Latgalian Functions, Discourses and Education a Decade Later: Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?

Sanita Martena

Heiko F. Marten

Rēzekne Academy of Technologies (Latvia)

Latgale and Latgalian

- Latgale: Easternmost region of Latvia
- In today‘s Latvia, no political or administrative decentralisation
- Latgale exists as unit in regional planning (cf. map) and as a constituency in elections
- Mostly cultural understanding of the regions in Latvia
- Economically weakest region of Latvia
- Biggest religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity

Point of Departure: Latgalian in the Early 2000s (cf. ICML 2005, 2007, 2009, 2013)

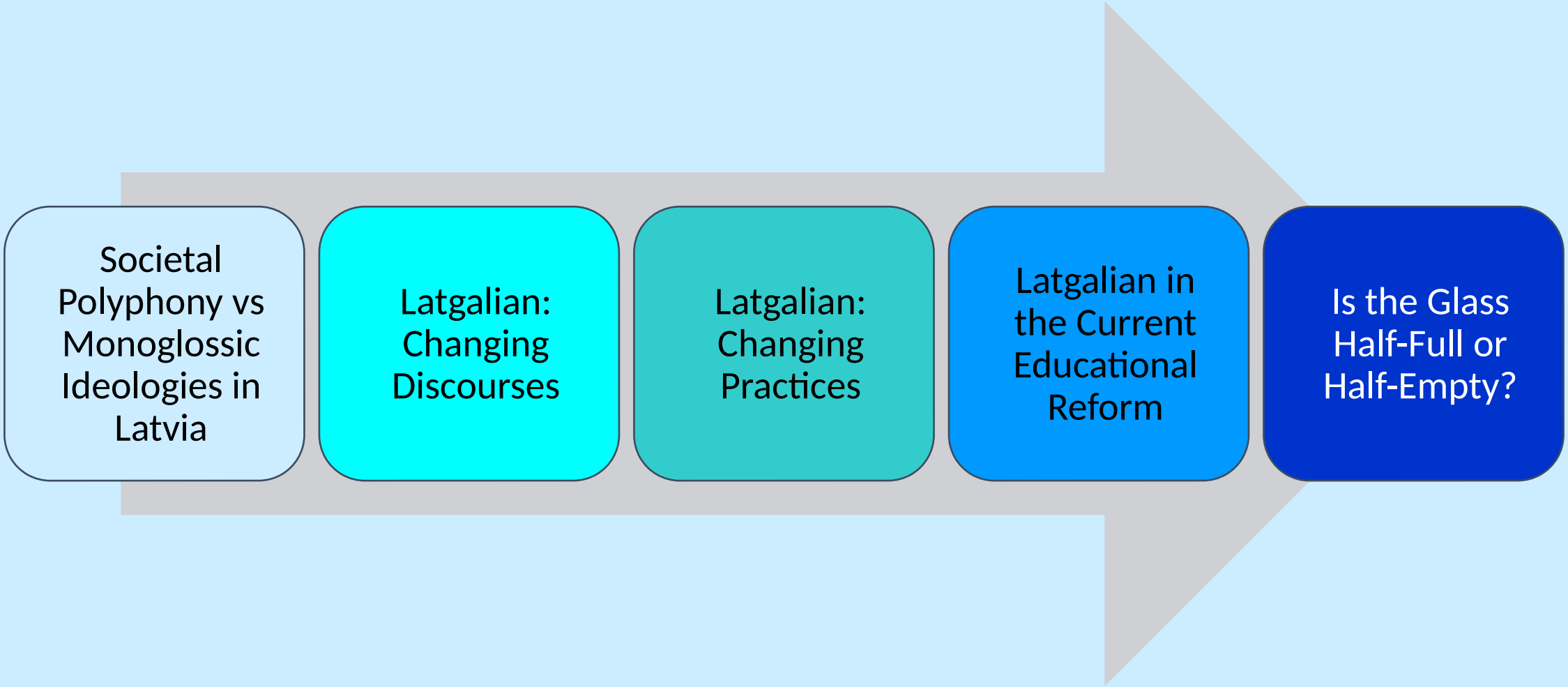
- Seemingly „endless“ discussions: language or dialect?
- Regional language (cf. Kashubian, Low German, Scots) closely related to Standard Latvian in largely diglossic relation
- Almost complete lack in official functions (except for some informal, spontaneous situations)
- According to Latvian language law – Latgalian Written Language as „historical variant of Latvian“
- Tradition of own written language, new orthography officially recognised in 2007
- Census 2011: 8.8% in Latvia use Latgalian on an every-day basis (in Latgale: 35%); among young persons only 5.7% in Latvia / 27% in Latgale
- UNESCO classification as “vulnerable”
- Lack of voice: no empowerment, no presence of Latgalian issues in society, often not even clear articulation of perception
- Little presence in education (Mercator Regional Dossier 2008)

