

POSTPRINT

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Why do Russian-speaking families in Latvia choose Latvian-medium education? Three narratives about critical events

Abstract:

Our paper discusses family language policies among multilingual families in Latvia with Russian as home language. The presentation is based on three case studies, i.e. interviews conducted with Russophones who have chosen to send their children to Latvian-medium pre-schools and schools. The main aim is to understand practices and regards among such families “from below,” i.e. which family-internal and family-external factors influenced the choice of Latvian-medium education and what impact this choice has on linguistic practices.

The paper shows that there have been critical events which both encouraged and discouraged the choice of Latvian-medium education. The wish to integrate into mainstream society has been met by obstacles both from ethnic Russians and Latvians. Yet, the three families consider their choices to be the right ones for the future development of their children in a multiethnic Latvia in which Latvian serves as the unifying language of society.

Keywords:

Latvian as a medium of instruction - Latvian as second language - family language policy - critical events - language narratives - Russophones - Latvia - societal inclusion

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1. Introduction

Sociolinguistic research on Latvia has often focused on questions of top-down language policies in the context of the reversal of language shift from Russian to Latvian as the main language of society since the 1990s. After more than four decades of Soviet occupation, *de facto* incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union, and encouraged migration from all parts of the Soviet realm, the proportion of ethnic Latvians in Latvia had decreased to just over 50 % of the population. Language policy since the re-establishment of Latvian independence has therefore focused on overcoming the “asymmetric bilingualism” in which L1-speakers of Russian were often monolingual, whereas L1-speakers of Latvian and of other languages used Russian as second language and language of interethnic communication. The policies of the Latvian state have since the 1990s aimed at societal integration using Latvian as main language of society; yet, these resulted in repeated political tension and opposing discourses and aims among L1-speakers of Latvian and Russian (e.g. Ozolins 2019, cf. also Lazdiņa, Marten 2019), including in education (Marten, Lazdiņa 2019). Other sociolinguistic topics in Latvia which have been investigated include, for instance, the regional language of Latgalian originating in the region of Latgale in the East of Latvia (e.g. Lazdiņa 2013 on the value of Latgalian, Lazdiņa 2019 on language regards; Marten, Lazdiņa 2016b on Latgalian between Russian and Latvian; Pošeiko 2017 on the use of Latgalian in different domains) or linguistic landscapes (Marten, Lazdiņa 2016a on Latgalian and migration; Pošeiko 2018a on graffiti; Pošeiko 2018b on educational

use). What remains rather under-investigated, however, are micro-situations of everyday language practices and language regards, and the ideologies and attitudes which shape these practices.

This study attempts to shed light on one particular aspect of such micro-practices; that is, individuals and families with a Russophone background who have opted to send their children to Latvian-medium education. This topic is of high relevance in the context of on-going debates on educational reforms, in particular on the question whether to maintain the Soviet tradition of a dual school system with “Latvian” and “Russian” schools [in line with discourses on language rights] or to create a unified school system [in line with, e.g., many Western European countries in which the main language of society is the regular medium of instruction for all children, with varying degrees of L1-education in other languages]. The aim of a unified school system usually lies in societal integration and in overcoming patterns of segregation between ethnic or linguistic majority and minority groups.

For the purpose of our research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with three Latvian families whose main home language is Russian. Their children have attended (or are attending) kindergarten, pre-school and/or school with Latvian as the medium of instruction (MoI) in all subjects except foreign languages. Our interest has been to understand different motivations to choose education in Latvian for their children; to highlight emotional experiences and ideologies and to investigate how education in Latvian influences the families’ linguistic practices. The research on these three families should be viewed as three case studies chosen as examples for analyzing specific choices and policies. As usual for qualitative research of this type, we do not claim our results to be representative of the entire population in Latvia which uses Russian as the main language. Yet, we believe they provide well-grounded insights into the underlying motivations of individual choices which may serve as a point of departure for further discussions and a better understanding of the challenges which Russophones in Latvia face.

The pre-structured questions on which the interviews were based consisted of three categories: practical use of languages in the family; language planning and management; and language attitudes, ideologies or regards. The interviews were conducted in Riga between October 2019 and January 2020. The length of each of the interviews was between 30 and 60 minutes. They were conducted in Latvian (cases 1 and 3; the respondents speak Latvian at a level between fluent proficiency and near-native competence) and German (case 2; the interviewee's competence was fluent, albeit with some lexical restrictions and some non-standard grammatical features).

In the following, we will first provide a short overview of the context of research on family language policy on which this chapter is based, then draw a sketch of policies and discourses on languages in Latvia, before presenting and discussing our case studies.

2. Family language policy: background

Family language policy (FLP) has gained substantial attention as a part of language policy and planning during the last years. FLP has been defined as “explicit and overt as well as implicit and covert language planning by family members in relation to language choice and literacy practices within home domains and among family members” (Curdt-Christiansen 2018). It includes aspects of various fields of linguistics, sociology, and education. Early studies on FLP are often related to bilingual child development. Currently, however, there is an increased focus on the broader context of families and the societal impact on family decisions (King, Fogle 2017; Higgins 2018). The concept of family has broadened to include, not only parents or single-parent families, but also new partners of parents and grandparents, children's caretakers and others. This diverse range of family types has an impact on language practices and management and reflects diverse models of FLP which take into account a variety of languages, choices, practices and attitudes.

As Curdt-Christiansen notes, FLP has within the discipline of sociolinguistics often been framed along Spolsky's (2004, 2009) theory of language policy "which consists of three interrelated components: language ideology – how family members perceive particular languages; language practices – *de facto* language use, what people actually do with language; and language management – what efforts they make to maintain language" (Curdt-Christiansen 2018: 2). Fundamental for all of these parts are choices on how families (in total and their individual members) negotiate which varieties and variants are assigned certain values, which variants are considered adequate, and which are chosen or unchosen in specific situations. For our understanding of values underlying these choices, we consider also the term "language regards" to be highly useful. The notion of "language regards" has been introduced by Preston (e.g. 2011) as a hypernym for terms such as "language beliefs", "language attitudes" and "language ideologies". These concepts are to different degrees evaluative or non-evaluative and govern, consciously or subconsciously, what people think and feel about languages and the way how they use different varieties (on language regards in the Baltic states cf. also Lazdiņa 2019; Marten 2019). Language management – or language policy in the narrower sense – takes place when family members actively intervene into these choices of practices and values. Other recent studies emphasize the bridge between home, family and school, between parental beliefs, attitudes or regards and national language policies (King, Fogle 2017). In total, these are always subject to the diversity of socio-political and historical contexts.

In different European countries there is therefore quite a diversity of issues regarding family language policies. FLP researchers have investigated families in different majority-minority contexts including migrant families, inter-ethnic marriages and differences between autochthonous minority and majority families. These have been related to current or more historic patterns of internal and external migration and different socio-political changes (e.g. the fall

of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the expansion of the EU, the Schengen zone, and others). The geographical contexts which have been analysed by FLP researchers include also the Baltic states (Schwartz, Verschik 2013; Siiner, Koreinik, Brown 2017). In the context of the Baltic states, however, a main interest of research on FLP may be less to understand recent migrant families' choices, as in many other European countries, but to investigate views and practices of children and their parents and grandparents who were born in Latvia and have lived here for several generations (see below).

