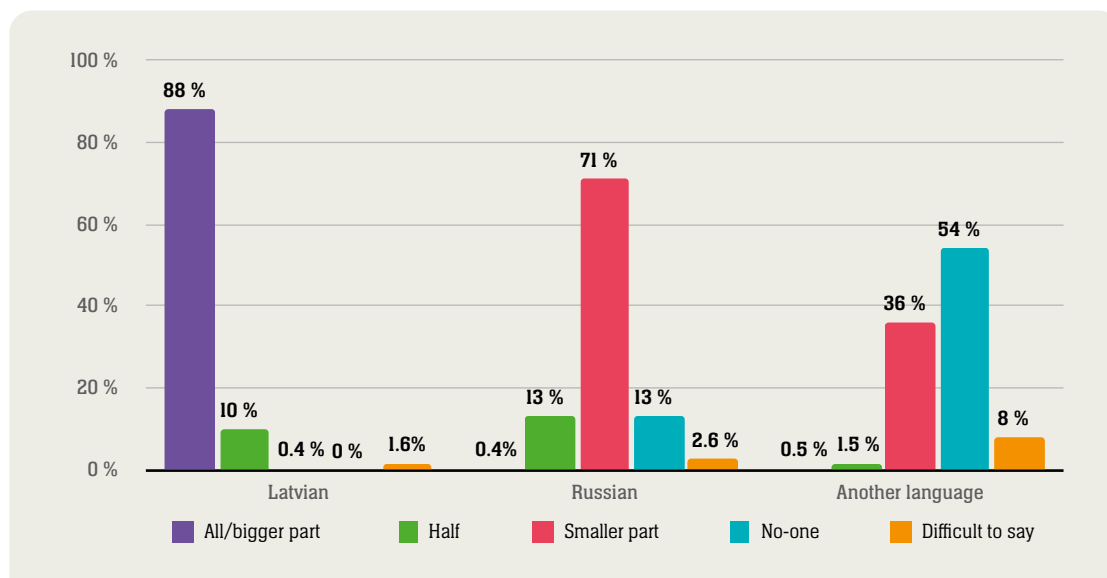


Fig. 69. Respondents' answers to the question "How many of the people you often come into contact with are people whose native language is Latvian, Russian or some other?" (%). Respondents: those who speak Latvian in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Accordingly, those who communicate mainly in Russian in the family most often come into contact with Russian native speakers, but quite often also with people whose native language is Latvian (Fig. 70). Thus, those who communicate in the family in Russian are more likely to come into contact with people whose native language is Latvian, compared to native Latvian speakers coming into contact with native Russian speakers. This is natural, taking into account the demographic composition of the Latvian population.

Overall, these data show a relatively high level of integration, as only about one in ten of those who communicate in Russian in the family comes into contact only with Russian-speaking people, and 88% of them come into contact with both native Russian and native Latvian speakers. There are too few respondents who speak another language (other than Latvian or Russian) in the family to include their answers in the analysis.

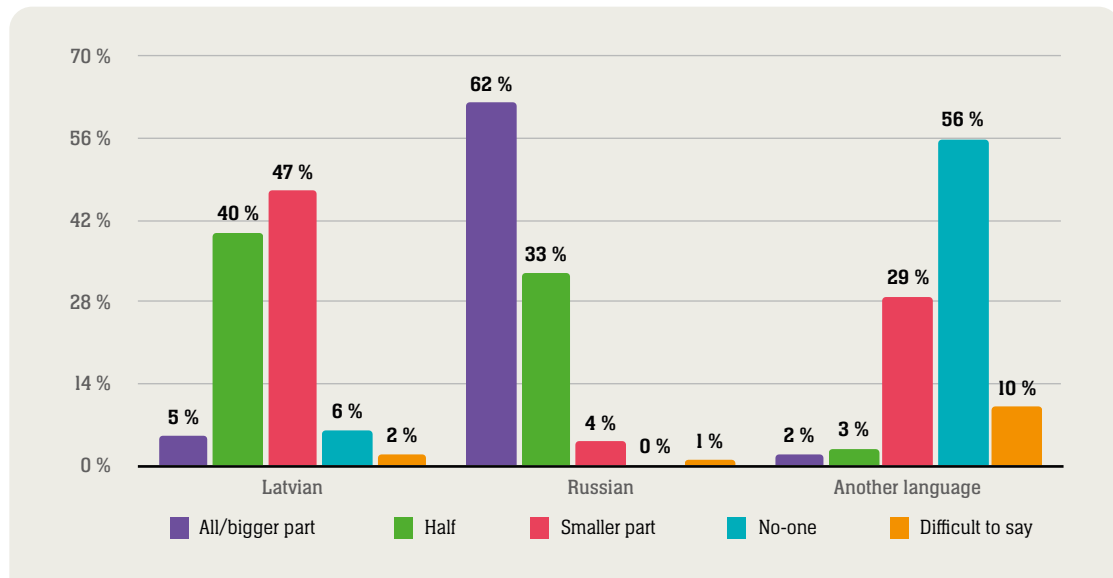


Fig. 70. Respondents' answers to the question "How many of the people you often come into contact with are people whose native language is Latvian, Russian or some other?" (%). Respondents: those who speak Russian in the family.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

There are no big differences in age groups here. Respondents aged 18–34 who communicate mainly in Russian in the family are slightly more likely to communicate with people whose native language is Latvian than other respondents. In the group of the respondents who communicate mainly in Russian in the family, there is a very small positive correlation between age and more frequent contact with Latvian native speakers compared to Russian native speakers ($r = 0.114$), i.e., the younger the person, the more contact they have with Latvian native speakers.

Most people who communicate in Russian in the family and also often communicate in Russian outside the family live in Riga (14%) and Pierīga (11%), i.e. in these places a part of the Russian-speaking population does not come into contact with Latvian native speakers. There are slightly fewer such people in Latgale than in Riga and Pierīga. Those who communicate mainly in Latvian in the family communicate with Russian speakers on a daily basis in Latgale and Zemgale, but those who communicate mainly in Russian in the family most often come into contact with native Latvian speakers in Vidzeme.

On the other hand, according to the self-assessment of Latvian language proficiency, Latvians are most often in contact in Latvian with respondents of another native language who have very good language proficiency (37%), while those who do not know or speak Latvian very poorly most often do not communicate in Latvian with Latvian native speakers – 49% (do not speak Latvian) and 21% (know Latvian very poorly).

Data on the communication between Latvian and Russian native speakers and the frequency of use of the Latvian language during the last five years in the view of the respondents not only show an increase in the environment of Latvian language use, but also reveal a correlation between good language skills and a desire to use the language, thus showing a positive linguistic attitude. This is also confirmed by the answers to the question as to whether respondents who are not native speakers of Latvian like to speak Latvian (Fig. 71). Those who have very good Latvian language skills and who represent the younger generation like to speak Latvian the most. The differences are noticeable when looking at the data by the level of education: the respondents with higher education prefer to speak Latvian (68%, only 42% with basic education). In this respect one can also observe the aspect of attitudes and language skills of the non-citizens that have been outlined above: 65% of citizens like to speak Latvian, but only 36% of non-citizens indicated so.

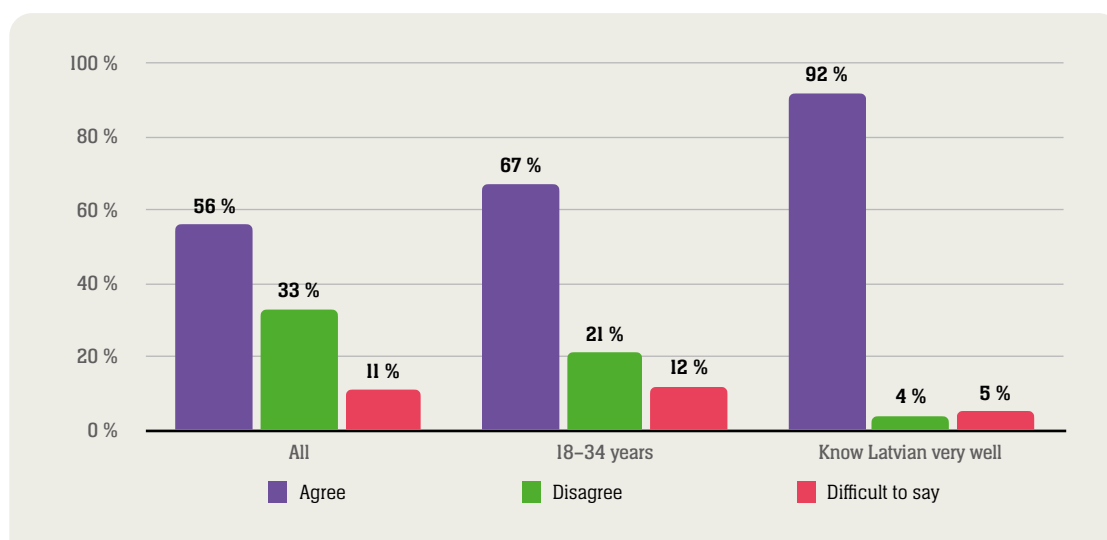


Fig. 71. Respondents' answers to the statement "I like to speak Latvian" (%). Respondents: non-Latvian language speakers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The younger generation and those who know Latvian very well also most often communicate in Latvian with Latvians they know. The answers to the statement "I speak Latvian with Latvians I know" supplement the data on the increase in the use of the Latvian language in the mutual communication of society and once again point to the close connection between language skills and linguistic attitude (Fig. 72).

The data of this statement show the situation described above in Latgale, where residents more often choose to speak Russian than Latvian if the interlocutors' native language is different, i.e. Latvian speakers are much more often forced to adapt to Russian speakers, who are more likely to have a low level of proficiency in Latvian, have different linguistic attitudes and beliefs as well as communication habits. In other regions on average, in 60% (83% in Vidzeme) of cases the Latvian language is used in communication with Latvians, whereas in Latgale the difference is quite large, and only 35% of the respondents speak Latvian with Latvians. This means that changes in the linguistic behaviour of society and each individual are even slower than at the level of

beliefs and views. The majority (73%) of all the respondents agree with the statement that it is only normal to speak Latvian in public places, whereas only 16% of the respondents do not agree. This aspect does not show specific regional differences or differences by indicators such as citizenship, employment sector, level of education, income level or age. The exception could be the criterion of proficiency, i.e., the higher the language proficiency, the more often the respondents agree with this statement (89% with very good language proficiency, 55% who do not know the language at all).

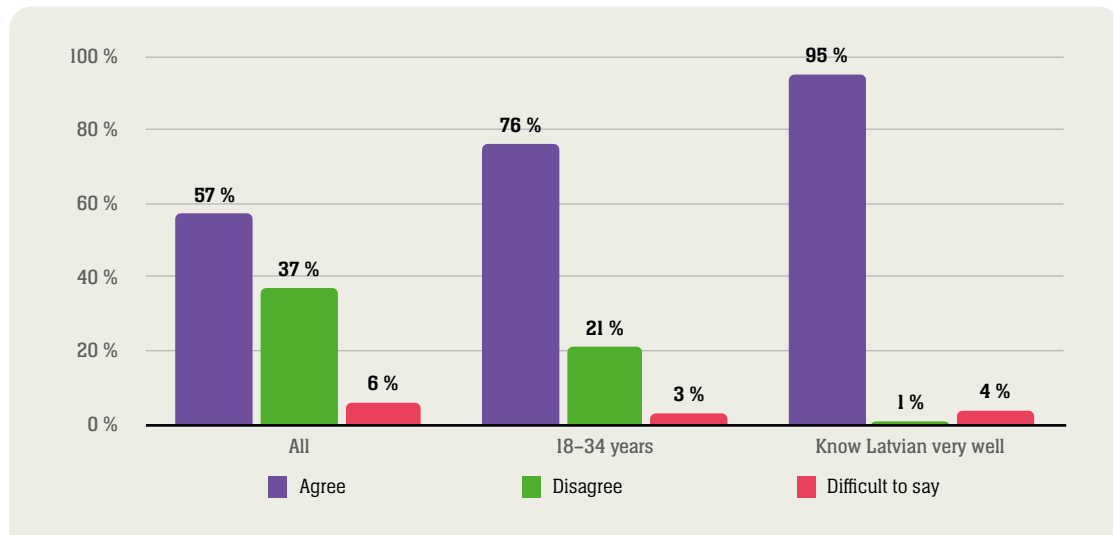


Fig. 72. Respondents' answers to the statement "I speak Latvian with Latvians I know" (%). Respondents: non-Latvian language speakers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Judging by the criterion of higher proficiency in the Latvian language, the number of the positive answers to the statement "If possible, I prefer not to speak Latvian" is lowest in the group of respondents who have a very good command of Latvian (only 15% of the respondents agree with this statement). In general, 50% of all respondents and 79% of respondents whose Latvian language skills are very weak agree with the statement (Fig. 73).

The level of language proficiency, of course, determines the frequency of language use, but the data described above point to the important role of language proficiency in shaping and changing linguistic attitudes at the level of both society and the individual. The relation is mutual, i.e. the linguistic attitude affects the quality of language skills, and vice versa. Attitude is a factor which, in the academic sense of bilingualism, is viewed as one of the inputs for good language skills and has a consequence on outcome [Baker 1992, 3], and this is also shown by the analysis of the data from this study.

For the time being, the main factor that shapes a positive linguistic attitude in Latvian society is good Latvian language skills, which can also be influenced by other changing elements, such as sociolinguistic context, linguistic competence, mother tongue, other language skills, age, etc. [Lasagabaster 2005]. This shows that as the environment and possibilities for using the Latvian language expand (which in itself is not possible without language skills), great emphasis must still be placed on ensuring the acquisition of the Latvian

language both for those who need to improve their language skills and for newcomers, especially focusing on specific target groups and inhabitants of certain regions.

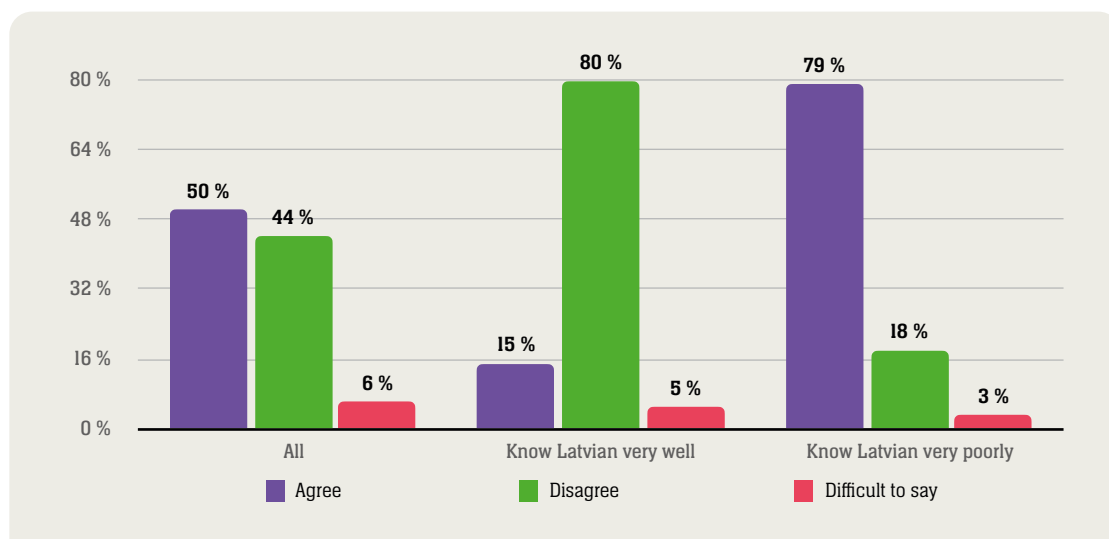


Fig. 73. Respondents' answers to the statement "If possible, I prefer not to speak Latvian" (%). Respondents: non-Latvian language speakers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

The linguistic attitude is also formed by the public's beliefs and opinions about the role of the Latvian language in the country, and they show the priority of the Latvian language in the context of the major competing languages (Russian and English). In order to find out the current value of languages in society as a whole, respondents were asked two questions about which languages Latvians should know and which languages they think their children should know, thus looking for the difference between the current value and how awareness of the value of different languages could change in the future (Fig. 74).

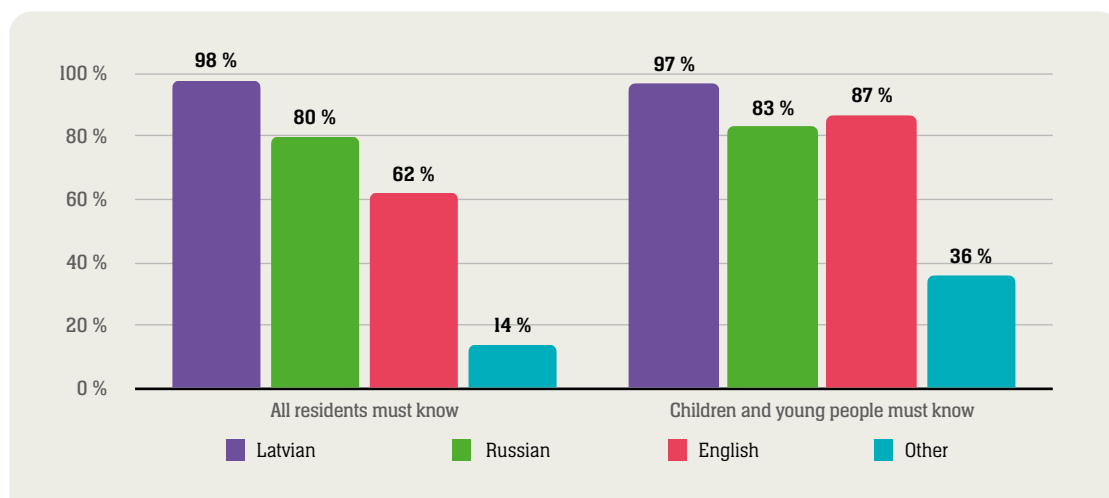


Fig. 74. Respondents' answers to the question about which languages residents of Latvia should know, and which languages children and young people should know (%). Respondents: all the respondents. It was possible to choose several answers.

Source: 2019 LVA Survey

Thus, proficiency in the Latvian language in society is considered axiomatic. The biggest differences in views on which languages are important relate to the assessment of English language proficiency, which reveals the active presence of the language in today's world, and perhaps emphasizes its instrumental significance. The value of multilingualism and public awareness of the benefits of language skills are reflected in respondents' views on the need for other language skills for children (36%). The need to speak English, at least at a declarative level, is high in society, but it is not as relevant in everyday life as it is when thinking about the future of children, where English in people's beliefs is closely linked to an imagined (and also realistic) better life, education, work, etc. Another question is whether proficiency in this language will really deliver these benefits [Ricento 2015, 34–36].

4.4. Conclusions

In general, the population of Latvia uses the Latvian language the most in all sociolinguistic domains and situations; the second most common language is Russian (thus, in society, both languages are used for communication in different situations). The use of English is narrower, it is used only in certain domains and situations, but the prestige of this foreign language is growing rapidly. English is the most widely used language on social networks; less often when addressing strangers in Latvia and in various situations in educational institutions, but in comparison with Latvian and Russian, English is used very little in everyday life.

The Latvian language is mostly used for official communication purposes (in educational institutions, state and municipal institutions, during work-related discussions and meetings, as well as in health care institutions), where it is used both by those who communicate in Latvian and those who communicate in other languages. In general, the Latvian language is used the least in the private sphere (in communication with family members, friends), where the use of languages differs mostly between the respondents who communicate in Latvian in the family and those who speak Russian in the family.