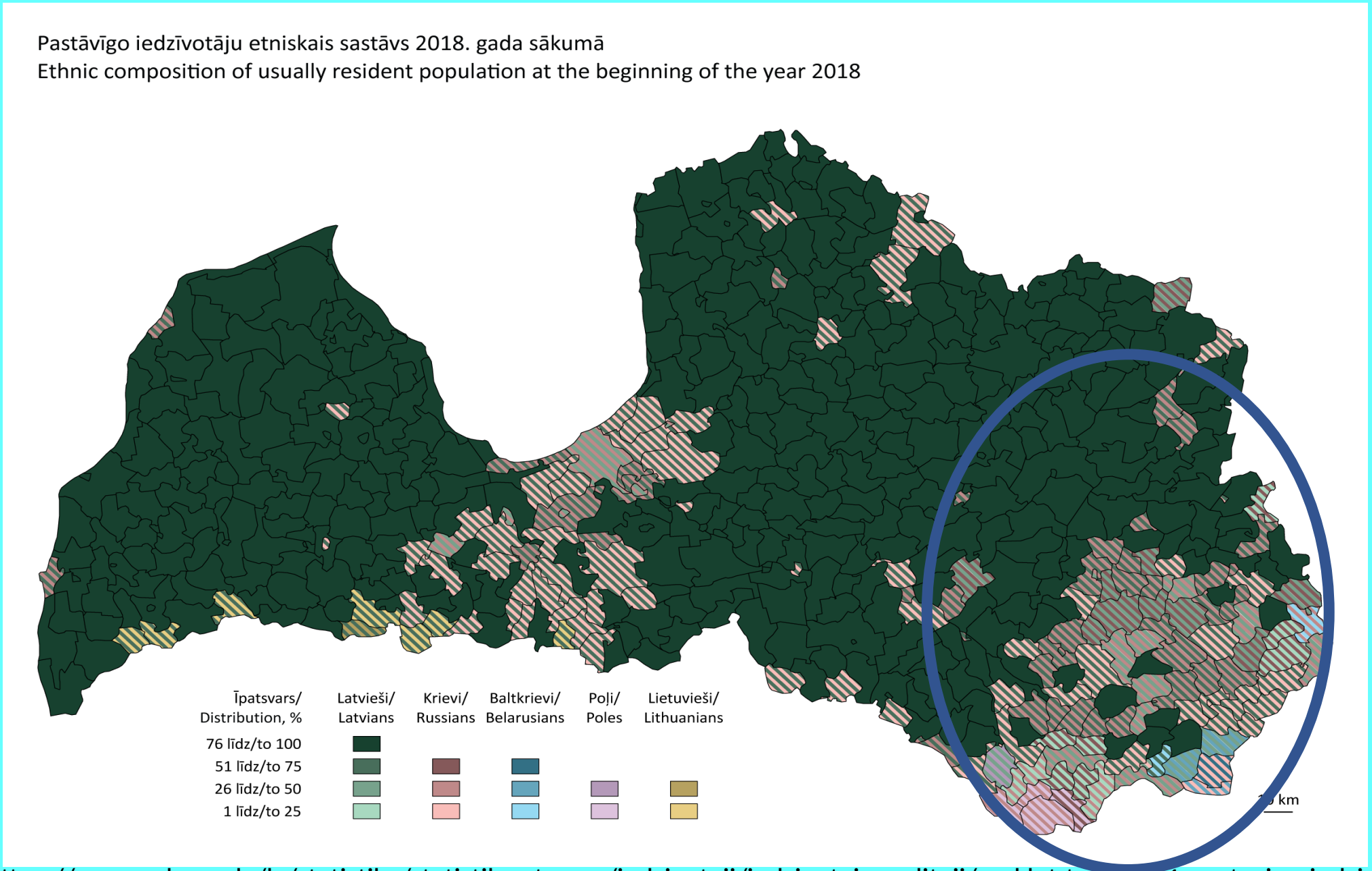
Domain / Area of Language Planning	Situation of Latgalian (Lazdiņa and Marten 2012)
Use in private communication (in private and public space)	No restrictions by law; number of speakers declining; Latgalian perceived as a rural variety of older generations; yet, intergenerational transmission still takes 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 ad hoc basis 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 ad hoc basis sometimes possible
Health Services	No written use; oral use on an ad hoc basis sometimes possible
Education/Research	No state-organised teaching of Latgalian; some local initiatives outside the regular curriculum; in higher education Latgalian as part of a few programmes of philology; increasing research activities in linguistics, literary science, regional studies
Economy/Business	No written use; oral use on an ad hoc basis sometimes possible
Culture/Heritage	No restrictions for cultural organisations to use and spread oral and written Latgalian; a rich variety of music groups in Latgalian
Media/Arts	Some local/regional media (radio – one local radio station, TV – very little, web sites – increasingly, newspapers – mostly only individual articles often relating to church issues) in Latgalian, a rather rich literature (but only a handful of books are published every year), but in total rather little
Religion	Catholic church as a place of survival of Latgalian
International relations	No restrictions to seek international cooperation with other speech communities

From ICML Graz 2013: Conclusion: Possible Futures of Latgalian

- Careful optimism amongst speakers of Latgalian with regard to these latest changes
- Increased prestige and self-confidence of Latgalian speakers
- Hopes for increase in presence of Latgalian in e.g. regional education which might stimulate revitalization
- Changing attitudes in other regions of Latvia (even though for the time being without officialisation of status)
- Yet, it is still by far too early for evaluating whether these changes in policies, status and attitudes will have a longer-lasting impact

