

DOI: 10.11649/abs.2015.001

Anna Stafecka

*Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia
Riga*

Latvian dialects in the 21st century: old and new borders

In Latvia, as well as in many other cultural traditions, one of the most important components of national identity is the language, including its regional variants – dialects and sub-dialects which form the local identity.

In the Latvian language, there are approximately 500 sub-dialects of minor territorial units, which traditionally are grouped into three regional dialects: the Middle dialect which forms the basis of Standard Latvian; Livonian (also called Livonianized) dialect which arose as a result of Latvian-Livonian language contact; and High Latvian dialect which in the 18th century formed the basis of another written variant of Latvian, the Latgalian written language which is used in the region of Latgale.

Traditionally, Latvian sub-dialect borders coincided with the borders of rural communities (after their division in 1939), but later on these administrative borders have been changed several times. Nowadays in Latvia one cannot speak of dialect and sub-dialect borders in their traditional sense because

- 1) the borders of the rural communities have changed and no longer coincide with those of the pre-war epoch (and thus – with the sub-dialect borders); subsequently the local identity is lost,
- 2) due to migration of inhabitants and the impact of standard language through mass media, the traditional dialects are subject to levelling and attrition, and gradual loss,
- 3) the sub-dialect area nowadays sometimes coincides with the territory of church parish.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s) 2015.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies PAS & The Slavic Foundation
[Wydawca: Instytut Sławistyki PAN & Fundacja Sławistyczna]

Especially the borderline between the High Latvian and Middle dialect has changed extensively. According to Edmunds Trumpa, this border has moved eastwards – i.e. the territory of the use of High Latvian is decreasing (more on this see E. Trumpa, 2012, pp. 65–75).

In the Latvian linguistics, the dialect borders are not determined by one or two dialectal features (which would make it much easier), but by sets of isoglosses reflecting both phonetic and morphological phenomena. In fact, we can speak of the narrowing of borders of one or another dialectal feature.

However, we can speak about dialect borders in another aspect as well – for instance, the borders between the area of maintenance of dialectal features and that of the standard language impact; or the borders of dialect maintenance among different age groups.

In different parts of the world, more and more attention is devoted to local identities, including dialects. Dialectological data are often combined with archeological, ethnographical, etc. findings in order to determine borders of areas inhabited by pre-historic ethnic groups or tribes. Dialect use in contemporary communication (taking into account generational differences, frequency of use of various dialectal features, standard/dialect relations, etc.) is being analyzed in many countries. For example, the dialectologists of Lithuania have conducted a major sociolinguistic survey of Lithuanian dialects in the beginning of the 21st century – the results of this research were published in 2014. (Lietuva_projekts 2014). In Latvia, following the example of Lithuania, a project “Latvian Dialects in the 21st Century: a Sociolinguistic Aspect” (*Latviešu valodas dialekti 21. gadsimtā: sociolingvistisks aspekts*) was initiated in 2013, with the aim to obtain an insight in the contemporary situation. At least three sub-dialects of each dialect are surveyed.

Sub-dialect and its borders: a historical insight

The first records concerning regional differences in the Latvian language date from the 17th century (Mancelius, 1638). G. Mancelius emphasized the fact that there were noticeable differences in Latvian spoken in practically every parish (more on this see Zemzare, 1961, pp. 11–63; Laumane, 1999, p. 6). First accounts of the Latvian language put more emphasis on the differences between various dialects, rather than focusing on how these dialects are called, or their geographical area.

The first study of the two different forms of pronunciation of Latvian, i.e. the dialects spoken in the region ruled by German speakers, and the one spoken in Polish-administered territory, is to be found in the grammar “Dispositio imperfecti...”,¹ published

¹ Its full title is: *Dispositio imperfecti ad Optimum seu Rudimenta grammatices Lotavicae Ab imperfecto Authore Imperfecti pariter Idiomatici Explanatore Ad salutem et Perfectionem rudium Animarum*

in 1732 in Vilnius by Georgius Szpungianski. These two variants of pronunciation are still found today in the Low Latvian dialects (as the Middle and Livonianized dialect are sometimes collectively called) and High Latvian dialect, respectively.