Although the use of the Latvian language dominates, the second most frequently used language in Latvia is Russian and it is mainly used in public communication – on the street, in shops, and other everyday situations, when addressing strangers in Latvia, also in private communication with friends. In these situations Russian is used by those who communicate in the family in Russian and those who communicate in the family in Latvian. Russian is the least used language in various official areas and situations.

The choice of the language of communication in one situation or another is most influenced by the language used in the family (which in Latvia most often coincides with the native language). Those who communicate in the family in Latvian use mainly or mostly Latvian in all sociolinguistic domains and situations; and least frequently at work with clients and business partners, where the Russian language is used more often (both in communication with clients and business partners and with colleagues), and in informal daily communication on the street, in a shop and other similar situations, as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia. Those who communicate in Russian with their

family most often use Latvian at work (especially in official communication, i.e. during consultations and meetings), in state and municipal institutions, educational institutions and health care institutions, as well as in informal daily communication on the street, in shops, and other similar situations; and the least often for private communication (with friends and family).

Among people who communicate in Russian in the family the choice of language is also influenced by their level of Latvian language skills, i.e. the better their Latvian language skills, the more often they use only or mostly Latvian. This is especially true of the use of languages in the public sphere: on the street, in shops, and other similar situations, when addressing strangers in Latvia, in state and municipal institutions, as well as in health care institutions. The level of Latvian language proficiency has the least impact on the frequency of language use in educational institutions, where everyone, despite their proficiency, uses Latvian.

The least significant differences in language use between those who communicate in Latvian in their family and those who communicate in Russian in their family are in the occupational field, especially when communicating during work-related discussions and meetings, where the representatives of both groups mostly use Latvian, but when communicating with clients and business partners, representatives of both groups use different languages. The field of work is one in which people, regardless of the language in which they communicate in the family, are most inclined to adapt to both the conditions and environment.

The respondents who communicate in different languages in the family most often use both Latvian and other languages (mostly Russian) at work and in informal public communication. On the street, in shops, and other everyday situations, as well as when addressing strangers in Latvia, respondents whose native language is Russian use Russian rather than Latvian. One third of those who communicate in Latvian in the family also use Russian for communication with friends, and two thirds of those who communicate in Russian in the family also use Latvian for communication with friends. This shows that communication occurs also in the private sphere. However, most inhabitants of Latvia communicate with friends in either Latvian or Russian, depending on the language in which they communicate in the family.

In Latgale, in all sociolinguistic domains Russian is more often used than in the rest of Latvia, including only or mostly Russian. The choice of language of communication of inhabitants of Latgale in everyday public situations differs from the habits of other inhabitants of Latvia. Latgale is the only region where, in many domains, Russian is generally used more than Latvian. The areas where the Latvian language is most often used in this region are work and various institutions. In Latgale, of all the fields, the Latvian language is used the most in the work environment, but in Riga the work environment is more multilingual, and here English is also present.

Overall, three quarters of inhabitants of Latvia have not felt that their language skills have had a positive or negative impact on their labour market situation over the past five years. Among those who have felt the effects of language skills, there are more positive examples and there are fewer people who have felt the negative effects in terms of salary or other areas. The negative effects have mostly been felt by those whose native language

is not Latvian. More than half of them do not speak Latvian or speak it poorly or very poorly. Moreover, a large part of this group of respondents do not know English at all or speak it poorly and very poorly. In general, the situation of the respondents in the labour market is most influenced by their Latvian language skills: both positively and negatively in the case of insufficient or non-existent skills (also in terms of salary). In general, the impact of Latvian language skills on the situation in the labour market has been felt most by those who speak Russian in the family and those living in Latgale and Riga, i.e. in places where the percentage of Russian-speaking respondents is higher. This group also has the largest number of respondents (about one-fifth) who believe that they need better Latvian language skills to improve their situation in the labour market. Thus, for those who speak Russian in the family, the most important factor affecting their position in the labour market is proficiency in Latvian, and there is a smaller number of those who emphasize the importance of proficiency in English (compared to the respondents who speak Latvian in the family).

Young people aged 18–34 have felt the greatest the impact of their Russian language skills on the situation in the labour market: both positive and negative effects on the situation in general and on salary specifically. Insufficient Russian language skills are felt mainly by young people (18–34 years), who at the same time feel the least that their Latvian language skills are insufficient. This reflects both the good Latvian language skills among young people in Latvia and shows that Russian language skills are considered necessary in the labour market. Those who speak Latvian in the family most often have felt the impact of Russian language skills or insufficient skills thereof, while those who speak Russian in the family have noticed the positive impact of Russian language skills on their salary. Russian is more valued as a positive factor by people working in the private sector in all regions of Latvia, but to a lesser extent in Latgale, where Russian language skills are most common. The need for better Russian language skills is felt most by young people aged 18–34, those who speak Latvian in the family, and those with higher education.

Knowledge of English or lack thereof has more often had a positive effect on the situation of respondents on the labour market, whereas a negative effect has been observed less often. People with higher education and high income have been most affected by English language skills; positive effects has been felt by young people aged 18–44, a negative effect has been experienced by older people (35–63). About a third of the respondents believe that a better command of English would improve their situation in the labour market. The need for better English language skills is felt more by those who speak Latvian in the family, have higher education, are aged 18–54 and live in Riga.

In the labour market, the respondents first feel the need for Latvian language skills, then the need for English language skills, and lastly the need for Russian language skills. As other language skills are not very common, their impact on the situation in the labour market is rarely mentioned.

Almost all employees in Latvia are bilingual, as they speak Latvian and Russian at least at a basic level. About 80% of the employees speak Latvian well (native speakers and those who speak Latvian very well or well), and the same percentage of employees know Russian well. The difference is in the fact that a very good and good command of Russian as a foreign language is more common than a very good and good command of Latvian as a second language. Data on employees aged 18–34 show that in the future employees

in this age group in Latvia will be trilingual and will be fluent in English in addition to Latvian and Russian. The employees of this age group speak Latvian much better than Russian, and Latvian employees of this age group are slightly more likely to know English than Russian.

Most people use several languages to communicate at work (mostly Latvian and Russian, less English), but Latvian is generally the most commonly used language (almost all respondents). About a half of the employees communicate in Russian and a tenth in English. The Latvian language is mostly used in formal communication, i.e. during work-related discussions and meetings. This shows that the official language in the workplace is usually Latvian. Russian and, to a lesser extent, English are most often used in communication with clients and business partners. Russian is also used for informal communication with colleagues. About 15% of employees use only or mostly another language for communication. The use of Russian may decrease slightly in the future, whereas the use of English may increase. The use of the Latvian language in the work environment could also increase in the future. In the age group 18–34, there are fewer people who communicate only or mostly in another language than in other age groups, and there are more people who communicate only or mostly in Latvian. Bilingualism and trilingualism are likely to increase, for example, in communication with clients and business partners.

The use of languages at work is greatly influenced by the language in which the person communicates in the family and the region in which the employee lives. Although all employees in Latvia mostly communicate in Latvian at work, those who communicate in Latvian at home also use only or mostly Latvian at work (especially during meetings), while those who communicate in Russian at home also use Russian much more often at work (in all situations) and much less often only or mostly Latvian. 52% of people who speak Russian in the family communicate only or mostly in Latvian in work-related discussions, while 33% of them communicate with colleagues only or mostly in Latvian. On the other hand, among the respondents who speak Russian in the family, 39% of them communicate with colleagues only or mostly in another language and 32% of them do so in work-related discussions and meetings. This means that a part of people who speak Russian in the family work in a work environment dominated by the Russian language, and this differs significantly from the work environment of the rest of the population of Latvia. It should be mentioned that among those employees who do not use Latvian or mostly use another language at work, most do not know the Latvian language or know it poorly or very poorly. On the positive side, there are significantly fewer people in the 18–34 age group who communicate only or mostly in another language (Russian) at work than in other age groups, but still in this age group about a quarter of non-Latvian language speakers communicate only or mostly in another language (mostly Russian) at work.

There are large regional differences in the use of languages at work. English is mostly used in Riga and Pieriga. Russian is the most commonly used language in Latgale and Riga, where bilingualism is predominant in the work environment, whereas Vidzeme is most monolingual. In Latgale and Riga, there are the most employees who do not communicate in Latvian at all or communicate in another language more often than in Latvian: in Latgale, about half and in Riga about a third of those who speak Russian in the family communicate only or mostly in Russian at work.

Communication in Latvian at work is one of the most important factors that motivates non-Latvians to learn the Latvian language and improve their Latvian language skills. About half of employees indicate that they have learned the Latvian language at work. In other words, the work environment increases the frequency of using the Latvian language and thus also promotes the integration of society.

In state and municipal institutions, educational institutions, i.e. in more or less official situations, the use of the Latvian language prevails. The Latvian language is less used in private communication and in the public informal environment, but the use of Latvian in these domains is also slightly increasing thanks to the increase in the level of Latvian language skills and mutual communication between speakers of different native languages. From the point of view of language policy, one should not forget the work environment as an important sociolinguistic domain that creates conditions (including through legal mechanisms) that would motivate people to communicate in Latvian in the work environment and in places where there are fewer Latvian speakers.

Proficiency in Latvian is of great importance: the better you know the Latvian language, the more likely you are to use only or mostly Latvian (on the street, in shops, etc.), i.e. language use increases together with the increase in language skills, which is logical. Therefore, when implementing the language policy, great attention should be paid to the acquisition of the Latvian language among children and young people (the question of the quality of education), but no less attention should be paid to ensuring the acquisition of the state language among adults.

As mentioned before, the biggest differences in the indicators of Latvian language skills and use are in the territorial perspective, which reveals both the impact of the ethno-demographic situation and the role of language acquisition, use, and compliance with the regulatory framework and educational measures. At present, 10% of Russian-speakers living in Latgale and Pieriga and 14% of Russian-speakers living in Riga do not come into contact with people whose native language is Latvian on a daily basis. In the long run, such a separated life creates segregation, which can be avoided by creating an inclusive education system and developing a Latvian language learning system for adults, as well as by promoting a positive linguistic attitude.

The indicators of linguistic attitudes generally show positive trends not only in terms of the increase of the role and value of the Latvian language in society (except for certain groups: non-citizens, elderly people whose native language is not Latvian), but also in the public's understanding of the language hierarchy and processes of multilingualism, i.e. language skills as a benefit for the growth of the individual, recognizing that the state language skills are not an obstacle to the preservation of their native language or the acquisition of other languages.

When implementing language policy, it must be borne in mind that the understanding of the role and hierarchy of languages and changes in linguistic attitudes are first and foremost based on good language skills. Through an increase in the level of Latvian language skills, which has a positive effect on the formation of attitudes and beliefs, language choice habits, and other aspects of language use or linguistic behaviour, the stability of the Latvian language as an official language is increasing and the state language can take a place that corresponds to its status in the language hierarchy.

CHAPTER 5

THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE DIASPORA

Ilze Korņeva
Inta Mieriņa
Andris Saulītis



The diaspora is “citizens of Latvia, Latvians, and others who permanently reside outside Latvia and have a link with Latvia, and also their family members” [Diaspora Law 2018]. In the expert report ‘Strengthening of the Unifying National Identity and the Cultural Space of Latvia. Proposals for the Social Integration Policy Plan 2019–2025’, the diaspora is understood as Latvian citizens and Latvians, as well as persons of Latvian origin who live outside Latvia and are aware of their belonging to the Latvian state [Mieriņa et al. 2017].

As costs of transport and communication grow lower, a transnational lifestyle is becoming more and more widespread in the world, including in Latvia, and people choose to reside in several countries at the same time. Consequently, this group of Latvians living abroad is also perceived and analysed as a part of the Latvian diaspora. The Latvian diaspora is extremely diverse; however, with the use of the criterion of chronology and historical conditions, it is usually considered to consist of Latvian exiles and their descendants, as well as other people who left Latvia before 1991, and the so called “New Diaspora”, i.e. the people who left the country after 1990.

Surveys on emigrants and remigrants show that language skills are one of the most important factors influencing plans for both leaving and returning. Thus, for example, in the survey “Return to Latvia” [Hazans 2016] it was concluded that 15% of remigrants were encouraged to return by a familiar, understandable language environment. In-depth interviews with Latvian remigrants [Kļave, Šūpule 2019] also show that the desire to speak one’s mother tongue is one of the main motivating factors for returning. On the other hand, those who do not speak Latvian so well more often than others face difficulties in adapting to life in Latvia [Hazans 2016].

One tenth of remigrants believe that opportunities to learn and improve Latvian language skills for children, as well as such possibilities offered to their spouses would help them return to Latvia. As language skills play a very important role in the migration process, increased attention has been paid to the acquisition of the Latvian language in diaspora policy planning documents, including *The Plan for Remigration Support Measures 2013–2016*, *National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy Guidelines 2012–2018* [Mieriņa et al. 2017], as well as the in the *Diaspora Law* that was adopted at the end of 2018.

In order to analyse the achievements of the diaspora policy, evaluate the planned tasks and the achieved results of policy planning in terms of the preservation and acquisition of the Latvian language, it is necessary to find out the main indicators of language skills, use and attitude and their impact factors. This would allow for further systematic and effective planning of work in the field of preserving, acquiring and enhancing language skills in the diaspora. In the implementation of the *Diaspora Law*, the Ministry of Education and Science is actively involved in co-operation with Latvian nationals, the Latvian Language Agency offers a variety of teaching materials and language learning opportunities, various materials are developed by the State Education and Content Centre, and support for remigrants is provided by the Society Integration Fund, etc.

5.1. Latvian language skills in the diaspora

The data of the 2019 Diaspora Survey¹ shows that since 2014, the share of Latvians and Latvian citizens (hereinafter – the Latvian diaspora) who assess their Latvian language skills as “very good” or “fluent” has increased (from 59% to 72%) (Fig. 75).

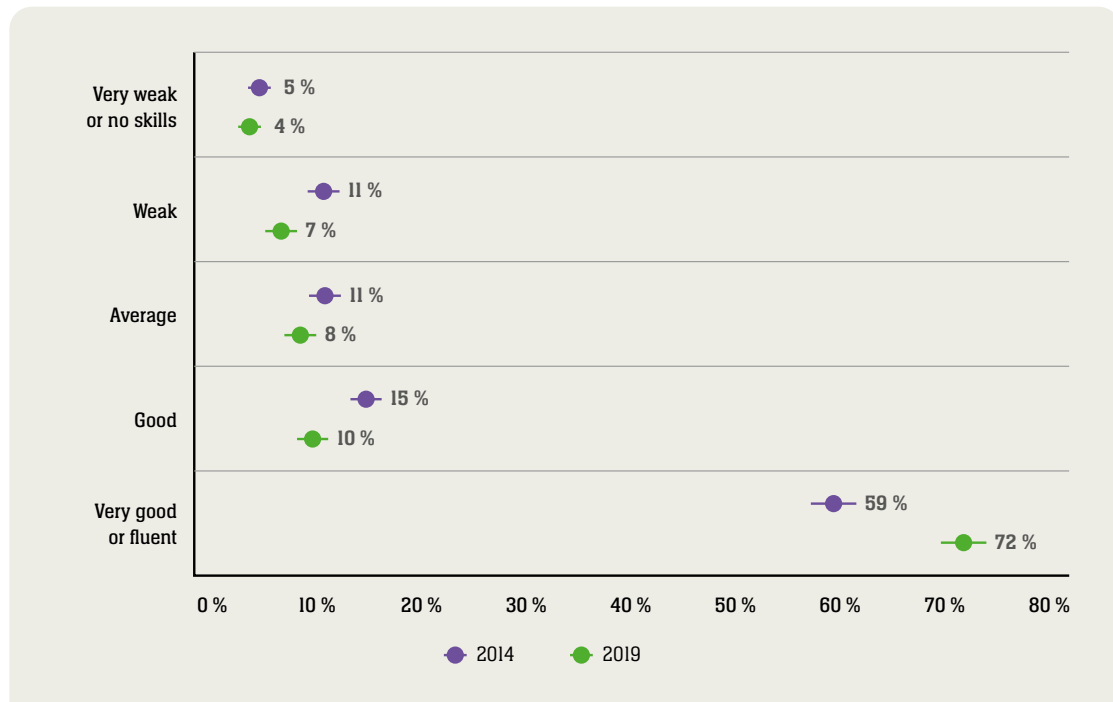


Fig. 75. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills in the diaspora, respondents' answers to the question “How do you assess your knowledge of the Latvian language?”: 2014 and 2019 survey data comparison (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

Analysing the data in groups by respondents'² ethnicity (Fig. 76), currently 86% of respondents who identified themselves as Latvians speak the language very well and fluently. Latvians born outside Latvia have a lower level of proficiency in language: 17% of respondents have weak or very weak Latvian language skills or do not know it, and only 57% of them know Latvian very well.

¹ In 2019, with the support of the Latvian Council of Science grant “Research of Welfare and Social Integration in the Context of Liquid Migration: A Longitudinal Approach” (Izp-2018/1-0042), the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia led by I. Mieriņa conducted the second survey “Latvian Emigrant Communities” (the survey was first conducted in 2014, cf. <https://migracija.lv/doc/latvijas-emigrantu-kopienas-zinojums.pdf>). Thanks to the support of Sub-project 2 Activity 2 of the State Research Programme “Latvian Language” (implemented by LVA), more detailed questions on the language situation in the diaspora were included in the survey. The obtained data allow one to observe the changes in the language proficiency indicators of the diaspora and remigrants – both adults and children – as well as to analyse the impact factors of these changes and other issues related to the use of language. Additionally the survey allowed one to obtain data on changes in the level of Latvian language proficiency and language use habits, not only at the collective but also individual level, and establish the factors that determine these changes.

² Respondents from the age of 15 were interviewed.

Latvian language proficiency of representatives of other nationalities is lower than that of Latvians: 51% of Russians and 62% of emigrants of other nationalities speak Latvian well or very well. However, this result is significantly better than in 2014, as the number of Russian respondents whose Latvian language skills are weak, very weak or who do not speak the language has decreased. This indicates an improvement in Latvian language skills among young people (cf. Fig. 77). Nevertheless, the improvement of Latvian language skills among Latvians can be partly explained by the decrease in the number of exiles and their descendants (Hazans 2020, 37) – they most often considered themselves Latvians, despite the lack of Latvian language skills.