Conditions for the Development of Latgalian Today

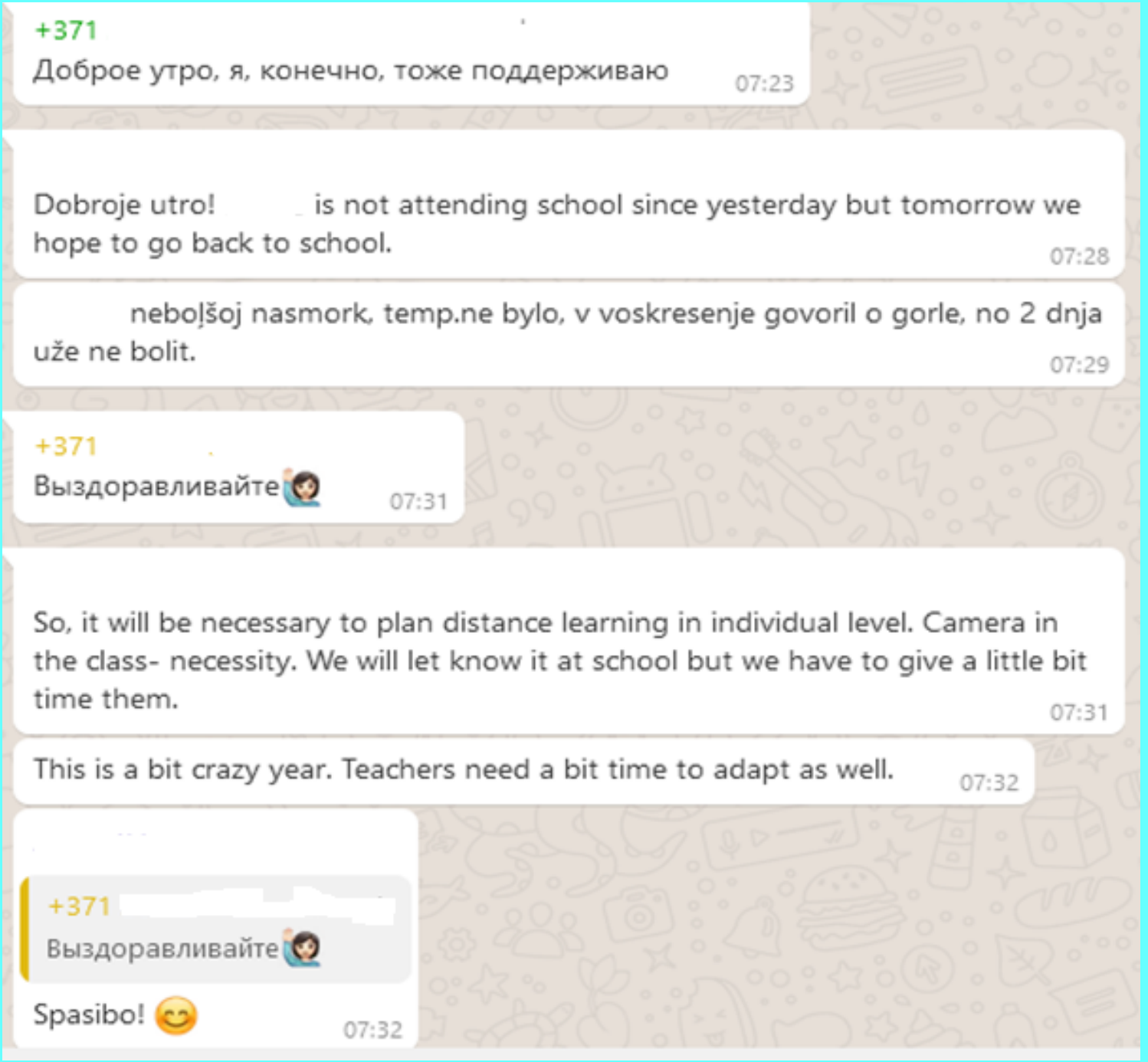




https://www.csb.gov.lv/lv/statistika/statistikas-temas/iedzivotaji/iedzivotaju-raditaji/meklet-tema/361-pastavigo-iedzivotaju-etniskais-sastavs

Example: Societal Polyphony in Latvia

Polylogue of 4 mothers – parents‘ chat in a WhatsApp group (2020)



Changing Discourses

ISO classification (2010) – “Solomonic solution”:

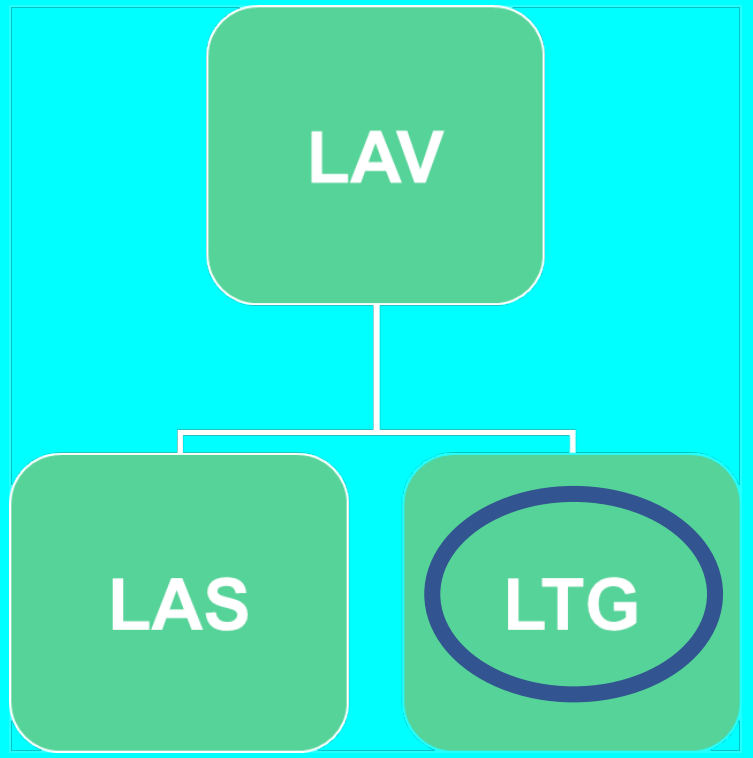
Latgalian as one of two written varieties alongside Standard Latvian under the umbrella of the Latvian language

