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## **Latgalian in Latvia: A Continuous Struggle for Political Recognition<sup>1</sup>**

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This article discusses the situation of the Latgalian language in Latvia today. It first provides an overview of languages in Latvia, followed by a historical and contemporary sketch of the societal position of Latgalian and by an account of current Latgalian language activism. On this basis, the article then applies schemes of language functions and of evaluations of the societal position of minority languages to Latgalian. Given the range of functions that Latgalian fulfils today and the wishes and attempts by activists to expand these functions, the article argues that it is surprising that so little attention is given to Latgalian in mainstream Latvian and international sociolinguistic publications. In this light, the fate of the language is difficult to prognose, but a lot depends on whether the Latvian state will clarify its own unclear perception of policies towards Latgalian and on how much attention it will receive in the future.

**Keywords:** Latgalian, Latvia, minority language, language policy, language activism, language functions

This article discusses the societal position of the Latgalian language in Latvia today. In introducing the situation of the Latgalian language to a broader international audience, it documents the impact of current debates in Latvian society and politics on the Latgalian speech community. This is based on an evaluation of Latgalian in the framework of the ethnolinguistic vitality of linguistic minorities and of language policy, legislation and rights.

Language policy in Latvia is a well-known case in international sociolinguistic circles: the organization of post-Soviet multilingualism, with the reversal of language shift from Soviet Russian back to native Latvian as the Latvian state's aim, and the struggle for linguistic rights by the Russian-speaking population, have dominated

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international debates and, partly, raised considerable attention and emotional uproar. The individual position in that debate has largely depended on whether authors saw the Latvian state's policies as a legitimate attempt to engage in post-colonial societal transformation. In light of this debate, other linguistic debates were heard far less often in Latvia in recent years, and other minorities have found it difficult to gain a voice. Traditional groups, such as speakers of Polish, Lithuanian or Belarusian in the South-East of Latvia, have suffered from a lack of attention in a similar way as non-Russian Soviet migrants, with their languages and cultures often being downgraded to purely folkloric items. Those minority schools which exist in Latvia today, such as Polish or Ukrainian schools, do not normally function in the respective minority language, but only teach it as a second language.

In this context Latgalian is in a rather specific situation. Whereas Latgalian enjoys some official recognition, in that it is mentioned in the Latvian constitution, it suffers from being traditionally perceived as a dialect of Latvian rather than a language in its own right. The debate on Latvian and Russian has been a considerable obstacle to discussing Latgalian issues, although in terms of users Latgalian-speakers are clearly the third-largest speech community in Latvia. Riga-dominated political and academic circles often do not show interest in Latgalian issues – an overtly political agenda which has only in recent years been slightly counteracted by some active individuals from Latgale.

The aim of this article is to place the Latgalian language within the context of ongoing debates on languages and their status in Latvia. For this purpose, we will first give a sociolinguistic and historical overview of Latgalian from a comparative perspective. We will then discuss recent developments and political discussions on Latgalian before putting Latgalian and its functions into theoretical frames of minority languages and discussing possible future scenarios. In this context, we will show the degree to which political (and to a lesser degree economic) obstacles may indeed shape the present and the future of a speech community and its language.

### **Latgalian in Latvia: an overview**

The dominant language of Latvia today is Latvian. It is the only official language ('state language' in Latvian terminology) and the first language of around 60% of the population.

Russian is the biggest minority language and is spoken as a first language by around one third of the population. Whereas Latvian-speakers were mainly the autochthonous population of Latvia, most Russian speakers (or their ancestors) came to Latvian territory during Soviet times. In 1989, less than 10% of the Russian population were traditional Russian speakers (e.g. Russians who came to the territory as part of an administrative elite in Tsarist times, but also Old Believers who settled in the seventeenth century after being expelled from Russia for religious reasons) and their descendants (c.f. Apine and Volkovs, 2007: 238). In the perception of the traditional population, there is a large gap between these “old” Russians who are referred to as “our” Russians and Soviet times migrants (c.f. Lazdiņa *et al.*, 2011); while the former are seen as locals, the latter are largely not.

Whereas Russian was the dominant language in all domains of higher prestige during Soviet times, Latvian has replaced Russian as the language of administration and the state since the reestablishment of Latvian independence in 1991. In all other domains, however, Latvian society functions fully bilingually – there are Latvian and Russian schools and media and there are no restrictions on everyday practices. The aim of official Latvian language policy since 1991 has been to develop Latvian as the “integrating language” of Latvian society, i.e. to develop sufficient competence in Latvian among non-Latvian mother tongue speakers.

Other languages of Latvia are traditional minority languages such as Polish or Belarusian. Like Russian, these are not officially recognized by law but enjoy financial and institutional support in certain areas such as education or culture. The most common foreign language today is English, albeit still with far lower competence than in many Western European countries. German as a traditional strong foreign language is still common but in decline, whereas other foreign languages are rare.