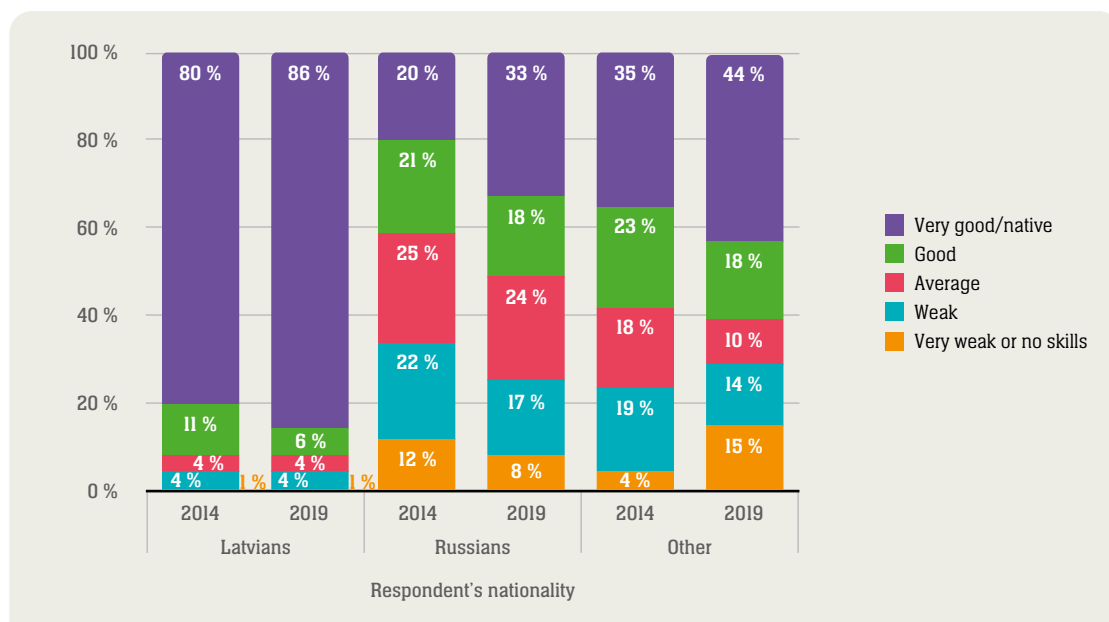


Fig. 76. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills in the diaspora in groups by ethnicity: 2014 and 2019 survey data comparison (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

Latvian language skills are assessed at a higher level by the representatives of the youngest age groups. Most young people (88%) under the age of 24 have either a native, very good or good proficiency in Latvian. In the age group from 25 to 34, the majority of the respondents have Latvian as their mother tongue, but in general 87% of the respondents speak Latvian well or very well (Fig. 77). To a large extent, these differences can be explained by the improvement of Latvian language skills among the younger generation of the so called new diaspora, who are not native speakers of Latvian.

The Diaspora Survey data show that proficiency and use of the Latvian language correlates with an individual's plans to return or, on the contrary, not to return to Latvia. This is logical, as language skills or lack thereof affect not only the adaptation and reintegration of remigrants into society and the labour market, but also the individual's psychological well-being and security. On the other hand, the opposite relation cannot be ruled out either – those who do not plan to return may be less motivated to learn or cultivate Latvian language skills.

Language difficulties were mentioned as an obstacle to return to Latvia by 19% of the Latvian diaspora respondents, including 15% of those who consider themselves Latvians –

and this number is slightly higher than in 2014. At present, 88% of the representatives of the diaspora who plan to return to Latvia in the next five years have a good command of Latvian, 95% of the respondents who intend to return in old age also have such a command of Latvian, while a relatively smaller percentage of those who do not plan to return to Latvia speak Latvian, i.e. 74% of the respondents (Fig. 78).

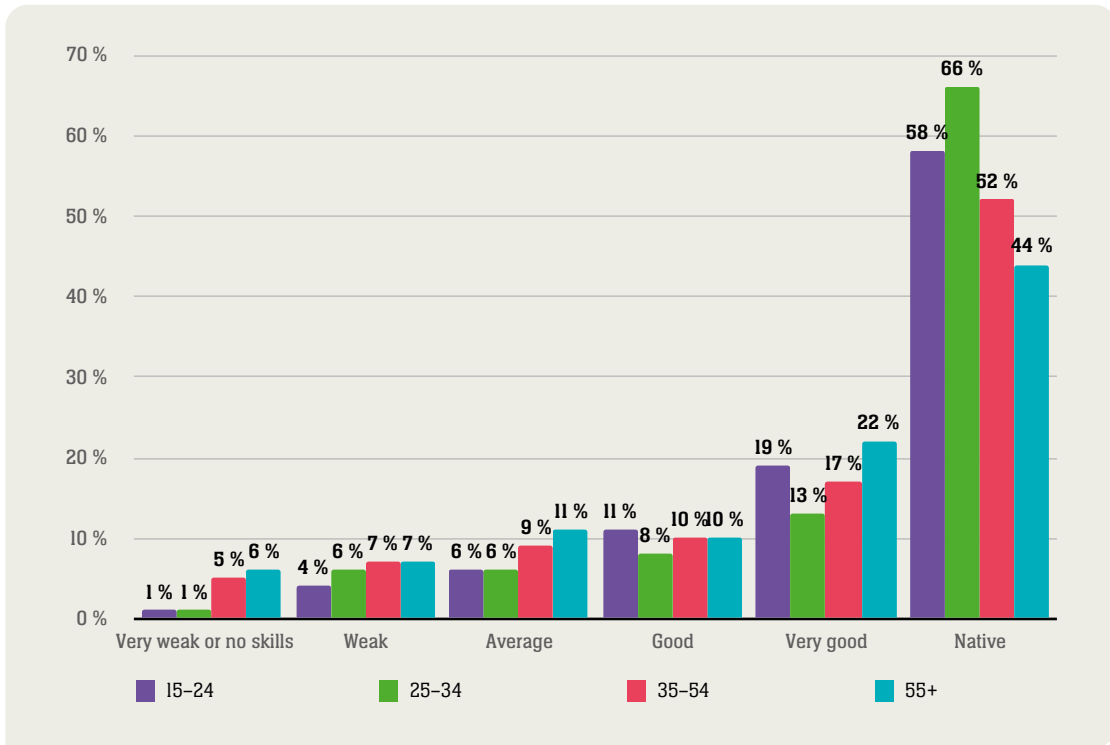


Fig. 77. Self-assessment of Latvian language skills in different age groups (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey

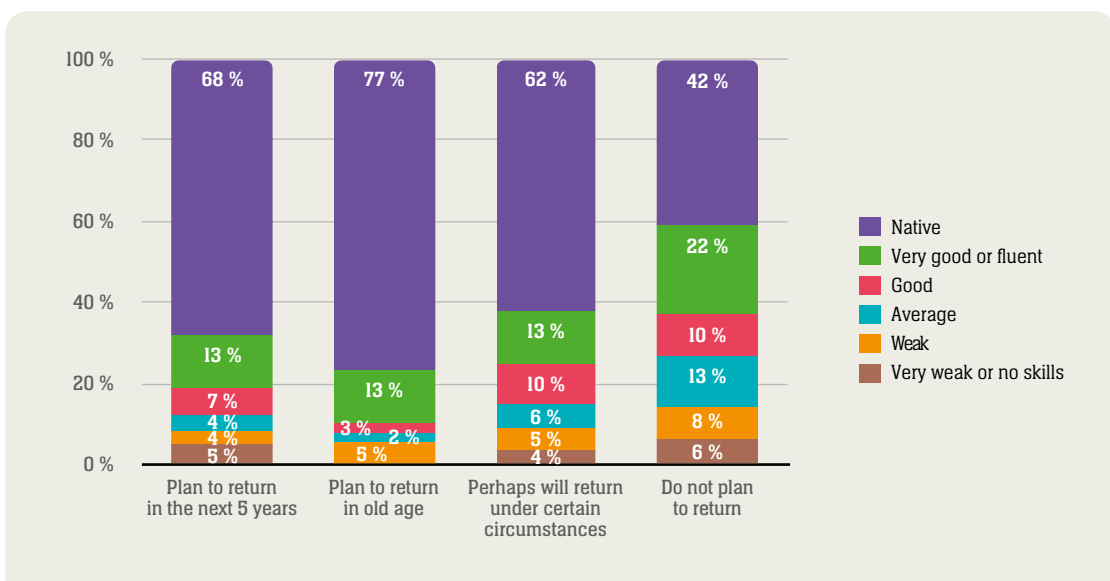


Fig. 78. Latvian language proficiency level (self-assessment) related to plans of diaspora representatives to return to Latvia (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey

Naturally, the Latvian language skills in the Latvian diaspora (especially in the group that left the country after 1991) are closely related to the respondent's ethnicity (and, consequently, mother tongue). The second important factor is the use of the Latvian language in the family, and the third factor is the number of years spent outside Latvia.

Those born abroad have a worse command of Latvian than those born in Latvia; moreover, those who have spent all their lives abroad know the language worse than others. Respondents who have spent more than 15 years abroad speak Latvian worse than those who have spent fewer years abroad. If the language is no longer actively used, language skills will also deteriorate among those who were born and have spent their childhood or youth in Latvia. A certain degree of assimilation is indicated by the fact that Latvian language skills are assessed as lower by those who feel a strong belonging to the local community in their country of residence, i.e. have established in the new country.

Taking into account the influence of these factors, the representatives of the diaspora who have Latvian citizenship have better Latvian language skills. Perhaps, having citizenship is yet another incentive to learn or maintain the Latvian language.

The level of Latvian language proficiency is not statistically significantly affected by the respondent's age, education, whether the respondent works in their country of residence, whether their spouse is Latvian, how often he or she travels to Latvia, or whether he or she has different personal (family, friends) or economic ties with Latvia. There is a definite connection between Latvian language skills and a sense of belonging to Latvia; however, this is not statistically significant. Finally, it should be noted that men have slightly worse Latvian language skills.

The answers of the respondents who participated in both the 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Surveys allow one to compare the changes in the self-assessment of Latvian language skills during the last five years in this group. Thus, the reasons for these changes are also revealed (Fig. 79). The answers provided show that 62% of the respondents in this group assess their Latvian language skills in 2019 just as they did before, i.e. their proficiency level has not changed. For 30% of respondents their skills have improved and for 8% of them they have worsened. The negative change in the level of Latvian language proficiency has almost always been small – within only one sub-level (i.e., from the assessment “very good” to “good”, from “good” to “average” or from “average” to “poor” language skills). The increase in the level was mostly insignificant even with the enhancement of language skills (23% of respondents). However, 7% of respondents indicated a significant improvement in Latvian language skills – at least two degrees higher (for example, very weak language skills improved into average, weak into good and intermediate into very good).

Latvian language skills have improved mainly among those who almost did not know the language at all in 2014 or whose Latvian language skills were very weak or weak, as well as among those who considered themselves to be Latvian or Russian and are under the age of 45, especially in the 25–44 age group (see Fig. 76, 77 and 80).

In 2019, Latvian language skills were assessed as higher by the Russian respondents (49%), as well as by respondents of other nationalities (except Latvian and Russian) (71%) (Fig. 80). At the same time, their Latvian language skills have deteriorated more often than among Latvians (15% and 12% of cases respectively). Taking into account that the use

of the Latvian language among these respondents living abroad is not necessary in most cases, unless there is a special willingness to maintain their Latvian language skills, it therefore is not so stable and can change faster.

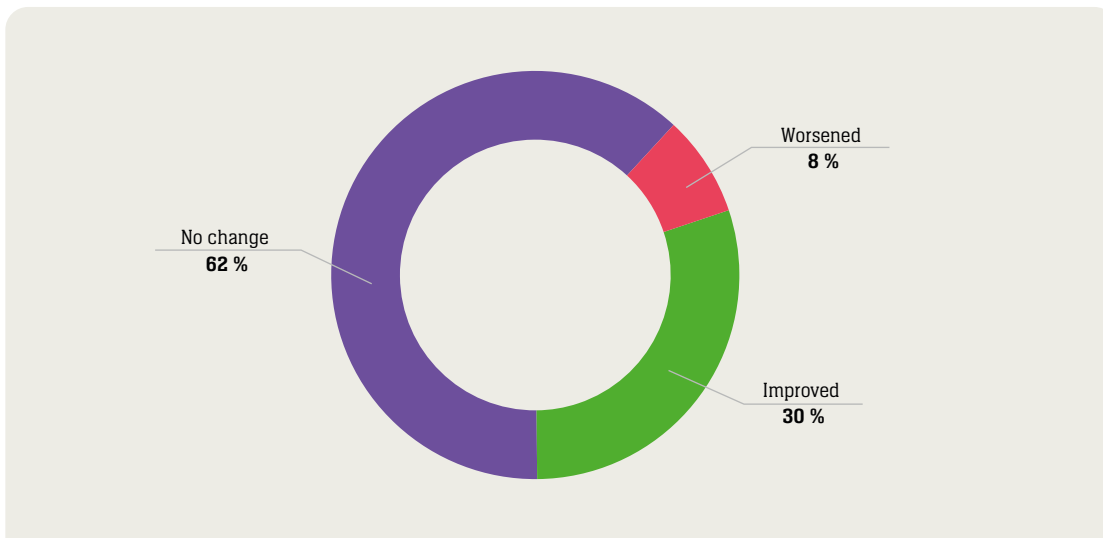


Fig. 79. Changes in the level of Latvian language proficiency: a comparison of the data of 2014 and 2019 Survey respondents (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

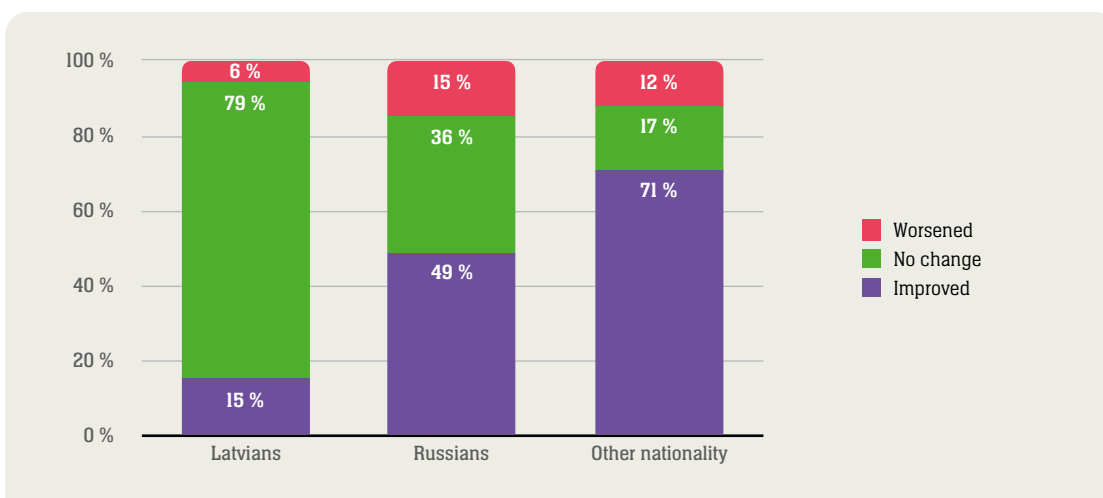


Fig. 80. Changes in the level of Latvian language skills in groups of respondents of different nationalities: a comparison of the data of 2014 and 2019 Survey respondents (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

An important factor is that a spouse having a different nationality does not per se affect the development of Latvian language skills. What is important, however, is whether the family speaks Latvian or not.

As mentioned above, those who plan to return to Latvia in the next five years have more often improved their Latvian language skills (41%), while among those who do not intend to do so or plan to return only in old age these skills have deteriorated (17%). Changes in Latvian language skills are also closely linked to a respondent's sense of belonging to

the Latvian population – the less belonging a respondent felt to the Latvian population in 2014, the sooner his or her Latvian language skills have deteriorated (Fig. 81). From the point of view of the research methodology, however, it should be noted that those who felt less belonging to the Latvian population mostly did not participate in the 2019 Diaspora Survey, which may have influenced the result, as the percentage of the respondents who participated in the survey rated their Latvian language skills higher than in 2014.

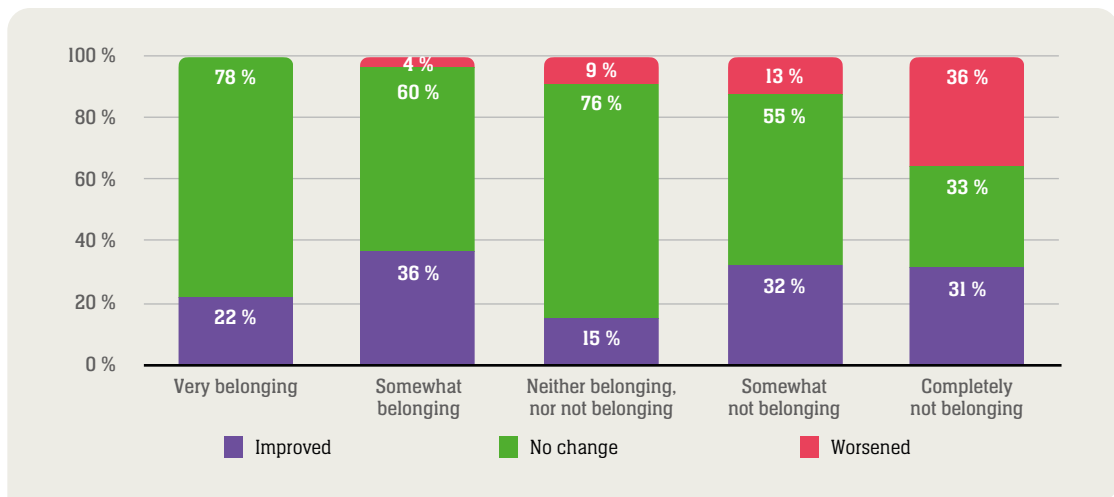


Fig. 81. Changes in Latvian language skills and sense of belonging to the Latvian population: a comparison of the data of 2014 and 2019 Survey respondents (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

The number of friends in Latvia or friends from Latvia in the country of residence does not in itself facilitate the development of Latvian language skills, moreover, more frequent communication does not help, as friends can be people of other nationalities and speak another language. However, a certain positive effect is observed if respondents still have property, company, work, credit obligations, etc. in Latvia, thus if there is any practical connection with Latvia, it most likely requires communication in Latvian. It also creates additional motivation to teach Latvian to a child or not to let them forget Latvian. Latvian language skills have deteriorated more among those who travel to Latvia only once every six months or even less often and who therefore do not have the opportunity to spend time in the Latvian language environment. Proficiency in Latvian language has also deteriorated more among those who work, i.e. are in constant contact with colleagues of other nationalities. The respondents with secondary or higher education, in turn, have managed to improve their Latvian language skills more often, therefore in the future more attention should be paid to the group with a lower level of education (as their level of information literacy may be insufficient for remote cooperation, this group is often more difficult to reach).

The survey data show interesting changes in respondents' self-identification by nationality. 60% of the respondents consider themselves Latvian, whereas 33% did not consider themselves did not consider themselves Latvian both surveys, but some of the respondents have changed their identification (Fig. 82). 2% of the respondents no longer consider themselves Latvian, while even more (5%) respondents who did not

consider themselves Latvian in 2014, now indicate that they are of Latvian nationality. This result shows that living in exile sometimes makes one more aware of one's origins and ethnicity.