Standardization during the XX century:

written language: strongly standardized

🔔

spoken language: lack of standardization & big diversity



Changing Discourses

- 2012 Latgalian World Congress in Rēzekne
  - Important role for creating future cultural and educational activities
- 2017 – 100 years anniversary of first Latgalian congress
  - New Congress of Latgale in Rēzekne
  - The celebration marked a symbolic start of the 2018 anniversary year on 100 years of independent Latvia.
  - Showed the diversity of organisations and individuals working on Latgalian
  - Impact on language, Latgalian identity and self-confidence
  - Congress resolution triggered political discussions at the national level
  - 2018: Latvian Parlament officially approves April 27 as the Day of the Latgalian Congress
  - Latgalian flag officially approved for use in official contexts

2020/21 Discourse Changes

- Latvian Language Development Plan 2021-2027
  - Goals and aims are included for the development and support of Latgalian

- 2020/21 initiative by Latvian president Levits to raise the status of the cultural regions of Latvia
  - Aim: to strengthen regional identities as part of Latvian identity
  - Levits explicitly mentions the role of Latgalian and uses the term “Latgalian language“
  - Suggestion for new Law on Administrative Regions – draft includes aims to re-structure and coordinate educational issues as well as regional language policies

Cultural Centre *Gors / Gars ("Latgalian Embassy")* in Rēzekne

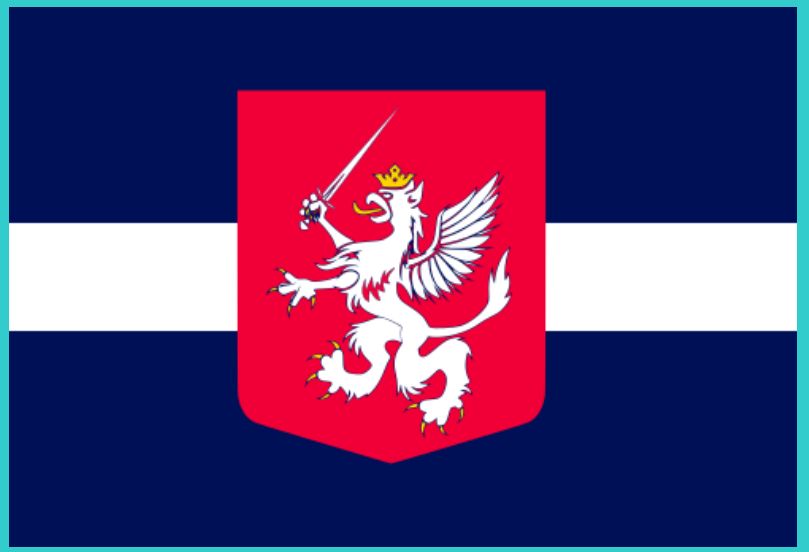
- Cultural events of all kinds
- Raises self-esteem
- Name Gors / Gars ("spirit") – ambiguous Latvian-Latgalian
- Many events in Latgalian (also staff is trained to address people in Latgalian)

GORS
Latgales Vēstniecība

Changing Practices: Public Linguistic Landscape

Changing Practices: Increased Presence of Latgalian in Latgale

- Latgalian cultural activities use by far more written Latgalian, e.g. when announcing performances, markets, concerts, exhibitions
- Increase in Latgalian souvenirs (cultural tourism industry) – e.g. proverbs in Latgalian on T-shirts, fridge magnets, post cards etc.
- Some written use of Latgalian by municipalities, e.g. on city maps
- Use of Latgalian in ergonyms or on restaurant menus
- Graffiti
- Use of Latgalian flag in private and semi-official contexts



Changing Practices: Increased presence of Latgalian beyond Latgale

- Radio broadcasts
- TV programme on national TV
- Theatre performances based on Latgalian productions taken to Riga (Latgola.lv)
- Online platform lakuga.lv
- Once per 2 months journal on Latgale “A 12” (some articles in Latgalian): “The road to Latgale. To be positive about people in Latgale and the world”