In light of these different approaches and contexts, this chapter chooses the influential graphic model by Curdt-Christiansen (2018) as the main tool for theoretical conceptualization of FLP (cf. Figure 1):

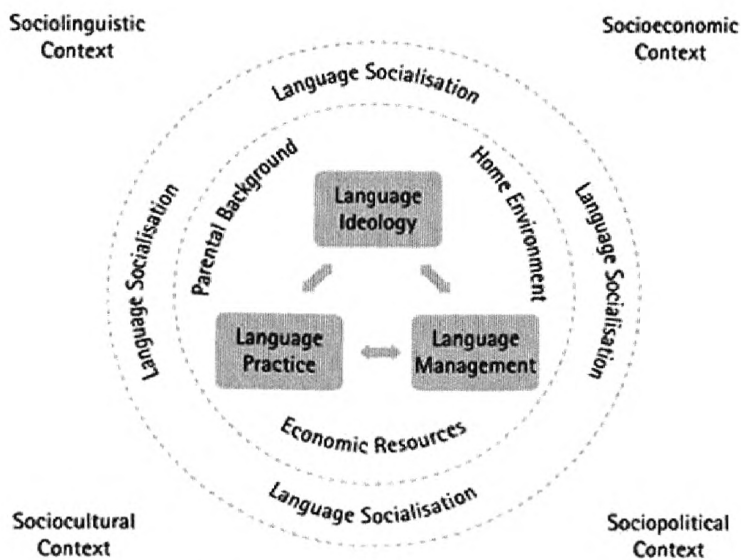


Figure 1. The interdisciplinary framework of family language policy (FLP; Curdt-Christiansen 2018: 422)

This model aims to pay tribute to the complex interrelation between family and societal contexts, between decision-making processes among family members and influences by other persons and societal forces, between official language policies and goals for one's children's educational success. For this purpose, the model combines

two theories: Spolsky's language policy model (Spolsky 2004, 2009) and the theory of language socialization (Duranti, Ochs, Schieffelin 2011). In the centre of the graphic representation are Spolsky's three interrelated components of language policy – beliefs, practices and management as outlined above.

Beliefs are represented as “ideologies” in the model. In our understanding, this is where “regards” may also be a useful concept. In a family, these three components are influenced, on the one hand, by internal factors – the home environment (i.e. which languages are used in the family, which values are considered important), the background (linguistic and other) of the parents (and, arguably, of other family members and close people) and economic resources. On the other hand, through (language) socialisation, the family interacts with the outside world. Decisions are also influenced by the contexts in which the family lives – sociolinguistic, sociocultural, socioeconomic and socio-political.

Curdt-Christiansen's FLP model serves as the main theoretical reference for our analysis; in addition, however, we would like to refer to narrative analysis (Gimenez 2010) which has also had a strong impact on our research. Our interview data reflect that FLP is frequently an emotional, sensitive field. Therefore, interviews at times turn into life narratives. In our case study this was not entirely unexpected but, whenever it happened, it came suddenly and with some surprise. According to Chesire (2000: 236), the study of such narratives consists of three basic components – the tale itself (i.e. the content of the story and its form), the teller (i.e. the person through whose eyes we hear the tale), and the process of telling (i.e. the act of narration). The narratives often reveal important events in the respondents' lives including their linguistic biographies. Within narrative analysis they are frequently treated as explicit or implicit *critical events*, i.e. crucial incidents which play highly significant roles in the life trajectories of the story tellers (Gimenez 2010). In the context of our research, it has therefore been our aim to concentrate on identifying such critical events, which have been decisive

for creating linguistic regards and language practices. These may be related to family-internal events as well as to the general external context in which our informants live.

3. Language Practices and Discourses on Languages in Latvia

Before turning to our data, however, it seems meaningful to provide more background information on language practices, policies and discourses in Latvia, i.e. important factors, which shape the sociolinguistic and socio-political, but also the socio-economic and sociocultural context. Census data from 2011 indicate that L1-Russophones make up 37.2 % of the total population of Latvia and 62.1 % of the population of Latvia speak Latvian as their dominant home language. Other dominant home languages amount to less than one percent including pre-Soviet minority languages such as Polish or Lithuanian, the languages mostly introduced to Latvia by Soviet-time migrants such as Ukrainian, as well as languages of people who have more recently migrated to Latvia, e.g. from India (Centrālās statistikas pārvaldes datubāzes, Population and Housing Census 2011). Authors such as Ozolins (2019) point out the peculiarity of the Baltic states in terms of language policies; that is, the right of ethnic Latvians to re-establish their cultural and linguistic dominance after Soviet occupation. Therefore, Latvian continues to be the sole official language of Latvia; however, other languages – mostly Russian and English – are widespread not only as home languages, but also as languages of business or in the linguistic landscape. Russian also continues to play an important role as a language of economic relations and as a *lingua franca* in the post-Soviet world. Therefore, and in contrast to many autochthonous minorities in other European countries, FLP issues for many Russophone families in the Baltic states are less related to the question of how to maintain a mother tongue which is threatened with vanishing from society. Because of the Soviet past with its asymmetrical bilingualism,

societal presence of Russian has never been questioned in the way as minority languages have been in many other countries. Intergenerational transmission of Russian can also today widely be taken for granted. The aim of a balanced family language policy in families with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is, therefore, how to guarantee competence in the titular language while at the same time ensuring adequate competence in the home language.

In this context, education is an important topic regarding languages, which continuously creates societal debate. Currently, a major education reform aims to reduce the on-going societal segregation between L1-speakers of Latvian and of Russian, since larger parts of the Latvian- and Russian-speaking populations during their educational careers rarely interact with persons of other linguistic backgrounds. Laizāne, Putniņa and Mileiko (2015: 26) report that even among the younger generations of Russophones in Latvia, networks of friends are usually created among young people with the same home languages. Contact with L1-speakers of other languages occurs largely only at sports events or similar, where the members of each team mostly stay among themselves; places for leisure time are frequently chosen according to a perception of which language will dominate.

In order to overcome this segregation, amendments to the Laws on Education and on General Education passed in 2018 have since the school year 2020/2021 started to replace the existing ethnic minority education models with three new models at the basic (integrated primary and lower-secondary) education level. In grades one to six in bilingual schools, 50 % of the teaching will be in Latvian and 50 % in the minority language (i.e. most often Russian). In grades seven to nine, not less than 80 % of the curriculum shall be taught in Latvian. Also since the beginning of 2020/2021, all subjects (except for foreign languages) in grade ten in general education schools are taught in Latvian. This rule will be extended to all upper-secondary education in 2022/2023. Ethnic minority students will, however, continue to be offered opportunities to study their home languages at mother-tongue level, as well as to study literature and cultural subjects in their L1.

3.1. DISCOURSES ON LATVIAN AND RUSSIAN

As with all education reforms regarding languages in Latvian, this reform has created debate in society. Yet, in comparison to previous times, the protests have until now remained moderate – most notably so when compared to the 2004 educational reform which was overshadowed by an infamous and partly-violent outcry from minority representatives which turned out to be more politically driven than fact-based (Bambals 2016: 63–64). The current political reactions indicate, in this sense, that the idea that Latvian society needs to integrate through one common language has become more widely accepted among the younger generations (see below). Competence in Latvian among people with other L1s has increased during the past years, in particular in the young generation due to intensive schooling. Data from 2015 show that almost 40 % of the population of Latvia (1,986,000) claim an ethnic identity other than Latvian; Russian is the biggest ethnic group with almost 26 %, while 91 % of the persons who identify themselves as part of an ethnic minority claim to have some competence in Latvian, (15 % proficient, 28 % upper intermediate, 33 % intermediate, 15 % basic and only 9 % none). Almost all young members of ethnic minorities (15–24 years old) have acquired some level of proficiency in Latvian: 39 % excellent, 39 % good, 20 % basic and 2 % weak (Latvian Language Agency 2017).

There are not many studies which have investigated regards of Russian L1-speakers towards learning Latvian. The existing studies show different practices and partly opposing tendencies of linguistic accommodation and attitudes towards Latvian. Vonda (2016: 160) in a study of views on bilingual education based on in-depth and focus-group interviews concludes that this highly depends on the region of Latvia: “Representatives of the Russian-speaking community from Zemgale and Kurzeme regions do not feel excluded from Latvian society, while in Riga and the Latgale region they feel excluded and threatened”. This is not unexpected in the sense that the proportion

of L1-speakers of Russian in Zemgale and Kurzeme is by far lower than in the remaining parts of Latvia (i.e. Riga, Vidzeme and Latgale), thereby making it more difficult for Russophones to create a self-sufficient Russian monolingual environment. With regard to the language of education, “in Zemgale and Kurzeme regions, the respondents are not prone to acquiring education in the Russian language, they more positively evaluated the bilingual educational approach and were more geared to inclusion in society. However, in Riga and Latgale, the residents are more focused on acquisition of education in Russian and have a negative view of the bilingual education” (ibid.). An ambiguous picture of attitudes towards Latvian is also provided by a survey among high school and university students in Latvia (Marten 2019); that is, L1-speakers of Russian on average consider Russian to be more beautiful and useful for their leisure time than L1-speakers of Latvian. For Latvian, the results are the opposite. For professional purposes, L1-speakers of Latvian consider Russian to be much more important than L1-speakers of Russian view Latvian, thereby indicating not only an emotional division based on language, but also a pragmatic one. In total, these studies indicate that language issues are still a controversial issue in Latvian society, but that it is less-legitimate to speak of a polarisation than of a scale of stronger and weaker regards.