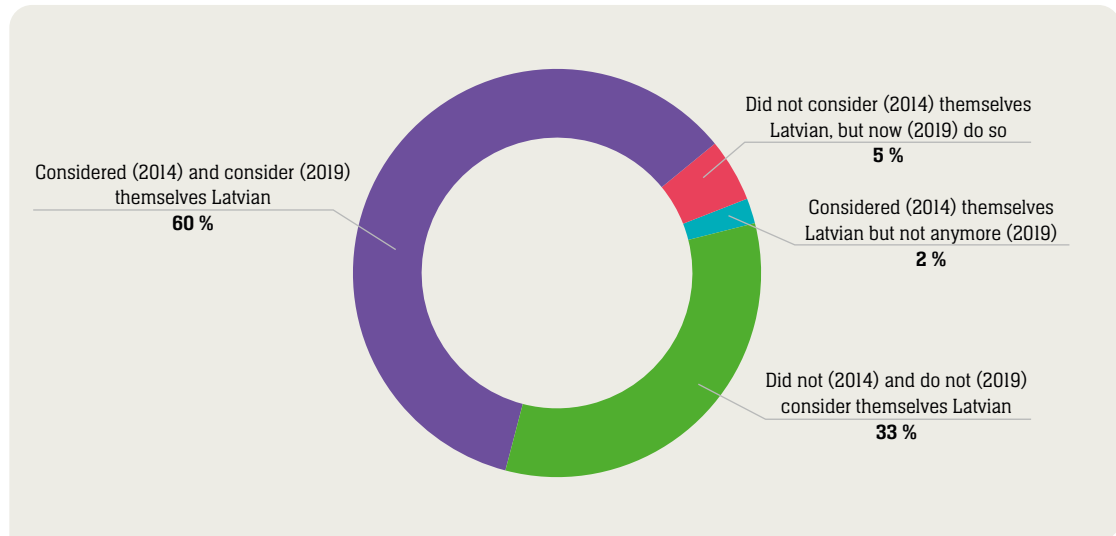


Fig. 82. Changes in ethnic self-identification: a comparison of the answers of the respondents of 2014 and 2019 Survey (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey

Thus, the Latvian language skills have been improved more by those who feel at least a little belonging to the Latvian population, as opposed to those who do not feel connected to people from Latvia. It must be acknowledged that identity, a sense of belonging and the idea of a possible return contribute to the maintenance of the Latvian language in the diaspora.

5.2. Latvian language use

Being outside Latvia, where a fully-fledged language environment is not possible, it is important what language family members speak at home. The 2019 Diaspora Survey data show that almost half (46%) of Latvians living abroad use Latvian in the family, 46% use English, 38% use Russian, 13% use the language of their country of residence (other than English or Russian, for example, German, French, Italian, etc.) and 2% speak another language, the reasons for which have not been indicated but can vary widely (Fig. 83). Compared to the situation in 2014, when 42% of the respondents used Latvian in the family, 46% used Russian and 39% used another language, it can be concluded that the use of Russian in emigrant families has slightly decreased, while the importance of other foreign languages has increased. In this respect the Latvian language has remained virtually unchanged.

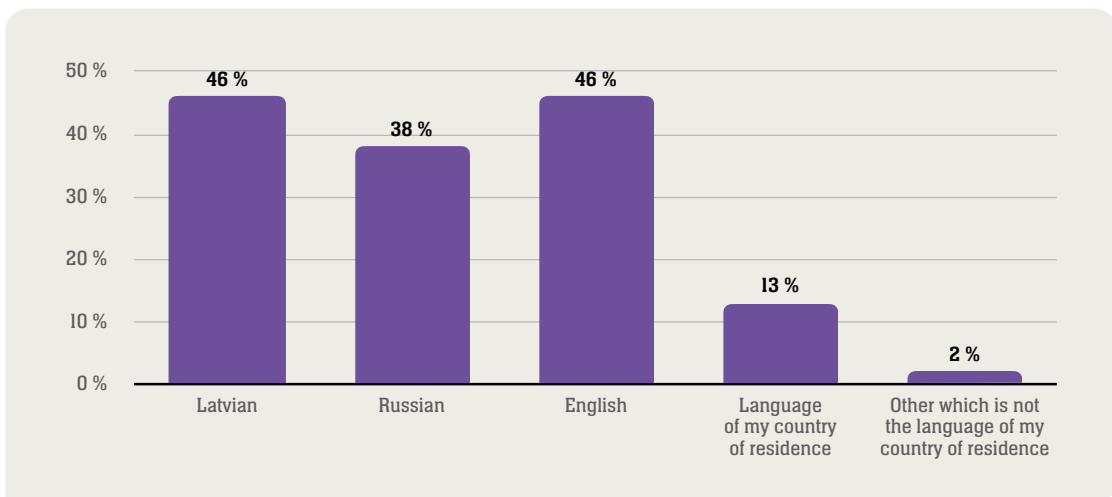


Fig. 83. Language used at home in the respondent's country of residence (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents who do not live alone)

Compared to 2014, the number of members of the diaspora who use Latvian and another language in the family has increased from 17% to 26%. 21% of the respondents use only Latvian in the family, which is slightly less than in 2014 (Fig. 84).

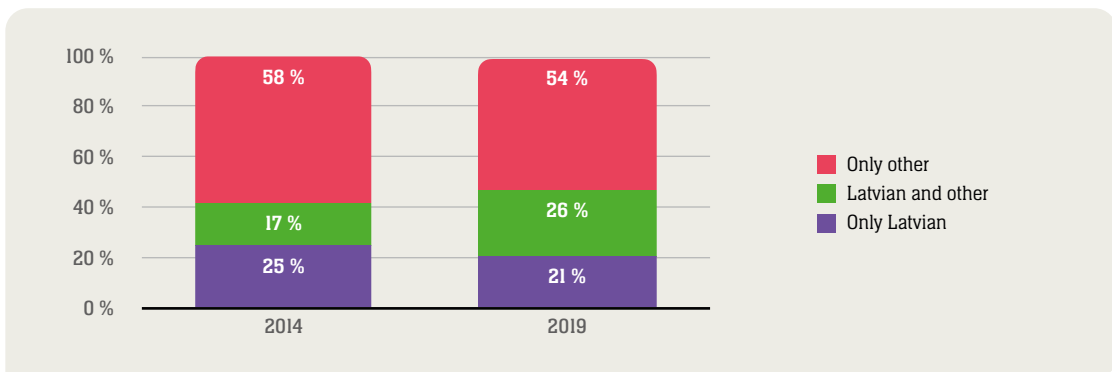


Fig. 84. Languages used at home in the respondent's country of residence: 2014 and 2019 survey data comparison (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents who do not live alone)

A similar picture is observed when analysing Latvian respondents only. The number of Latvians who use Latvian and another language in the family increased (from 24% to 32%), while the number of Latvians who use only Latvian in the family decreased significantly (from 40% to 28%) (Fig. 85). This means that it will become increasingly difficult for children to maintain their Latvian language skills in the future.

19% of the respondents³, who according to the data of the 2014 Diaspora Survey spoke Latvian in the family, now, as shown by the survey conducted five years later,

³ Out of the 1,073 respondents who participated in the 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Surveys (i.e. panel respondents who participated in both surveys), 15–16% currently live or lived alone and were therefore did not answer questions about language used in the family.

stopped using Latvian at home (in the family). At the same time, 12% of those who did not previously use Latvian at home started doing so (Fig. 86).

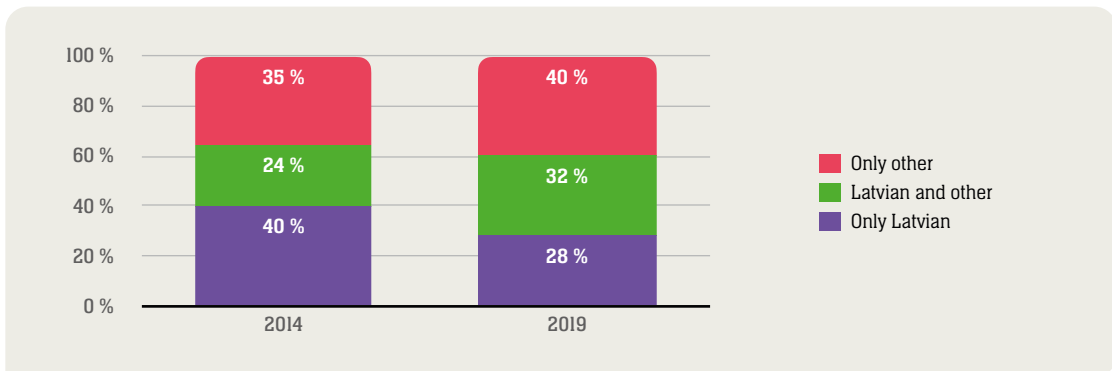


Fig. 85. Languages used at home in the group of Latvian respondents in their country of residence: 2014 and 2019 survey data comparison (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (Latvian respondents who do not live alone)

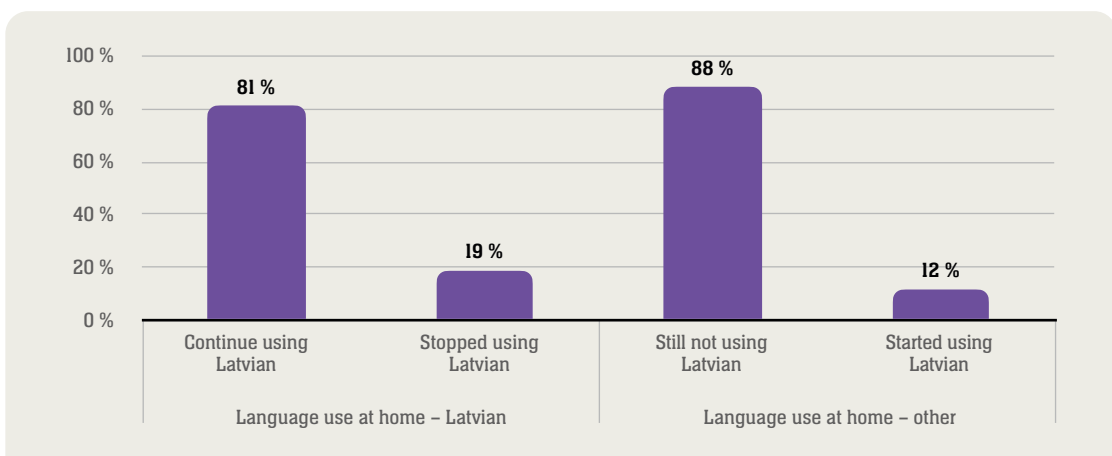


Fig. 86. Dynamics of Latvian language use at home (%): 2014 and 2019 survey data comparison (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Surveys (panel respondents who do not live alone)

Those who have fully moved abroad are more likely to stop using Latvian at home, while those who live “mostly abroad” have started using the Latvian language more often in the family outside Latvia. Those who indicated that they live both in Latvia and abroad and had not used the Latvian language in communication at home before (2014 Diaspora Survey) most often (84%) have not changed their habits in using the Latvian language (2019 Diaspora Survey). The majority of those who come to Latvia at least once every 2–3 months use Latvian in the family, while those who visit Latvia less often usually choose to communicate in another language at home.

Similarly, the use of the Latvian language at home is influenced by a respondent’s communication with family or friends in Latvia: the less frequently such communication occurs, the more often the use of the Latvian language in the diaspora is abandoned, and vice versa. (Fig. 87). The exception here, of course, is the case of respondents who have neither friends nor family in Latvia. Thus, there have been some other significant

factors that have influenced the choice to use the Latvian language at home. In general, the answers provided by the respondents show that habit is of great importance in regard to the use of the language – if the respondent speaks Latvian more often on a daily basis or remains in the Latvian language environment, this habit also seems more natural in the family and at home.

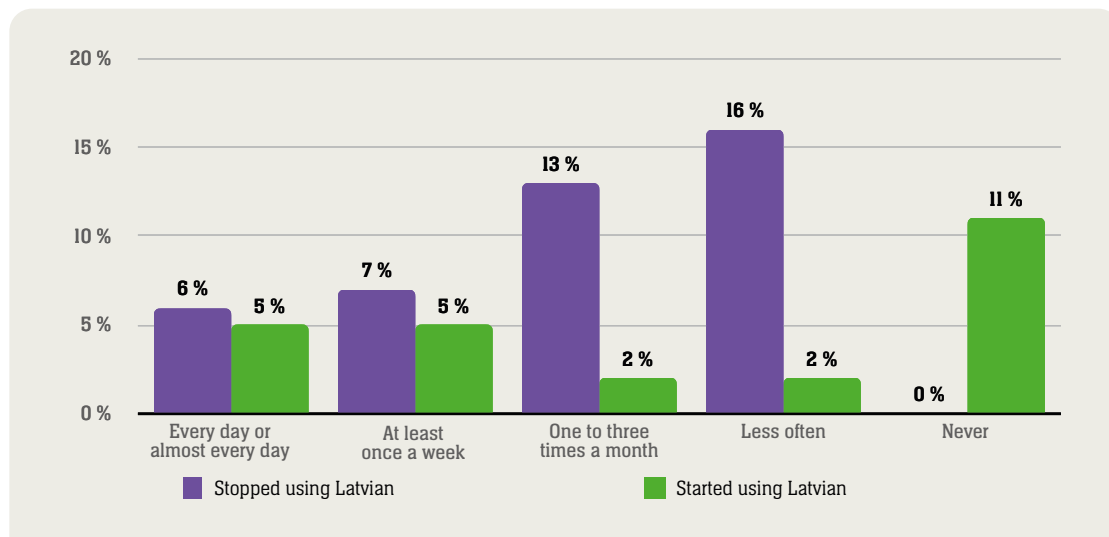


Fig. 87. Use of Latvian at home and in communication with relatives and friends in Latvia: interrelation (%).
 Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (panel respondents who do not live alone)

The use of language at home and in the family is greatly influenced by the nationality of respondents’ spouses. Although the 2019 Diaspora Survey did not ask about the nationality of a respondent’s spouse and asked questions about citizenship instead, it can nevertheless be concluded clearly enough – during the last five years those whose spouse is a citizen of their country of residence stopped using Latvian the most, whereas those whose spouse is Latvian have started to communicate in Latvian (Fig. 88).

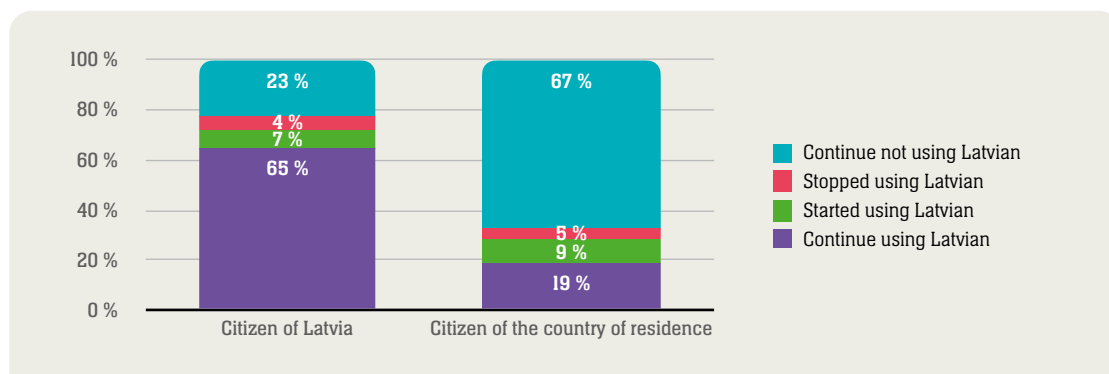


Fig. 88. Changes in the use of Latvian at home and the relation between the choice of language and the spouse’s citizenship of their country of residence or Latvia (%).
 Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (panel respondents who do not live alone)

The use of the Latvian language at home is also associated with a sense of belonging to Latvia. As shown by the answers, the respondents who do not feel closely connected

with Latvia or are not connected with it, most often did not and do not use Latvian in the family or have stopped using Latvian; on the other hand, respondents who feel very closely connected with Latvia have started using the Latvian language at home in the majority of cases (Fig. 89).

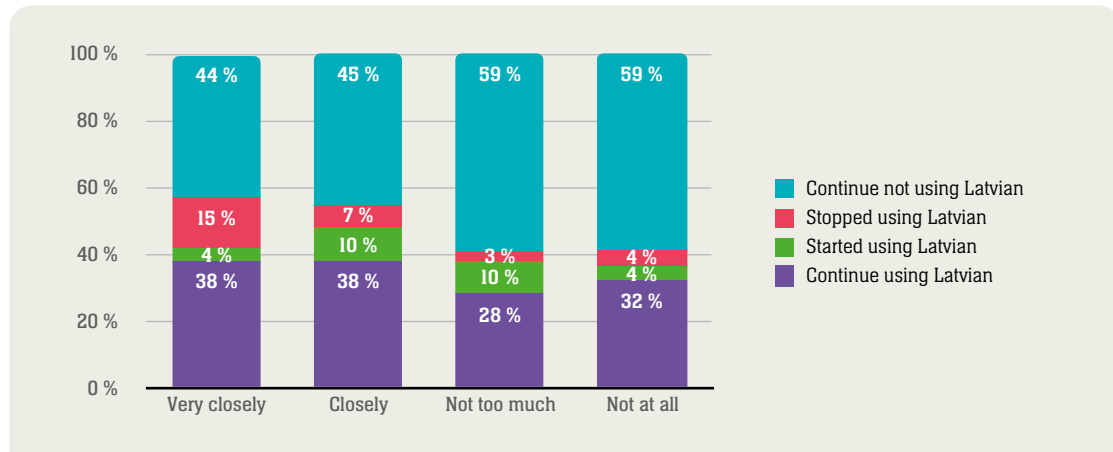


Fig. 89. Use of Latvian at home in relation to respondent's sense of belonging to Latvia (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (panel respondents who do not live alone)

Return plans have some influence on the choice of language: if respondents plan to return to Latvia in the next five years, they are most likely to start using Latvian in the family, while respondents who do not plan to return to Latvia have most often stopped using Latvian at home (38% of those who used Latvian at home five years ago stopped using it).

5.3. Latvian language skills of children and young people in the diaspora: possibilities for preservation and language use

Latvian language skills of children and young people in the diaspora to a great extent are rooted in parents' motivation and willingness for their children to preserve their language. [Mieriņa 2016]. The analysis of the data of the 2019 Diaspora Survey shows that if it is not important for parents that their children know Latvian, the language skills of their children will be significantly worse. Even the willingness for a child to be able to at least understand and communicate in Latvian at a conversational level positively motivates learning and guarantees success.

In the 2014 Diaspora Survey, about half (48%) of the respondents indicated that children should have a very good command of Latvian, however, the answers to this question show a pronounced difference of opinion in the groups by ethnicity (Fig. 90). About two thirds (70%) of Latvians living abroad with a child want their child to know Latvian fluently. 22% of them want their child to at least understand and be able to communicate in Latvian, and for only 7% of Latvians this issue is irrelevant. There is a

special group that consists of representatives of the so called old diaspora, who consider themselves Latvians; and show strong willingness for their children to understand Latvian very well (88% compared to 69% of the respondents of the new diaspora).

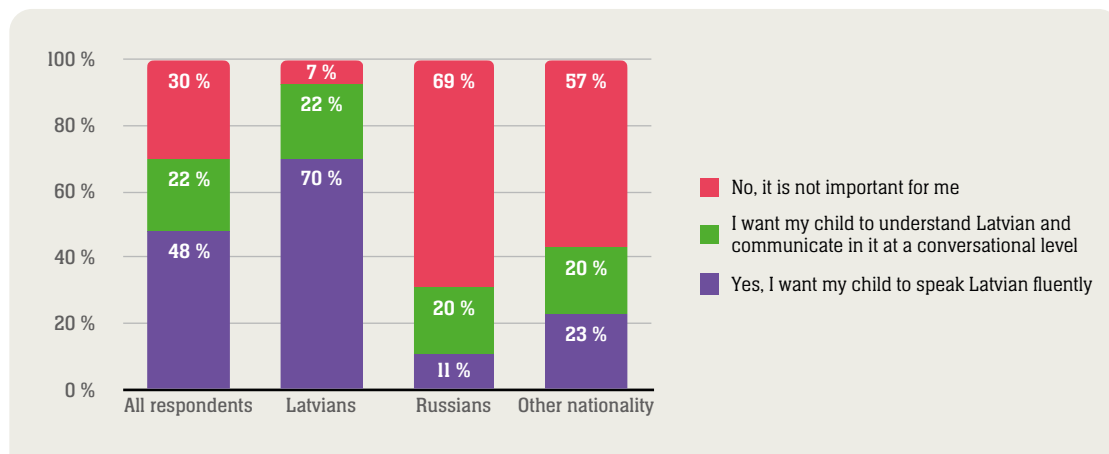


Fig. 90. Importance of Latvian language skills of children and young people in the diaspora: parents’ opinion (answers to the question “Is it important for you that your child knows Latvian?”, %).
 Source: 2014 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

Representatives of other nationalities who have emigrated from Latvia mostly find it irrelevant whether their children understand Latvian, although about a third (31%) of the respondents of Russian nationality and 43% of the respondents of other nationalities would like to have their children speak Latvian. Most of them consider the ability to communicate and understand Latvian to be sufficient.