KEBABS
ČAJS -0,50 €
KOPEJS- 1,00
KAKAO-1,00
LAVAŠA-
.LELĪS -3,00€
.VIDEJĪS- 2,55 €
.MOZĪS -1,95 €
UZ ŠKEIVJA-
LELĪS - 4,15€
VIDEJĪS - 3,65€
MOZĪS - 3,15€
BULBYS FRĪ - 1,30€
14 BU BLĪNI - 1,20€
KAPELA DZIGA
GOTOVS!
RĒZEKNE / LATVIJA 2012
Obi lob
RĒZEKNE LATGOLA 2011.
Byusim cīši kai zuodža zūbi!
RESTORĀNS - KAFEJNĪCA
Gords
GORS
Latgales Vēstniecība
KONDITOREJA MOZŌ ROGOVKA
Kas pard, tys dzeivuos!
LV FB-6444
MYSIM, LATGAĻĪŠIM KRĪZE PI DIRSYS!
MŌRA
GOTIŅA
PIENA KONFEKTE
MOKSLA PASTOV ARI ORPUS MŪZEJA SĪNOM!
3.05. caturtdīna – Sv. Stunde plkst. 19:00 (Maija kolpošona)
4.05. – I Mēneša pīktdīna
plkst. 8:00 Vyssvātoko Sakramenta uzstodiešona
sv. Mises plkst. 9:00 un vokorā plkst. 19:00
6.05. – I MĒNEŠA - ADORĀCIJAS SVĀTDĪNA
sv. Mises plkst. 9:00 un 12:00
Rūžukrūni dzīdos: Klušu Silinīku s. t.
13.05. – II MĒNEŠA UN LELDĪNU VI SVĀTDĪNA
Mōtes diena
sv. Mises plkst. 9:00 un 12:00
Rūžukrūni dzīdos: Lovonu, Višnevsku un Poču s. t.
17.05. – caturtdīna – Kunga J. Kristus debesskopšonas svātki
sv. Mises plkst. 12:00 un 19:00
Rūžukrūni dzīdos: B – Nagļu, Puntužu un Jurašinku s. t.
18.05. – pīktdīna – Novennas Svāto Gora gūdam sokums
20.05. – III MĒNEŠA UN LIELDĪNU VII SVĀTDĪNA
sv. Mises pl. 9:00 un 12:00 - Kristaceļš

The town of Karsava: Innocence of a sign?

ONLINE DISCOURSES:

- Local identity, local patriotism, respect for a distinct language and culture, traditions and regional identity

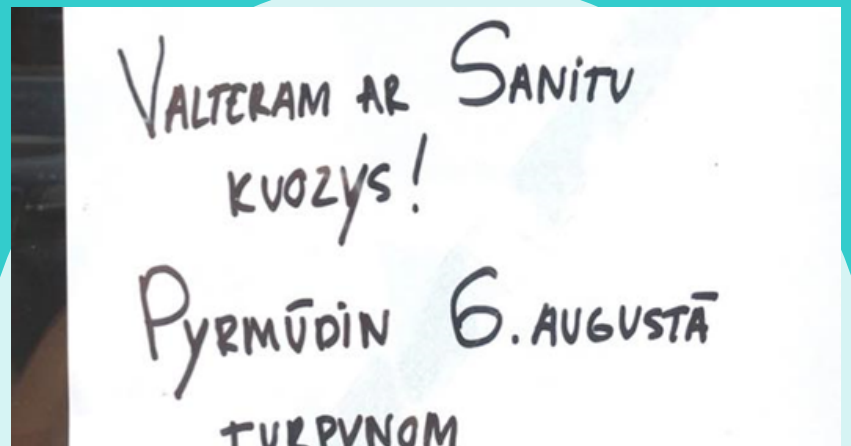
  vs.

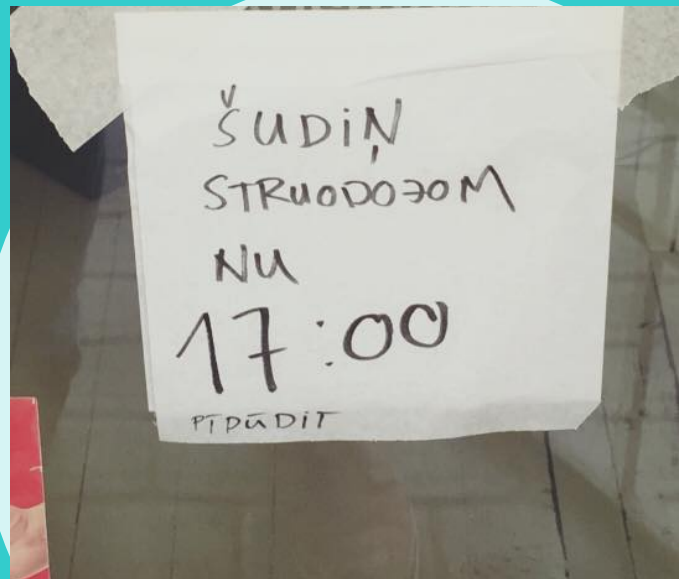
- ”separatism“, “proponents brainwashed by Kremlin propaganda“ etc.

http://www.la.lv/karsava-ielu-norades-bus-gan-latviski-gan-latgaliski/

Changing Practices: The case of “Ausmeņa kebabs“

- Valters Murāns: a designer who created *Ausmeņa Kebabs* in Rēzekne
- Since 2017 also in Riga
- Ausmeņa Kebabs – name and symbol