3.2. ISSUES OF IDENTITY

In the search to understand reasons for opposing or contradicting views, Hanovs (2016) analyses how opposing discourses continue to shape large parts of Latvian politics. Ethnic Latvians’ views on post-Soviet re-establishment of nationhood are based mostly on ethnic and linguistic grounds. In contrast, Russophone discourses continue to focus on minority discrimination. Hanovs argues that these differences can be mostly explained by living in two largely separate spaces of collective memory and of interpreting history. At least those parts of non-ethnic Latvian inhabitants of Latvia with

a post-Soviet identity which have not acquired citizenship seem to alienate themselves from the political mainstream. This could be observed most notably in the 2012 referendum launched by pro-Russian groups which unsuccessfully called for establishing Russian as a second state language, and through the establishment of an unofficial assembly of non-citizens. However, as Bambals (2016) points out, surveys indicate that also with regard to politics of identity and belonging, there are contradicting tendencies among Russophones in Latvia: “the majority of the Russian-speaking minority is proud of the country they are living in, even seeing themselves as patriots. However, when different comparative perspectives are offered, such as ‘Latvia vs. Russia’ or ‘Latvia vs. country “X” with a higher welfare level’, perceptions among Russian speakers are divided”. (Bambals 2016: 66) For the study on the young generation’s views on identity already quoted above, Laizāne, Putniņa and Mileiko (2015; cf. Ascendum 2017) organised focus-group discussions with teachers and 15–19 year old students from bilingual Russian-Latvian schools whose mother tongue in most cases was Russian, but who partly also indicated other ethnic identities (Polish, Belarusian, Lithuanian). Several of the conclusions are highly significant in the context of family language policy research, e.g.:

“Minority school students do not feel that they belong to Russia, at the same time they do not feel like Latvians, because they believe it is a blood issue – as a Latvian you can (only) be born. These two reasons create not only alienation from the country’s main inhabitants and from politics, but also a general feeling of exclusion” (*Mazākumtautību skolu skolēni nejūtas piederīgi Krievijai, tajā pašā laikā viņi nejūtas arī kā latvieši, jo uzskata, ka tas ir asiņu jautājums – par latvieti var piedzimt. Šie divi iemesli rada ne vien atsvešinātību no valsts pamatiedzīvotājiem un politikas, bet arī atstumtības sajūtu kopumā*) (Ascendum 2017).

The study also reveals that minority youth mostly do not have doubts regarding their civic identity. The perception that they regard Latvia as their homeland often stands in contrast to the attitude

of ethnic Latvians, who frequently behave towards Russophones in Latvia as guests in spite of the fact that they, their parents and grandparents were born in Latvia.

The feeling of being “others” or “strangers,” both explicitly and implicitly, has also been described by students in a study currently conducted by the Latvian Language Agency. For instance, one secondary school student with Latvian as the language of instruction argued:

“Es varu latviski runāt ļoti normāli, bet rakstīšana man grūti iet. Bet man patīk mācīties latviešu valodu, jo es dzīvoju Latvijā. Bet man nepatīk skolotāju attieksme, ka viņa atgādina, ka es neesmu latviete. Un uzskata, ka es esmu krieviete, bet īstenībā tā nav. Un tas ļoti tracina, jo es nepropagandēju to krievu politiku un pārējo, jo es esmu latviete.”

‘I can speak Latvian very normally, but writing is hard for me. But I like to learn Latvian because I live in Latvia. But I do not like the attitude of the teachers that she reminds me that I am not a Latvian. And she thinks I’m Russian, but in reality that’s not how it is. And it maddens me very much because I do not propagate this Russian policy and the rest because I am Latvian.’

(transcript from a focus group discussion in Rēzekne, April 14, 2019)

In order to overcome these patterns of segregation and feelings of alienation to Latvia, Houtcamp (2016: 33) suggests we look at Latvian society in terms of inclusion – as opposed to integration or even assimilation. He argues that inclusion in the Latvian case would imply that “adaptation comes from both the majority and the minority groups, where it depends on the particular circumstances to what degree both sides have to adapt to each other” (ibid.). This would allow minority groups “the cultivation of two cultural identities” and to “have the option to both connect with the majority culture but still maintain their own cultural heritage” (ibid.). At the same time, Houtcamp argues that policies of inclusion must consider in

the 21st century that many people today incorporate transnational elements in their lives, i.e. modern technologies and travel opportunities allow them to live in one state while at the same time keeping or establishing regular contacts with another state.

In summary, this short insight into research on the identity of Russophones in Latvia indicates the gap between the self-identification of the young generation of Latvia with a minority background as belonging to Latvia, and a framing by many ethnic Latvians who continue to view these persons as “others” or “foreigners”. The perception of two opposing stances on identity – a “Russian” one which alienates itself from the Latvian state and a “Latvian” one in which Latvian identity is connected to being ethnic Latvian – is therefore too simplistic. Such questions of identity can arguably have an important impact on family language policy and on family decisions regarding the choice of language of instruction at school (Latvian or bilingual Russian-Latvian) which we will address in the next section.

4. Family language policy: case studies

For our research, we therefore looked deeper at three families in Latvia in which the main family language is Russian, but whose children attended or still attend schools or preschools with Latvian as the language of instruction. This combination is still considered “unusual” in Latvian society; the majority of children with Russian as home language attends bilingual preschools and schools with both Russian and Latvian as mediums of instruction (in 2019, 54,394 pupils were enrolled in bilingual Latvian-Russian schools, as opposed to 157,563 pupils in Latvian-MoI-schools (IZM 2019)). These proportions have remained stable during the past decade – in 2009, 56,069 pupils attended bilingual Latvian-Russian schools, whereas 159,554 pupils were enrolled in schools with Latvian as medium of instruction (Centrālās statistikas pārvaldes datubāzes). In the tradition of the dual educational system and the different identities and

continuing segregation, the choice of Latvian-MoI-education by Russian-dominant families requires some level of dedication. At the same time, as Bambals (2016: 62) reports, the family is still by far the most important factor for the development of social capital and identity among the Russophone minority in Latvia (Bambals 2016: 62, relating to SKDS (August 2014)). In the following, we will therefore try to provide some insight into the motivations, regards and policies of families which opted for this step. As outlined above, we have based our research on three main interests:

- What has been the main motivation of the families to choose Latvian-MoI-education for their children?
- Which emotional experiences, ideologies and regards and which critical events have influenced this choice?
- How does education in Latvian influence linguistic practices in the family?

4.1. FAMILY BACKGROUND

In all three case studies, the parents of the families identify themselves as speakers of Russian, but with diverse ethnic and sociolinguistic backgrounds. All families currently live in Riga, but their ancestors have backgrounds in different regions in and outside of Latvia. The families were randomly selected on the basis of the educational choices made for their children, and their readiness to be interviewed. There were no other criteria except for being traditional Russian-speaking families who have sent the children to Latvian-MoI pre-schools and/or schools for the overwhelming part of their educational careers. All families are still involved in education, i.e. there are children who currently attend educational institutions in Latvia, even though the interviews reflected different time periods. This had not been our deliberate choice, but it turned out that different eras since the 1980s were frequently mentioned in the interviews with different conditions for education and different language environments. As indicated above, these case studies are not meant

to be representative for the entire Russophone population of Latvia, but they were promising for revealing interesting insights into questions of identity, language choices and discourses on languages and education among Russian-speaking families in Latvia.