In the 2019 Diaspora Survey, for the absolute majority of Latvian parents (94%) it is important that their children know or at least understand and speak Latvian. This is also important for the majority (81%) of parents of other nationalities. Among parents of Russian nationality, preserving Latvian language skills in their children seems important to 46% of the respondents (Fig. 91).

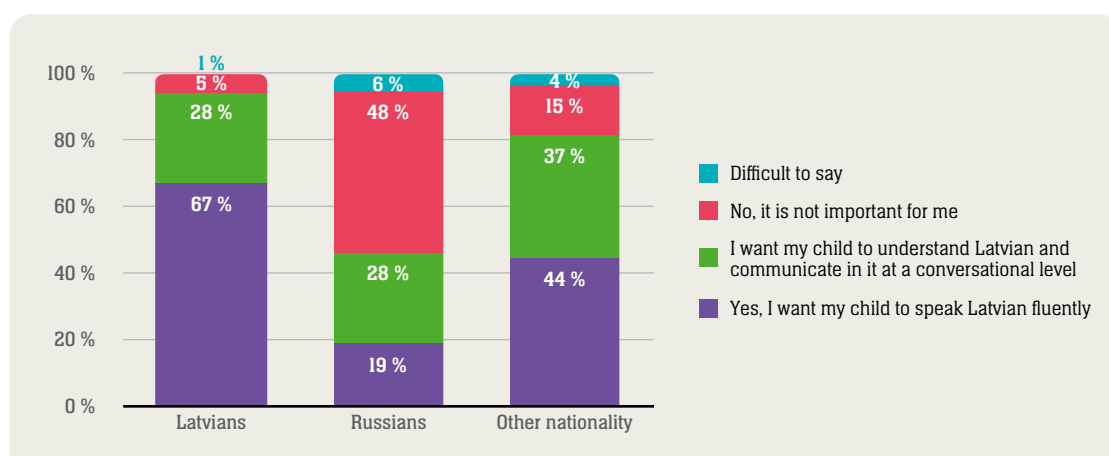


Fig. 91. Importance of Latvian language skills of children and young people in the diaspora: parents’ opinion (answers to the question “Is it important for you that your child knows Latvian?”, %).
 Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

In terms of attitude towards the language, the respondent's ethnicity, but no less respondent's citizenship, plays an important role. The likelihood that a Latvian citizen will want his or her child to speak Latvian fluently is 125 times higher as opposed to an indifferent attitude. Latvian citizens are also 25 times more likely to want a child to be fluent in Latvian, as opposed to being able to communicate in Latvian at least at a conversational level. The nationality of a spouse also plays an important role in regard to the attitude towards the Latvian language. If a spouse is Latvian, respondents 3.8 times more often expressed their wish that the child knows Latvian very well, and 2.7 times more often that the child can speak Latvian fluently, not just at a conversational level. If a spouse is Russian, it will rather not be important for the respondent that the child understands Latvian.

The greater the number of relatives and friends in Latvia, the more pronounced the opinion that the child should be fluent in Latvian, as this increases the value of the language in maintaining family ties. Patriotism and a sense of belonging to one's nationality and Latvia are also important: the likelihood that those who feel closely connected to Latvia will want their child to know Latvian well, as opposed to an indifferent attitude, is nine times higher than the likelihood that it will be important for those emigrants who do not feel connected to Latvia at all. This shows that the emotional component is important in motivating language acquisition and preservation.

The attitude towards a child's Latvian language skills is largely influenced by plans to return to Latvia. It is possible to form such a correlation from the data obtained from the 2014 Diaspora Survey and in comparison with those who do not plan to return to Latvia; respondents who admit this possibility are six times more likely to express a positive opinion about the need for good language skills as opposed to an indifferent attitude, and are three times more likely to express a need for a higher level of proficiency than just conversational skills. For example, 94% of those who plan to return to Latvia in the next five years want to know Latvian fluently, compared to only 34% of those who do not plan to return to Latvia during this period (Fig. 92).

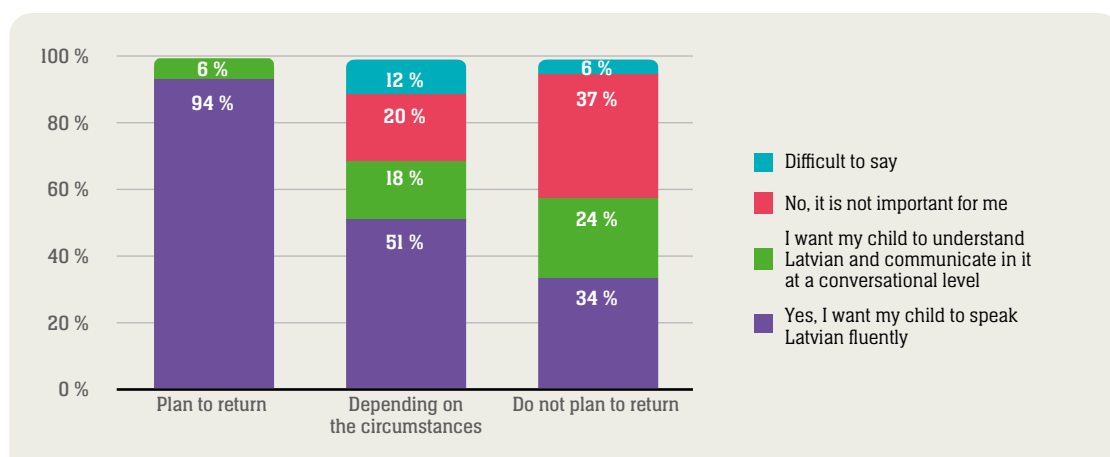


Fig. 92. The importance of children's and young people's Latvian language skills in the diaspora and its connection with plans to return to Latvia within five years (%).

Source: 2014 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

It should be noted that the fact that a child knows Latvian fluently is more often not important for the respondents who do not trust the Latvian government and who have left

Latvia due to better social guarantees and economic stability abroad. This may indicate that the respondent views this new country as a possible future country of residence for his or her child, therefore, of course, he or she considers their child's Latvian language skills to be less necessary. If it is very important for parents that their children live and study in Latvia, the Latvian language skills of these children and young people are significantly better than those of children whose parents do not have such plans or hopes.

Interestingly enough, children living in families of higher-level managers and skilled specialists, as well as of service or sales workers, know Latvian more poorly than children of workers without special qualifications. One of the possible explanations is that the children of higher-level employees have more opportunities to make contact and make friends with local children and young people, which does not promote the preservation of the Latvian language. On the other hand, language "forgetting" may be deliberate and related to the status of languages in society, as evidenced by in-depth interview data (there are children who are shy to speak Latvian in the presence of friends or at school [Kārklīņa, Kamerāde 2015]).

The 2014 Diaspora Survey concluded that almost half (46%) of the families living abroad with children are deterred from returning to Latvia by concerns about whether the child will receive the necessary support to integrate with the Latvian education system. Another 23% of the respondents admit that this issue is important enough. The 2019 Diaspora Survey reveals that the lack of Latvian language skills in children is the cause of these concerns. 73% of the surveyed parents indicate that insufficient language skills or lack thereof could most often hinder a child's inclusion in Latvian schools and kindergartens (Fig. 93). According to diaspora parents, different approaches to teaching in schools and the attitude of teachers and peers towards newcomers could also pose a problem.

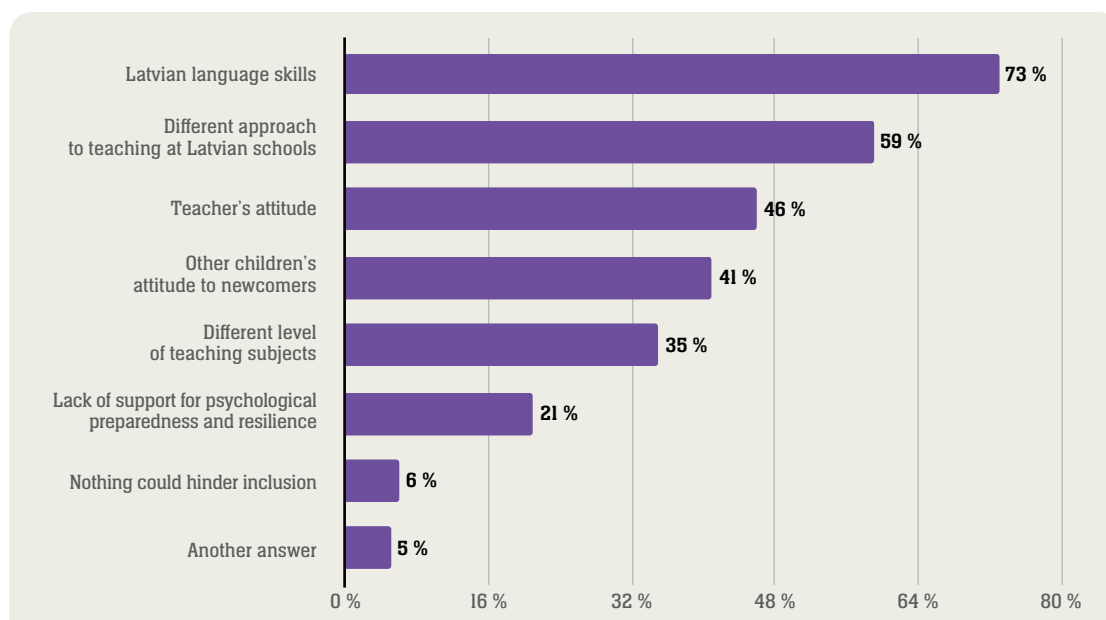


Fig. 93. Lack of Latvian language skills as an obstacle to children's integration in Latvian schools (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

It is more often important for people with higher education that their child knows Latvian fluently, while for those with secondary or lower education this aspect is not

as important. Thus, children in these families have the highest risk of language loss. Employment also influences parents' wishes: those who work, look after children or other family members, or are actively looking for work, as opposed to economically inactive respondents, are more often willing to accept that their child speaks Latvian only at a conversational level. This shows that being busy may be one of the factors that makes parents accept a certain loss of their child's Latvian language skills.

There are also differences in the answers of the respondents depending on their place of residence, i.e. in the groups of respondents from different countries. The diaspora parents in Eastern Europe, Northern Europe and Germany have a stronger desire for a child to be fluent in Latvian. It is less relevant in other countries, including those living in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; perhaps this is due to the great distance from Latvia, which limits the possibility for various forms of contact. Of course, in all countries there are families who are able to maintain Latvian language skills among children.

Characterization of Latvian language skills of children and young people of the diaspora

Latvian children and young people (aged 3–17) living abroad have a significantly better knowledge of the language of their country of residence than Latvian. According to parents, for 31% of children the official language (or one of the official languages) of their country of residence is their mother tongue, and a further 45% of children speak it very well or fluently. Moreover, more than half of the children of the Latvian diaspora have poor or very weak Latvian language skills (or they do not know the language). Only 21% of children living abroad know Latvian at a good or native level of proficiency (Fig. 94). Compared to proficiency in other languages, the proficiency of Latvian is the weakest among emigrant children of Latvian origin. The rare use of Latvian in the family and the fact that communication outside the family mostly occurs not in the Latvian language but in the language of their new country of residence significantly reduces the likelihood that a child will preserve the Latvian language.

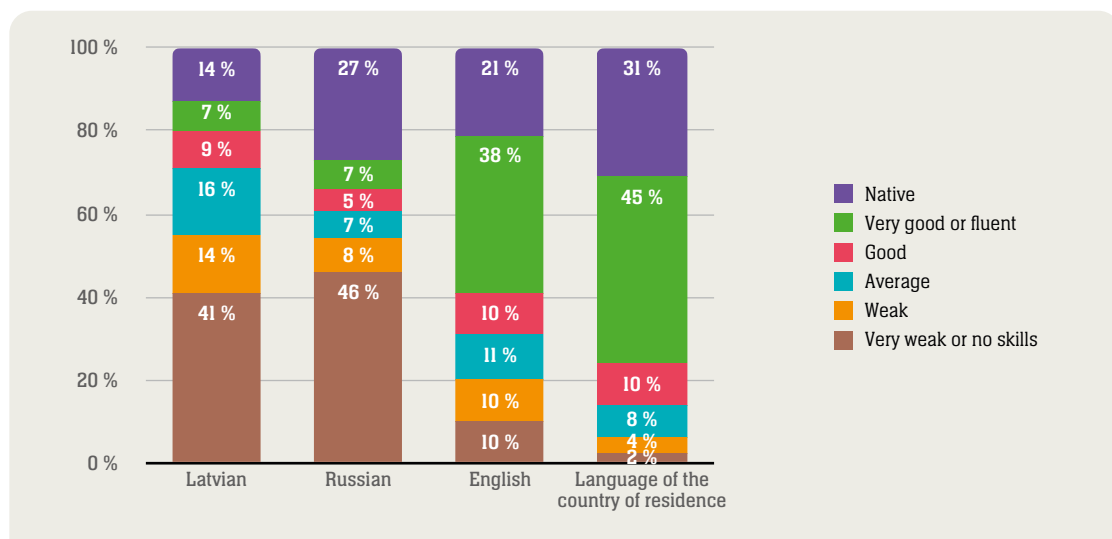


Fig. 94. Language skills of children and young people in the assessment of respondents (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

Over the last five years, the percentage of children and young people with good Latvian language skills has decreased significantly, from 17% to 9%, with a slight increase in the number of children and young people with average, weak and very weak proficiency in language or lack of knowledge of the language. On average, one fifth of diaspora parents still believe that their children know Latvian very well and/or at the native language level (Fig. 95).

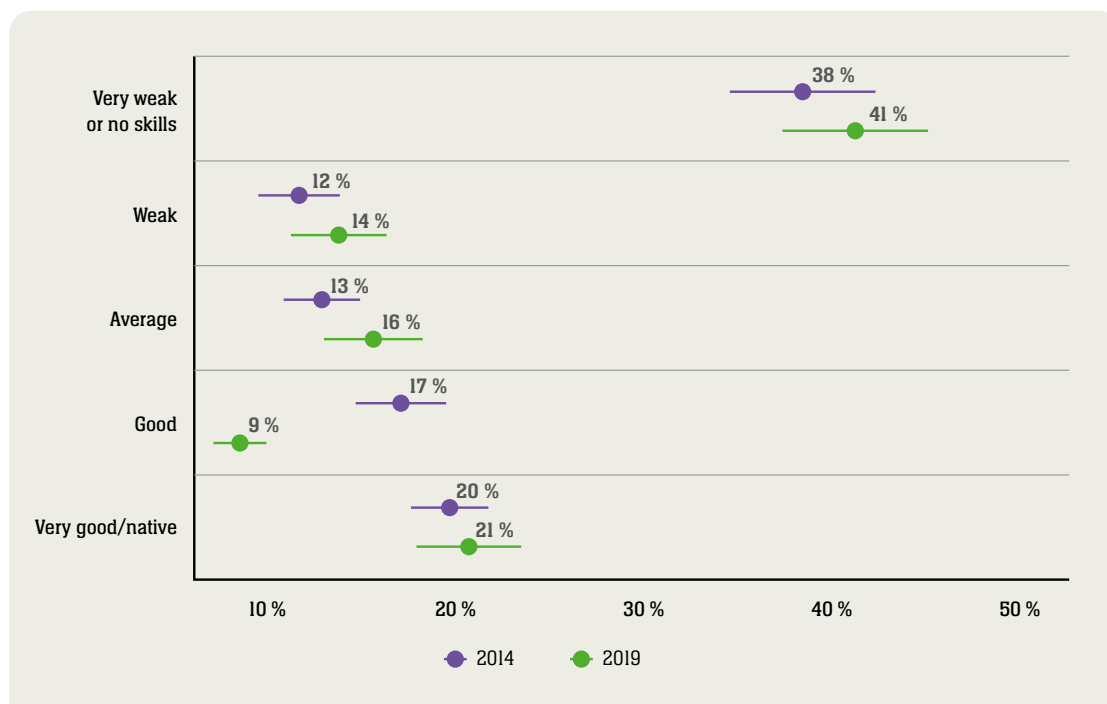


Fig. 95. Children's Latvian language skill level in parents' assessment (%).

Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents who have children)

This decrease in the level of Latvian language skills can be partly explained by the fact that with the decrease in the intensity of emigration, the percentage of children and young people in the diaspora who have been living abroad or were even born abroad has increased. As is well known, the time spent as an emigrant significantly affects proficiency in Latvian: those who left the country as children often forget the language. Naturally, over the years, the proportion of children with at least a good level of language skills has decreased, but the proportion of those with intermediate knowledge has increased significantly (Fig. 96).

There is a close connection between a child's Latvian language skills and a child's age. Firstly, until a certain age, a child intensively learns and develops language skills; secondly, among older children there are more of those who spent their childhood in Latvia in the Latvian language environment. In the terms of the Latvian language proficiency level, one should take into account the age at which a child emigrated: the older a child at the time of emigration, the better his or her Latvian language skills and the greater the chance that his or her language skills will not be lost (Fig. 97). Children who emigrated at an early age, and especially those born abroad, have the relatively weakest Latvian language skills. For example, 48% of children born abroad aged 3–17 have very poor skills or do not speak the language, compared to 32% of children born in Latvia. Children born abroad have not

had the opportunity to learn Latvian naturally in the relevant linguistic environment, and as they become more independent of their parents and start school, their language skills deteriorate further (for comparison: in children who left Latvia at the age of six or more, when their Latvian language skills had stabilized, a marked decline in Latvian language skills is no longer observed [Mieriņa 2016]).