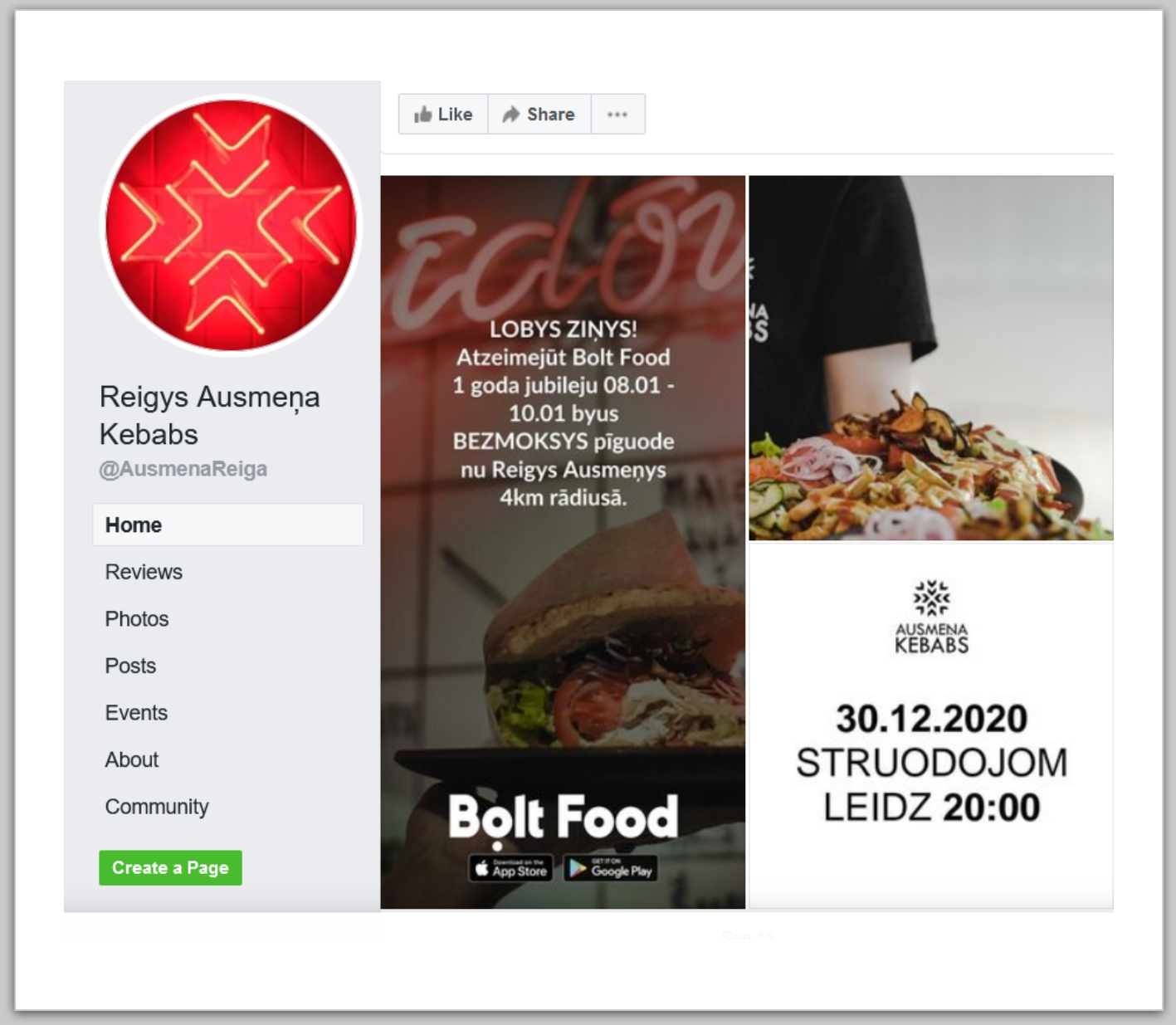


Computer-mediated Communication (Facebook practices)

Communication between the owner, customers, friends – in Latgalian, Latvian, English