The only two languages besides Latvian which are mentioned in the Latvian constitution are the small Finno-Ugric autochthonous language of Livonian (with only a handful of speakers left today) and Latgalian. Latgalian is referred to as the “historical written variety of Latvian”, but it remains unclear what this status implies. Latgalian is a Baltic language variety closely related to Latvian and spoken mostly in the historical region of Latgale in Eastern Latvia. It has sufficiently distinctive features to make it unintelligible to many Latvian-speakers. However, even more important for classifying it as a separate language is the tradition of a written standard

which was developed during the nineteenth century and which was used in the first time of Latvian independence between 1920 until 1934. Thereby, Latgalian fulfils linguistic as well as social and political criteria for being perceived as a language in its own right. From an ethnic point of view, Latgalian is closely related to Catholicism (in contrast to dominant Lutheranism in other parts of Latvia, c.f. Lazdiņa *et al.*, 2011). In this, religious and linguistic components interact, but in total most speakers of Latgalian see themselves as a sub-ethnos of Latvian ethnicity rather than as a separate ethnicity altogether. Thus Latgalian, in terms of its perception by the state as a historic variety and the self-identification of its speakers with the main ethnos of the state, can be considered a regional language in line with regional languages such as Kashubian in Poland, Low German in Germany or Scots in Scotland (c.f. Lazdiņa and Marten and Pošeiko, 2011).

Latgalian is a Baltic variety which has developed separately from other varieties over several hundred years. Originally spread over large parts of today's Latvian territory, Latgalian tribes settled in the Eastern area of today's Latvia as the rural population under changing rulers. They were politically separated from other Baltic-speaking people when their territory came first under Polish and then under Russian rule, whereas the Western parts of today's Latvia remained Swedish. This also explains why Roman Catholicism is the dominating religious confession among speakers of Latgalian in contrast to mostly Lutheran speakers of Latvian. Also after the incorporation of the entire territory of today's Latvia into the Russian Empire, Latgale remained administratively separate, thereby reinforcing cultural and linguistic differences. Therefore, early written forms of Latvian and Latgalian developed independently of each other. This development could not be stopped by Russification attempts in the nineteenth century, which banned printing in Latgalian (as any other variety not written in cyrillics) for several decades. After this ban was lifted in 1904, in the spirit of national awakening all over Europe a lively scene of Latgalian culture developed. This resulted ultimately in the political aim of uniting with Latvian-speaking areas, a demand expressed in 1917 in a congress in which Latgalian intellectuals declared their unity with Latvia. After the creation of the Latvian Republic in 1918, a slow process of cultural reunification started, with Latgale as the economically weakest and ethnically most diverse part of Latvia. Yet, in spite of nationalist attempts to unite the Latvian language, the cultural and linguistic distinction was maintained, as Latgalians had explicitly demanded. Therefore,

publication of Latgalian periodicals and books flourished since 1920, and Latgalian was the medium of instruction in the first four years of primary school.

This development of Latgalian stopped when the authoritarian Ulmanis regime took over in 1934. Latgalian was banned from all public functions, printing and schools. Essentially, this situation has continued to the present day. During Soviet times, Latgalian remained banned (even though this was not an official law, but rather a *de facto* policy), with niches of its survival being mostly private homes and the Catholic Church. In addition, Latgalian was maintained in exile, including several publishing houses, albeit with very limited extension. Bukšs, one of the most active researchers of Latgalian literature and culture in exile, commented as early as 1961 that Latvian philology during Soviet times continued the Tsarist perception of Latgalian within the tradition of a ‘political philology’ in which the decision of what to recognize as a language and what to downgrade to a dialect depended on the ruling powers (Bukšs, 1961: 104).

Since the reestablishment of Latvian independence in 1991, the use of Latgalian has no longer been publicly forbidden, but the traditional lack of official recognition has continued. Latgalian is not used in administration, official public signs in Latgalian do not exist, and education in Latgalian is very limited and takes place only on individual initiative (c.f. Marten *et al.* 2009). The difference with previous times is that Latgalian is no longer restricted to the private sphere, and nobody is afraid of being punished for using it. Also, to a limited degree, Latgalian is used in publications, media and research reflecting the numbers of its speakers in today’s Latvia.

According to the large-scale Ethnolinguistic Survey of Latgale with more than 9,000 respondents all over Latgale (Šuplinska and Lazdiņa, 2009), 62.1% of the population have command of Latgalian. Related to the total population of Latgale of about 350,000, this means that around 217,000 persons in Latgale know Latgalian. Traditional accounts speak of 150–200,000 speakers of Latgalian in all of Latvia (c.f. Marten *et al.*, 2009: 9). It will be interesting to see the results of the current census in Latvia (carried out between March and May 2011) which, for the first time, has included a question on Latgalian (see below).

