

**IMPACT OF CHANGE OF THE LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT  
ON THE EXTENT OF LANGUAGE SHIFT IN THE CONTEXT  
OF LINGUISTICS**

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**Abstract.** The article analyses the influence of the language shift and social processes on ethnic identity, whereby the study, on which the article is based, was motivated by processes in today's Estonia, which cause the low usage of the Estonian language in the Russian-speaking language environments. Also there can be seen a tendency of the language shift in favour of the Russian language. The goal of the article is to describe the development of ethnic identity of the Russian-speaking people, living in the segregated areas in the post-Soviet country Estonia, and the influence of the language choice and shift on the development of ethnic identity of Estonian ethnic minorities. A written questionnaire was used as a method for this study.

**Keywords:** language shift, identity, language policy, Estonian language, Russian language, other languages

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## **1. Introduction**

The Soviet time brought to Estonia an alien population, both culturally and language-wise. Estonian culture was still preserved, but two different communities developed in that time. With the regained independence, the status of the ethnic groups living here, changed (Ehala 2009, Rannut 2009, Lauristin, Vihalemm 2004, Lauristin 2008). That in turn caused the change in identity categories (Kirch, Kirch 1995, Masso 2002). While in the process the acculturation the double- or multi-identities can develop (Gellner 1996:647, Valk 2003), also the two cultures can blend and a new culture with different traits can arise, then the acculturation can become a catalyst for the development of the new identities (LaFromboise et al. 1993, Valk, Karu 1999:81). This kind of identity evolution mechanism is working in many social groups, which are drifting away from their culture of origin,

because they have lived in their current community a longer time (Valk, Karu 1999:81, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Valk 2003:246).

At the same time we should remember: the fact that the people are speaking the same language, does not mean that they have necessarily the same identity (i.e. the third nations, who might speak Russian as a first or only language, but do not identify themselves as ethnic Russians) (Verschik 2001:537, Verschik 2005:295). On the other hand, there are people, who speak Russian as their first language, but they do not constitute a community, they are rather heterogeneous (ibid.).

The Russian immigrants and also the third nation immigrants, who were born in Estonia and who are the interviewees of the study this article is based upon, have a very clear difference in identity: they do not identify themselves with the Soviet-time immigrants or their offspring, but it has been seen that a new Estonia-Russian identity is evolving (or has already evolved) (Kirch 2004, Vihalemm 2004, Vihalemm 2007).

### *1.1. Social links of the language and ethnic identity*

Different schools have different ideas about identity: one side emphasizes that ethnic identity changes constantly, and everyone can create one, using language, as the situation arises (a constructivist approach, e.g. Wendt 1995:46, Tabouret-Keller 2000, Katzenstein, Keohane 2006). Other researchers handle it as something static, bringing out persons' need to belong and the security (functionalist direction, e.g. Phinney et al. 1994, Jenkins 2004). The representatives of both schools still see ethnic identity as a practical phenomenon that an individual can create depending on the situation for the pragmatic goals, and common trait is the existence of the language, as an important cultural trait and divider.

Different studies (e.g. Tabouret-Keller 2000:317, Mills 2001, Kidd 2002:192, Iskanius 2005) stress the importance of the language in developing identity. The main point of these directions is the fact that the language is the mediator of the personal and also the social identity, i.e. the language choice is seen as the method of the definition of the identity, at the same time the language offers tools to create and to express this bond (ibid.). Language choice is seen as the most important part of developing ethnic identity (Tabouret-Keller 2000, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Iskanius 2005, Shannon 2007), but it does not mean just speaking a language, but also feeling a bond with the other groups speaking the same language that is true for the ethnic minorities also (ibid.).

In sum, different schools have emphasized the existence of the language of the origin as the most important trait of ethnic identity, but it is also sometimes true, if the language skills are low and the language use is marginal (e.g. Fishman 1991, 2001, Bilaniuk, Melnik 2008), i.e. regard towards the national language can be positive and supporting without using the language (Bilaniuk, Melnik 2008:436). Today's globalisation because of migration can leave the minorities less opportunities to preserve their ethnic identity (Kidd 2002:195). Our identity tends to develop and change over time (Siraj-Blatchford 1996:65).

### 1.2. Ethnic identity of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia

Because the Estonian SSR was part of the Soviet Union, nobody considered themselves as immigrants, nor Estonia as a separate country – everyone was considered as the citizens of the Soviet Union (Hallik et al. 1997, Vihalemm 1999, Masso 2002). After Estonia regained independence the aliens had to adapt to changed circumstances (Saks et al. 2000, Helemäe et al. 2000).