Case 1 is a family, both of whose daughters have already graduated high-school. The respondent (born in 1970) lives in Riga, her family language is Russian but she stresses that her origin is linked to a Latgalian old-believers' family. Her grandmother and other relatives spoke Latgalian and Latvian, but her parents spoke only Russian with her. Her own life story also tells about mixed language practices. In 1992, she decided to send her oldest daughter to a nursery with Russian as MoI where there was a special experimental group with a Latvian immersion programme. After two months, this group was affiliated to a kindergarten with Latvian as MoI. In 1999, she sent her younger daughter to the same Latvian kindergarten. Now both daughters live separately, the older is married to an ethnic Latvian. They are raising two children and their family language is Latvian. The younger daughter has a boyfriend whose mother tongue is Latvian and their home language is also Latvian.

Also case 2 reports a family with two children (8 and 13 years). Both partners were born in Riga but both have a multicultural background. The mother's grandmother has roots in Ukraine and spoke also Ukrainian; the husband's father has origins in Latgale and spoke Latgalian, while the husband's mother came from one of the ethnically defined republics within the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic. The mother who was interviewed summarises: *Also wenn man sagt Du bist eine Russin dann ein Russe das versteht dass Du bist sowieso multikulturell*. 'If you say you are Russian then a Russian understands anyway you are multicultural'. Both children attend(ed) Latvian-MoI kindergartens and schools. The only language that the parents and their children use among themselves if nobody else is present is Russian. Both parents, however, use other languages at work – the father English and the mother German. The mother lived for a shorter period in Germany when she was younger.

Case 3 is a Russian-speaking family with three children; a twin daughter and son who are 4 years and 9 months old, and a son who is one year and 9 months old. Both parents have grown up in Russian-speaking families. The parents of the father (who was the respondent for the interview) came to Latvia from Siberia during Soviet times. At the time of the interview he was 32 years old. He and his wife (26 years old) have graduated from Russian minority secondary schools and afterwards studied in Latvian at universities in Riga. The interview focused mostly on their twins and the parents' decision to send them to a kindergarten with Latvian as MoI.

4.2. REASONS FOR CHOOSING LATVIAN-MOI-EDUCATION

Since one of our main research interests was to understand reasons for the choice of Latvian-MoI-education, this topic was a guiding line throughout the interviews. As explained above, the three cases reflect experiences in different times. In case 1, the children started to attend preschool in the beginning of the 1990s, in case 2 in the 2010s and in case 3 in 2017. The interview with Family 1 therefore turned out to be quite retrospective at times; the more time had passed since the situation under discussion occurred, the clearer and the more reflective the answers became. Large parts of the answers were very explicit; whereas, the answers in case 3 were more implicit. Case 2, in this sense, lies between the two other cases.

An important issue that was regularly mentioned was the change in the political situation. Latvia had become independent, and the families reacted to that. As Extract 1 reflects, Latvian independence in this sense turned out to be a critical event in the narratives:

Extract 1 (family 1):

(...) tas bija, protams, saistīts ar to, ar Latvijas brīvības iegūšanu. Un mēs toreiz jau skaidri... nu, es skaidri apzinājos to, ka bez otras valodas te... mums, ā, būs kaut kā ne tā.

'(...) that, of course, was related to Latvia gaining freedom. And we at the time already clearly... well, I was clearly aware that

without a second language here... we, uh... would be somehow wrong’.

Also family 2 mentions the Latvian state and argues with regard to integration, but also stresses practical reasons. About her own upbringing, the mother recalls that she hardly ever heard Latvian in the neighbourhood where she grew up. But she says that at the time of Latvian independence, her parents explained that the situation had changed and that Latvian had become important now. However, since she already was at school at the time, she continued education in Russian, in contrast to her younger sister who started school after independence. Regarding her own children, she repeats similar arguments. Commenting on her daughter, she recalls:

Extract 2 (family 2):

Das war also eine kritische Situation in unserer Familie. Eltern meines Mannes sagten dass wir müssen unsere Tochter in den russischen Kindergarten bringen. (...) Und ich verstand habe verstanden dass Lettisch sehr wichtig wäre. (...) Weil wir sind so Lettland jetzt kein Sowjetunion da muss man das anerkennen und so sich integrieren

‘That was a critical situation in our family. My husband’s parents said then that we have to send our daughter to a Russian kindergarten. (...) And I understood that Latvian would be very important. (...) Because we are Latvia, there is no Soviet Union now, you have to respect that and integrate’.

What is noticeable here is that the mother herself calls it a “critical situation”, thereby highlighting the decision and the time as a decisive moment. At the same time, the decision was not only connected to respecting the political status quo. Just as important was the pragmatic aspect – Extract 3 explains how the wish for an easier future of their children was an important factor in the decision:

Extract 3 (family 2):

Und was macht unsere Tochter in der Zukunft. Wir wissen das nicht. Wir können das jetzt also irgendwie ihr helfen in diese lettische Sprache ausgezeichnet zu lernen. (...) Wäre besser wenn unser Kind geht in den lettischen Kindergarten.

‘And what will our daughter do in the future. We don’t know. We can help her now somehow to learn that Latvian language excellently. (...) It would be better if our child attends a Latvian kindergarten’.

In case study 3, the informant comments on events that happened only about 2 years prior to the interview, but there was no direct answer why the decision was taken. He says:

Extract 4 (family 3):

Tas bija apzināts lēmums. Nu, ļoti lielas diskusijas nebija, šaubas biščiņ bija.

‘It was a conscious decision. Well, there was not a really big discussion; there was a little bit of doubt’.

From the answer one can assume that the issue of acquisition of Latvian is quite self-evident and that, after almost 30 years of Latvian independence and of state language status, the need of proficiency in Latvian is obvious. When explaining the factors which influenced the family’s decision, the informant names the authentic environment of a Latvian-MoI pre-school and the quality of the teachers’ Latvian as the crucial factors. He emphasises the poor proficiency in Latvian among many pre-school teachers in institutions where Latvian is taught as a second language. Yet, as Extract 5 shows, since the groups can be linguistically quite heterogeneous, there is no guarantee for authentic Latvian even in a Latvian-MoI pre-school:

Extract 5 (family 3):

kaut kā, it kā vajadzētu tam vieglāk notikt ... dabiskā vidē (..) Bet interesanti, ka tā grupa izrādījās, nu, pusi uz pusi vai pat vairāk. Jā, un līdz ar to tur izrādījās, ka viņiem ... tajā autentiskajā vidē neko

nemācās. Un vienīgā cerība bija uz audzinātāju.. un audzinātāja mums mainījās un bija arī... krievu tautības audzinātāja, kura varbūt... to latviešu valodu arī (smejas) nevajadzēja viņiem klausīties. Līdz ar to, nu tā... tricky vispār tas pasākums.

‘somehow, it should be easier... in the natural environment (..) But, interestingly, that group turned out to be, half-half or even more. Yes, and so it turned out that they ... learned nothing in that authentic environment. And the only hope was for the teacher and the teacher changed and there was also a ... Russian teacher who maybe ... they didn’t have to (laughing) listen to her Latvian language. So, so... tricky this entire event’.

In summary, we can therefore conclude that the main motivation for choosing Latvian MoI among our informants was the wish for authentic acquisition of Latvian. In the most recent example, the idea in theory seemed to be least controversial – but in reality, to achieve the aim was not as simple as the family had believed. In the older cases, in retrospect, the decision was less obvious but also clearly connected to the new normality in which Latvian independence and the transition to Latvian as the official language played an important role, both in terms of ideology and of respect for the Latvian state – but also for pragmatic reasons.

4.3. LANGUAGE PRACTICES: HOW DOES EDUCATION IN LATVIAN INFLUENCE LANGUAGE USE IN THE FAMILY?

The second focus of our research addressed the role of Latvian in the families’ language practices. Our data reflect that socio-political and historical contexts have an impact on choices of language practices in the families. In all three case studies, our informants have accepted the importance of Latvian, therefore they have chosen preschools and schools with Latvian as MoI. Yet, the families make a distinction between society and family, keeping Russian as the main family language. At the same time, cases 1 and 3 indicate that everyday practices of their children at schools or preschools

have also changed language practices in the families, particularly between siblings. Extract 6 shows how Latvian-medium education changed family 1's practices in the long run:

Extract 6 (family 1):

Mēs ar vīru runājam krieviski. Ar meitām runājam krieviski, bet meitas savā starpā runā tikai, pārsvarā tikai latviski.