The first scholar to describe all three dialects of the Latvian language was August Bielenstein, a German Lutheran minister, in 1863 (Bielenstein, 1863). A. Bielenstein described the phonetic and morphological differences between the dialects and gave quite an accurate description of the areas in which they were prevalent. This was the first extensive account of the dialects of the Latvian language.

The borders of dialectal features in geolinguistic maps

The area of distribution of certain dialectal features is best shown by geolinguistic maps. The first geolinguistic map of the Latvian language was published in 1892 also by August Bielenstein (Bielenstein, 1892). This map was an Appendix to the main body of his book, *Die Grenzen des lettischen Volksstammes...* The map contains 33 isoglosses that mostly represent phonetic and morphological features of Latvian dialects and sub-dialects and mark the boundaries of their distribution. These isoglosses can be used to identify boundaries between various dialects; they also are an evidence of the distribution of sub-dialects. However, the map does not explicitly show the regional areas of the dialects of the Latvian language.

Latvian linguist Janis Endzelins wrote that:

following the example set by A. Bielenstein, it is now possible to gather information about material expressions of culture [...] as they are to be found in different regions. This information should help to identify the borders of territories inhabited by ancient tribes (Endzelins, 1933, p. 105).

During the second half of the 19th century several questionnaires for gathering immaterial cultural data were elaborated. One of the most important among them was the program created by Eduards Volteris, a professor at St.Petersburg university. (Volteris, 1892). Although the main emphasis was on ethnography and folklore, it contains questions regarding language, dialects and sub-dialects as well (more on this see Mikulėnienė & Stafecka, 2011, pp. 123–133). During the first half of the 20th century main attention was paid to sub-dialectal phonetics and morphology, and the descriptions of almost 110 sub-dialects were published (following a unified system). On the basis of these descriptions, Velta Rūķe created several geolinguistic maps. In 1939, she published an article *The Sub-dialect*

cum Adjuncta Catechesi Apostolico Missionarium Zelo Suppeditata Permissu Superiorum. Anno Loquentis nobis in Verbo Infante Dei 1732. Vilnae typis Collegii Academici Societatis Jesu.

Groups of Latgale in Volume 19 of the journal *Filologu biedribas raksti*, including three maps (Rūķe, 1939):

- 1) *Isogloss map of Latgale. Phonetic variations.* 14 isoglosses depict the distribution borders of the most characteristic features of Latgalian sub-dialects, e.g., the border of broken and rising tone, the shift of sounds: *i, ū, ē, ir* and *ur, ie, uo, ei, au, ei*, and *ai* following *k* and *g, k, ģ > č, dž* or *k', g'*, distribution area of endings *-as, -es > -ys, -is*, etc.,
- 2) *Isogloss map of Latgale. Morphological variations.* They are shown with the help of 17 isoglosses, including the most characteristic features of nouns, numerals, pronouns and verbs,
- 3) On the basis of the distribution of phonetic and morphological differences, V. Rūķe in her map sketches in the borders of the three main sub-dialect groups of Latgale – northern, south-western, and eastern.

In 1940, V. Rūķe published an article *Livonianized Area of Kurzeme and Vidzeme* in Volume 20 of *Filologu biedribas rakst.* This article demonstrates the phonetic and morphological differences in the area of the Livonianized dialect in Kurzeme and Vidzeme. Two geolinguistic maps are included (Rūķe, 1940):

