

# Challenges in Child Language Research in Latvia

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# The national research programme Nr. VPP-IZM-2018/2-0002



- The project “**Latvian Language**” of the national research programme is composed as a set of 10 sub-projects, whereby each of the 10 tasks defined in the Cabinet regulation Nr. 465 “*Par valsts pētījumu programmu “Latviešu valoda”*” (paragraph 6 of the Cabinet regulation) corresponds to one sub-project.

# Sub-projects I

- **Sub-project No. 1.** Research of the language ontology, focusing on the linguistically constituted social reality and its transformation possibilities, thematizes the language boundaries and aesthetic qualities in the context of political power.
- **Sub-project No. 2.** The sustainability of the Latvian language in a climate of severe language competition can only be ensured by well-considered language policy measures.
- **Sub-project No. 3** “Grammar and its interfaces: an encyclopaedic dictionary” is envisaged as a first-time project in Latvian linguistics – an encyclopaedic dictionary of grammar.
- **Sub-project No. 4.** The theoretical studies in Latvian lexicology and lexicography and the practical work on the compilation of dictionaries are directly linked to the sustainability, quality and competitiveness of the Latvian language, and are supported by the *Official Language Policy Guidelines* (2015–2020) as well.

# Sub-projects II

- **Sub-project No. 5** is closely linked to the overarching goal of the programme. Proper names, among other lexical categories, are most directly associated with the awareness of language as a valuable core element of national identity – being an inalienable part of a person's identity and self-perception, proper names simultaneously carry their own linguistic, historical and cultural heritage.
- **Sub-project No. 6.** The sustainability of the Latvian language in a climate of language competition can be enhanced by a systematic and strategic development of terminology within the framework of language policy.
- **Sub-project No. 7.** Research in the field of translation studies and contact linguistics, as well as comparative and contrastive linguistics will be of great benefit to the quality and development of the Latvian language, helping it to function fully in the multilingual European and global context.

# Sub-projects III

- **Sub-project No. 8.** Research in the field of Latvian language acquisition will enhance the competitiveness of Latvian both on local and global scale, and will analyze the data regarding the situation in Latvian language acquisition as first, second and foreign language (taking into account language proficiency and the factors that influence learning).
- **Sub-project No. 9.** The regional studies of the Latvian language will effectively enhance the awareness of language as a core element of national identity – especially in Latgale where the Latgalian written language has long been the backbone of the Latvian identity.
- **Sub-project No. 10.** The tools for Livonian language research and acquisition elaborated within the framework of the sub-project “Livonian Language”.

# The goal of sub-project 8

- To investigate the current situation in the Latvian language acquisition in a broad range of regions (Kurzeme, Rīga, Latgale), ages (pre-schoolers, high-school students, university students from abroad) and ethnicities.
- It is also intended to supplement an already existing learner corpus of foreign students and to compile a new one (the so-called language learner corpora which will provide data about Latvian language proficiency among the high-school students in various regions and educational institutions of Latvia);
- To disseminate the research findings through academic articles and at international conferences;
- To analyze the positive experience of bilingual and trilingual speakers.
- To elaborate methodic aids and recommendations for language learning.

# Methodology

- For analysis of Latvian language skills and their influenced factors before was used also parents survey version developed by Sharon Unsworth “Utrecht Bilingual Language Exposure Calculator” (UBiLEC). This version was improved by our researchers.
- The newly developed test is based on well-known pictures appropriate to children age, but besides that it offers additional questions which facilitate children to talk and answer to questions about numbers, colours, figures and their comparison, there are also two sentences for reading and conversation about the picture.

# Excerpt from Latvian language test

CARROT	Transcription	<b>What is this ? What colour is the carrot ? What can we do with the carrot ? Why should we eat carrots ?</b>	CORRECT <input type="checkbox"/>	INCORRECT <input type="checkbox"/>
CIRCLE, SQUARE, TRIANGLE		<b>What do you see on the picture? Tell about each of figures on the picture what are they ! Compare what are the circles (rings), what are the difference between them ( by the size, by the colour) !</b>	CORRECT <input type="checkbox"/>	INCORRECT <input type="checkbox"/>
BOOK		<b>What is this ? What we can do with a book ? What book have you read ?</b>	CORRECT <input type="checkbox"/>	INCORRECT <input type="checkbox"/>

# Problems

- The level of preparedness for a school curriculum in Latvian is quite diverse among pre-schoolers.
- Latvian linguistics is still lacking a research covering all levels of language acquisition, which is increasingly essential in the light of the new educational strategy to be implemented in Latvia. The findings of the present project will provide the necessary diagnosis of the current language proficiency, and will serve as a basis for elaborating further theories and methodology. Since this research project involves both linguistics and education, experts of both fields, as well as psychologists, participate in the project.