'With my husband, we speak Russian, with daughters we speak Russian, but among themselves they speak only, in most cases only Latvian'.

Our informant's family displays a language shift from Russian towards Latvian. The next generation, based on the choice of a Latvian-speaking educational environment, have shifted to Latvian. About her own language use, the informant recounts situations in which she calls her daughters by phone and understands that they are in a context with Latvians ("in a Latvian environment – *latviešu vidē*"), or when she makes a phone call and is in such a "Latvian" context herself. As she reports, she begins to speak Latvian to her daughters – with the idea that those within the environment will not consider it 'strange' when they suddenly start to speak Russian. This remark reflects a conscious language management process in which the informant actively changes her linguistic behaviour. She seems to wish to protect her daughters or herself from awkward situations when, for her, it is a sensitive issue to use Russian in public. Her daughters, on the other hand, do not lack the self-confidence to speak Russian in public when their mother addresses one of them on the phone in Latvian,

Extract 7 (family 1):

(..) viņi nekautrējas, toties atbild man vienalga... mūsu pieņemtajā ..., teiksim (smejas) mājas valodā, krievu valodā. Lūk, tā. Vot. (..) Viņi man atbild krieviski, tur nņuņem mama, bet es, bet es turpinu latviski (smaida).

'they are not shy, they answer me anyway... in our adopted... let's say (laughs) home language, in Russian. So... Vot. (..) They answer

me in Russian, e.g. *npubem mama*, but I, but I continue in Latvian (smiles)'.

In a similar way, family 3 explains how the use of Latvian at pre-school influences the family's practices:

Extract 8 (family 3):

Nu piemēram, viņi spēlējas un ļoti naturel: o, metam zaķi, nu... viņi runā... krievu, krievu valodā un pēc tam: o, metam zaķi. Latviski pasaka, ja... Vai vienkārši spēlējas un (..) sāk modelēt tās pašas situācijas, kas ir... bērnudārzā, piemēram: tu slikti uzvedies. Tur puika meitenei saka. Un tai brīdī mēs mēģinām arī atbalstīt, nu ar viņiem latviski, piemēram, parunāt.

'Well, for example, they (the family's children) play and very naturally: *oh, let's throw a bunny*, well... they speak... Russian, Russian and then: *oh, let's throw a bunny*. They say it in Latvian... or they just play and start (..) to imitate the same situations that are... in kindergarten, for example: *you behave badly*. There the boy says to the girl. And in such situations we also try to support, now, for example, talk to them in Latvian'.

Extract 8 involves Latvian on their home territory, where it is not the aim of the parents to stick to Russian. Quite the contrary, the parents sometimes even support the use of Latvian at home.

Family 2, on the other hand, states that there has been rather little effect from attending a Latvian school on language practices within the family. The mother recalls her childhood, when her little sister attended a Latvian-medium school. The family tried to introduce some Latvian at home, but her sister displayed a clear sense of which language "belonged" to which place:

Extract 9 (family 2):

Sie hat nicht verstanden. Wieso wir sprechen doch zu Hause auf Russisch. Wenn ich bin in der Schule dann in meinem Gedächtnis. Tschk tschk. Bin ich jetzt schon auf Lettisch wenn ich zu Hause tschk tschk bin jetzt auf Russisch so. Wir dachten meine kleine Schwester wird uns Lettisch lehren. Das war dumm wahrscheinlich [Lachen]

‘She didn’t understand why – we speak Russian at home. When I am at school then in my mind tchk thck (she imitates a switch which is turned) I am in Latvian, when I am at home tchk thck in Russian. We thought my little sister would teach us Latvian – that was probably stupid (laughter)’.

In a similar way, also with her own children, Latvian is used at home only in highly formalized contexts, such as when she helps her children with Latvian homework:

Extract 10 (family 2):

Wenn wir Lettisch, lettische Literatur, lettische Sprache die Übungen machen. Ja manchmal mein Sohn fragt was bedeutet das Wort. Dann ich erkläre, wenn ich das Wort nicht kenne ich übersetze wir lernen zusammen.

‘When we do exercises in Latvian. Latvian literature, Latvian language. Yes, sometimes my son asks me – what is the meaning of that word. Then I explain to him, when I don’t know the word I translate and we learn together’.

The informant also recalls that she suggested to her family to introduce “Latvian language days” at home. As she tells us, however, her husband didn’t agree. There was no question that the family can use Latvian in outside situations – and sometimes is met with surprise by relatives or neighbours that the children speak Latvian so well. Practices within family 2 only changed when a German exchange student lived with them for some months and the children started to speak English to her. In the family, however, the husband would find it too tiring and artificial.

Both Extracts 9 and 10 show how societal expectations, or the perception of these, play an important role in language choices. Practices can be influenced, in particular in public situations – both with regard to using Latvian in an environment perceived as “Latvian”, or to use Russian as the default language in which the use of Latvian is met with surprise. In total, our case studies, therefore, demonstrate several impacts of Latvian-MoI on practices in the

home environment. Among the parents and between parents and children, Russian usually continues to be used. Practices in the outside environment may, however, influence practices also inside the families in the long run as in family 1 in which the grown-up daughters use Latvian among themselves, and in family 3, which reports translanguaging by the children when playing with each other. At the end, there are always individual factors which influence language choices in a specific situation, but our case studies commonly demonstrate that the Russian-only practices may be weakened by outside influence.

4.4. IDEOLOGIES, EMOTIONS AND CRITICAL EVENTS

The third main aspect on which we focused in the analysis of our research data revealed language ideologies and (in relation to those) attitudes, values, emotions and identity questions. As a common aspect of our families, the well-being of children and how they are perceived in the Latvian-medium education, seem to be linked to emotional insecurities. In terms of ideology, however, the integration into a Latvian-dominant society seems to be more important than possible emotional barriers which would preclude the families from choosing Latvian as MoI. Yet, even among our informants who, by definition, chose Latvian-medium education, our data clearly reflect that there were obstacles which these families had to overcome. These are framed in the narratives of the families' language histories as specific critical events through which families have had to travel in their trajectories of adapting to Latvian. Such events were usually related to moments when the family doubted their decision, e.g. when re-considering whether to send their children to a school with (at least partly) Russian as MoI.

Such a critical event is, for instance, expressed very explicitly in Extract 11. The informant recalls a situation when her younger daughter attended kindergarten at the end of the 1990s. The children were preparing for one of Latvia's national holidays.

Beforehand, the mother was asked by the teachers to take her child home earlier on that day because the small girl did not yet speak Latvian and the teacher did not want anybody to notice it during the celebration:

Extract 11 (family 1):

Un man pateica: nu, ziniet, viņa [meita] neprot neko, ne izteikties, neko, paņemiet savu bērnu tajā... (ļoti skumji). Nu, es domāju, nu labi, tas man bija tā kā pamats piedomāt pie tā, nu varbūt patiešām ŠIS EKSPERIMENTS savā ziņā, nu ar otro meitu... varbūt, nu... neizdosies... Lūk, man zvans... tajā pašā dienā: (teatrālā balsī) ziniet ko, jūs neejiet pakaļ meitiņai, ziniet, viņa vēl nerunā, bet viņa TIK LABI RĀDA, KA MĒS VIŅU PAT ŅĒMĀM TUR SVĒTKU, TUR, teiksim par dalībnieci kaut kādu. Nu, man tie smieklī līdz šim pat iet...

‘And they told me, well, you know, she [the daughter] doesn’t know anything, doesn’t say anything, take your child... (very sad). Well, I guess, well, that was kind of a reason for me to think about it, maybe THIS EXPERIMENT, in a way, with my second daughter... maybe, well... wouldn’t work. But then suddenly I got a call... the same day: (in a theatrical voice) *you know, don’t come and don’t pick up your girl, you know, she doesn’t speak yet [Latvian], but she’s PERFORMING SO WELL THAT WE EVEN TOOK HER THERE FOR THE PARTY, THERE*, let’s say a participant in something. Well, for me, I still could laugh about it...’