- 1) Isogloss map of Western Vidzeme. All 13 isoglosses, as the author points out, *are included in one map – both phonetic and morphological features.* The map shows, for instance, the variations of syllable tones, the quality of the vowel *e* in monosyllabic infinitive forms of verbs, the form of the diminutive suffix and ending *-iņš*, as well as some inflectional endings of nouns and verbs,
- 2) Sub-dialectal features of Northern Kurzeme are shown in two maps:
 - a) *Isogloss map of Northern Kurzeme. Phonetic variations.* 13 isoglosses depict such phonetic differences as, e.g., the pronunciation of *-ir-* and *-ur-*; the shifts of diphthongs *ei* and *au*; the distribution of the palatalized *ŗ*,
 - b) *Isogloss map of Northern Kurzeme. Morphological variations.* These are shown with the help of 16 isoglosses, reflecting some inflectional endings of nouns; the forms of some prefixes and suffixes, the reflexive ending of 3rd person verb forms, etc. On the basis of the areas of distribution of some dialectal features reflected in the maps, V. Rūķe contrasts the similarities and differences in the Livonianized sub-dialects in Northern Kurzeme and Western Vidzeme, as well as shows the borders of the said features with the help of isoglosses.

The most intense period of collecting and studying Latvian dialectal material was the second half of the 20th century. The sub-dialects were traditionally described, analysing their morphological, phonetic and lexical qualities in contrast with Standard Latvian norms. During that time one of the most important researcher of Latvian dialects and their borders was Marta Rudzīte. In the summary of her doctoral thesis, she has published 36 geolinguistic maps (Rudzīte, 2005, pp. 100–101).

In the end of the 20th century and early 21st century, several geolinguistic atlases have been elaborated (LVDA Leksika, 1999; LVDA Fonētika, 2013; ABL, 2009, 2012). However, until now there has been very little sociolinguistic research carried out in the field of Latvian dialects.

Dialect borders and the local cultural environment

Since language, as well as its regional variants, is ever changing, it became evident that it is necessary to research Latvian dialects in a sociolinguistic aspect as well. Therefore, the project “Latvian Dialects in the 21st Century: Sociolinguistic Aspect” was initiated to analyse the situation of Latvian dialects in the 21st century and to study their sub-dialects from a geolinguistic and sociolinguistic aspect:

- looking at the differences in the use of sub-dialects in central and peripheral parts of respective areas, as well as determining the dynamics of borders of dialectal features,
- gathering information about the possible link between the regional language variant and the local cultural environment, the perception of the sub-dialect as a marker of identity, the vitality of sub-dialects in areas with a functioning school, church, culture institutions, etc.

It is envisaged to survey and analyse the linguistic situation and cultural environment in at least three sub-dialects of each of the three dialects, thus obtaining an insight in their situation in the beginning of the 21st century.

Fragmentary information about the usage of various dialectal features in Latvia can be found, for example, in the commentaries of the above-mentioned geolinguistic maps, as well as in several monographs devoted to particular thematic groups of dialectal vocabulary (see, for instance, Jansone, 1993; Bušmane, 2007; Kurzemniece, 2008; Laumane, 2013). As one of the most significant recent studies we can point out the research conducted by Edmunds Trumpa within the framework of European Social Fund project “Changing Development Strategies and Cultural Spaces of Latvia’s Rural Inhabitants (2010–2012)” about the contact zone of Latgalian and Selonian sub-dialects of the High Latvian dialect in Western Latgale and Eastern Vidzeme (Trumpa, 2012, pp. 51–97). He analyzes various issues related to borders between sub-dialects, administrative units and church parishes in a geolinguistic or areal linguistic context. E. Trumpa provides a critical overview of the concept of sub-dialect in the light of cultural history (e.g., describing the changing borders of administrative territories and parishes which might have influenced the sub-dialect borders), as well as defines one of the main borderlines separating the Selonian and Latgalian sub-dialects – the isogloss of rising and broken tone.

Meanwhile, the project “Latvian Dialects in the 21st Century: Sociolinguistic Aspect” aims to survey at least three sub-dialects of each Latvian dialect (if possible, representing different sub-dialect groups). These are Livonianized sub-dialects spoken in Dundaga, Pope, Svētdiems, Ugāle and Venta; Middle dialect sub-dialects spoken in Bārta, Grobiņa, Rucava, Ērgeme, Jērcēni, Strenči and Vijciems; High Latvian sub-dialects spoken in Kalncempji, Litene, Nautrēni, Stāmeriena, Viļāni and Višķi.