It has been shown that after the rebirth of the Estonian Republic other identity categories started to appear next to the Soviet identity (Masso 2002:28). For example, many studies have shown that the Russian-speaking population in Estonia identifies with Russia (inst. Ruutsoo 2002, Vetik 1999, Jakobson 2002a, Jakobson 2002b, Kõuts, Tammpuu 2002, Masso 2002), i.e. the carriers of that identity feel the cultural link with the Russian language and culture (ibid.). Studies show that the social network (work environment, relatives, friends) and also the communication field in the broader sense (consuming media) of the relevant identity category is as often as Russian (inst. Korts, Kõuts 2002, Jakobson 2002a, Vihalemm 2002, 2007, Helemäe 2008). Thereof it is expected that the information from the media about the processes of today's Estonia is more one-sided for that identity category, i.e. the Russian minority (Vihalemm 2008). It has been found that the representatives of the third nations living in the segregated Russian-speaking areas in Estonia have linguistically joined the Russian-speaking communities and consume media mostly in the same language (Rannut, Rannut 2007). In addition, some researchers are considering the geographic location as one basis of the categorization of the identity (e.g. *Baltic states/Russian*, Melvin 1995, Laitin 1998, Vihalemm 2002, Masso 2002, Kirch 2004).

In the 1990s, the studies already showed that the ethnic self-determination of the Estonian Russian-speaking population was in the process of changing (e.g. Vihalemm, Masso 2003). David Laitin (1998, inst. Kirch 2004) has highlighted the reduction of the links with the culture of the origin of the Russian population in Estonia, because in many cases the contacts with Russia and also other countries of origin have weakened, because over time they have started to feel as a part of the Estonian state. That means a language-cultural and also territorial and communicative network at the same time: they feel unity with the Estonians on the basis of the place of residence, communication with the Estonians is active, they are pro-Estonia, they feel similarity with the Estonians (sometimes also with the local Russians, but not with the Russians living in Russia), also they feel the link with the Estonian culture and have adapted with the local social environment (ibid.). Many researchers call this identity category the *Estonian Russians* (Fiškina 2000:179, Kirch 2004:19, Pavelson 2004, Proos 2000:37, Vihalemm 2004:237).

Although the Estonian society considers the so-called third nations as the Russian population with the single identity, the studies show the prevalence of certain personal choices in relation to the identity (Vihalemm 2007). At the same time the language shift towards the majority language tends to happen in societies (Crystal 2000, Barron-Hauwaert 2004, Fishman 2001, Komondouros, McEntee-Atalianis 2007).

### *1.3. About the language shift of the minority nations*

The language shift processes are influenced by many factors. As the most important ones, immigration, which is distinctive to today's world, has been highlighted, in addition there is an attitude toward different languages (value of the languages for the language communities and the status of the language) (McAdams 1997, Kaufman 2004). The language choices can be strongly influenced by the language shift determined by the education opportunities of the next generation (Vahtin et al. 2003). Equal importance belongs to the language environment (including the opportunity to speak some languages), the influence of the media on the language preferences and the opportunities to learn languages (language programs in schools and language courses) (ibid.). The result of the social changes in the same social organization is that the language shift can start and end during a few generations (Jansson 2005:72). There is a possible scenario, where the older and younger relatives do not speak the same home language, because of the diminished language skills (De Houwer 2005). At the same time the communities are not homogeneous and in case of the new socio-linguistic situations there are segments or individuals in the community, who want to keep using the existing language, and on the other side those who want to change over to another language (Verschik 2010:87). We have to consider the status of the group and its language of origin, common demographic aspects and the current institutional support of the group (Potowski 2004). The accepted majority language in society, psychological, social and political factors influence the preserving of the language, identity and culture (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

The language shift does not always mean the culture or identity shift (e.g. being Ukrainian through Russian language) (inst. Bilaniuk, Melnik 2008). But the tendency of the major intergenerational language shift starting in the communities, where the language of origin is not passed on, is still prevalent (inst. Crystal 2000, Barron-Hauwaert 2004, Fishman 2001, Komondouros, McEntee-Atalianis 2007).