Research on attitudes to Latgalian shows that its speakers are generally quite positive towards it (c.f. Šuplinska and Lazdiņa, 2009; and Lazdiņa *et al.*, 2011). Of the respondents to the Ethnolinguistic Survey of Latgale, 35% wish to see Latgalian

as an official language, 33.9% are against it and 31% do not know. 58.9% of the respondents perceive the need to speak Latgalian as being a substantial condition for integration into the local community. Only 23% of the respondents do not wish Latgalian to be used at school at all, whereas 77% do – but only 8.3% as Latgalian-medium education, 10.5% as a compulsory second language, and 58.2% as an optional subject (Šuplinska and Lazdiņa, 2009: 337). These attitudes show that the population in Latgale is in favour of supporting Latgalian, even though there is no consensus concerning its official status. The fact that people often do not know reflects that they might not have thought about the question, arguably as a result of efforts to discourage the development of personal opinions during Soviet times. In addition to that, research for a linguoterritorial dictionary of Latgale (Rēzeknes Augstskola TILRA Project 2010) revealed that 1,763 of 1,959 respondents considered the Latgalian language to be of importance for “Latgalianness”, thereby declaring it the second most important characteristic of Latgale (next to the pilgrimage to the Church of Aglona).

Since 1991, the Latvian state has focused on the reversal of language shift from Russian back to Latvian as the main language of society. Latgalian is seen by many as either not important or even as a separatist threat, although Latgalian identity is largely constituted as a regional identity within Latvian identity, not in opposition to it. In fact, the minority-friendly climate of the 1920s reflected this by referring to Latgalian and their speakers by the term “Latvian(s) of Latgale”. Yet, societal attitudes gradually deteriorated – similar to processes which delegitimized the use of South Estonian varieties in the early twentieth century (c.f. the article by Koreinik and Saar in this volume). Among the population of Latvia outside Latgale, negative attitudes are still regularly displayed, for instance in online fora relating to newspaper articles on Latgalian. Trūpa (2010) shows numerous of examples of extremely aggressive comments between 2006 and 2009 which reinforce stereotypes relating to the primitivism of Latgalians. Similarly, in a discussion of an article on the demand to give Latgalian regional official status in October 2009, many respondents made openly hostile and occasionally vulgar remarks towards Latgalian (c.f. Marten, 2012).

In education and science, it is a step forward for recognition of Latgalian that the important 4th Letonika Congress, held in October 2011, included a section on Latgalian issues (c.f. *Apvienotais Pasaules I atviešu zinātnieku III kongress un Letonikas IV kongress* 2011). Yet, as a counter example, the Association of Teachers

of Latvian Language and Literature in November 2010 clearly displayed its attitude to Latgalian in a decision taken on the position of Latgalian linguistic and cultural heritage in the Latvian curricula: the members decided that a project should be developed to have ‘the students become acquainted with all non-standard forms (dialects) of the language’. By doing so, the Association entirely ignored the fact that a standardized Latgalian language exists, while simultaneously classifying Latgalian within the same category as Latvian varieties which are entirely lacking the separate development of Latgalian and whose speakers have never asked for official recognition. Further, it suggested that these measures should take place in the form of (voluntary) “hobby lessons”, thereby also clearly showing that it did not assign any importance to the issue (*Latviešu valodas un literatūras skolotāju asociācija* 2010).

The position of Latgalian within the ecolinguistic framework of Latvia may therefore be summarized in the following hierarchical overview of languages in Latvia today, according to their functions, their prestige, their recognition and their spread (c.f. Figure 1). This includes the distinction between endogenous (for languages which have traditionally been present in Latvia) and exogenous varieties (languages which only recently entered the ecolinguistic scenery of Latvia). Latgalian is certainly an endogenous language, but from the perspective of Latvian society as a whole it lacks the functions and prestige of Latvian, or of languages such as English or Russian which, in turn, are less endogenous than Latgalian. In terms of societal strength it is far weaker than Latvian, but also than Russian – with its demographic strength and the political and societal attention it receives – and than English, which is considered a prestigious target of educational policies.