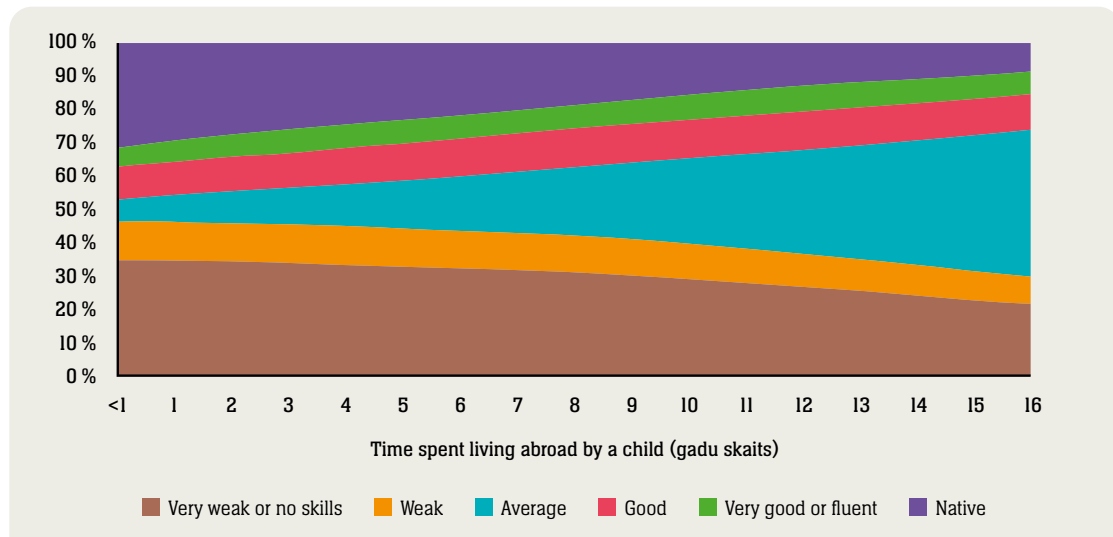


Fig. 96. Level of children's Latvian language skills in the parents' assessment in relation to the time spent by their child as an emigrant (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

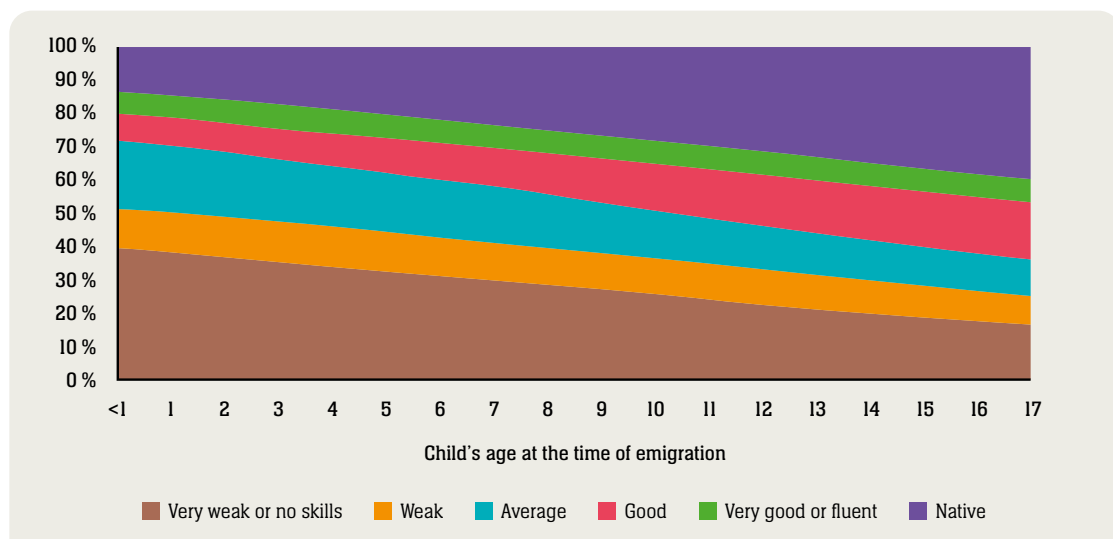


Fig. 97. Level of children and young people's Latvian language skills in their parents' assessment in relation to the age of their child at the time of emigration (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

As many children leave Latvia once already at a level of intellectual development, the worst Latvian language skills are currently observed in children aged 3–8, while more than half of children aged 14–17 have at least an average level of proficiency. This means that children aged 3–8 also need the greatest support for language learning.

As mentioned above, the level of Latvian language skills of children varies significantly depending on the region in which the child resides. The best proficiency in Latvian is observed among children in the Nordic countries, the British Isles, North America and Australia, as well as in Western Europe. On the other hand, the weakest Latvian language skills are found in children in the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as in Georgia, Uzbekistan and Israel, where 61% of emigrant children have very weak or no Latvian language skills. Similarly, in Southern Europe, two out of three children do not know Latvian or speak it very poorly.

Parents play an important role in language acquisition and preservation. The analysis of the data of the 2019 Diaspora Survey shows that if it is not important for parents that their children know Latvian, the language skills of children will be significantly worse. Even the willingness for a child to be able to at least understand and communicate in Latvian at the conversational level positively motivates learning and guarantees success. Moreover, if it is very important for parents that their children live and study in Latvia, the Latvian language skills of these children and young people are significantly better than those of children whose parents do not have such plans or hopes. Children whose families have property, businesses, work or loans in Latvia also have better Latvian language skills. Perhaps, this creates an additional link with Latvia and is an additional motivation for a child to learn or not to forget the Latvian language.

The main factor that determines a child's level of Latvian language skills is the language used at home and in the family. Latvian language skills of children who do not speak Latvian in the family is on average 0.8 points (on a 5-point scale) lower than language skills of children whose family speaks only Latvian. If both Latvian and another language is used in the family, the child's Latvian language skills are significantly worse than those whose family uses only Latvian, but better than those whose family does not use Latvian at all. The nationality of a spouse plays a small role in this respect; everything is determined by the language used at home. Obviously, the results are better if parents or at least one of the parents speaks Latvian well.

The group of positive influencing factors includes not only the choice of the language of communication in the family, but also spending as much time as possible in Latvia and regular contact with friends and relatives in Latvia. Improvement of Latvian language skills is facilitated by involvement in social communication sites among groups of Latvian-speaking members. It is also important that parents talk to a child regularly. Unfortunately, children whose parents have moved abroad to work and are employed have worse Latvian language skills.

An important factor is whether parents (family) feel more belonging to Latvia or to the society of a country of residence, or to a transnational European community. A stronger sense of belonging to a country of residence is associated with weaker children's Latvian language skills, while Latvian patriotism is associated with better language skills.

The 2019 Diaspora Survey shows that the choice of the language of communication in the family and among relatives may differ (Fig. 98). Children and young people most often talk to the respondent, i.e. parents, in Latvian, almost as often in Russian (the differences are not statistically significant), which also mirrors the ethnic affiliation of Latvian emigrants. A similar percentage of children speak Russian and Latvian with their grandparents, while children often speak Latvian, Russian and English with a respondent's partner and siblings.

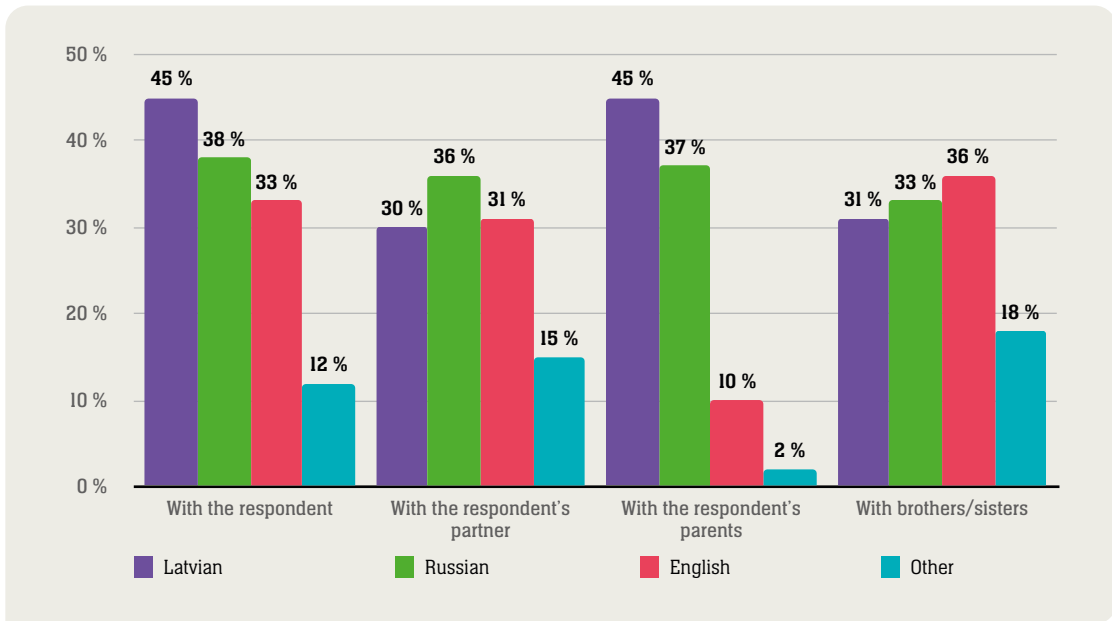


Fig. 98. Children's choice of language of communication with relatives (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

In the families of Latvian respondents Latvian and English dominate, i.e., children communicate bilingually (Fig. 99).

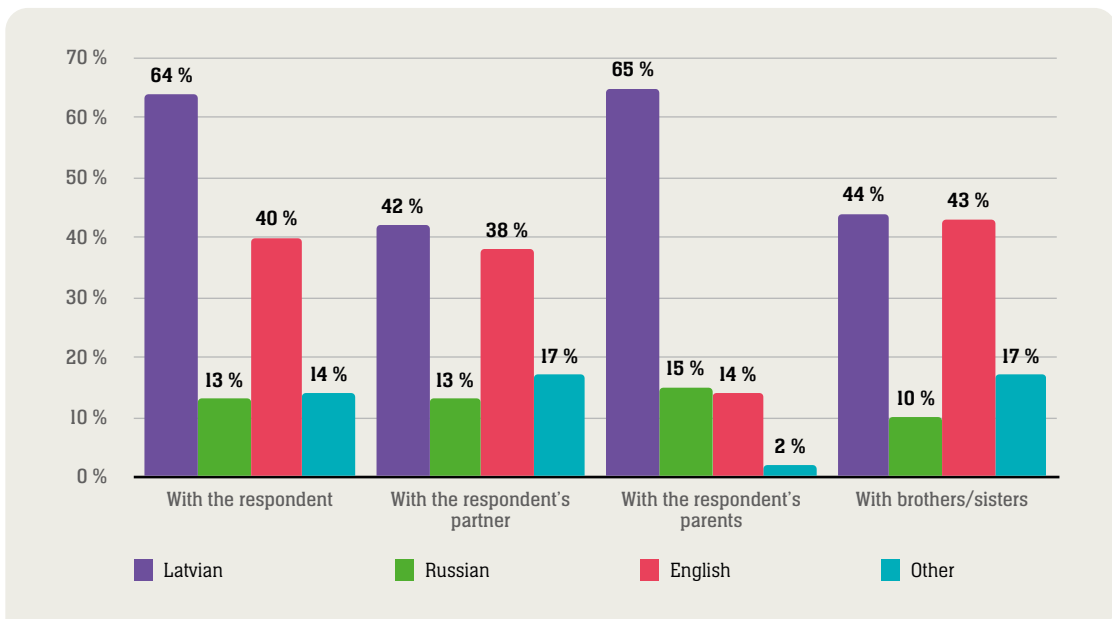


Fig. 99. Children's choice of language of communication with relatives in the families of Latvian respondents (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (Latvian respondents who have children)

Latvian language skills are significantly higher in the families where the respondent speaks Latvian with children (Fig. 100). In such cases, children of more than half of the respondents speak Latvian at least at a good level. On the other hand, if communication occurs in another language, less than 20% of children have a good level of Latvian language skills.

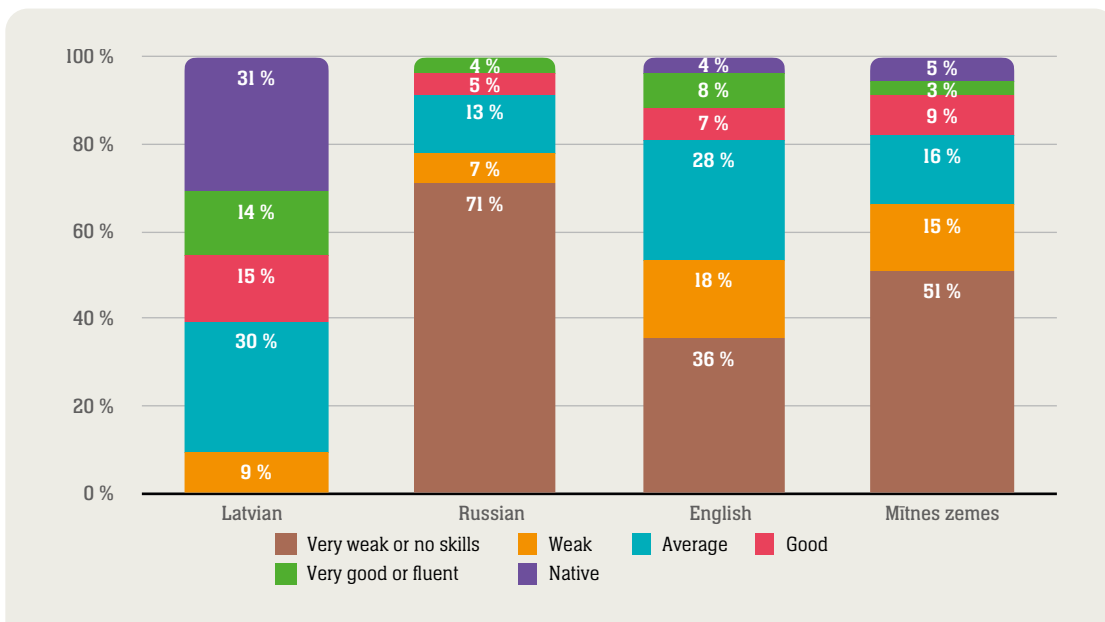


Fig. 100. The level of children’s Latvian language skills and its relation to the language of communication in the family (with the respondent,%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

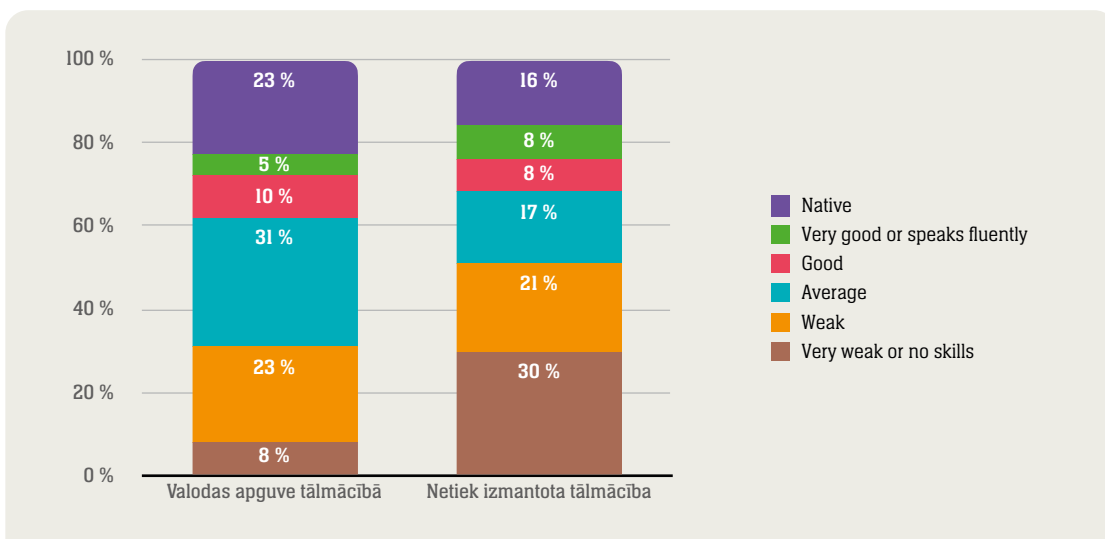


Fig. 101. Latvian language skills of diaspora children and young people in connection with language learning through distance learning (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents – Latvians who have children)

It must be admitted that the relationship between Latvian weekend school attendance and the Latvian language skills of children and young people is not statistically significant. The same is valid for the relationship between Latvian language skills and language acquisition in home schooling. In turn, participation in diaspora camps in Latvia has a positive, although not very large, impact on the development of children’s Latvian language skills. However, such a conclusion should not be taken as an argument that Latvian schools and home schooling do not affect language skills. It is possible that the result is influenced by the fact that Latvian schools are attended by children who initially have poorer language skills, and those who speak Latvian fluently usually do not go to

Latvian schools. A separate study would be needed to evaluate the efficiency of Latvian schools. The answers provided in the in-depth interviews show that Latvian schools play an important role not only in the acquisition of the language (especially reading and writing skills), but also in the formation of emotional attachment, togetherness and identity [Mieriņa 2016].

The acquisition of the Latvian language is also facilitated by distance learning (6% of children use these opportunities). The Latvian language skills of this group of children and young people are significantly better than those of children who do not use these opportunities (Fig. 101).

5.4. Measures for preserving language skills and activities in the diaspora

Most often, in order to strengthen children's Latvian language skills and identity in the diaspora, Latvian is learned at home. Although the 2019 Diaspora Survey shows that the choice of this form of education has decreased from 40% to 34%, the difference is not statistically significant (Fig. 102).

An important factor in language acquisition is whether a child reads books in Latvian (for younger children, the fact that parents read to a child can also help maintain language skills), watch Latvian films, cartoons and play computer games in Latvian.⁴ During the five years (2014–2019), the proportion of children living abroad (regardless of nationality) who read books in Latvian significantly decreased (from 33% to 26%). Although the difference is not statistically significant, it was valid for one third of children in the 2014 Diaspora Survey and only a quarter in the 2019 Diaspora Survey. The popularity of the other activities that was indicated in the question did not change significantly.

On the other hand, the data of the 2019 Diaspora Survey on children who are Latvians by ethnicity show that children of 18% of families⁵ attend a Latvian school, and children of 16% of families participate in activity clubs (Latvian dance ensembles, choirs, etc.). Compared to the situation five years ago, children of the Latvian diaspora are increasingly involved in these types of activities, although the changes are currently small (Fig. 103). 6% of Latvian children also use the opportunities provided by distance learning. At the same time, the acquisition of the Latvian language at home has decreased, but the changes are not significant. The number of children that read books in Latvian has decreased significantly over the past five years: from 49% to 37%. This is likely to be due to the growing role of digital information, especially among children and young people.

⁴ It is difficult to determine, though, the direction of the cause and effect relation. It is possible that those who have good Latvian language skills read more books in Latvian, but the connection can work in both directions.

⁵ The question was only asked about children under the age of 17 living in a household, without asking whether it is the respondent's child. However, it can be assumed that in most cases the answer was given by one of the child's parents.