### *1.4. The influence of the Soviet language policy on the language shift*

The development of the home language and the disappearance of the language of origin of the immigrants from the areas of the former Soviet Union have come about in the environment of the Russification (Rannut, Rannut 2010a:6). Because of the Russification in the Soviet Union, many non-Russians (mainly Belarus and Ukrainian language speakers) changed their language to Russian (Rannut, Rannut 2010b:244). Also, in the families where the spouses had different nationalities and left their ethnic habitat, a language shift in favour of the Russian language occurred to a certain extent (Pavlenko 2006).

The Soviet policy induced the immigration of the Russian-speaking population to the areas, where the Russian language was not spoken previously, e.g. the Baltic countries (Rannut 2009). In addition, there was the obligatory job assignment and the mandatory Soviet Army service, which expected the use of the Russian language (ibid.). The people, who could speak Russian better, had the chance of

better jobs and career, which reinforced the status of the Russian language (Rannut, Rannut 2010b).

At the same time the number of the schools, where the learning language was different, was reduced, and the teaching of the Russian language became mandatory (Bilaniuk, Melnik 2008:348). The language shift was also favoured by the fact that the immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union put their children in schools, where the learning language was Russian (Rannut 2005:116–117). For the nations to whom the Soviet power did not create opportunities to found the schools of their own language or teach officially their national language to their children, the Russian language became the only written language (*ibid.*). Thus, the language of instruction in the schools had an important role in the process of the language shift (Vahtin et al. 2003, Massenko 2008, Rannut, Rannut 2010b).

As the Soviet-era process, the Russian language obtained a high status, and with that the usage of the Russian language became *de facto* prestigious in the former Soviet republics (Bilaniuk 2005:74, Verschik 2010:95). As a main tendency it can be observed that the former citizens of the USSR have distanced themselves from the traditions of their culture and the language in many cases has been preserved as nothing more than a symbol (Woolhieser 2001, Fournier 2002, Massenko 2004, Bilaniuk 2005:75, Pavlenko 2008:74, Verschik 2010:90, Rannut, Rannut 2010b). Step-by step the Russian language and also culture took root in other nations (Valdmaa, Hallik 2002). Because of that, Russification has influenced the choice of the home language and the fading of the language of origin of the population originating from the areas of the former Soviet Union, in Estonia (Rannut 2005).

## 2. The issues and the research methodology of the topic

According to the Census by The Statistics Estonia (REL 2011) the Estonian population is ethnically heterogeneous: among the total of the population 24.8% are Russians, 6.5% other nations, of whom more than half considers the Russian language as their mother tongue (53.9%). From the language point of view, the biggest group are people speaking Estonian as their main language, to the next group belong the people, who prefer to speak Russian, the third group consists of the Ukrainians and Belarussians, who outside of their home prefer to communicate in Russian and also as a home language the majority uses the Russian language (Rannut, Rannut 2010a). The Russian language tends to dominate also in the case of the other national groups, who use their national language only as their home language and this too in parallel with the Russian (*ibid.*). Because of the high concentration of the immigrants in those areas the usage of the Estonian language is limited (Rannut 2005). In addition, the census marks a total of 159 languages as the mother tongue, but this does not indicate the real usage of the corresponding languages in society (e.g. in case of almost 100 mother tongues the speakers were

living in the separated locations or were the only person with that mother tongue in Estonia) (REL 2011).

Besides finding out the languages used in different language environments, it was interesting to research the influence of the social processes on the language shift in the minority nations, the so-called third nations (e.g. Belarussians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis), in the Estonia as a post-Soviet country. So, the main goal of the current article is to contemplate the factors that influence the formation of the ethnic identity. In addition, the change of ethnic identity of the respondents in the conditions of the Estonia was studied. This helps to understand the language choices better, when people want to emphasize their belonging to a certain ethnic group (or groups).

Under the observation were the areas of the language environment, where the Russian-speaking population concentration is great, compared to other areas in Estonia (Paldiski, city of Kohtla-Järve). The target population of the study was adults aged 30–50 years, who had finished a school where the teaching language was Russian. The written questionnaire was used as a research method.

Statistical data processing software SPSS 13.0 was used for the calculations where the links between the different factors were analysed with the  $\chi^2$ -test (inst. Parrington et al. 1997).

### *2.1. The language choices and the ethnic identity of the respondents with the example of Kohtla-Järve and Paldiski*

The study on which the article is based, analyses the language choices and the ethnic identity of the respondents from the cities of Kohtla-Järve and Paldiski. Those areas were selected for the study, because Kohtla-Järve is a Russian-speaking segregated city in a Russian-speaking segregated county, Paldiski city also fulfils the requirements for a segregated Russian community in Estonia.