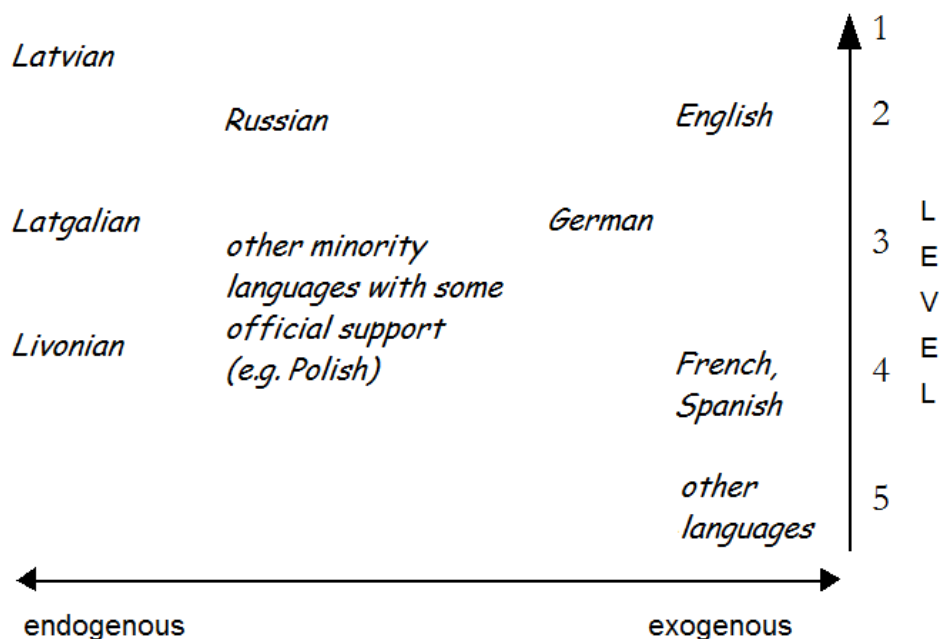


Figure 1: Languages in Latvia

In light of models for assessing language rights and policy situations, the model by Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1995: 80) enables us to evaluate Latgalian along two dichotomies: assimilation versus maintenance-oriented (on a scale ranging from prohibition via toleration, non-discrimination prescription and permission to promotion) and overt versus covert language policies. In this respect, the situation of Latgalian today suffers from a lack of active promotion of language rights or even a rights-based approach. The state only very hesitantly reacts to repeated demands by activists, if it reacts at all. Spoken Latgalian is tolerated as long as this is restricted to less formal domains, and it is only slowly spreading to more prestigious functions wherever there is support from activists. Therefore it seems legitimate to place Latgalian into the “toleration” category of the assimilation versus maintenance scale. On the overt versus covert scale, because of the lack of coherent policies and the continuing confusion regarding how Latgalian should be classified, we can speak of a more covert than overt policy.

It is interesting to compare the evaluation of Latgalian in the context of languages and language policies in Latvia to other scientific accounts of languages in Latvia. In this context it is remarkable that Latgalian is often not mentioned at all, and where it is this is often only as a side issue. Encyclopaedic publications such as



Haarmann (2002) or Janich and Greule (2002) do not refer to Latgalian with a single word. The *Ethnologue* – which provides encyclopaedia-type overviews of countries world-wide according to the languages which are spoken therein – mentions Latgalian under the entry ‘Latvian’ only as a dialect of Latvian and an alternate name for the variety called East Latvian or High Latvian. There is no distinct entry for Latgalian, and Latgalian also does not appear separately in the *Ethnologue*’s list of ‘Languages of Latvia’; nor is there a remark on the Latgalian written language.

Hogan-Brun *et al.* (2009: 103) do mention Latgalian, but only in one paragraph (about a third of a page) in a volume of 164 pages. Druviete (2010), in her account on sociolinguistics in the Baltic States, does not mention Latgalian once and her account also ignores all sociolinguistic research which has taken place on Latgalian in recent years. Many older scientific articles of language policy in Latvia similarly do not discuss the issue of Latgalian, for example Ozolins (2003), Tsilevich (2001), Hogan-Brun (2008) or Schmid (2008) (with the first author taking a Latvian perspective, the second a Russian perspective, and the last two outsiders’ perspectives). Not surprisingly, Latgalian is also missing in accounts of Latvian language policy in general volumes on language policy, such as those by Spolsky (2004, 2009).

Many more general scientific publications on Baltic linguistics also speak of just two surviving Baltic languages today (i.e. Latvian and Lithuanian), thereby failing to recognize that Latgalian exists in both spoken and written form. Although scientists working on Latgalian such as Leikuma (e.g. 2002) or Andronovs (e.g. 2009) do mention Latgalian, references beyond these circles are very few, e.g. Nītiņa (2007).

These examples show that Latvian centralist policies have been very successful in concealing the existence of Latgalian both in Latvian and in international publications. While examples of Latvian linguistics might be found in the tradition of centralist structures and may even have a political dimension, for example in attempts to recognize Latgalian, international authors arguably do not have an ideological reason for failing to include Latgalian in their lists.

In total, there is thus a considerable discrepancy between perceptions by local and regional scholars and activists, and scholars from other regions of Latvia and other countries. In spite of the fact that Latgalian already fulfils a large number of social functions, has the potential to expand to more official domains, and enjoys the

support of activists, the dominant view taken by the Latvian state on Latgalian has been supported by many non-Latgalian scholars from Latvia, and has shaped the perception of languages in Latvia by the international scientific community. In this interplay of activism and research, contradictory societal opinions, and the state's rather sceptical attitudes, it is difficult to foresee a positive angle on Latgalian. A lot depends on whether the modest steps initiated by activists in their dialogue with politicians will eventually lead to more fundamental changes, such as a partial recognition of Latgalian as a regional language with certain rights, possibly even extending to administrative use in certain defined areas.

### **Latgalian activism in recent times**

In the light of the tradition of suppression and neglect of Latgalian, since the reestablishment of Latvian independence Latgalian activists have fought fiercely for the reintroduction of Latgalian onto the cultural and political agenda. From the early 1990s activists initiated events such as competitions in Latgalian for school children or Latgalian summer camps. The first books in Latgalian, after the interruption of Latgalian publishing during Soviet times, have appeared again in the publishing house of the Latgalian Cultural Centre. Institutions created at the time included the Association of Latgalian School Teachers and the Research Institute of Latgale at Daugavpils University. Activism in education succeeded in establishing afternoon classes in Latgalian in several schools, culminating in academic programmes which included courses in Latgalian language and literature. The publication of scientific works, including the journal *Via Latgalica* since 2008, has indicated the direction in which Latgalian might be heading in the future.