(the respondent is not laughing at all, there is a sadness, huge emotion on her face)

Even though this experience occurred more than 20 years ago, the informant still displayed strong pain while telling her story. She clearly remembers her feelings when her daughter did not “fit” into a patriotic event for children because of the “wrong” language. There was apparently a clash between the teacher’s and the mother’s expectations about what it means to be included in the Latvian pre-school environment, and what that would imply to the progress in

acquisition of Latvian. It was noticeable how she stressed the word EXPERIMENT (i.e. to send her child to the kindergarten with Latvian as MoI). The interviews show that this was a “critical event” for her; if no one had called her from kindergarten saying that her child in the end was allowed to stay, she would probably have taken her daughter to a Russian-medium kindergarten instead.

Also family 2 encountered a lot of different emotions – with regard to reactions from both Latvian society in general and from their own family and neighbours. The interview shows a constant struggle between different emotions and ideologies. Also case 2 addresses nationalist attitudes of Latvian teachers – and, interestingly, the informant recalls similar experiences both in her own childhood in the 1990s and in recent times concerning her own children. At the same time, she stresses that there were always also people who held opposite views and helped them out of the situation. In Extract 12, she explains how her younger sister had problems at school:

Extract 12 (family 2):

Klassenlehrerin, ja sie war pro-nationalistisch. (...) Also alle Kinder machen Fehler, das ist normal. Da muss man also reagieren und helfen aber sie hat sehr aggressiv reagiert. Deswegen meine Schwester möchte nicht mehr in die Schule gehen.

‘The class teacher was pro-nationalist. (...) I mean, all children make mistakes, that’s normal. You have to react and help but she reacted in an aggressive manner. Therefore my sister didn’t want to go to school anymore’.

The mother then went to the school director and wanted to take her out of school:

Schulleiterin fragte: Was ist los? Meine Mutter möchte nicht erzählen. Sie hatte Angst. Sie wusste nicht. Eine schlechte Situation ist in der Republik, ja. Keine Sowjetunion mehr. Schon eine neue Republik. Lettische Republik. Da muss man sich integrieren

aber hier gibt es ein Problem und niemand weiß wie kann man das lösen. Lieber schweigen. (Lachen)

‘The director asked: What is happening? My mother didn’t want to tell. She was afraid, she didn’t know, it was a bad situation in the Republic. No Soviet Union anymore, already the new Republic. Latvian Republic. You have to integrate but there is a problem and nobody knows how to solve it. It’s better to be silent’. (laughter)

However, it was the director’s strong stance which helped her to overcome these doubts:

Aber Schulleiterin stand sehr fest und sagte: Ich möchte wissen was ist los. Dann meine Mutter hat ihr die Wahrheit erzählt. Die Schulleiterin hat empfohlen eine andere Klassenlehrerin zu wählen. (...) Und da hatten wir Glück. Das war eine junge Klassenlehrerin ohne verschiedene diese nationalistische Gedanken.

‘The director was very strict and said: I want to know what’s wrong. Then my mother told the truth. The director recommended another teacher. (...) And we were lucky. It was a young teacher without nationalist thoughts’.

Twenty years later, in the second decade of the 21st century, a similar situation with a school director occurred when our informant registered her own daughter in a Latvian-medium school:

Extract 13 (family 2):

Sie hat immer auf mich kritisch geguckt dass russischsprechende Mutter möchte ihre Kinder zur Schule bringen. Ja. Dann ich habe Dokumente geschrieben und sie hat sehr tüchtig auf meine Handschrift geguckt wie ich schreibe auf Lettisch. (...) Wie habe ich wahrscheinlich mein Kind vorbereitet so was. (...) Natürlich ja so was aber Schulleiterin war sehr offen und freundlich. Ja kein Problem bitte schön – Dokument, wir warten auf ihr Kind.

‘She looked critically at me that a Russian-speaking mother wants to bring her children to that school. Then I wrote documents and she looked carefully at my writing how I write Latvian. (...) Yes,

how I have probably prepared my child and so on. (...) But then the director was very open and friendly – yes, no problem here you have your documents, we are awaiting your child’.

Extracts 12 and 13 reveal that in two very different eras a family ideology to respect Latvian independence and to integrate into mainstream society was met by scepticism from some of the schools’ representatives. In both situations, encounters with teachers and headmasters developed into critical events in which they suddenly felt hostility and rejection. To this, the family reacted with insecurity and fear, which might have led to societal exclusion. In both cases, however, they also encountered important players (the school directors) who displayed encouragement and support and ensured that the family could continue on the path of linguistic integration.

In addition, family 2 also reports emotional obstacles in communication with both ethnic Latvian and Russians. Some Latvian parents were sceptical to see a child from a Russian-speaking family in class. At the same time, the interviewee is also critical of the role of some Russophones, and explains her belief that the impetus for integration needs to come from both sides. She also recalls situations in which the Latvian state, e.g. representatives of educational authorities, displayed attitudes of control. For instance, teachers whose Latvian did not meet the demands of the state might encounter problems. Here, our informant says that the state should offer better training and support the teachers instead. In total, such critical events related to emotional experiences – both positive and negative – therefore helped her to (consciously and subconsciously) develop her own language policy: schools should operate in Latvian, but Russian should be taught, and Russian teaching should take place in groups which differentiate between L1-speakers of Latvian and Russian, otherwise Russian lessons would be too boring for children who speak Russian at home. The family’s regards, in this sense, reflect the in-between-ness between ethnic Latvians and more reluctant views among Russophones, as also identified in the studies

quoted above. The family is quite strong in their ideology to adapt to Latvian society, which they also defend in the Russian-speaking community – while at the same time hoping for more respect from ethnic Latvians. At the end, a combination of dedication and support by the right persons in the right moment encouraged the family to continue their path in Latvian education.

Family 3 who reports on the most recent situation seems to be more self-confident. Before making a decision they reflect and investigate alternatives. Before taking the decision to send their children to a kindergarten with Latvian as MoI, the family asked if the teacher could also speak Russian in situations when their twins (who were just over 2 years of age at the time) would need it:

Extract 14 (family 3):

Un jā, mums bija svarīgi, ka, ka, ka... vai nu auklīte vai nu audzinātāja nu saprot vispār, ko bērns saka krievu valodā... un kādos ekstremālos... nu, vispār atbalstīt.

‘And yes, it was important to us that, that... either the nanny or the teacher understands at all what the child is saying in Russian... and at some extreme [situation]... well, support them’.

This attitude was grounded in unpleasant experiences among friends. The informant mentioned two situations with family friends whose children were unhappy and cried; therefore, those parents took their kids out of Latvian-MoI preschool and sent them to a preschool with Russian as MoI. The decision was difficult – as the father stressed. The parents wanted their children to learn Latvian from children and teachers for whom it is a mother tongue. Therefore, in the end they decided “to risk and see how it will be in their case” (*nolēmām riskēsīm, paskatīsimies, kā tas būs nu tā kā mūsu gadījumā*). Currently, two years after the decision, they are highly satisfied and discuss where to send their twins to school so that they can properly learn and keep their mother tongue (Russian), while at the same time continuing to develop a good proficiency of Latvian.

In total, our case studies reveal that the families' choices were based on strong ideological convictions that it would be important to respect the Latvian state and to provide a solid knowledge of Latvian for their children. These decisions repeatedly caused strong emotions which may be analysed as critical events for the children's language acquisition trajectories. It is important to stress that the decisions for or against Latvian-medium education have been made in polarised situations in which only one of two options seemed feasible. Critical moments existed both in terms of encouraging and discouraging experiences. Attitudes of society – and in particular by teachers – were highly diverse. It was important, however, that in all cases in which the families encountered criticism and nationalism there were other voices that softened the tone and encouraged the families to continue on their path. In terms of policies of the Latvian state and predominant regards in society, our examples show that there are both supportive attitudes and policies and barriers, depending on how individuals interpret the rules and how their own attitudes and practices aim at respecting individual backgrounds.

4.5. Reflection on time and different periods in Latvian society

A common feature in our case studies was that our informants all reflected upon their families' experiences at different times. This had not been part of our research design, but it turned out that the families regularly went back to family histories and the perceptions by previous generations; the 1990s, the early 2000s, and contemporary developments were all mentioned regularly. In this sense, life narratives featured prominently in our interviews. One important aspect in this was that the choice of Latvian-medium education was not only a question of language of instruction, but generally of acceptance of political and societal developments. The minority perspective featured regularly, with language as a topic that was present in life in general, not only regarding educational choices.