The development process of the population of these two cities has been mainly influenced by the conditions of the Soviet era. The Soviet central government encouraged the migration (Rannut, Rannut 2010a). For the building and the workforce for the factories, the workforce was hired from all over the Soviet Union, also there was the mandatory Union wide job assignment policy after finishing the higher education schools, the workers additionally looked for jobs and better living conditions on their own (Rannut 2005). A separate category of the immigrants consisted of the military personnel, who were also directed into different places across the Soviet Union, including Paldiski (ibid.).

183 people participated in the questionnaire (96 women and 87 men). The data was collected using personal contact, phone and e-mail. As the background data the respondents were asked about their birthplace, nationality, mother language, the spouses' nationality, education level and their Estonian language skills and the frequency of the communication in using the Estonian language.

### *2.2. Efficiency of the Estonian-language teaching according to the respondents and the frequency of the communication using the Estonian language*

Although all the respondents had finished a Russian school, 72.2% (132) had learned Estonian at school. 27.9% did not have that opportunity, because they did not study in Estonia. The efficiency of the teaching of the Estonian language was evaluated by the fact whether the respondent was able to communicate using Estonian language after finishing school (it was the subjective opinion of the respondents).

The efficiency of the teaching of the Estonian language was evaluated using the scale of 1–5 where 1 represented the lowest and 5 the highest value. Highest value ‘5’ was given only by the 8.7% of the respondents (16), same result was for the value ‘4’ – 8.7% (16). Most of the respondents of that group thought that the level of the teaching corresponds to the value ‘3’ – 30.6% (56) and 14.8% (27) gave the value ‘2’, additionally the 9.3% (17) gave ‘1’. The efficiency of the teaching of the Estonian language was linked to the birthplace of the respondents ( $\chi^2= 124.783$ ,  $df = 10$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

15.3% of the respondents communicated with the Estonians every day, 31.8% a few times a week, 39.8% once a week and 13.1% once a month. So most of the participants communicated with the Estonians at least once a week, some about once a month. Consequently we cannot conclude that the studied 30–50 year-old respondents were segregated into the Russian-language environment, because a big percentage of the respondents communicate with the Estonians at least once a week. So, we cannot talk about a fully segregated network. The results did not depend on the place of residence or the sex.

### *2.3. The language choice of the respondents*

Most of the respondents in both areas use Russian language as their only language at home (83.1%), in the rest of the cases the other language at home is Estonian (10.4%) or another language (6.5%).

When we observe the cross-generational language choice, the most used language is Russian (79.8% of the respondents (146)). In addition to the Estonian and Russian language there was also Ukrainian, 5.5% (10), Belarussian, 3.3% (6) and 2.7% (5) of other cases. Other languages were Latvian (1), Kazakh (1), Azerbaijan (2) and Lithuanian (1).

Most of the respondents spoke with their parents in Russian (79.8%), some (20.2%) used other languages as well (Estonian 8.7% and other languages 11.5%). Speaking other languages with their children was used parallel with the Russian language, also the grandparents used other languages speaking with their grandchildren (Estonian 8.7%, other languages 3.3% of the cases) as another language parallel with the Russian language (this includes the Estonian language also). It was the mixed families where the respondents and their spouses were both Russians, or one was a Russian and another belonged to another nationality.

An analysis of the scope of the language shift in this group brings out the following facts: the proportion of the Russian language has increased in the course of the generations – when Russian was used communicating with parents in 79.8% of the cases, then the children talked with their grandparents in Russian language in 88% of the cases, the difference is 8.2%. When the respondents used Estonian for communicating with their parents (in 8.7% of the cases) and other languages (in 11.5% of the cases), whereas their children did not use their native language talking to their grandparents exclusively, but used both Russian and their native language. The children of the Estonian respondents spoke Estonian with their grandparents parallel to the Russian language (8.7%), other languages were used less. Only 3.3% of the children spoke with their grandparents in Russian and in other languages. From this it emerges that in three generations a significant language shift of the minority languages has occurred, in favour of the Russian language.

Outside home Russian and Estonian languages were used. Russian was used exclusively in speaking with friends in 89.6% of the cases, with co-workers in 69.9% and in the public offices, in the stores and on the street in 78.7% of the cases. Additionally, next to the Russian language, Estonian was used talking to the friends in 10.4%, co-workers 30.1% and on the street, in the stores and in other places in 21.3% of the cases. Other languages in those places outside home were not mentioned.