Similarly as in the Lithuanian project, it is envisaged to characterize the locality of the sub-dialects (obtaining information in the local municipality). It is planned to describe the culturally historical situation – whether the area of the sub-dialect contains an administrative centre, as well as school, library, museum or other cultural institutions, church, post office, cemetery, marketplace, shopping centre, cafe, etc.; and whether there exists an internet homepage devoted to the respective area. Objects of historical or architectural heritage (castles, manor houses, castle mounds, watermills, parks, etc.), as well as art monuments (sculptures, etc.) and significant objects of nature (rocks, large trees, landscapes) are also described. The inhabitants are questioned about ethnographical heritage (festivals, local traditions, food or clothes), the mythological explanations of local placenames and other legends; religious practices and the use of the local sub-dialect in religious events. The sources of written heritage are also important – including historical documents and other archived information about the respective area, inscriptions on gravestones, etc.

Proper names (and the presence of local sub-dialect in their use) are also investigated – placenames (including microtoponyms), personal names and nicknames, etc. The use of the sub-dialect in local oral culture traditions (e.g. in folk music groups) or in Internet homepages and local publications is also analyzed.

It is important to show the ethnic characteristics of the local inhabitants, the number of immigrants from other areas, and other reasons of change in the number of dialect speakers.

Another sociolinguistic questionnaire contains data about the respondents – their name and surname, year and place of birth, ethnicity (both in official documents and in their own perception); the ethnicity of their spouses is also questioned, as well as the language used among different family members, the knowledge of other languages, and the education and occupation of the informant. A special attention is devoted to the choice of language or language variant in the public sphere – for example in a shop, administrative institution, or church; when addressing an acquaintance or a stranger; when talking to people of a younger generation. The attitude of the respondent towards the use of sub-dialect is questioned by asking whether, in their opinion, a typical speaker of a sub-dialect is:

- an elderly person,
- a person residing in countryside, a person without higher education,
- a person who respects the native sub-dialect as the language of their ancestors,
- a patriotic person, etc.

The primary results showed that the overall attitude towards sub-dialects is positive. The prevailing answer is that a sub-dialect speaker is one who respects their native language variant, and is patriotic.

Respondents are asked which is their preferred language or language variant of everyday communication, and to explain the difference, in their opinion, between a dialect or sub-dialect and the standard language, and their use in different situations. Thus, a speaker of the Livonianized dialect replied that he speaks the standard language when in Riga (the capital city) but when he returns to his native place he speaks “properly” (i.e., in the native sub-dialect or at least using some of its features). A speaker of a Latgalian sub-dialect of the High Latvian dialect admitted that she speaks both the sub-dialect and standard language in her everyday life but regards the sub-dialect as her native language, while Standard Latvian as a foreign language was taught at school. In Latgale, one can often encounter references to the opposed concepts of “speaking Latgalian” (in the sub-dialect) and “speaking Latvian” (in standard language). The sub-dialect is regarded as a value and a symbol of local identity.

The attitude towards one’s native sub-dialect and other sub-dialects is also investigated. Sometimes the informants regard their own sub-dialects as “correct” but the neighbouring sub-dialects – as “incorrect”.

Border between the dialect and standard language

The preliminary results showed differences in the situation of various dialects. In the Vidzeme sub-dialects of the Middle dialect (e.g. around Strenči) which are closest to Standard Latvian, the border between the dialect and standard language is practically lost because the respondents do not feel any difference between these language variants. Only separate dialectal features can be discerned in their speech. More stable dialectal features can be observed in the Middle sub-dialects spoken in South-western Kurzeme – an area of rich cultural heritage. However, these features are mostly present in the speech of the older and middle generation only.

In the Livonianized dialect, there are some characteristics that are observed in the speech of all generations – for example, the generalization of the masculine gender, the shortening of word endings. However, the dialectal features are undergoing certain attrition in the use of the younger generation.