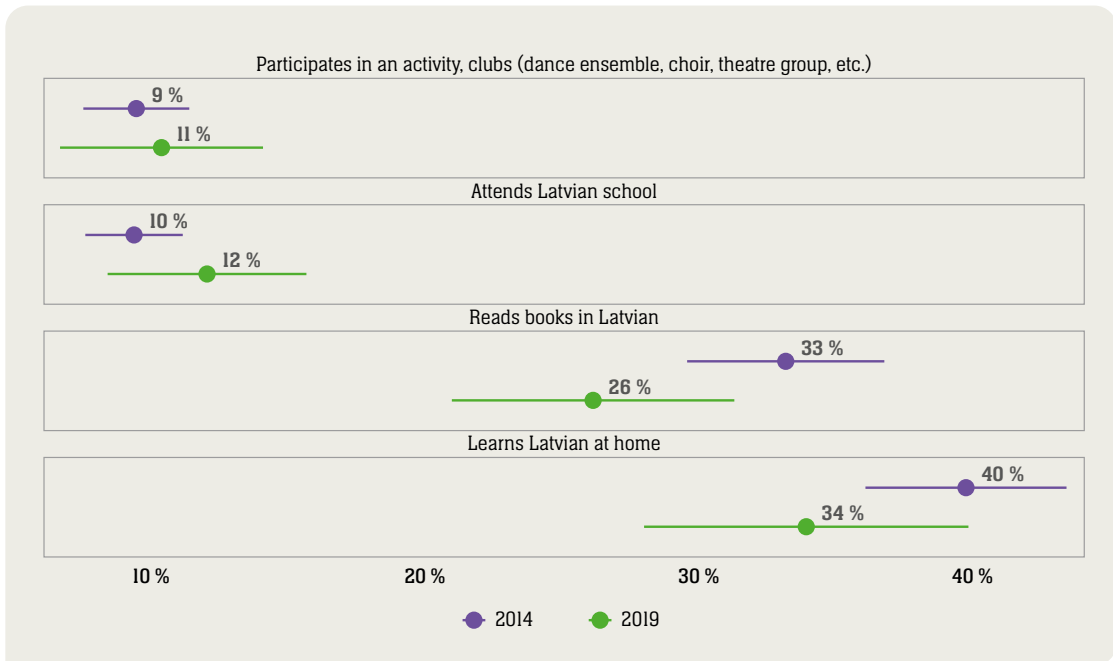


Fig. 102. Types of preserving and acquiring Latvian language skills, as well as identity strengthening activities for diaspora children (%).
 Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents who have children)

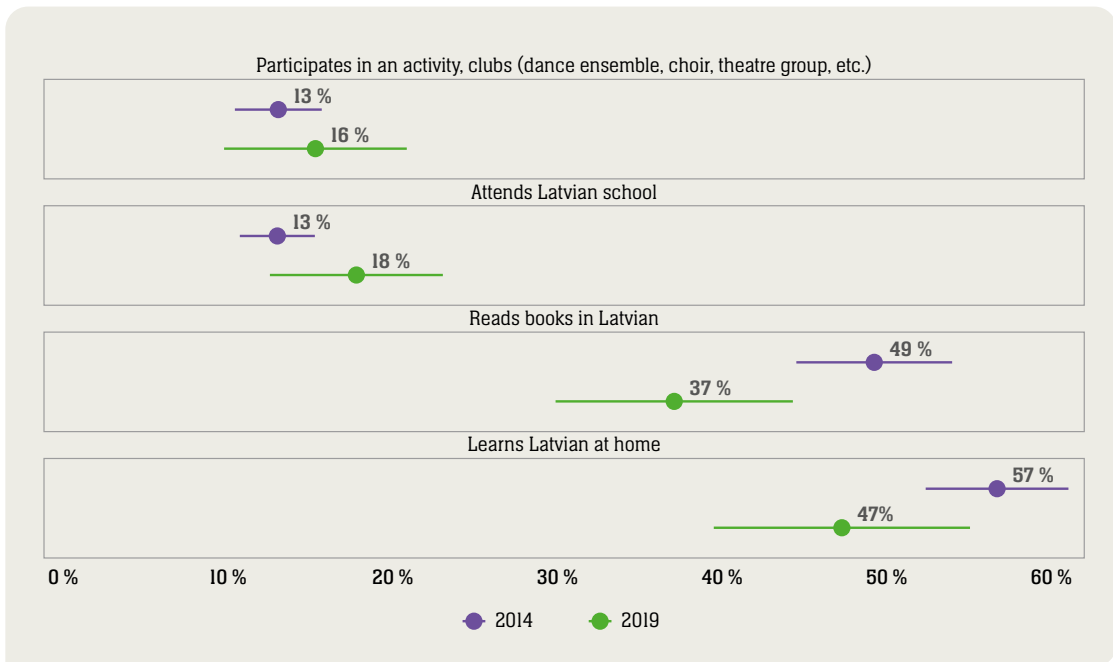


Fig. 103. Types of maintaining and acquisition of Latvian language skills of Latvian children (%).
 Source: 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents who have children)

The answers provided by the respondents allow for the conclusion that Latvian children born abroad are more often involved in various activities aimed at maintaining the Latvian language and identity (Fig. 104). 18% of Latvian respondents' children born abroad (compared to 13% born in Latvia) attend a weekend school, and almost half (44%) learn the language through self-study or distance learning. Children born in Latvia are

relatively less involved in such activities, but they read books in Latvian more often (46%). The lowest percentage of children use distance learning (6–7%), but the majority (74%) of these children were born abroad, and this should be taken into account when developing teaching materials.

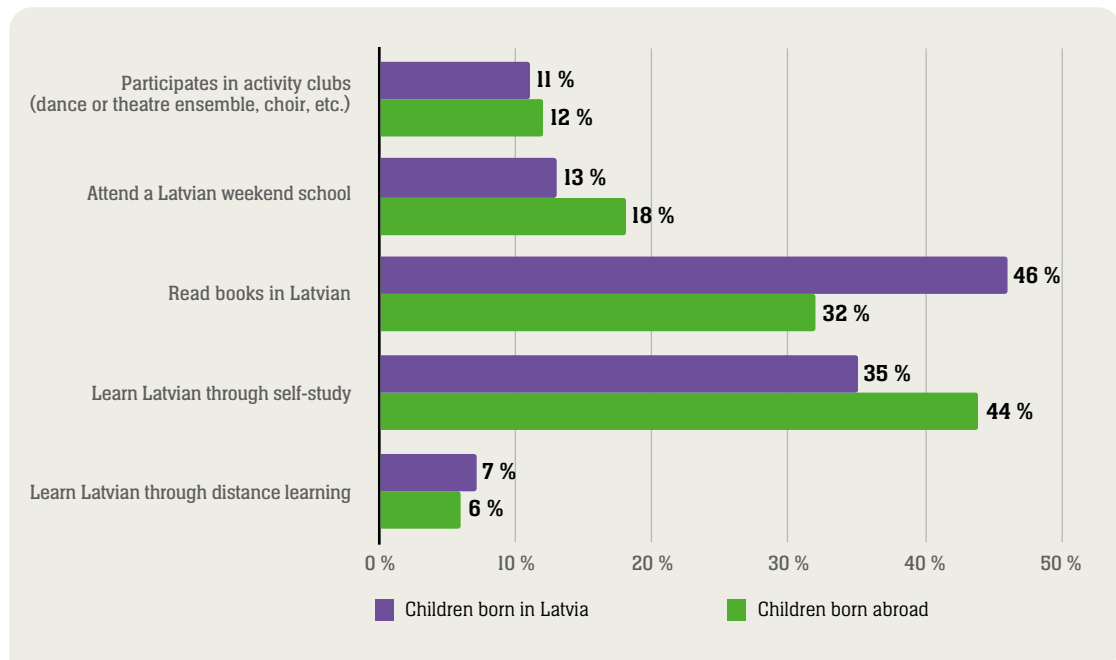


Fig. 104. Types of preserving and acquiring Latvian language skills, as well as identity strengthening activities for diaspora children in groups by children's country of birth (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey (respondents with children)

It should be noted that activity clubs in the diaspora are less frequently attended by those Latvian children whose financial situation is worse. For example, the group of respondents with financial difficulties less often than others provides an opportunity for children to participate in an activity club (5%; 36% of the respondents without financial difficulties), to attend weekend school (13%; 40% of those without difficulties). Sending a child to such groups and classes requires extra time and resources, so it is important that the facilities are as close as possible and do not require significant financial investment. The less wealthy children of Latvian emigrants also read fewer books in Latvian. This means that this is one of the groups of children and young people in the diaspora that needs more support.

The reasons for not attending children's camps and weekend schools were explored in depth in the 2014 and 2019 Diaspora Surveys [see Mieriņa 2016]. The most common reasons given by parents: In 2014 – it is not known where such schools are located (29%), in 2019 – too far, not possible to travel (29%). A study on diaspora networking [Mieriņa, Jansone 2019] shows that a lack of knowledge does not always mean that there are no Latvian schools in an accessible area; often respondents simply do not know or are not interested in them. On the other hand, the location of the school was particularly emphasized by those living in Ireland and Germany. The results indicate the importance of the role of distance learning in further work with children in the diaspora.

Remigrants' language skills and experience

In 2016, the survey "Return to Latvia" was carried out, and data on the language skills of remigrants also collected [Hazans 2016]. The results show that 14% of respondents have average, weak or no Latvian language skills (Fig. 105). For comparison: 17% of respondents have average, weak or no Russian language skills, but almost a third (31%) have average, weak or no English language skills.

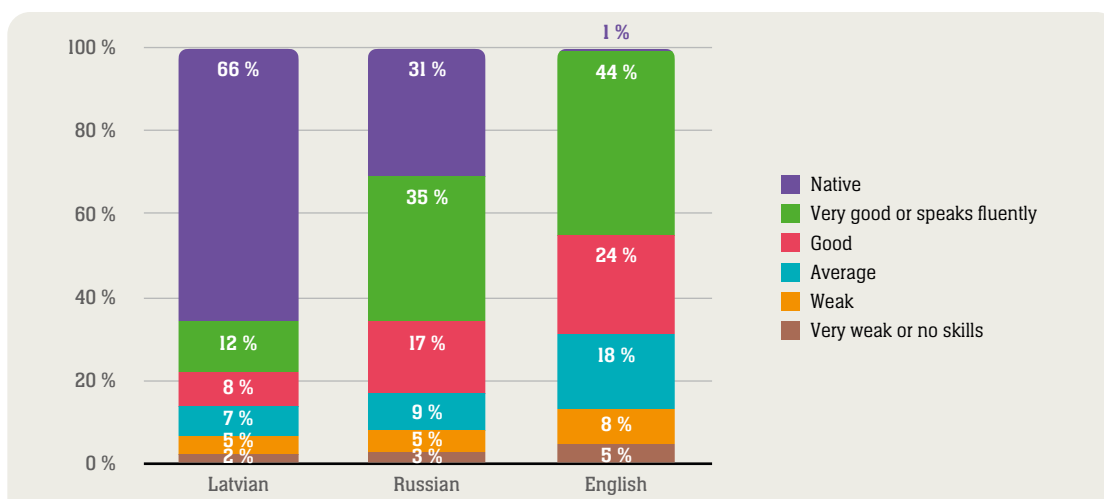


Fig. 105. Remigrants' language skills (%) [Hazans 2016]

3% of working remigrants consider that their Latvian language skills are insufficient for the performance of work duties, and 8% of respondents consider their skills to be satisfactory (Fig. 106). Although the language skills of most of the respondents are sufficient, in some cases the level of existing language skills encumber the work, which in turn shows the need to offer Latvian language learning opportunities not only to remigrated children, but to families in general.

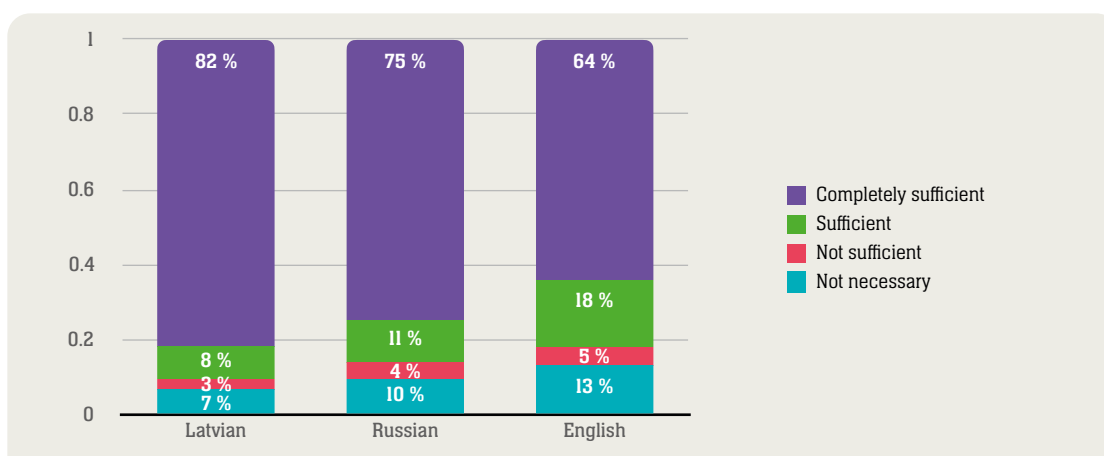


Fig. 106. Compliance of remigrants' language skills with work needs (%) [Hazans 2016]

In turn, the 2019 Diaspora Survey also found out the language skills of children of remigrants. 28% of children (aged 3–17) speak Latvian very poorly, poorly or at an average

level (Fig. 107). This means that, at least initially, a child may have some difficulty entering the Latvian education system.

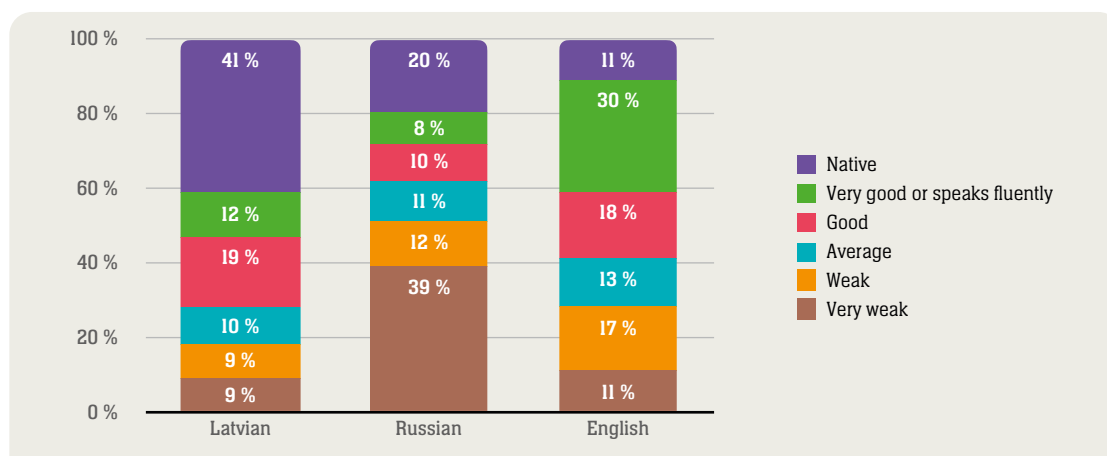


Fig. 107. Language proficiency level of remigrant children (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey

20% of remigrant parents admitted that it had been difficult for a child to enter a school or pre-school educational institution in Latvia (evaluation on a scale of 1–7 points, where 1 is 'very difficult' and 7 is 'very easy'). A reason mentioned most often was insufficient Latvian language skills (indicated by 30% of the parents), but there are other difficulties as well – different approaches to teaching, differences in curriculum and level of education, and often incomprehensible attitudes of teachers towards remigrant pupils (Fig. 108).

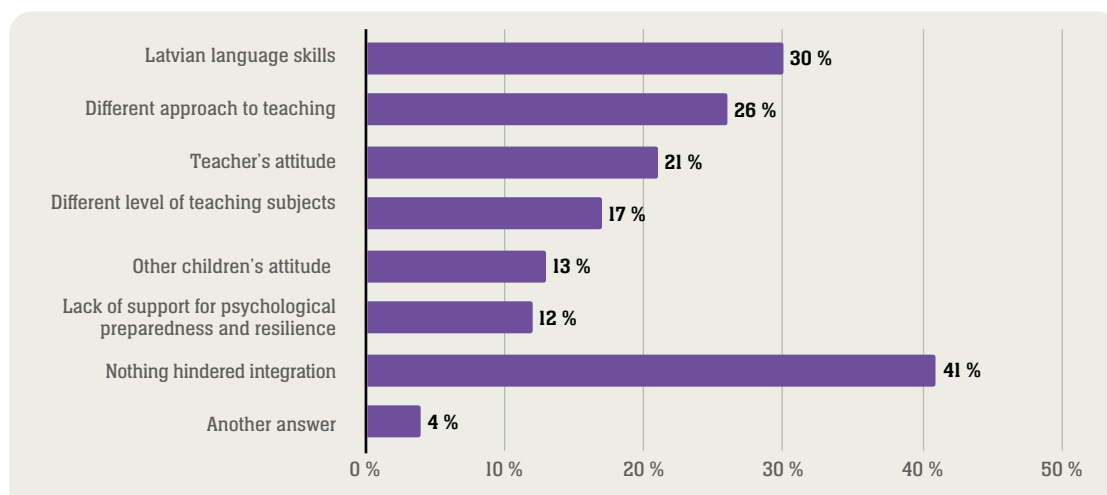


Fig. 108. Entering of remigrant children in school or pre-school: problems and barriers (%).

Source: 2019 Diaspora Survey

Latvian language skills, both in respect to emigration and returning to Latvia, are one of the most important factors that influence several aspects – the decision to stay in a country of residence, return plans, opportunities to preserve and develop ethnic identity, adaptation and integration of remigrants into daily life, work, education institution.

5.5. Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the data obtained from the diaspora surveys shows that since 2014, the percentage of Latvians and Latvian citizens living abroad who rate their Latvian language skills as very good or speak the language fluently has increased significantly (from 59% to 72%). At this proficiency level the language is spoken by 86% of Latvians in the diaspora aged 15 or over, as well as 51% of Russians and 62% of emigrants of other nationalities. The number of respondents of Russian nationality whose Latvian language skills are weak, very weak or who do not speak the language has decreased. This indicates an improvement in Latvian language skills among Russian-speaking young people. On the other hand, the improvement of Latvian language skills among Latvian respondents can be partly explained by the decrease in the number of historical exiles and their descendants and their identification with the language of the country of residence. Better Latvian language skills are especially noticeable among those respondents who feel belonging to the Latvian population and plan to return to Latvia.

Apart from ethnicity, the second important factor influencing the level of Latvian language skills is the use of the Latvian language in the family. Whether or not a spouse is of a different nationality does not change the quality of the language of either the respondent or the children living in the family. It is important, however, whether the family speaks Latvian, i.e. whether Latvian is an everyday language.

Communication in Latvian with other speaking relatives and friends in Latvia and abroad has a positive effect, and this happens more often if the family owns property in Latvia. It forms an additional link with Latvia, and it also serves as an additional motivation for a child to learn or not forget the Latvian language. Thus, in the development of a child's Latvian language skills, the opportunity to be in the appropriate linguistic environment, the parents'/ family's sense of belonging to Latvia and the Latvian nation (the emotional component of motivation) is of great importance.

The level of language skill is influenced by the number of years spent outside Latvia. There is also a tendency to forget the language among people who were born and spent their childhood or youth in Latvia. In the context of the influence of other factors, those who have Latvian citizenship have better Latvian language skills. The symbolic link with Latvia, embodied in citizenship, can encourage the acquisition or preservation of Latvian language skills.

The representatives of the Latvian diaspora often speak several languages at a good level. Comparing the results of the 2014 Diaspora Survey, the English language skills of Latvian emigrants have significantly improved, while the level of Russian language skills among the diaspora has deteriorated, with a 77% to 67% decrease in the number of respondents who rate Russian language skills as very good or good.

At present, almost half (46%) of the Latvian diaspora use Latvian in the family, 46% use English, 38% use Russian, 13% use the language of their country of residence (other than English or Russian) and 2% speak another language. This means that almost every second family uses two languages. 60% of Latvians living abroad use Latvian in the family, while the families of Russian emigrants, unsurprisingly, use Russian, and Latvian is used very little here (only 8%).