The language used outside home depended on the Estonian language skills of the respondent (language with the friends –  $\chi^2 = 57.820$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; language at the workplace –  $\chi^2 = 47.852$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; language choice in the stores and on the street –  $\chi^2 = 53.442$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Also the link between the language choice and the nationality of the respondent became apparent (language choice with friends –  $\chi^2 = 151.420$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; preferred language at work –  $\chi^2 = 47.036$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; language used in the stores and on the street –  $\chi^2 = 67.454$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

In reading, Russian language was used exclusively in 89.6% of the cases, 10.4% of the respondents read both in Russian and Estonian. Other reading languages were not mentioned. 47.5% of the respondents watched programs only in Russian, 44.8% watched programs in both Russian and Estonian, and additionally 2.2% also in English and 5.5% in German.

In conclusion we can say that the Estonian language was used, in parallel with the Russian language, most at work and least with friends. The language preference depended mostly on the knowledge of Estonian, language environment, social network and the nationality of the respondent. At the workplace there were probably some co-workers who did not speak Russian – especially younger people, but communication is essential at the workplace. The Estonian language was used the least while communicating with friends. This is probably caused by the fact that the respondents had few Estonian friends, or they knew Russian well enough, so the Russian language was selected for communication. In Estonia a large part of the Russian-speaking population in the Russian-speaking areas in Estonia often uses only the Russian language in communicating among themselves



and also with the Estonians, because usually the Estonians living in those areas can speak Russian well (Vihalemm 2007). Also in stores and in the public offices it is only possible to communicate in Russian because of the language skills of the other side. In conclusion we can argue that the results above show the dominance of the Russian language at home and also outside the home, in case of the less studied groups in certain areas of Estonia.

### **3. Development of ethnic identity**

An additional goal of this study was to observe the development of ethnic identity of the 30–50 year-old Russian-speaking respondents living in the cities of Kohtla-Järve and Paldiski. The author of the article has already researched the ethnic identity of the younger Russian respondents in her earlier study.

Ethnic identity can be defined as a subtype of collective identity, representing a belonging to a specific group, represented with the language and the culture, being also the collective opposition to another nations and traditions (Liebkind 1995, Nesdale et al. 1997, Vihalemm 2007). Today's society can in some cases cloud or diversify the identity, identity keeps developing and changes over time (Nesdale et al. 1997, Kirch 2004, Vihalemm 2007).

Because the Estonian society is not homogeneous, instead people from different national groups are living here together, the problems of the identity of the minority nationals is crucial in the acculturation process. The changing identity of the Estonian Russian population has been caused by the changes characteristic to today's society, the differences and the similarities are influenced by the pressure by the majority group (Vetik 1999, Pavelson 2004, Vetik, Helemäe 2011).

The current article analyses also the factors influencing the types of ethnic identity: which nations' representatives do the respondents resemble the most, what is the nationality of their friends and which country's traditions and customs they follow. Additionally it was studied whether the respondents have experienced discrimination on the basis of nationality and how certain they feel about the future.

#### *3.1. Nationalities of the friends of the respondents*

Identifying the nationalities of the friends helps to understand whether the respondents from the Russian-speaking areas are communicating more with the Estonians or with the Russians and which factors are influencing the selection of the friends. Because the close communication with the Estonians helps to improve the Estonian language skills, and with the better language skills it is, among other things, easier to participate in the Estonian cultural events, then according to this principle we can make the assumption that there is an interaction of some degree between the nationality of the friends and the ethnic identity.

The friends of the respondents were mainly of the Russian nationality (66.8%). 24.0% of the respondents had friends with both the Estonian and Russian nationalities, and 9.2% of the respondents had Estonian friends. It is understandable, because we are dealing with the Russian-speaking areas, and also the immigrants might have friends in their birth country and some of the friends have the same nationality as the respondents.

The nationality of the friends had a correlation with the birth country, nationality and the Estonian language skill level. The respondents who were born in Russia did not have Estonian friends. The respondents born in Estonia had both Estonian and Russian friends (39.8%) ( $\chi^2 = 62.502$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In reference of the nationality of the respondents, 75% of Estonians had only Estonian friends, 12.5% had both Estonian and Russian friends, 60.3% Russians had only Russian friends ( $\chi^2 = 58.578$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Also, the respondents whose Estonian language skills were higher, had more Estonian friends (68.8% of respondents with the 'very good' level, 84.2% with the level 'good', of the respondents) ( $\chi^2 = 68.788$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The respondents who identified themselves as Estonians, had learned in a school with the Russian study language and they were not married or living together with an Estonian.