In High Latvian dialect, the situation differs in various sub-dialectal groups. In the Selonian sub-dialects of Zemgale only traces of sub-dialectal features can be observed (some tones, irregular vowel shifts, etc.), and mostly in the speech of older people. In the Latgalian sub-dialects of Vidzeme the respondents of the older generation sometimes speak their sub-dialect at home but in the public sphere the

sub-dialect practically cannot be heard. However, some of its features has been preserved in the speech of middle and even younger generation. For example, in the phonetic aspect, the use of narrow [e] instead of the sub-dialectal [a], where the sound [æ] might be expected. Some morphological and lexical particularities can also be observed.

The most stable are the subdialects spoken in Latgale because of their use not only in everyday speech but also in cultural activities. Latgalian written language, too, helps to maintain the local subdialects. For instance, it is used in Roman Catholic church in Latgale. Practically all generations there use their sub-dialects; at least the younger generation uses it when speaking to older people. Among themselves the younger people sometimes use standard language as well, but some of them speak local subdialect even with the speakers from other dialects.

Thus, the main objective of this project is to analyse the situation of Latvian dialects and sub-dialects in the 21st century, studying their dynamics; finding those dialectal features that have been preserved in the speech of the youngest generation; making sure if speakers of different generations today still recognize the lexical units registered during the 20th century.

For the lexical survey, the program for gathering data for the *Atlas of the Latvian Dialects* was used. The results obtained in 2013 were then compared to those of the second half of the 20th century. As it turned out, much of the dialectal vocabulary is still used by middle and older generations, but the influence of standard language can be felt in their speech. Sometimes the dialectal vocabulary is in the so-called passive use – respondents give standard language words in their replies but, when asked if they know another word for the respective object or phenomenon, remember the dialectal word as well. Less frequently, the interviewer has to suggest the dialectal vocabulary to the informant in order to make sure if they are familiar with it.

Attention is paid to the use of sub-dialects in the central and peripheral parts of the respective areas. The preliminary research showed that the inhabitants living further from the centre are most likely to use the sub-dialect – especially with family members (including the younger ones), relatives, and neighbours.

Borders of age-graded linguistic change

Another border in dialects is more or less relatively metaphorical – it is connected with age-graded linguistic change. One of the aims of this research was to find those dialectal features that have been preserved in the speech of the youngest generation, and to make sure if speakers of different generations today still recognize the lexical units registered during the 20th century.

Change (including the impact of standard language) affects all levels of language, but especially the vocabulary. Elderly speakers still know or use the dialectal vocabulary. They have partly preserved some of the oldest thematic groups of vocabulary, e.g. those referring to earlier agricultural practices. In the middle generation, these words are usually in the passive knowledge, they have heard them from the older speakers.

The middle generation often still speaks the sub-dialect, but with a more or less discernable impact of standard language – especially in the speech of local intellectuals (teachers, clerks). The younger generation uses the sub-dialect most seldom. However, when asked about their attitude towards the sub-dialect, they often express regret about its disappearance. In Latgale, however, many of the younger people still use their sub-dialect consistently, even outside Latgale, out of patriotic feelings. Nevertheless, many people (of different generations) are using dialectal features when speaking in the standard language, and are not aware of it themselves. Thus, the present research is providing new facts and might form the basis for future studies, attempting to predict the development of native language and its dialects as an important component of national and local identity respectively. The material acquired at different periods allows to conclude which dialectal features are more viable and which are more likely to change and disappear. Although everyday observations show that the use of sub-dialects is diminishing (especially in the speech of the younger generation), there has been so far too little academic study to prove this fact. Thus, the current research will be an essential source of data about the situation in Latvian dialects in the early 21st century.

Conclusion

The preliminary results of the project show differences in the situation of various Latvian dialects. In the territory where the Middle dialect is spoken, the border between the dialect and Standard language is almost lost (except for sub-dialects spoken in South-western Kurzeme – an area of rich cultural heritage). In the territory of Livonianized dialect, there are some dialectal features that are observed in the speech of all generations. The most stable are the sub-dialects of High Latvian spoken in the Latgale region because of the Latgalian Written Language, the use of sub-dialects also in Roman Catholic church and cultural activities.