Comparing the data of the 2019 Diaspora Survey with the results of the 2014 survey, the use of Russian in emigrant families has slightly decreased, but the importance of other foreign languages has increased. In this respect the Latvian language has remained virtually unchanged. It should be noted that the number of people who use Latvian and another language in the family has increased (from 17% to 26%). The number of Latvians who use only Latvian in the family has significantly decreased (from 40% to 28%). Refusal to use the Latvian language in the family has often been related to the fact that a spouse is not Latvian and/or has a weak emotional connection with Latvia (return plans and identity). In the use of language, habit is also important – if the respondents speak Latvian more often or stay in a Latvian language environment, it seems more natural to do so in the family as well.

Finally, the results of the study show that language skills are one of the most important factors influencing both emigration and return plans. Language difficulties were mentioned as an obstacle in returning to Latvia by 19% of representatives of the Latvian diaspora, including 15% of those who consider themselves Latvians – and this number is slightly higher than in 2014. 73% of diaspora parents believe that insufficient Latvian language skills could hinder a child's inclusion in a Latvian school or pre-school educational institution. Thus, improving the Latvian language skills of both adults and children will increase the chances of return and successful reintegration into Latvian society, the education system and labour market.

Children's language skills in the diaspora are deteriorating. During the last five years, the number of children who do not know or almost do not speak Latvian has significantly increased, while the proportion of children with good Latvian language skills has decreased. This may be partly explained by a decrease in the intensity of emigration and an increase in the percentage of children who have lived abroad for a long time (and have not used the language actively) or were born abroad.

Latvian children or children of Latvian origin aged 3–17 living abroad have a significantly better knowledge of the language of their country of residence than Latvian. According to parents, for 31% of children the official language (or one of the languages) of their country of residence is their mother tongue, and 45% of the children speak it very well or fluently. At the same time, more than half of the children of the Latvian diaspora (including 43% of Latvian children) have weak, very weak or no Latvian language skills. According to the parents' assessment, only 21% of the children in the Latvian diaspora know Latvian very well or at the level of their mother tongue.

Latvian language skills of remigrant children are relatively better; however, 28% of the children in this group aged 3–17 also have very weak, weak or average Latvian language skills. It is the insufficient language skills in addition to the different approach to teaching and the attitude of teachers that is the main reason why a part of remigrant children (20%) at least initially face difficulties in integrating into the Latvian education system.

While the majority (57%) of Latvian children living abroad speak Latvian at least at an intermediate level, the majority of Russians (81%) as well as children of other nationalities (73%) either do not speak Latvian at all or speak it very poorly. The worst Latvian language skills are in the CIS, as well as Georgia, Uzbekistan and Israel, where 61% of children of emigrants do not speak Latvian or speak it very poorly. Similarly, in Southern Europe, two out of three children do not know Latvian or speak it very poorly.

The level of Latvian language skills is influenced by the child's age at the moment of emigration. Children who emigrated at an early age, and especially those born abroad, have the weakest Latvian language skills. They have not had the opportunity to learn Latvian naturally in the environment in which it is used, and their language skills tend to deteriorate further as children become more independent of their parents and start school. Children who left Latvia at the age of six or more, when their language skills had already strengthened, no longer show a marked decline in their Latvian language skills. At present, the worst Latvian language skills are among the children aged 3–8, and, accordingly, the greatest support in language acquisition is needed for children at this age.

As already mentioned, the Latvian language skills of children in the diaspora are greatly linked to their parents' motivation and desire for children to preserve the language. About two thirds (70%) of Latvians living abroad with a child in their family want them to be fluent in Latvian. 22% of them want the child to at least understand and be able to communicate in Latvian, but only for 7% of Latvians is this matter irrelevant. For members of other nationalities who have emigrated from Latvia, it is mostly not important that their children know Latvian. 31% of Russian respondents and 43% of respondents of other nationalities expressed a positive attitude; what is more, most of them consider the ability to communicate and understand Latvian to be sufficient.

The attitude towards learning the Latvian language is determined not only by ethnicity, but also by whether the respondent is a Latvian citizen. This confirms the importance of citizenship as a symbolic link to the country of origin. Those who have a Latvian spouse show a much greater willingness for the child to be able to communicate in Latvian or to use the language fluently. If a spouse is of another nationality, it may be more difficult to insist on the need to learn the Latvian language. The greater the number of relatives and friends in Latvia, the more pronounced the willingness for a child to understand the Latvian language very well, which increases the value of the language in maintaining family ties.

Children in the diaspora choose very different languages to communicate with relatives. In Latvia's Russian families living abroad the Russian language dominates. Latvian children often speak English (40%) or another language with their Latvian parents. More than a third (36%) of Latvian children do not speak Latvian with their parents (the same percentage of children do not speak Latvian with their grandparents). Only 44% of Latvian children use Latvian in communication with their brothers and sisters. Less than 20% of children who do not speak Latvian with their Latvian parents have good language skills (i.e., it would not be very difficult for most of them to speak Latvian). However, it is the lack of knowledge of the Latvian language that makes it more convenient for a child to choose another language of communication. A "vicious circle" emerges in which weak Latvian language skills go hand in hand with lack of use of the language in the family.

Plans to return, which give Latvian language skills a practical meaning, have an extremely strong effect on the child's Latvian language skills. Finally, the respondents' answers show that being busy may be one of the factors that makes parents accept a certain loss of Latvian language skills among children.

The acquisition of the Latvian language at home and in self-study is most often used for the acquisition of the Latvian language and the strengthening of identity in the diaspora. 34% of Latvia's diaspora families (including 47% of Latvian families) learn Latvian this way.

18% of children from Latvian families attend a Latvian weekend school, and 16% participate in activity groups (Latvian dance or theatre ensembles, choirs, etc.). 6% of children use the opportunities provided by distance learning. Compared to the situation five years ago, the change is not statistically significant. The quality of language skills is also influenced by reading books in Latvian. However, during the last five years, the proportion of children reading books in Latvian has decreased significantly from 49% to 37%. This is likely to be due to the growing role of digital information, especially among children and young people.

Latvian children born abroad are more often involved in various Latvian language and identity preserving activities. Their Latvian language skills are weaker, therefore these activities have great value. When developing teaching materials, it should be borne in mind that weekend schools and distance learning are used by children born abroad. The answers of the respondents allow one to conclude that the representatives of the historical diaspora and their descendants mostly learn the language by maintaining living Latvian traditions, attending diaspora camps, clubs and Latvian weekend schools, while children of the new diaspora read more books, watch Latvian films, cartoons and use other audiovisual materials, which does not require active involvement.

It is understandable that mainly Latvian children are involved in various activities that help maintain or improve their Latvian language skills, but the negative dynamics among children of other nationalities should be noted. In 2014, at least a small part of the children of Russian respondents participated in these activities, while currently Latvia's Russian emigrant children participate in them significantly less often or do not participate at all. Latvian children whose parents do not feel connected to Latvia and do not plan to return also participate in these events relatively less often.


Children of Latvian emigrants who are in a weaker financial position are less likely to attend these classes. Sending a child to such groups and classes often requires extra time and resources, so it is important that the facilities are closer to children's place of residence and do not require financial investment. The children of less wealthy Latvian emigrants also less often read books in Latvian. This shows that children of less affluent, less educated diaspora parents should be given more support.

Continuing to implement the tasks set in the diaspora policy documents, it is necessary to take into account some important aspects in the development of the Latvian language situation in the diaspora.

- As the Latvian language is increasingly used in the family alongside another language (especially among children), it will become increasingly difficult to preserve Latvian language skills in the diaspora in the future. Therefore, it is important to continue to provide support in the acquisition of the Latvian language for children of the diaspora, especially children of the youngest age group and those born abroad.
- As children read fewer and fewer books, more digital resources should be provided that are freely available to parents of all levels of wealth and occupation. However, as reading books plays an important role in the development of vocabulary, it is necessary to continue to provide diaspora children with appropriate finances.
- In order to promote the acquisition and preservation of the Latvian language, the emotional and practical connection of the diaspora with Latvia must be strengthened. Children and young people should regularly be able to stay in a Latvian language environment, e.g. in camps and weekend schools.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS



The study analyses the dynamics of the language situation from 2016 to 2020, comparing several components of the language situation with the data obtained in previous periods and characterising the development trends of the language situation. The analysis of the data shows the positions of the Latvian language and other languages used in society, indicating both the results of the implementation of the language policy and further objectives, as well as the conditions of language competition created by modern globalization processes and the development of information technology.

LATVIAN LANGUAGE SKILLS:

- 1) provision of language learning for children and adults (including young people);
- 2) education and work environment – the most important areas of language acquisition and skill development;
- 3) identification of social target groups for language acquisition (non-citizens, newly arrived immigrants, remigrants, diasporas) and provision of language acquisition opportunities;
- 4) promotion of language acquisition and improvement of skills in regions (large cities with a heterogeneous language environment, Latgale) with low language proficiency indicators;
- 5) development of language learning didactics (incl. professional development of teachers, development of teaching aids and methodological materials according to the needs of target groups, etc.);
- 6) improvement of the quality of language skills: acquisition of Latvian as a mother tongue, as a second language, as a foreign language and as a ethnic heritage language (theory and practice).

LATVIAN LANGUAGE USE:

- 1) strengthening the fully-fledged use of the Latvian language (audibility and visibility of the language in all areas of public life);
- 2) implementation of habits of positive linguistic behaviour in the consciousness of native Latvian speakers;
- 3) the use of the Latvian language as a common language of communication in the diverse society of Latvia;
- 4) further observance and strengthening of the legally established requirements for the use of the language (the requirements of legislation and regulatory enactments have been one of the driving forces for the increase of the quantitative indicators of the use of the Latvian language);
- 5) expanding the use of language in informal communication (the relationship between the improvement in language skills and a positive linguistic attitude).

LINGUISTIC ATTITUDE:

- 1) the link between positive linguistic attitudes and language use and the increase in the quality of language skills;
- 2) an open and favourable attitude towards speakers of Latvian as a second or foreign language – the basis for the willingness to use the language;
- 3) awareness of the value of the Latvian language in society: the balance between the language as a national and constitutional value, its integrative value and its utilitarian meaning or instrumental value;
- 4) differences in the linguistic experience and behaviour of different generations: in the younger generation, along with better language skills and the need to use the Latvian language in education, work and everyday communication, a positive linguistic attitude towards the language, its symbolic and practical meaning is formed;
- 5) awareness of stereotypical assumptions and beliefs about languages, multilingualism in society and the multilingualism of the individual, as well as the relations of mother tongue and other languages, and of the coexistence of languages in society as a factor influencing linguistic attitudes;
- 6) the possibility to use the Latvian language promotes the formation of a positive linguistic attitude (the use of the Latvian language in work and everyday communication helps to improve Latvian language skills and creates a positive linguistic attitude).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LANGUAGE POLICY (language promotion):

- 1) clear communication of language policy makers with the public in accordance with the principles of language policy – promotion of the understanding of the regularities of language coexistence;
- 2) coordinated action of language policy implementing institutions and organizations at all levels – a factor that promotes the motivation of Latvian language users and learners to learn and the development of a positive linguistic attitude;
- 3) educating the public about languages, their coexistence, multilingualism, the values and role of languages and their variants, the regularities of the language hierarchy: dispelling stereotypes and myths and promoting a positive linguistic attitude;
- 4) offering informative, educational and engaging activities to certain target groups to ensure an environment for language learning and use, to promote a positive linguistic attitude;
- 5) the implementation of communication with the public that promotes and supports co-operation, without using communication on language issues that condemns one or another group of society at all levels of communication;
- 6) support for all Latvian speakers and learners.

Fig. 109. The language situation in Latvia: development trends, directions of activity and objectives for strengthening the stability of the Latvian language

The study reflects topical issues of language management at different levels: language competition in the world, historical conditions of the language situation in Latvia and changes under the influence of global processes, strengthening Latvian language skills and use, specific language use and acquisition in certain target groups, characteristics of language use across different regions of Latvia, identification of certain problems or positive experiences and results in terms of sociolinguistic functions and areas of language use, the role of public involvement in the implementation of language policy, etc. Only by consciously and strategically implementing the micro-planning tasks of language policy can the goals set in the macro-plan be achieved [Hatoss 2008, 71].

The resilience of languages today is influenced by social changes and the related complex attitudes of society and associated language. The rapid spread, popularity and prestige of one language, i.e. English, in many areas of society around the world is already a cause for concern not only for organizations and researchers closely involved in languages and their research, but for society *per se*. This can be observed in the traditional media, on various social networking platforms and in other views.

In a broader context, in addition to these so called convergence processes, there are also divergence processes (awareness of the importance of diversity and multilingualism in the world and in society). This has contributed to the understanding of the functional value of the state language in a multilingual society with multilingual individuals, i.e. globalization is at the same time a trigger for the preservation of diversity [Extra, Barni 2008, 29]. Concern for survival is relevant even for languages whose existence is considered safe from the point of view of language endangerment and vitality, i.e. they have a sufficient number of speakers, they are standardized and maintained, they are available in modern technology, they even have the status of an official language in a country, etc.

English as *lingua franca* has strengthened as a result of economic globalization and various historical, political and social developments. As a result, there is a growing confidence in the need for the proficiency in this language at the individual and societal level (especially in areas such as business, science, higher education, etc.) [Wright 2016, 168], which in turn has underpinned the current protection of national/official/state/standard languages¹ and concern for their existence and development. In the European Union, language as a value is one of the principles of the pursued policy, and in the context of increasing diversity, the importance of official languages for social cohesion and equal opportunities, such as education and employment, is emphasized. As the structure of public communication changes and a new social reality emerges, so do the goals and objectives of language policy. Society is becoming more diverse, individuals are no longer so geographically attached, and new models of interaction call for a look at the role of languages through other aspects, i.e. the national language (in European countries it is usually also an official language) as an indicator of national identity and nationality additionally serves as a means of collective communication, the official language becomes the unifying and common language of communication [van Hoorde 2020].

¹ The use of these terms is determined by the language policy traditions of different countries, in Latvia the term state language or official language is used.

Data on the language situation in Latvia over the last five years show that, from the point of view of the language hierarchy, the Latvian language occupies a central place in the life of the society – the Latvian language is the most commonly used language. This is determined by the results of the implementation of the legal and pedagogical directions of language policy. However, the present competition of languages also marks some changes in the use of languages in Latvia: especially in the younger generation, the positions of two other hitherto relevant languages are gradually changing, i.e. the role of Russian is declining and the importance of English is growing rapidly. The presence of these two languages in society is determined by very different factors, and the changes are influenced by the demographic situation, the prestige and the popularity of English as a global language of communication. A similar trend (i.e. an increasing role of the English language) is currently being observed both linguistically and sociolinguistically in almost every society.

Data on Latvian language skills in society and its use allow us to set the main objectives for the implementation of language policy in the future. All the elements characterizing the language situation are closely related: without sufficient Latvian language skills, full use of the Latvian language will not be possible, and without the existence of an appropriate linguistic environment it will not be possible to improve Latvian language skills or use the language, etc. This means that language policy must act in a coherent manner in all areas of activity; it is the main task and also responsibility of each language policy implementer [Kaplan, Baldauf 2008, 20].

The aspects characterizing the language situation have been described in detail in the individual chapters of the study, therefore the concluding part outlines general tendencies that will be encountered in the language policy in the future:

- changes in the group of speakers of Latvian;
The number of speakers plays a role in ensuring the competitiveness of the language; the diversity of Latvian speakers will continue to grow due to both migration and other global processes. This means that one needs to think about improving the language learning process and promoting language use.
- the influence of modern language competition on the situation of the Latvian language from both a linguistic and sociolinguistic point of view;
This also means taking special care to maintain the quality of the language, being pro-active in educating the public and involving society in language policy, as well as implementing positive communication with the public by fostering a positive linguistic attitude.
- maintaining language stability in sociolinguistic areas and functions that are relevant to society and the state;
The data obtained in the research on the role of education in the acquisition of the official language, the use of language in the occupational field and everyday communication show that only regular and systematic work on improving Latvian as a second language and strengthening the use of language in society allows for positive development trends. In addition, all mechanisms for implementing language policy, be they legal, pedagogical, scientific or public information, will continue to be used.

- determining the target groups of specific language learners and ensuring the acquisition of the Latvian language as a second language;

This is necessary to prevent the segregation of society, which may affect certain groups, in which communication in Latvian does not occur in daily life due to some external circumstances (work, broader daily communication, participation in civic processes, etc.) and therefore language learning does not seem essential. Currently, this target group includes about one tenth of the respondents with native Russian language in Latgale, Pierīga Region and Riga and the same number of both non-citizens and new language speakers who are currently mostly entering the country from Russia. However, the diversity of newcomers is growing, both in terms of place of origin, culture and mother tongue. Therefore, it is paramount to provide the opportunity to learn the official language, which is necessary first as a common language of communication and is a prerequisite for a united society. Without state language skills, there can be no equal work, education, personal growth and other opportunities.

- changes in linguistic attitudes, public attitudes and beliefs about the role of languages;

As the research of the language situation has already shown in several stages, the development of linguistic attitude in non-native Latvian society is mostly related to the level of language proficiency, thus the better the proficiency in Latvian, the more positive the linguistic attitude and the more fluently, more frequently and more widely Latvian is used. This is evidenced by the increase in the use of Latvian in mutual communication with Latvians in private communication. Native speakers of Latvian, on the other hand, express the opinion that Latvian plays an important role in terms of both an individual's identity and nationality (and also plays a key role in the language hierarchy in Latvia), but real linguistic behaviour differs from this belief: in the communication there is a likely shift to a partner's native language or another intermediary language of communication (most often Russian, but also English due to the rapid increase in its use) even if all participants of the conversation speak Latvian. Consequently, achieving positive changes in the use of language in everyday life will still be one of the main objectives for educating the society.

- involvement of society in the implementation of language policy and education of society is one of the most difficult tasks, but can provide positive results in regulating the interaction between languages, individuals and society (language ecology) in the country;

This means providing clear, coherent and consistent information to the public by language policy makers; promoting a sense of pride and belonging to the state in regards to the role of the state language, while perceiving different language skills as a benefit at both the individual and societal level and as a prerequisite for knowledge about languages (or a group of speakers) and respect for each other. As the use of language is always linked to the choices of the individual or a part of society, in order to promote a positive linguistic attitude, one should assess achievements, promote a supportive attitude of society and create a scientific context for conversations on the issue of language coexistence, avoiding

emotional condemnation and criticism in the actions and choices of society, and not forming negative perceptions of individuals or wider communities.

- research of specific problem areas, which is necessary for a detailed understanding of the situation in various aspects of language use and development;

The scope of language policy is very wide and affects society as a whole. However, by in-depth study of the linguistic behaviour and language skills of individual target audiences, as well as by finding out the relevant issues in specific areas of human activity, it is possible to better understand the situation and plan policy more precisely and appropriately.

- systematic, successive and targeted implementation of language policy.

Only a consistent and planned language policy can lead to an increase in the competitiveness and role of the Latvian language in Latvia. This means not only solving the issues of state language acquisition, but also improving the quality and standardization of the Latvian language, using it in modern technologies and further strengthening the status of the official language.

The relation between modern society and languages is complex, and in language policy and planning it requires one to take into account the reality of multilingualism and public understanding of the value and role of language and language types in the life of an individual. At the same time, the important task of language policy (also for its creators and societies) is to recognize and see the common individual in ever growing diversity, i.e. language policy focuses on the preservation and further development of national/official languages in terms of national security and equal rights, despite the impact of globalization. The official language is an important element that can unite society in its diversity [van Hoorde 2020].

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Language situation in Latvia: 2016–2020

Latvian Language Agency

Rīga 2022

In Latvian

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