### 3.2. Traditions and customs

Every ethnic group has its own traditions and customs, which are distinctive to this group, are passed on to the next generations and constitute a part of the ethnic identity (Kidd 2002). This study tries to explain whether the Russian population follows only its own traditions and customs, or also the Estonian (or traditions and customs of a third ethnic group). From this we can conclude whether the changes in the ethnic identity have taken place or not (e.g. among others, towards the Estonian culture).

Based on the study, 58.5% (107) of the respondents followed both the Estonian and Russian customs, 19.9% only the Russian customs, 12.6% followed mostly the Russian customs (total of 32.6% followed Russian customs) and the Estonian customs were followed by 8.9% of the respondents. The following of the traditions and customs has a correlation with the birth country ( $\chi^2 = 141.608$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), nationality of the respondent ( $\chi^2 = 184.740$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and also with the Estonian language skills ( $\chi^2 = 180.522$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The participants with higher Estonian language skills followed either only Estonian customs, or the Russian and Estonian customs combined.

Among the respondents born in Estonia, 82.3% followed both the Estonian and Russian customs, 12.5% followed only the Estonian traditions and customs. Among the Russian born respondents, 37.1% followed both the Estonian and Russian customs, 88.6% of the people born in other countries followed only the Russian traditions and customs. So the link between the traditions and birthplace is apparent.

The preference of the traditions and customs of a certain country also depended on the nationality of the respondent: 87.5% of the Estonians followed only the

Estonian traditions and customs, 12.5% followed also the Russian customs (the influence of mixed marriages). 72.6% of the Russians followed both the Estonian and Russian customs, the respondents from other nationalities preferred the Russian traditions and customs (88.5%).

It becomes apparent that most of the respondents follow both the Estonian and Russian traditions. The traditions and customs of other nationalities were not mentioned, although the option was present in the questionnaire. From this we can conclude that the Russian population, interviewed in this study, knows the Estonian customs and traditions and follows them. At the same time the Russian respondents have not forgotten their own ethnic customs. Other traditions and customs were not mentioned, so the respondents have blended ethnically into the Estonian society, following the mainstream. From this we can assume that the Estonian identity has influenced the identity of the Russian-speaking respondents through the Estonian traditions and customs.

### *3.3. Identifying yourself with a national group*

It has been observed that in the situation where the nations share the same territory and communicate with each other, it is natural that generally the beliefs of all the groups can change to some degree (Vihalemm 1999). It is especially apparent with the minority nations, where the convergence with the natives or with another national group in the same area takes place (*ibid.*). In Estonia next to the Estonians, the Russian population is a big national group, which in the segregative Russian speaking areas has a majority (e.g. Kohtla-Järve and Paldiski) and as a rule in those areas, the same smaller ethnic groups align themselves language-wise with the Russian-speaking population (Rannut, Rannut 2007). This study question tries to analyse if the respondents think they resemble the Estonians. If that is true, it shows the change in the ethnic identity of the subjects towards the Estonians.

With this question many respondents found that they resembled both Russians and Estonians (43.2%), at the same time 48.2% thought that they resembled only Russians, and a small part (8.6%) identified themselves with the Estonians. The ethnic Estonians, who had learned in a Russian school, identified themselves with the Estonians.

The national identity of the respondents correlated to their birth country ( $\chi^2 = 86.497$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), nationality ( $\chi^2 = 160.288$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), Estonian language skills ( $\chi^2 = 120.513$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and also with the nationality of their friends ( $\chi^2 = 117.775$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The respondents born in Estonia, with a higher Estonian language skills and who communicate with the Estonians more frequently, found that they resembled both the Estonians and the Russians, other nationalities were not mentioned. This also shows the blending of the other small ethnic groups with the Russians, and a disappearance of those groups in the less researched areas and groups in Estonia.

When we compare the respondents' national identity with their nationality (Russians 79.8%, Estonians 8.7% and other nations 11.5%), it becomes apparent that there have been changes in the ethnic identity of the respondents; the same

goes for the Estonian identity. Among other things, the changes in the identity can be explained with the language environment and with the influence of mixed marriages.