One of the major successes of Latgalian activism was official recognition of Latgalian orthography in 2007, initiated by the Latgalian Students' Centre. In the State Language Centre, an organization operating within the structures of the Ministry of Justice, the Expert Commission of Latvian Language created a sub-group on Latgalian. Latgalian scientists and activists participated in this commission, resulting in an orthography which tries to pay justice to phonetical and grammatical differences within the Latgalian varieties.

The establishment in 2009 of LatBLUL, a Latvian counterpart to the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) (which has since been closed down),

was a success in terms of activism of linguistic minorities in Latvia in general. Languages that are represented in LatBLUL are Latgalian, Livonian and the Russian varieties spoken by Old Believers. The organisation focuses on issues relating to minority languages in Latvia. To date it has had some practical impact on procedures to develop the current working group on Latgalian and the inclusion of a question on Latgalian in the census (see below).

At the international level, the official assignment of an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) language code (“ltg”) in 2010 was seen as a major success by Latgalian activists, and lobbying by LatBLUL also ensured the inclusion of Latgalian in the 2011 national census (Dalykums, 2010: 217–227). The question of ‘Which language do you use at home?’, which originally offered only the options ‘Latvian, Russian, Belarusian and others (please name which)’, was changed to include the question: ‘Do you use Latgalian, subtype of the Latvian language, on a daily basis?’ (*Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets* 2011). This is a fundamental step forward insofar as Latgalian had not otherwise been mentioned in official statistics at all. Latgalian linguists are thus eagerly awaiting the census results in order to contrast them with previous research results.

In spite of these successes, however, there were also considerable setbacks which show that the general position of Latgalian has not changed dramatically. One major example was the decision by the Latvian Supreme Court in August 2009 relating to official documents in Latgalian. The court ruled that ‘a document in the Latgalian written language is to be considered a document in a foreign language’ (c.f. Viļums, 2011), based on the legal provision that all official documents in Latvia must be in Latvian. It thus became apparent that, in spite of the tolerance of cultural activism, political recognition remained out of question. As a consequence, the Register of Enterprises ruled in March 2011 that the application to include a company which handed over relevant documents in Latgalian was unlawful (c.f. Viļums, 2011).

The discouraging situation regarding official use of Latgalian and the lack of improvement in terms of societal prestige resulted in a petition by participants of the 2nd scientific conference on Latgalistics which took place in Rēzekne in October 2009. The main demand of the petition was to recognize Latgalian as a regional official language (Dalykums, 2010: 204–206). Yet, two letters in response to the petition by the Latvian Ministries of Justice and of Education and Science reinforced the tradition of seeing Latgalian as a dialect of Latvian. The Ministry of Justice also

argued that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages did not provide for the possibility of ‘dialects of official languages to be eligible as regional languages’, and therefore denied Latgalian the possibility of arguing for its status as a regional language (c.f. Dalykums, 2010: 212–215). Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Science rejected the demand on the grounds that Latvian laws did not create the grounds for providing official status to any variety other than Latvian – rather than considering that it might be time to create such grounds. The Ministry only referred to the possibility of safeguarding Latgalian traditions, including the Latgalian language, under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on Non-Material Cultural Heritage (c.f. Dalykums, 2010: 212–215).

However, the uproar among Latgalian activists and the continuing pressure by several groups in the aftermath of the petition prompted the Ministry of Education and Science to initiate a working group on Latgalian. Arguably, the government had understood that Latgalian has become an important topic in parts of Latgalian society, which, in light of the general elections in Latvia in September 2010, would have been unfavourable from the perspective of the Latgale electorate. The working group began meeting in the summer of 2010. Many activists were disappointed by the fact that the group did not initiate any real policy changes but instead just created a list of tasks for developing Latgalian issues before its work was interrupted by early general elections in September 2011.

Similarly, in a letter to the leader of the language policy department in the Ministry of Education and Science in November 2011, Veronika Dundure, the head of the Latgalian Teachers’ Association, stressed that Latgalian was not mentioned at all in the Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005-14, and provided several suggestions as to how Latgalian could be supported. The main demand was to ‘develop a state-financed programme for maintaining and developing the Latgalian written language’. Dundure (2010) called for a guarantee to study Latgalian at school, to create an institution responsible for Latgalian and to finance at least one periodical in Latgalian, in order to overcome ‘the Soviet heritage in the educational system with regard to Latgalian’.