# Outcomes

- 3 bachelor's theses (becoming speech therapists),
- 1 popular-science article, 6 scientific articles ( 5 of them in Web of Science),
- 18 presentations by researchers in local scientific and international conferences,
- 6 presentations in conferences made by students.

# Publications

- **Markus D., Zirina T.** (2019) *Assessment tools of Latvian language acquisition: problems and application versions //INTED 2019 Proceedings. 13th International Technology, Education and Development Conference Valencia, Spain. 11-13 March, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-09-08619-1 / ISSN: 2340-1079 doi: 10.21125/inted.2019, p. 3242-3247. Web of Science. URL: <https://iased.org/inted/publication>*
- **Markus D., Zirina T., Markus K.** (2019) *Education in state language: problems and necessary solutions in pre-school education institutions // EDULEARN19 Proceedings. 11th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies, Palma, Mallorca, Spain. 1-3 July, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-09-12031-4 / ISSN: 2340-1117. doi: 10.21125/edulearn.2019, p. 6802-6807. Web of Science. URL: <https://iased.org/edulearn/publications>*

# PublicationsII

- **Tomme - Jukevica I.** ( 2019) *Second language grammar of pre-school children acquiring Latvian in an instructional setting.* //INTED 2019 Proceedings. 13th International Technology, Education and Development Conference. Valencia, Spain. 11-13 March, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-09-08619-1 / ISSN: 2340-1079 doi: [10.21125/inted.2019](https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2019) p. 7099-7105. *Web of Science*. URL: <https://iased.org/inted/publication>
- **Tomme - Jukevica I.** ( 2019) *The lexical competence of pre-schoolers acquiring Latvian as the second language in an instructional setting* // INTED 2019 Proceedings. 13th International Technology, Education and Development Conference Valencia,Spain. 11-13 March, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-09-08619-1 / ISSN: 2340-1079 doi: [10.21125/inted.2019](https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2019) p. 6530-6539. *Web of Science*. URL: <https://iased.org/inted/publication>

# PublicationsIII

- **Tomme – Jukevica I.** (2019) *The types of errors in the speech production of preschoolers acquiring Latvian as the second language in an instructional setting* //EDULEARN19 Proceedings.11th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies, Palma, Mallorca, Spain. 1-3 July, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-09-12031-4 / ISSN: 2340-1117.doi: 10.21125/edulearn.2019 p. 7589 – 7597. 2019.1836, *Web of Science*. URL: <https://iased.org/edulearn/publications>
- **Markus D.** (2019) *Bērnu runas specifika izglītības aktualitātes kontekstā [ Child language specific character in educational context]*. Scriptus Manet.

# Abstracts

- **Markus D., Usāne S.** (2019) *Skaņa. Vārds. Saruna [Sound. Word. Conversation]*. Akadēmiķa Jāņa Endzelīna 146. dzimšanas dienas atceres starptautiskā zinātniskā konference “Vārds. Nozīme. Vārdnīca.” 2019. gada 21.-22. februārī. Rīga, 46.-47. lpp. Abstract.
- **Tomme-Jukēvica I.** (2019) The lexical competence of preschoolers acquiring Latvian as the second language in an instructional setting. *INTED 2019 Conference 11-13 March, Valencia, Spain*. Abstract.
- **Tomme-Jukēvica I.** (2019) Second language grammar of pre-school children acquiring Latvian as the second language in an instructional setting. *INTED 2019 Conference 11-13 March, Valencia, Spain*. Abstract.