In this sense, our case studies indicate a development throughout time. In retrospect, the 1990s seemed to be dominated by adjustment to the new political realities, i.e. to the independence of Latvia and respect for the new republic. However, in the 2010s and even around 2020, language choice is still a potentially sensitive issue and Latvian MoI for families with Russian as the main home language remains a “hot potato”.

Among our informants, there was no doubt about the general need for acquiring Latvian, but language and educational choices are still emotional issues which highly depend on individual critical events. Opposition to the choice of Latvian-medium education continues to be experienced and is framed as a potential threat to Russophone identity and the intergenerational transmission of culture and values which are perceived as being connected to the Russian language. In this sense, our case studies indicate that the basic challenges – encounters with both Russian and Latvian nationalism as well as with individuals who support inclusion through linguistic integration – feature in all the times that our informants reflected upon.

In terms of language practices, translanguaging and a less clear separation of language spaces seems to be a reality among our informants. Even if Russian continues to be the dominant language at home, the children use Latvian among themselves to different degrees. In addition, other languages such as English or German have been mentioned as being part of life trajectories. At the same time, societal and political discussions and attitudes continue to create a sense of in-between-ness, with both encouraging and discouraging events. This is reflected in emotional reluctance and insecurity in some situations about which language would be adequate in a specific situation. Also, our informants report that there is still a strong reluctance to adapt to Latvian among some Russophones. This is expressed, in particular, in the older generation’s surprise at good Latvian language skills. This again, however, if seen from a time perspective, seems to indicate changing attitudes, since the

reports mostly dealt with the older generation, whereas the middle-generation who currently has children at school or preschool seems to be living less in a monolingual mind-set.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. MAIN RESULTS FROM OUR INTERVIEWS

As stressed above, we do not claim in any way that our three case studies would allow us to generalise for all Russian-dominant individuals in Latvia who have chosen Latvian-MoI education for their children. However, in line with our intention to provide examples of motivations for language choices and practices, we see that there are some common features in language regards, practices and critical events relating to languages among these randomly-selected families.

The families in our case studies accept the dominance of Latvian in Latvian society. They understand that their children need to acquire Latvian, based on both ideological acceptance of post-Soviet nationhood and on pragmatic grounds. At the same time, they wish to keep Russian as the main language of communication at home. Outside the home, Latvian and other languages are used in many situations. At the same time, the language issue has a strong emotional aspect. It is perceived as highly discouraging if the willingness to acquire Latvian meets scepticism from ethnic Latvians. Critical events have the potential of turning generally positive regards to Latvian in different directions, but these positive regards were also repeatedly reinforced when our informants felt sufficient support by ethnic Latvians.

All our interviews consisted of narrative elements which contextualised current practices and choices in the families' backgrounds. It had not been part of our research design to analyse language regards throughout different periods, but all our interviews turned to discussing individual FLPs in relation to historical developments. In the 1990s it was more "revolutionary" to opt for education in Latvian, but even today this is still an emotional issue.

Critical events which shape language choices and practices were identified both in retrospect and regarding the contemporary period. Generally, today's younger generations seem to be linguistically much more flexible, with the inclusion of Latvian in individual linguistic repertoires and practices such as translanguaging having become normal. Our families' FLPs, in this sense, do not adhere to Russian-only practices – e.g. children also use Latvian at home, and the educational environment may have an impact on how siblings talk to each other. However, occasional doubts about which type of school to choose for one's children continue among Russophones also today.

In the interpretation of our data we have to keep in mind that our sample consisted of well-educated families in that all of the parents had higher education. Therefore, it would be very important to conduct research among people with other educational backgrounds. Additional research would also be highly welcomed among parents who have considered Latvian-MoI schools but decided against them. As family 3 reports, there continue to be Russophones in Latvia who are not against Latvian-MoI education in principle, but for whom negative critical events caused them to finally opt against Latvian MoI for their children.

5.1. OUR DATA IN RELATION TO CURDT-CHRISTIANSEN'S FLP MODEL

In light of the conclusions based on our case studies, we will now go back to the categories used in the model on FLP by Curdt-Christian- sen outlined in chapter 2.

The families' decisions were taken in a *sociolinguistic* context in which the polarisation between L1-speakers of Latvian and L1-speakers of Russian is still an important issue, even though intermediate patterns of identity and of language practices have become more wide-spread in recent years. When reflecting upon the 1990s, families 1 and 3 clearly recalled the new societal situation after Latvian independence, which made decisions to opt for Latvian-MoI education unusual. Today, multilingualism in Latvia

has become obvious for our informants, with our families displaying a high level of competence in different languages. The reversal of language shift and of the position of Russian and Latvian in the official language hierarchy – with English as a strong new factor – is reflected in these choices. Yet, even within the past ten years, the choice for Latvian MoI still needs a conscious decision which may easily be influenced by negative and positive critical events. In this sense, the *socio-political* context continues to be difficult; both Latvian and Russian language nationalism continue to be potential obstacles. The *socioeconomic* context implies that without becoming multilingual (including not only Latvian, but also English and possibly other languages), the next generation of Russophones in Latvia will neither be successful in Latvian society, nor able to make use of the economic opportunities of Latvian integration into European political, economic and educational structures. At the same time, Russian continues to be an important asset, not just for identity reasons, but also as a language of economic value both for satisfying the demands by Russian-speaking customers from Latvia and as an international language for trade with the post-Soviet world.

The in-between-ness of our informants is connected to the *socio-cultural* context in which participation in Latvian society through good Latvian skills is perceived by some Russophones as linguistic assimilation. While our informants see the importance of integrating into Latvian society, they also highlight their wish to maintain Russian as an L1, albeit to different degrees. Family 1 feels like they have to some degree assimilated. The respondent in family 2, in contrast, calls for differentiated mother-tongue education in Russian at schools with Latvian as MoI, while she at the same time expresses in the interview that Russian may face the same fate as other languages which at some point of history played an important role in the Baltic states – such as Swedish or Polish. However, she would not object to future generations assembling under the umbrella of Latvian. To her this would be a natural development. Family 3, on the other hand, places higher emphasis on instruction in Russian in addition to

Latvian-MoI education and stresses an FLP to provide the children with high-quality education in both languages.

With regard to the three key elements of language policy in Spolsky's frame, our interviews reveal that there have been very conscious *language management* decisions by the families to opt for Latvian-MoI education. This was based on the availability of Latvian kindergartens and schools and, at times, not only relied upon active choices by the families, but also on occasional intervention by other persons, e.g. school directors, in order to convince school staff to accept their children.

Language beliefs, or language regards, continue to play an important role for the families' language policies. Latvian-MoI education is linked to respect for the Latvian state, but also to expectations that attending a school with Latvian MoI implies better and quicker Latvian language acquisition, which is seen as an economic necessity. In terms of ideologies, Latvian nationalism as displayed by some parents or teachers is seen as an obstacle to the families' integration. Also, the beliefs of L1-speakers of Russian continue to be influential in the families and their neighbourhoods. In this context it was remarkable that our interviewees rarely commented on top-down discourses in Latvian society as expressed in the media or through official language policies, but mostly stayed in their personal contexts.

In all this, ideologies in the *home environment* play a crucial role for FLP choices. Our families have made conscious decisions, which were sometimes met by scepticism, opposition, and the view that sending one's children to schools with Latvian as MoI implies giving up one's identity. It is of particular importance in this respect that the families' choice of Latvian-MoI education did not disrupt the use of Russian as the main home language. Language *practices* at home were influenced only in the long run in family 1 where the families' adult daughters have integrated into their partners' Latvian-speaking families, while continuing to use Russian with their parents. In families 2 and 3, however, Russian remains the only language of communication at home.

In addition, our interviews reveal that multilingual resources in general are assigned high value in the families' contemporary life – not only in education and regarding Latvian and Russian, but also for work purposes and participation in international contexts with regard to English and German.