So far the working group has created a list of areas in which policy steps should be developed. According to suggestions by activists in December 2010, the chapters in this list sound promising and point towards holistic, coherent language

planning: legal questions, financial questions, education, teaching materials, communication and mass media. Yet the optimism did not last long. Many core issues were taken off the agenda right from the start, notably in the section on legal questions. The comment on why the activists' demand to 'render more precisely the status of the Latgalian language in the Latvian state' was deleted from the list reveals the conditions under which state representatives participate in the working group: 'Since there is no normative document in which the term "Latgalian language" is used/explained, it is not necessary to make the terminology more precise.' Similarly, in response to the demand to 'secure the possibility guaranteed by the state to use the Latgalian standard language in business communication in the region of Latgale', they commented that 'the state language law regulates that in record keeping the Latvian language according to its standard norms is used'. And regarding the request to ensure that all schools in Latgale have at least one specialist on Latgalian language, literature and culture, government representatives replied that 'it is every school director's responsibility to decide on the pedagogical staff in their schools'. Not surprisingly, demands to establish an institution for the coordination of Latgalian issues or the right to Latgalian classes at schools were also rejected (*Latgaliešu rakstu valodas darba grupa* 2010).

What remain on the list are a few issues that merit discussion, but which in no sense reflect the quest for more equal status for Latgalian in Latvia. They include the inclusion of language-related aims into the strategic aims of regional development, the preparation of Latgalian study programmes and teachers' training, financial support for Latgalian media and projects relating to culture and history. These aims sound promising, but they are vague and in no sense create a legally binding framework. In addition, the responsibility for reaching these aims is assigned to educational institutions and activist organizations in Latgale, many of which are already fulfilling these tasks without being officially assigned to do so by the government. Attitudes expressed by some working group members such as "nobody stops your activism" reflect this attitude; according to the government, Latgalians should be happy that they can enjoy the freedom of researching what they wish and of conducting cultural events. This attitude is also reflected in the fact that one of the remaining points on the list refers to 'regularly informing the Ministry of activities with regard to Latgalian', a notion which seems reminiscent to activists of Soviet-era state control (*Latgaliešu rakstu valodas darba grupa* 2011).

Regarding the question of whether Latgalian is part of Latvian or a separate language, it seems that many state institutions follow whichever line suits them in a given moment, in order to avoid having to give more support to Latgalian. If it suits their purposes, Latgalian is considered part of Latvian; if it does not, it is considered outside the limits of Latvian. There is thus a remarkable logical contradiction: in most official situations, Latgalian is not considered ‘sufficiently Latvian’; however, when speakers of Latgalian try to gain recognition for the standardized version of Latgalian, Latgalian is denied the status of a language in its own right. Viļums (2011) explains that the question of whether Latgalian is seen as part of the Latvian language has the following consequences: if it is seen as part of Latvian, it should gain equal rights as the Latvian standard language; if it is not considered part of Latvian, the state would have to take a clear decision on where Latgalian can be used and where it cannot (at which point it would then have to be counted as an autochthonous minority language alongside Livonian). Viļums (2011) also stresses that there would need to be a redefinition of the ethnicity of speakers of Latgalian.

In total, on the one hand recent steps have led to a partially more coherent policy towards Latgalian by the Latvian state. On the other, the negative reaction towards any demands that might entail more substantial recognition have demonstrated that no serious language planning activities which might safeguard or even promote Latgalian are on the agenda. In addition, the lack of a clear definition of its status once again illustrates the shortfalls of not having a clear policy on Latgalian. In this struggle to be recognized as a distinct variety, social perceptions regarding Latgalian are therefore similar to other regional languages throughout Europe, such as Võru in Estonia, Kashubian in Poland, Low German in Germany, or Scots in the United Kingdom. This, in turn, is an additional reason for questioning traditional categorizations of languages determined by political and economic power structures (c.f. Hornsby and Agarín in this volume). Only if these obstacles are overcome will the Latgalian speech community be able to use its language in a wider sphere.

### **Functions of Latgalian in contemporary Latgale**

Taking into consideration the history of Latgalian and contemporary activism, we can now summarize the functions of Latgalian in Latgale society today. Marten (2009: 37) suggests the following domains of language use as a point of orientation for analysing

the functions of minority languages: use in private communication (in private space and in public), general legal status (i.e. recognition by law), use in administration, court, police/prison, health services, education, economy/business, culture/heritage, media/arts, religion, and international relations. Given the boom in studies of written languages in the public sphere under the heading of “Linguistic Landscapes”, this additional category will also be added to the list. Furthermore, corpus planning, symbolic language use and attitudes/prestige planning were included not as domains of language use in the strict sense, but as aspects relating closely to specific perceptions in the evaluation of language planning and status.