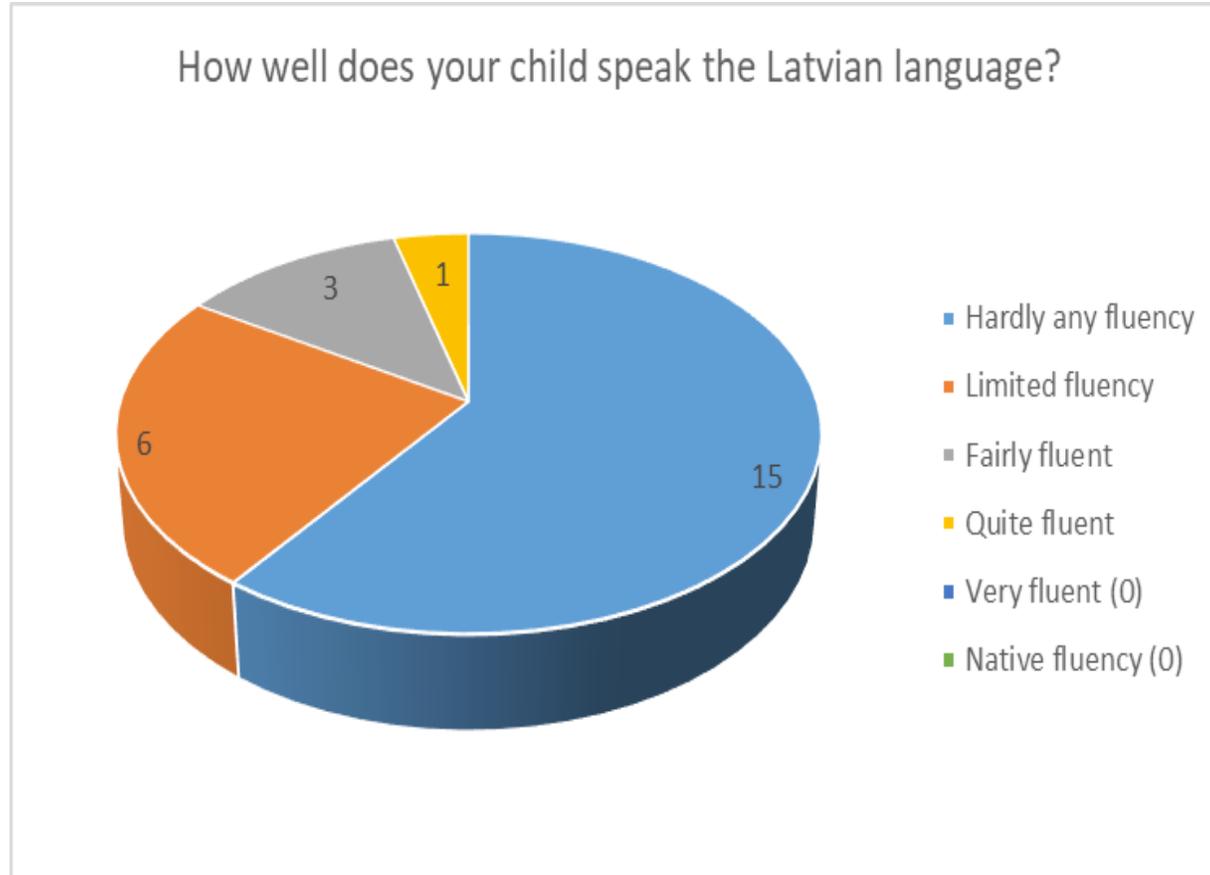
# Abstracts II

- **Tomme-Jukēvica I.** (2019). The types of errors in the speech production of preschoolers acquiring Latvian as the second language in an instructional setting. *EDULEARN19 Conference 1-3 July*, Palma de Mallorca, Spain. Abstract.
- **Tomme-Jukēvica I.** (2019). Assessing linguistic performance of children acquiring second language (Latvian) in preschool education. *EDULEARN19 Conference 1-3 July*, Palma de Mallorca, Spain. Abstract.

# Abstracts III

- **Markus D., Zīriņa T.** (2019) Assessment tools of Latvian language acquisition: problems and application versions. *INTED 2018 Conference* March 2019, Valencia, Spain. Abstract.
- **Markus Dace, Zīriņa Tija, Markus Kārlis** (2019). Education in state language: problems and necessary solutions in pre-school education institutions. *EDULEARN19 Conference 1-4 July*, Palma de Mallorca, Spain. Abstract.

# The first conclusions



## Language environment at home

	<i>Hardly ever Latvian, almost always Russian</i>	<i>Seldom Latvian, usually Russian</i>	<i>50% Latvian, 50% Russian</i>	<i>Usually Latvian, seldom Russian</i>	<i>Almost always Latvian, hardly ever Russian</i>
<i>Mother</i>	22	2			1
<i>Father</i>	21	2			1
<i>Sister/brother</i>	17		1		
<i>Sister/brother</i>					
<i>Sister/brother</i>					
<i>Other adult family member 1 (please specify)</i>	23 (Grandmother)	2			
<i>Other adult family member 2 (please specify)</i>	25 (Grandfather)				
<i>Babysitter</i>					1

# The first conclusions

- Those 5-6 years old children state language skills, which attend pre-school education establishments with Russian language instruction, are not adequate in order to continue studies in Latvian language and there would be problems not only in language acquisition, but also in learning other subjects.
- Poor Latvian language skills by Russian speaking children in majority cases is due to the lack of appropriate language environment.

**Thank you for your attention !**