As stressed above, an important aspect in the FLP choices of our informants is the *parental background* (and the background of other close people). The parents in all of our families have higher education which has supported their integration into Latvian society. For them, it seems to be apparent that Latvian language skills help one to be well-integrated into society. To have successfully chosen a multilingual path increases the parents' intention toward passing this model on to their children. The family background in this sense influences language regards in the families; hypothetically this could be considered as a crucial aspect of the educational success of pupils who attend minority schools. In Extract 15, the informant in family 3 reports on his experience as a teacher in a minority school with both Russian and Latvian as MoL:

Extract 15 (family 3):

Tas, ko es redzu, nu, piemēram, strādājot mazākumtautību skolā, tur nenormāla problēma ir tas, kādi vecāki ir tam bērnam un ko viņi viņam iedod. Tie bērni, bērns man sēž vidusskolā: man latviešu valoda nav vajadzīga, es tur braukšu tur, tur, tur. Nu, protams, viņš nemācīsies. (...) Un skola tur neko nevar izdarīt, nu, ļoti maz var izdarīt. Ja ģimenē ir naidīgs, naidīgs, ne naidīgs, nu, neadekvāts kaut kāds ... noskaņojums

'What I see, for example, when working in a minority school, there is the abnormal problem of what kind of parents that child has and what they give him. Those children, the child sits in high school [and tells me]: I don't need Latvian, I'll go there, there, there. Well, of course he will not learn. (...) And the school can't do anything there, very little can be done. If in the family there is a hostile, hostile, not hostile, well, inadequate ... mood'.

Economic resources, on the other hand, played a smaller role in our interviews – the wish to be economically successful is a key element in the choice of Latvian-MoI among our families, but the families' economic resources did not have an impact on the availability of schools. Nobody among our informants reported expensive private kindergartens or other “exceptional” educational institutions which would have enabled the families to go a chosen way. In this respect, our results show that *economic resources* of the parents and the socio-economic context (available teaching materials, educational resources, access to schools) do not have a high impact on FLP; mainstream institutions by the Latvian state are available to everybody. Internet, open access to video, books, and educational games – but also the offers by mainstream Latvian state schools – were mentioned as supportive tools for the acquisition of Latvian.

Figure 2 summarises the findings from the case studies in Curdt-Christiansen's graphic model.

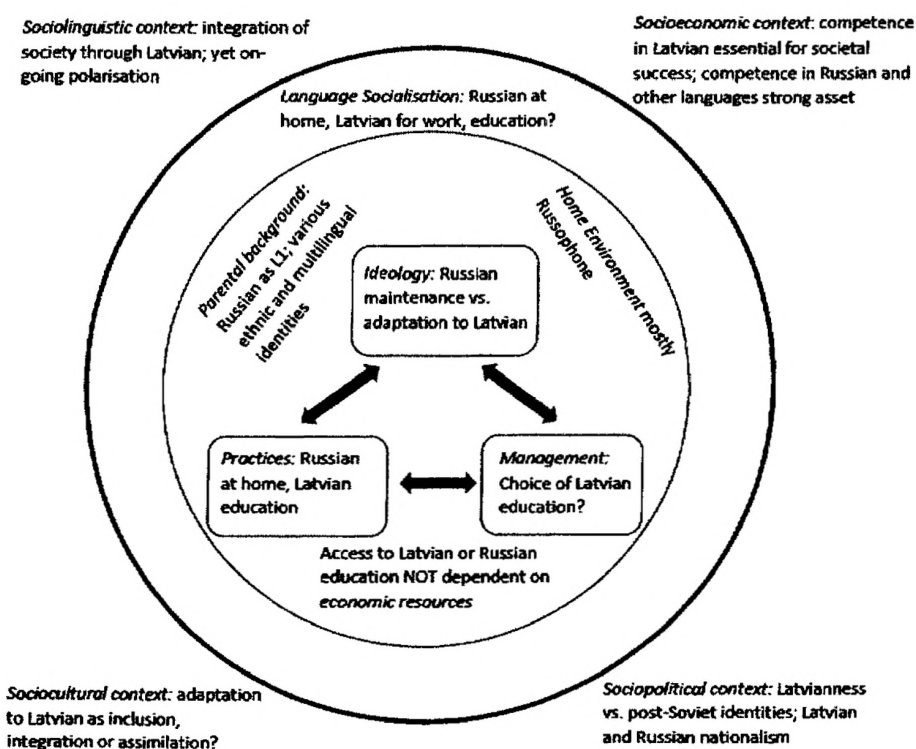


Figure 2. Findings from our research in Curdt-Christiansen's FLP model

5.3. POSSIBLE PERSPECTIVES FOR LATVIAN SOCIETY

In the context of discourses on languages, education, ideologies and nationalism in Latvia, our examples show that successful integration of families with home languages other than Latvian is possible. It is possible to choose Latvian-MoI-education for one's children if Russian is the main home language, which facilitates a much easier societal integration and economic participation. In the case of the families interviewed for our research, the choice of a "Latvian" educational trajectory has been connected to conscious language management decisions – the decision to send one's children to Latvian kindergartens or schools. These decisions were challenged by critical events in which the behaviour of ethnic Latvians caused strong emotional reactions and might easily have resulted in choosing a different educational path, but which were also met by counter-reactions which provided sufficient support for continuing on the chosen trajectory. At the same time, the Russian-speaking environments (family, friends, and neighbours) of our informants were not always supportive regarding the FLP choices of our families.

In relation to Houtcamp's inclusion model, the families in our case studies therefore confirm that Russophone Latvians may be torn between two cultures and discourses. Our families have developed an identity relating to Latvia as their home and place of living, but at the same time, continue to incorporate identity aspects related to the Russian language and culture (although less to Russia as a state). In this sense, our cases also confirm the studies quoted above on an in-between-ness of young L1-Russian speakers in Latvia and that they sometimes feel rejected both by ethnic Latvians and by more traditionally-oriented Russophones. As in previous studies, our FLP data indicate that a new generation of Latvian citizens with a non-Latvian ethnic background develops an identity in-between these two polarised discourses. Yet, the focus on Latvian ethnicity by state language and educational policies – and the behaviour by some ethnic Latvians which reflects this focus – is often seen as an

obstacle for full integration. Our interview data therefore reflect that a higher level of awareness for inclusion would be important. Latvian mainstream society needs to build bridges for those parts of the minority population who are openly ready to integrate, not least linguistically, even though many of them may include transcultural or even transnational elements in their identities, as well as in their everyday lives.

It is here where integration – or, following Houtkamp (2016), “inclusion” – needs to come from both sides. Latvian society has to be welcoming to children with other L1s and make more offers to help teachers; while at the same time, those parts of the Russophone community which continue to be sceptical of Latvian-MoI education should see the benefits of participating in Latvian society. In the context of language education policy and management, it seems necessary to plan more work with parents of pre-school children to explain basic principles of multilingualism, bilingual education and so on. At the same time, schools and teachers need to be supported with information and practical advice about how to work in linguistically and culturally heterogeneous classes, and how to respect individual language backgrounds while at the same time supporting integration.

The multilingual reality of Latvia is a fact, and people integrate different languages and identities into their lives. Pragmatic aspects usually help to make family language policy decisions – for maintaining one’s home language, but also acquiring the main language of society as well as other languages needed for specific purposes in the individual families’ lives on the local, national and transnational levels. The individual family language policy cases which we have investigated show that it is not a question of speaking either Latvian or Russian, but of knowing both languages – Latvian as the main language of society and Russian as minority language which continues to be used at home. A balanced policy of inclusion by all parts of society should be in the interest of Russophone families who are ready to integrate as well as of mainstream Latvian society. It is

the acceptance of this multifaceted reality which might be a key element in the future integration of society – the connection of respect for the home language, active help for minority members to acquire Latvian and to be included into society, as well as support for other languages wherever they play a role.

After all, critical events – both in positive and negative ways – are always likely to happen, and educational institutions should be prepared to create positive critical events, while offering support in case of negative critical events. Not least, this three-way traffic among majority, minority and the outside world would be an important aspect in the implementation of the education reform which aims to integrate all children in Latvia into one Latvian-MoI school system.

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