There were few Estonians among the respondents (the target group was people who had finished a Russian school). 43.2% of the Russian-speaking respondents had also accepted the Estonian identity, which shows the qualitative change of ethnic identity. The other ethnic groups had blended with the Russian-speaking community, so their ethnic identity had gone through a change. The reason for this can be the fact that they have lived in the Russian-speaking area for a long time or their migration came from the Russian-speaking areas, they communicate mostly with the Russians, follow their traditions and customs and also their friends are mostly of the Russian nationality.

The ethnic identity is also influenced by the attitude of the respondents towards the natives and also the natives' attitude towards the respondents (Vihalemm 2007). Next we find out if the subjects find they have experienced some discrimination based on their nationality, and if the subjects have confidence for the future.

#### *3.4. Discrimination based on nationality*

The last paragraph studied the attitude of the minority nations toward the majority nation, in this paragraph we study the main nation's attitude towards the minority nations, e.g. whether the respondents have experienced the discrimination from the Estonians or Russians, because they are neither Estonians nor Russians.

67.2% of the respondents had not experienced discrimination, 21.3% of the respondents had experienced discrimination at some level. 11.5% of the respondents did not have an opinion on this topic.

When we analyse the results, it becomes apparent that the respondents with higher Estonian language skills, who communicated more frequently with the Estonians, had not experienced discrimination. The respondents, who had evaluated their language skills to be 'not satisfactory', experienced discrimination the most (69.3% of the cases) ( $\chi^2 = 149.417$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and they communicated with Estonians very seldom. For example, of those who communicated with the Estonians once a month, 88% of the respondents had experienced the discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 274.783$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

Discrimination based on the nationality was experienced by 16.4% of the Russians. Although there were few respondents of other nationalities, they had experienced the discrimination based on nationality in 71.4% of the cases ( $\chi^2 = 112.725$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Other nationalities experienced discrimination also from the Russians. Because they have joined the Russian-speaking language environment, they communicated with the Russians more than with the Estonians, the conflicts also appeared in socializing with the Russians. Among the Estonians there were more of those who had not thought about discrimination. So we can conclude that they lack the experience of discrimination (ethnic Estonians who had learned it at a Russian school, but who were not married or living together with Estonians).

As a discrimination experience, the following cases were presented: people refused to talk with the respondent in Russian, people did not understand the respondent and told them to learn the Estonian language, a hostile attitude towards the respondent, a recommendation to leave the country. In most cases the conflict ended with the arguing, but in some cases physical violence was also involved. So these discrimination cases were not discrimination in the legal sense (i.e. equality in front of the law), but in most cases it was a conflict because of low language skills, which was regarded as a humiliation of the nationality. So in regard of the last cases we can only talk about the perception of the discrimination (subjective) by the respondent, because the corresponding human rights principle – equality in front of the law – was not violated.

### *3.5. Confidence about the future*

Almost half of the respondents (49.7%) found that their future in Estonia is certain, at the same time 37.7% of the respondents were concerned about their future. 12,6% of the respondents did not have an opinion on that topic. From the respondents born in Estonia 80.5% felt confident about the future ( $\chi^2 = 170.663$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Also, the respondents with higher Estonian language skills had a higher confidence (with language skills level ‘very good’, 87.5%, and with the language skills level ‘good’, 94.7% of the respondents were confident about the future) ( $\chi^2 = 145.112$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). They had also higher confidence about the future than the respondents born outside Estonia or with low Estonian language skills. The respondents with higher language skills communicated with the Estonians more often, they had developed their own social network and they had people to turn to for help. The nationality of the respondents had a correlation with the confidence – 100% of the Estonian respondents felt confident about the future and 51.4% of the Russian respondents ( $\chi^2 = 64.372$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

### *3.6. Ethnical identity*

In today’s multinational societies it is very important for a country that the interaction between the groups were peaceful (Lauristin, Vihalemm 2004, Vihalemm 2007). As the result of communication a blending of ethnic identity can take place, where the traits of the identity of other groups are acquired and over time, a change in the ethnic self-awareness can occur, whereby the language and the language environment is considered as the main element of the differentiation of the ethnic group (LaFromboise et al. 1993, Valk, Karu 1999, Vihalemm 2007). To communicate, different ethnic groups have to understand each other and the language is the tool to achieve this goal – the parties have to know each other’s languages or the language used by the majority group (Lauristin, Vihalemm 2004).