Owners: in Latgalian

Customers: in Latgalian, Latvian, English

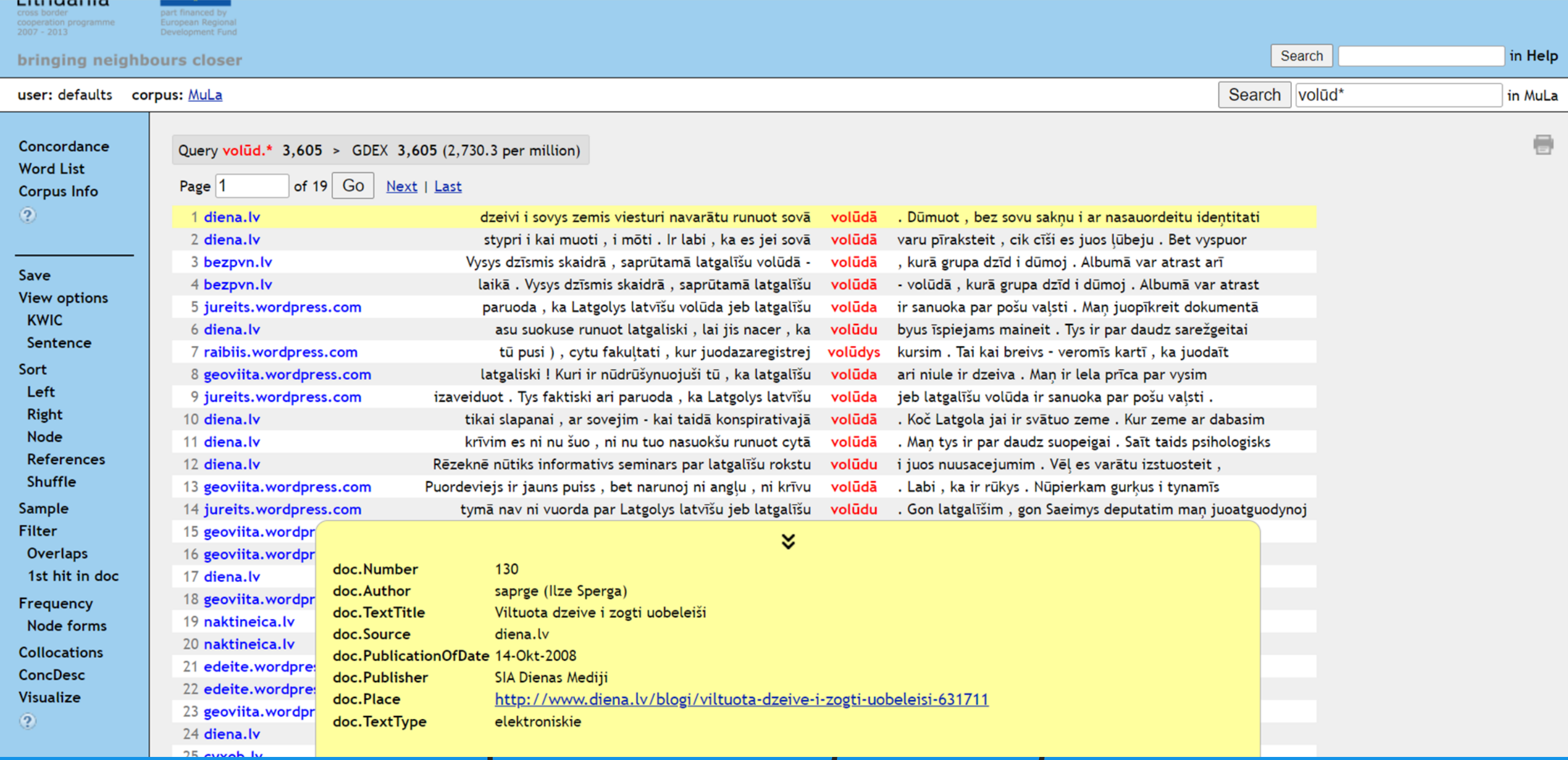


Latgalian in Education: Mercator Dossier 2008 (updated edition forthcoming 2021)

- In 2008: no official subject “Latgalian” at schools
- After 2012, new subject “regional studies” including some Latgalian
- Voluntary afternoon classes
- Summer camps and other cultural activities
- Spontaneous use in educational institutions – mostly informal
- Individual research, but also larger projects in structural linguistics, sociolinguistics, literature
- Conference “Latgalistica” since 2008
- Lack of teaching materials

Latgalian in the Current Educational Reform

- Dedicated Latgalian Activist as Latvian Minister of Education since 2019
  - Until 2019, no changes in top-down educational policies regarding Latgalian
- New national curriculum for upper secondary schools (grade 10-12) includes optional course “Latgalian Written Language”
  - “Students acquire minority languages and the Latgalian written language in accordance with the results which have to be achieved in the subject “Latvian language”
- New national curriculum for primary schools
- Transition to the content of the new curriculum has started in the school year 2020/2021