In most of these domains the use of Latgalian depends on individuals and their decisions. There are no restrictions on the use of Latgalian in private communication, and it is in this area where Latgalian is at its strongest. The second stronghold of Latgalian is the Catholic Church. In state-dominated domains, however, the written use of Latgalian is usually not accepted, and oral use mostly takes place on an *ad hoc* basis in situations where persons are familiar with each other, e.g. in small rural communities where locals know each other and know who speaks Latgalian and who does not. In education and the media the use of Latgalian is rare, even though private local initiatives have created a certain space for Latgalian: for instance, the regional radio station *Latgolys radeja* has been in operation for several years, activists among teachers and parents have organized Latgalian classes at primary schools (outside the regular curriculum), and Latgalian has seen a certain academic revival through its inclusion in several academic study programmes at Rēzekne University College, and through the series of annual international *Latgalistica* conferences since 2008. The examples of symbolic use in the names of companies or cafes to create a local image show that over the past few years a certain prestige has developed around Latgalian as a marker of regional identity in specific situations.

Table 1 provides an overview of the functions of Latgalian today. It summarizes a situation that is characteristic of many minority languages: while Latgalian is frequently used in informal and private domains, thereby reflecting a desire on the part of the people to use the language, it is only rarely used for official purposes. The use of written Latgalian is also rare in comparison to its oral use, which is clearly the result of a lack of competence or experience on the part of many Latgalian-speakers in writing the language, due to the lack of Latgalian education and the fact that an official agreement on standard orthography was only reached in 2007.

Domain	Situation of Latgalian
Use in Private Communication (in private and public space)	No restrictions by law; number of speakers declining; Latgalian perceived as a rural variety of older generations; yet, intergenerational transmission still takes place to differing degrees
General Legal Status (i.e. the recognition by law)	Mentioned as ‘a historical written variety of Latvian’ in the state Language Law, without further specification
Administration	No written use; oral use on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis is sometimes possible
Court	No written use; official court ruling that documents in Latgalian are considered to be written in a foreign language and therefore have to be rejected; oral use rare
Police/Prison	No written use; oral use on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis sometimes possible
Health Services	No written use; oral use on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis sometimes possible
Education	No state-organized teaching of Latgalian; some local initiatives outside the regular curriculum; in higher education Latgalian as part of a few programmes of philology
Economy/Business	No written use; oral use on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis sometimes possible
Culture/Heritage	No restrictions for cultural organizations to use and spread oral and written Latgalian; a rich variety of music groups in Latgalian
Media/Arts	Some local/regional media in Latgalian (radio: one local radio station; television: very little; websites: increasingly; newspapers: mostly only individual articles, often relating to church issues); a rather rich literature (but only a handful of books are published every year); in total rather little
Religion	Catholic Church as an institution where Latgalian has survived
International Relations	No restrictions on seeking international cooperation with other speech communities
Linguistic Landscape	Rare, even in core Latgalian areas
Corpus Planning	Standardized orthography adopted in 2007; otherwise some small-scale private initiatives only
Symbolic Language Use	Sometimes in the names of companies, cafes or similar
Attitudes/Prestige Planning	Some activists’ activities; traditionally low prestige; today at the local level partly with increasing prestige

Table 1: Functions of Latgalian according to Domains of Language Use

Latgalian shows today a tendency towards decline. Even though it is not classified as ‘endangered’ by UNESCO's “World's Languages in Danger”, its placement as ‘vulnerable’ at the lowest end of a scale illustrating the levels of threat faced by languages means that it is also not considered to be entirely safe (Moseley, 2010). This evaluation is accurate in that Latgalian is certainly not on the brink of extinction: it is not acutely endangered in the sense that there are no children who speak the language. Yet it is also true that, as a result of the policies of the twentieth century, Latgalian is not entirely safe and the numbers of active users are declining.



Stage	Content	Situation of Latgalian Today
1	Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels	No activities on Latgalian at the national level
2	Local/regional mass media and governmental services	Some mass media in Latgalian exist, but these are few; no governmental services in Latgalian
3	The local/regional (i.e. non-neighbourhood) work sphere both within the ethnolinguistic community (among other X-men), as well as outside it (among Y-men)	Oral communication in the local work sphere is sometimes in Latgalian, depending on individual attitudes; hardly any written use of Latgalian; no use of Latgalian with outsiders
4b	Public Schools for X-ish children, offering some instruction via X-ish, but substantially under Y-ish curricular and staffing control	No Latgalian-medium instruction
4a	Schools in lieu of compulsory education and substantially under X-ish curricular and staffing control	No separate Latgalian schools; local administration reacts often positively to parents' demands for extra-curricular classes on Latgalian issues and in Latgalian
<i>II. RLS to transcend diglossia, subsequent to its attainment</i>		
5	Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education	Latgalian courses exist in some schools as extra-curricular activities and in some universities
6	The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighbourhood-community: the basis of mother-tongue transmission	Intergenerational transmission takes place in a substantial proportion of families, depending on the area of Latgale
7	Cultural interaction in X-ish is primary involving the community-based older generation	No coherent picture; cultural activities in Latgalian take place and involve all generations, yet there is a lot of code-switching to Latvian
8	Reconstruction of X-ish and adult acquisition of XSL	Not necessary, but acquisition of larger parts of the adult population might make sense
<i>I. RLS to attain diglossia (assuming prior ideological clarification)</i>		