Although everyday observations show that the use of sub-dialects is diminishing (especially in the speech of the younger generation), the tendency of preservation of the sub-dialect as a symbol of local identity can be observed. The overall attitude of the respondents towards sub-dialects is positive – they respect their native language variant, and are patriotic.

Bibliography and sources

- Bielenstein, A. (1863). *Die lettische Sprache nach ihren Lauten und Formen*. Berlin: Ferd. Dümler's Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Bielenstein, A. (1892). *Atlas der ethnologischen Geographie, des heutigen und des phraehistorischen Lettenlands: Beilage zu den Grenzen des lettischen Volksstammes und der lettischen Sprache in der Gegenwart und im 13. Jahrhundert*. St. Petersburg: Commisionäre der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Bušmane, B. (2007). *Piena vārdi: Piena produktu nosaukumi latviešu valodā*. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts.
- Endzelīns, J. (1933). Latviešu valodnieku turpmākie uzdevumi. *Burtnieks*, 11, 817–821. In Endzelīns, J. (1980). *Darbu izlase III 2*. Rīga: Zinātne, 104–108).
- Jansone, I. (1993). *Galvas un plecu segas: Lingvistiskais aspekts latviešu valodā*. Rīga: Latviešu valodas institūts.
- Kurzemiece, I. (2008). *Žogu nosaukumi latviešu valodas izloksnēs*. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts.
- Latviešu valodas dialektu atlants: Leksika* [LVDA Leksika]. (1999). Rīga: Zinātne.
- Laumane, B. (1999). Ieskats latviešu izlokšņu pētīšanas vēsturē. In *Latviešu valodas dialektu atlants: Leksika* (pp. 6–9). Rīga: Zinātne.
- Laumane, B. (2013). *Jūra latviešu valodā un folklorā: Etnolingvistiskais aspekts*. Liepāja: Kurzemes Humanitārais institūts.
- Mancelius (1638). *Lettus / Das ist Wortbuch / Sampt angehengtem taeglichem Gebrauch der Lettiſchen Sprache; Allen vnd jeden Außheimiſchen / die in Churland / Sempallen vnd Lettiſchem Liefflande bleiben / vnd ſich redlich nehren wollen / zu Nutze verfertigt / Durch GEORGIVM MANCELIVM Sempall der H. Schrifft Licentiatum &c. Erster Theil*. Gedruckt vnnnd verlegt zu Riga durch Gerhard Schroeder Anno M. DC. XXXVIII [1638].
- Mikulēnienē, D., & Stafecka, A. (2011). Iš lietuvių ir latvių tarmėtyros istorijos: Leksikos klausimai Eduardo Volterio programose. *Baltistica*, 46(1), 123–133.
- Mikulēnienē, D., & Meiliūnaitė, V. (2014). *XXI a. pradžios lietuvių tarmės: Geolingvistinis ir sociolingvistinis tyrimas. Žemėlapiai ir jų komentarai*. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos institutas.
- Rudzīte, M. (2005). *Latviešu dialektoloģija (fonētika un morfoloģija)* [Doktora disertācijas autoreferāts]. In L. Leikuma, A. Andronovs (Ed.), & M. Rudzīte, *Darbi latviešu dialektoloģijā* (pp. 100–101). Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.
- Rūķe, V. (1939). Latgales izlokšņu grupējums. *Filologu biedrības raksti*, 19, 133–188.
- Rūķe, V. (1940). Kurzemes un Vidzemes lībiskais apgabals. *Filologu biedrības raksti*, 20, 75–128.
- Sarkanis, A. (Ed.). (2013). *Latviešu valodas dialektu atlants: Fonētika* [LVDA Fonētika]. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts.
- Stafecka, A., & Mikulēnienē, D. (Eds. & Introduction). (2009). *Atlas of the Baltic languages: Prospect* [ABL]. (I. Jansone, A. Stafecka, R. Bacevičūtė, & A. Leskauskaitė, Map commentaries, E. Trumpa, Map computer graphics). Rīga, Vilnius: University of Latvia, Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, The Institute of the Lithuanian Language.