The respondents preferred to use Russian at home or outside. The frequency of the Estonian language usage was linked to the level of Estonian language skills. The respondents who communicated with the Estonians every day (15.3%), had also a higher level of Estonian language skills than those who communicated with

the Estonians only once a month. Other ethnic languages were spoken only with the family members, in parallel with the Russian language.

Most of the friends of the respondents were Russians (66.8%), 24.0% had friends both from Russian and Estonian nationality and 9.2% had only Estonian friends. The nationality of the friends had a correlation with the nationality, birth country and the Estonian language skills of the respondent. Having Estonian friends is a factor that helps improve the Estonian language skills, helps to follow Estonian culture and media, and helps to accept the Estonian customs and traditions, which also can influence the changes in ethnic identity. The respondents born in Estonia had also more Estonian friends.

The traditions and customs are a part of the identity of every ethnic group (Valk 2003). So, the traditions and customs the respondents were following indicated their ethnic identity. The study showed that 58.5% of the respondents followed both the Russian and Estonian customs, i.e. they have accepted the Estonian traditions in addition to their own. It can be concluded that the Estonian traditions and customs have influenced their ethnic identity.

As it was mentioned before, the attitude of the minority nations towards the main nation (and the other way around) is important to the development of ethnic identity (Vihalemm 2007). The current thesis studied if the respondents had experienced any discrimination on the basis of their nationality. The analysis showed that 67.2% of the respondents had not experienced the discrimination on the basis of their nationality. For the rest the reason was poor knowledge of Estonian (misunderstandings, Estonians refusing to talk in Russian etc.). There were also cases where the representatives of the third nations got into conflict with the Russians.

The analysis of the answers about with which nation the respondents feel similar showed that 43.2% of the respondents found affinity with both Russians and Estonians, 48.2% found affinity with the Russians and 8.6% found similarities with the Estonians, other nations were not mentioned. From this we can conclude that 43.2% of the respondents have accepted both the Russian and the Estonian identity, and they can be called the Estonian Russians (also in cultural meaning).

The majority of the respondents do not feel they are discriminated on the basis of their nationality, but almost half of them worry about the future. Better Estonian language skills were considered the prerequisite for better coping and avoiding discrimination, also the respondents with the higher Estonian language skills were more confident about the future. From the results it became apparent that the respondents are ready to improve their Estonian language skills, but the teaching level is not always sufficient.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The current study also shows that the Russian language has maintained its status as the lingua franca for many ethnic groups from the former Soviet Union, preserving its place as the first language for the ethnic minorities at home and

outside the family. However, although the language shift was occurring in many cases, a considerable number of respondents named their ethnic nationality as their main nationality. In the light of the current study we should stress that we cannot expect the same sociocultural and language processes from the Russian-speaking people in Estonia, because this is not a homogeneous group. The identity and language shift is occurring at different speeds inside the Russian community, also the very good Estonian language skills do not guarantee a total identity shift because the effective link between the language skills and the identity does not always exist, but it is still shown that the language skills can be a catalyst for the identity change (Verschik 2005, Bilaniuk, Melnik 2008).

Although it has been possible to learn languages and culture of ethnic minorities in the ethnic minorities language schools (i.e. Sunday schools) (Müüripeal 2012) since 2007, there is still a need for adequate education in minority languages in the national education system. Information about education projects and learning materials (e.g. information about free courses of Estonian) should be easily available for the people belonging to the ethnic minority (Müüripeal 2006: 20). In principle, the Estonian educational legislation and the language law allow the ethnic culture societies with few members to organize the teaching of the language and culture in their native language in addition to the Sunday schools, also in the public schools as an optional subject. However, at least 10 parents in the same area with the same first language have to submit an application to the local government to enable that – all parents should be aware of that option (Müüripeal 2012).

Also, because of the great influence of the media, it is important to support the communication between communities, encourage the development of the common media channels for both Estonians and other language speakers (Jakobson 2002b). Many people belonging to the ethnic minorities are still following the foreign media channels of the Russian Federation. On the state level we have to think which opportunities would be possible to create in print and virtual media for ethnic minorities and also dual language initiatives in Estonia.

As a conclusion we can say this. Because we know that the shift of the identity and also the change in the other cultural and psychological processes occur during the acculturation process (Valk 2003:238), the national, language and education policy of the government should take in account demands bound to the identity changes of the aliens (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). The policy of the Republic of Estonia has the goal of integrating the ethnic groups living here into a well-functioning society so that each group can preserve their national and cultural identity. In general it is apparent that it has supported the ethnic minorities in adapting to the Estonian society.

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