Table 2: Latgalian in Fishman's GIDS, authors' assessment

When placing Latgalian into Fishman's influential Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (c.f. Fishman, 1991) on the well-being and revitalization of minority languages, we see that reality does not correspond to the idealized model in which a language may clearly be placed on one stage (c.f. Table 2). Yet, there are certain statements which can be made. No doubt, Latgalian does not fulfil the requirements of Level 1, as Latgalian is not present at the national level in Latvia. However, its situation is not so poor as to justify classification of level 7 or 8. That said, placement within the other levels is less apparent. Intergenerational transmission is widespread, although there are also many families in which the language is not passed on to the younger generation. The Ethnolinguistic Survey of Latgale (Šuplinska and Lazdiņa, 2009) reveals that 33.7% of the respondents speak Latgalian with their children, with some areas where the overwhelming majority passes on the

language and others where Latgalian is rather rare. At first sight this may seem like a rather low proportion. Yet, considering that 32.2% of the respondents answered that they do not have any children, this means that about half of the respondents (33.7% out of 67.2%) do in fact transmit Latgalian to their children. Furthermore, when considering that only 62.1% of respondents answered that they know Latgalian, this means that within the Latgalian speech community, intergenerational transmission takes place among a majority of speakers.

Regarding the other domains, as seen above, Latgalian education exists only on a voluntary basis outside regular curricula. Oral communication in the workplace and local media in Latgalian is rare and essentially depends on individual situations, and personal networks and preferences. Overall, therefore, classification at level 5 seems justified: while intergenerational transmission and extra-curricular schools remain safe, Latgalian education as part of the general curriculum, along with the use of Latgalian in the media and economic spheres, are the exception.

### **Discussion: what future for Latgalian?**

From this historical and political account of the linguistic situation in Latvia, we can conclude that Latgalian remains a language that is used and cherished by a large number of speakers in Latvia, even if there is a certain level of endangerment resulting in large part from the attitude of state authorities for much of the twentieth century. However, Latgalian is spoken and written in various contexts and intergenerational transmission does take place, if not throughout the entire speech community. Many users wish to see the functions of Latgalian increased, as evidenced by a lively community of activists who have developed local initiatives with the aim of spreading Latgalian and according it greater recognition. Latgalian is currently being researched from structural linguistic, sociolinguistic and other perspectives. It can therefore rightly be considered a fully-fledged language which may fulfil all societal functions, even if historical and contemporary attitudes preclude it from doing so at the moment.

One fundamental aspect of this debate is whether the Latvian state is able to clarify its own policy towards Latgalian: will Latgalian be recognized as a fully-fledged second written variety under the broader roof of the Latvian language and, if

so, will that mean that Latgalian can be used wherever regulations demand the use of Latvian? Or will it be seen as a non-Latvian variety of a minority language used by a considerable proportion of the autochthonous population in Latvia (at least 7% but possibly by high as 15-20%)? Or will the Latvian state continue to be undecided in its approach and violate the rights of Latgalian speakers by making decisions on an arbitrary and *ad hoc* basis? One solution to the problem of defining what Latgalian actually is might be to go back to the dominant perception of the 1920s, when Latgalian and Latvian were seen as two written varieties within the Latvian language. This would also solve the question of whether Latgalian activism is perceived as separatism, since it would clearly establish that Latgalian is part of Latvian identity.

However, regardless of the final decision on the status question, for Latgalian to be recognized it is essential that the Latvian state develop a coherent approach towards the language. Very modest steps in that direction are being taken by the current working group, but most activities today are rather small-scale initiatives by individual activists and organizations, e.g. in education and the media. If the linguistic and cultural heritage of Latgalian is to flourish under the conditions of the twenty-first century, a coherent language policy is needed which is modelled on policies of 'active offer' or holistic language planning. Latvia has a rich experience with language policy, so the designing and implementing of language policy programmes are a question of political will rather than of competence.

It is here that political and economic obstacles to the well-being of the minority group play a major role. The political obstacles – the centralist attitudes and the lack of willingness by the central government to respond to Latgalian demands – clearly show how much the Latgalian community depends on the goodwill of its political leadership. In addition, there is an obvious issue of structures: Latgalian certainly suffers from Latvian centralism, which permits only a very low level of regional decision-making, let alone any notion of autonomy or federalism (c.f. Marten, forthcoming, on the detrimental impact of decentralized structures on minority language development). This centralism is even reflected in the perceptions of large swathes of the scientific community.

Economic obstacles play an additional role, with Latvia experiencing financial difficulties that have resulted in heavy cuts in public spending. As the poorest region in Latvia, Latgale suffers from particular problems such as high unemployment, low salaries and social problems. Yet there are activists who are currently devoting their

time to developing the Latgalian language, designing educational programmes and teaching materials, to creating literature and music in Latgalian, and to producing small-scale radio and television programmes.

However, it would be too easy to argue that the non-recognition of Latgalian is essentially an economic problem. Latvian centralism has certainly had a negative impact on the distribution of resources. For even in times of financial hardship, a different attitude on the part of political leadership would nevertheless make a coherent, Latgalian-oriented policy possible.

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