- Stafecka, A., & Mikulėnienė, D. (Eds. & Introduction). (2012). *Atlas of the Baltic languages. Lexis 1: Flora* [ABL] [CD]. (I. Jansone, A. Stafecka, R. Bakšienė, A. Leskauskaitė, V. Meiliūnaitė, S. Ambrazas, & R. Kregždys, Map commentaries, I. Akmentiņa, L. Geržotaitė, L. Markus-Narvila, & E. Trumba, Map computer graphics). Rīga, Vilnius: Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, The Institute of the Lithuanian Language.
- Trumba, E. (2012). *Latviešu ģeolingvistikas etīdes*. Rīga: Zinātne.
- Volteris, E. (Ed.). (1892). *Programma tautas gara mantu krājējiem*. Sastādīta privātdocenta E. Voltera vadībā no dažiem Pēterburgas latviešu studentiem. Jelgava: Jelgavas Latviešu biedrības Rakstniecības nodaļa.
- Zemzare, D. (1961). *Latviešu vārdnīcas*. Rīga: LPSR ZA izdevniecība.

Dialekty łotewskie w wieku XXI: stare i nowe granice

Streszczenie

Choć na Łotwie wciąż stosunkowo dobrze zachowały się historyczne dialekty lokalne, nie można już obecnie mówić o dialektach i gwarach w tradycyjnym znaczeniu. Zmiany granic administracyjnych sprawiły bowiem, że tradycyjne gwary ulegają dziś zatarciu i stopniowo zanikają. Znacząco zmieniło się zwłaszcza usytuowanie strefy styku dialektów środkowego i górnołotewskiego; granica zasięgu tego ostatniego przesunęła się na wschód. Kwestiom tym poświęcono projekt „Dialekty łotewskie w XXI wieku: aspekt socjolingwistyczny”, w ramach którego od 2013 r. badana jest sytuacja socjolingwistyczna gwar na współczesnej Łotwie. Analizowane są przynajmniej trzy gwary w obrębie każdego z dialektów.

Pojęcie granicy ma jednak zastosowanie do opisu innych aspektów badań dialektologicznych. Można na przykład mówić o granicy między zachowaniem cech dialektów a wpływami języka literackiego, jak również o granicach podtrzymywania cech gwarowych w mowie użytkowników należących do różnych grup wiekowych. Badaniu poddano także kwestię używania gwar w centralnych i peryferyjnych częściach rejonu ich występowania. Wstępne wyniki sugerują, że ludzie mieszkający dalej od centrum używają gwary częściowej – zwłaszcza w komunikacji z członkami rodziny (w tym z młodszego pokolenia), z krewnymi i z sąsiadami.

Wstępne wyniki badań wskazują także na zróżnicowaną sytuację poszczególnych dialektów. Na obszarze występowania gwar dialektu środkowego, najbliższego literackiej łotewszczyźnie, niemal zanikło rozgraniczenie między gwarami a językiem literackim, skoro różnicy takiej nie odczuwają sami informatorzy.

W dialekcie liwońskim występuje kilka cech dialektalnych, obecnych jeszcze w większym lub mniejszym stopniu w mowie wszystkich pokoleń, jak uogólnienie rodzaju męskiego czy redukcja wygłosu. Jednakże i tutaj język, którym posługują się młodszy użytkownicy, stopniowo traci cechy dialektalne.

Inna sytuacja panuje w grupach gwarowych dialektu górnołotewskiego. Gwary selskie z Semigalii wykazują ślady cech dialektalnych (tonalność sylab, nieregularne przesunięcia samogłosek itd.); występują one przede wszystkim w mowie starszego pokolenia. Gwarami łatgalskimi z Widzeme posługują się z kolei głównie starsi respondenci, zwykle w gronie najbliższej rodziny; gwar tych praktycznie nie słyszy się natomiast w przestrzeni publicznej. Wiele cech dialektalnych zachowało się tu jednak także w mowie średniego, a nawet młodszego pokolenia. Najstabilniejsze okazały się gwary Łatgalii, co wiąże się z ich użyciem nie tylko w mowie codziennej, lecz również w działalności kulturalnej. Zachowaniu gwar sprzyja także istnienie łatgalskiego języka pisanego, jak również używanie miejscowego języka podczas nabożeństw Kościoła katolickiego. Wszystko to sprawia, że w Łatgalii gwarami posługują się przedstawiciele wszystkich pokoleń. Jednakże i tutaj ludzie młodszy niekiedy komunikują się między sobą w języku literackim.