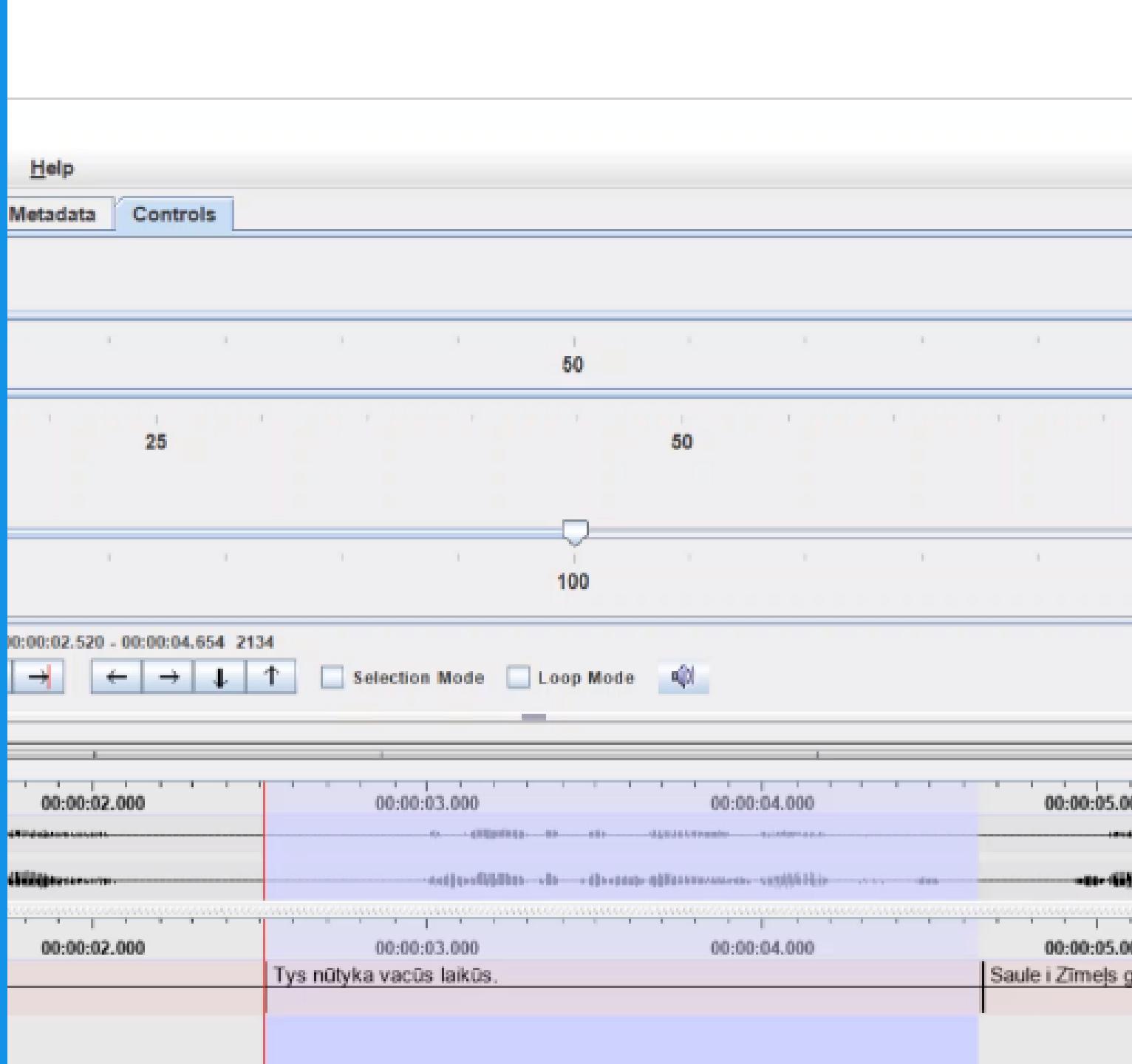


Corpus of modern written Latgalian (2011-2012)

Corpora of Latgalian

Modern Latgalian Corpora

- **MuLa2012** — 1 million wordforms
- **MuLa2022** — 1 million wordforms
- **MuLaR** — ~ 10 h speech transcripts



Problems with Teaching Latgalian

- Latgalian is in competition with other subjects
- For the time being, there is no automatism in introducing Latgalian
- A lot continues to depend on individual decisions by teachers, school directors, parents or educational authorities
- Lack of modern teaching materials
- Lack of competence in WRITTEN Latgalian
- Lack of teacher training: teachers are not prepared to teach Latgalian or use it as a medium of instruction
- Language is not fully standardised – the official standard is not used by everybody

From ICML Graz 2013: Conclusion: Possible Futures of Latgalian

- Careful optimism amongst speakers of Latgalian with regard to these latest changes
  - parts of hopes have been fulfilled, some optimism has remained, but parts have also been replaced by fatalism
- Increased prestige and self-confidence of Latgalian speakers
  - indeed more self-confidence as displayed in practices
- Hopes for increase in presence of Latgalian in e.g. regional education which might stimulate revitalization
  - modest steps in education
- Changing attitudes in other regions of Latvia (even though for the time being without officialisation of status)
  - Latgalian is still not a main issue in society and opponents are strong – in spite of some increased presence
- Yet, it is still by far too early for evaluating whether these changes in policies, status and attitudes will have a longer-lasting impact
  - Absolutely!

Unesco Report on Language Vitality: Presence in Functional Domains

Degree of Endangerment	**Grade**	**Domains and Functions**
universal use	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions
multilingual parity	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions
dwindling domains	3	The language is in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
limited or formal domains	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions
highly limited domains	1	The language is used only in a very restricted domains and for a very few functions
extinct	0	The language is not used

EGIDS (Lewis/Simons 2010)

Level	Label	Description
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of a nation.
3	Wider Communication	The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.
4	Educational	The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.
5	Developing	The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
6a	Vigorous	The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.
6b	Threatened	The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.

Is the Latgalian glass “half-full”…?

Achievements of small-step realpolitik:

- Solomonic solution of what Latgalian is
- More Latgalian in the Linguistic Landscape
- Public awareness
- More self-confidence of Latgalian speakers
- Increased use in the media
- Inclusion in educational reform
- Symbolic steps – President’s speech
- In contrast to previous policies and practices: by far more recognition

…or is it still “half-empty”?

- No official status – not even on the regional level
- Diglossia is still a reality for most speakers of Latgalian: Latgalian is vital as a spoken language
- Fragile patterns of inter-generational transmission
- Lack of long-term funding for planning and implementing Latgalian in different domains
- Only limited inclusion in educational programmes with de facto obstacles
- Reflection of monoglossic societal ideologies at schools framing teaching (incl. language teaching) in a way which mismatches with plurilingual repertoires of students (incl. Latgalian)

- Thank you!
- Lels paļdis!

- sanita.martena@rta.lv
- heiko.marten@rta.lv