Studium to jest prezentacją nowych danych i jako takie może stanowić podstawę dalszych badań. Badania takie mogłyby umożliwić prognozowanie tego, jak rozwijać się będą język łotewski oraz jego dialekty jako ważne składniki odpowiednio narodowej i lokalnej tożsamości Łotwyszy. Analiza porównawcza materiałów zebranych w różnych okresach pozwala na wyciąganie wniosków co do tego, które cechy dialektalne wykazują większą żywotność, które zaś prawdopodobnie ulegną zmianie lub zanikowi.

Słowa kluczowe: dialektologia; socjolingwistyka; dialekty łotewskie

Latvian dialects in the 21st century: old and new borders

Abstract

Although historical regional dialects are still relatively well preserved in Latvia, nowadays one can no longer speak of dialects and sub-dialects in the traditional sense because, due to changes of administrative borders, the traditional sub-dialects are subject to attrition and gradual loss. In particular, the contact zone of Central and High Latvian dialect has changed markedly. The border of High Latvian dialect has moved to the east. Since 2013, a project “Latvian Dialects in the 21st Century: a Sociolinguistic Aspect” is being carried out in order to gain an insight into contemporary Latvian dialect situation, analyzing at least three sub-dialects in each dialect.

However, we can speak of dialect borders in another aspect. For instance, the borders between the preservation of dialectal features and the impact of standard language, as well as the borders of maintenance of sub-dialectal feature among the speakers of different age groups. Attention is also paid to the use of sub-dialects in central and peripheral parts of territories. The first research results showed that people who live

further from the centre use the sub-dialect more often - especially in communication with family members (including the younger generation), relatives and neighbours.

The preliminary results show a different situation among dialects. In the sub-dialects of the Middle dialect, which is closest to Standard Latvian, the borderline between sub-dialect and standard language has almost disappeared, since the informants practically do not feel any difference between them.

In the Livonianized dialect, there are several features that are still more or less present in the speech of all generations – generalization of masculine gender, reduction of word endings, etc. However, in this dialect, too, the language used by younger speakers is gradually losing the dialectal features.

The situation differs in various sub-dialect groups of High Latvian dialect. The Selonian sub-dialects spoken in Zemgale show traces of dialectal features (syllable tones, irregular vowel shifts, etc.); they are found mainly in the speech of older generation. The Latgalian sub-dialects in Vidzeme are mainly spoken by older respondents and usually among family members; while in public spaces the sub-dialects practically cannot be heard. However, many dialectal features have been retained in the speech of middle and even younger generations. The most stable are the sub-dialects spoken in Latgale because of their use not only in everyday speech but also in cultural activities. The presence of the Latgalian written language, too, helps to maintain local sub-dialects; it is also used in Roman Catholic church services in Latgale. In Latgale, the sub-dialects are spoken by all generations. However, the younger people sometimes use the standard language to communicate among themselves.

This study provides new facts and might be the basis for further research. It might allow to predict the development of native language and its dialects as an important component of national and local identity respectively. Comparative analysis of material acquired at different periods allows us to conclude which dialectal features are more viable and which are more likely to change and disappear.

Keywords: dialectology; sociolinguistics; Latvian dialects

Correspondence: A. Stafecka, Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, Riga, e-mail: anna.stafecka@inbox.lv

This work was supported by a grant No. 264 Latvian Dialects in 21st Century: Sociolinguistic Approach from Latvian Science Council.

Competing interests: the author is a member of the Scientific Board of this journal.