Nicole Nau: Forms of bilingual talk in present-day Riga

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1. Introduction

Over the last 15 years, the language situation in Latvia has been the subject of a wide range of investigations by linguists and sociologists from both Latvia and abroad. The main topics of these investigations have been language status and status planning for the State language, competence of majority and minority languages, linguistic attitudes, and other questions of language policy (see, for example, Baltaskalna 2001; Druviete 1995, 1996, 1998; Priedīte 1997; Vēbers 1997). In addition, Latvian linguists have been concerned with corpus planning of Latvian and, to a lesser degree, with language transfer and borrowings. By contrast, little attention has been paid to pragmatic aspects of language behavior in a multilingual setting.

However, phenomena as code choice and code switching have attracted linguists from various parts of the world and research on these phenomena in various situations and in different countries has brought about many interesting facts, showing both similarities and differences of bilingual talk in diverse settings.[1] As each situation differs from others, Latvia has certainly something to add to the picture. On the other hand, an investigation of code-choice in conversations between members of different linguistic background may serve as a diagnostic tool for describing and evaluating the sociolinguistic situation in a multilingual society.

In my paper I want to describe some patterns of language use by bilingual speakers in everyday situations, observed in Riga, the capital of Latvia, within the last two years.

Of the many languages which are spoken in today's Latvia, I will consider only two: Latvian, the language with the highest number of native speakers country-wide and the only language with official status, and Russian, which today is the most widespread minority language and which had been an official or quasi-official language during the Soviet occupation as well as in the 19th century.

2. Foundations

2.1 Number of speakers

Some figures of native and non-native language competence in Latvia and Riga are given in the tables on the following page.

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[1] For references see, for example, the overview given by Haust 1993, or handbooks and paper collections such as Apple&Muysken 1987; Hamers&Blanc 2000; Auer 1998; Heller 1988; Milroy&Muysken 1995; Pütz 1997.

table 1: Ethnicity of population and most widespread mother tongue in Latvia in the year 2000 (TSR 15)

Personas tautība / *Ethnicity of person*	Visi iedzīvotāji / *All population*	Ar savas tautības dzimto valodu / *With mother tongue of their own ethnicity*	Procentos pret visiem attiecīgās tautības iedzīvotājiem / *Per cent to all population of corresponding ethnicity*	Ar dzimto latviešu valodu / *With Latvian mother tongue*	Procentos pret visiem attiecīgās tautības iedzīvotājiem / *Per cent to all population of corresponding ethnicity*	Ar dzimto krievu valodu / *With Russian mother tongue*	Procentos pret visiem attiecīgās tautības iedzīvotājiem / *Per cent to all population of corresponding ethnicity*
Visi iedzīvotāji **All population**	2377383	2050763	86,3	x	x	x	x
To skaitā - *Of which:*							
latvieši - *Latvians*	1370703	1311093	95,6	x	x	48242	3,5
krievi - *Russians*	703243	664743	94,5	31141	4,4	x	x
baltkrievi - *Belarussians*	97150	18265	18,8	6347	6,5	70717	72,8
ukraiņi - *Ukrainians*	63644	17301	27,2	2309	3,6	43159	67,8
poļi - *Poles*	59505	11529	19,4	11727	19,7	34340	57,7
lietuvieši - *Lithuanians*	33430	13187	39,4	14203	42,5	5437	16,3
ebreji - *Jews*	10385	825	7,9	918	8,8	8211	79,1
čigāni - *Gipsies*	8205	5637	68,7	1670	20,4	574	7,0
vācieši - *Germans*	3465	541	15,6	854	24,6	1970	56,8
tatāri - *Tatars*	3168	867	27,4	70	2,2	2162	68,2
igauņi - *Estonians*	2652	720	27,2	1041	39,2	840	31,7

Caption inside table: Iedzīvotāju tautība un izplatītākās dzimtās valodas 2000.gadā / Ethnicity of population and most widespreaded mother tongue, 2000

Summary of table 1: 11 ethnicities make up 2355550 people or 99.08% of the population. Of these declare as their native language:

Latvian:	58.64 %	(1381373)
Russian:	37.38 %	(880395)
	96.02 %	

table 2: Latvian and Russian linguistic competence in 1989 (Latvia and Riga) and 2000 (Riga)

	Latvia 1989		Riga 1989		Riga 2000	
	Latvian	Russian	Latvian	Russian	Latvian	Russian
L1 (native language)	52.0 %	42.5 %	35.9 %	58.2 %	≈ 40 %	≈ 55 %
L2 (know language in add. to native)	9.7 %	39.1 %	11.7 %	**33.6 %**	28.80 %	**32.43 %**
L1 or L2 competence	61.7 %	81.6 %	**47.6 %**	91.8 %	**≈ 69 %**	≈ 88 %

(source for 1989: Eglīte [1994]: 71; for 2000 based on TSR 15-17, 152, 164)

As can be seen from table 2, among the inhabitants of Riga, speakers of Russian, either as a first or a second language, in 2000 still outnumber speakers of Latvian[2]. However, the gap between these two language communities has significantly diminished since 1989, when competence of Russian was two times higher than competence of Latvian and bilingualism was common only among native speakers of Latvian or one of the smaller minority languages. Today, Latvian-Russian bilingualism is very widespread among the active population at age 20 - 60 years, regardless of their first language. Almost everyone who is a fluent speaker of one of the languages has at least some passive knowledge of the other.

While Latvian is the only official language in Riga, it is not the only one which is spoken in public and in semi-official situations. There are in fact a great number of public situations, where both Latvian and Russian may be used as the language for an encounter, none of them is marked or unmarked with respect to situational factors. For example, you may use Latvian as well as Russian in a shop, at a bank or at the post office, when ordering in a restaurant, when asking information about services of a private or a public company, when making a contract with the electric supply company, or when paying for water and heating at the house-manager's office. I found that in these situations, both Latvian and Russian are unmarked when used in oral communication. Note that I am considering here only spoken language. Matters are different for most kinds of writings.

Note also that, while the right to use Latvian in these situations is guaranteed by the language law (*Par valsts valodu* 2001), the possibility to use Russian is not based on any written law, but on custom and tolerance.

2.2 Negotiation of languages for interactions

In these situations, the language, in which the interaction will take place, is negotiated by the participants at the beginning of the encounter. In most cases, this negotation is fully integrated into the main interaction. That is, instead of making language choice an explicit topic of a conversation, e.g. by asking "do you speak Russian" or by demanding "let's talk in Latvian", speakers just use a certain language for the main purpose of the interaction, and thereby implicitely make proposals for language choice, accept or reject the other's proposal, alter their choice etc.

This habit of implicit language negotiation may be illustrated by the following example, taken from a radio advertisement of the Latvian telephone company "Lattelekom".

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[2] Country-wide, the numbers are almost equal: Latvian L1 or L2 $\approx$ 79%, Russian $\approx$ 81%.

Example 1: Lattelekom

Radio advertisement of the national telephone company *Lattelekom*, January 2003 (broadcasted in Russian speaking radio stations of Latvia)

A = employee, B = client; languages: plain = Latvian, *italics* = Russian.

(a telephon rings)

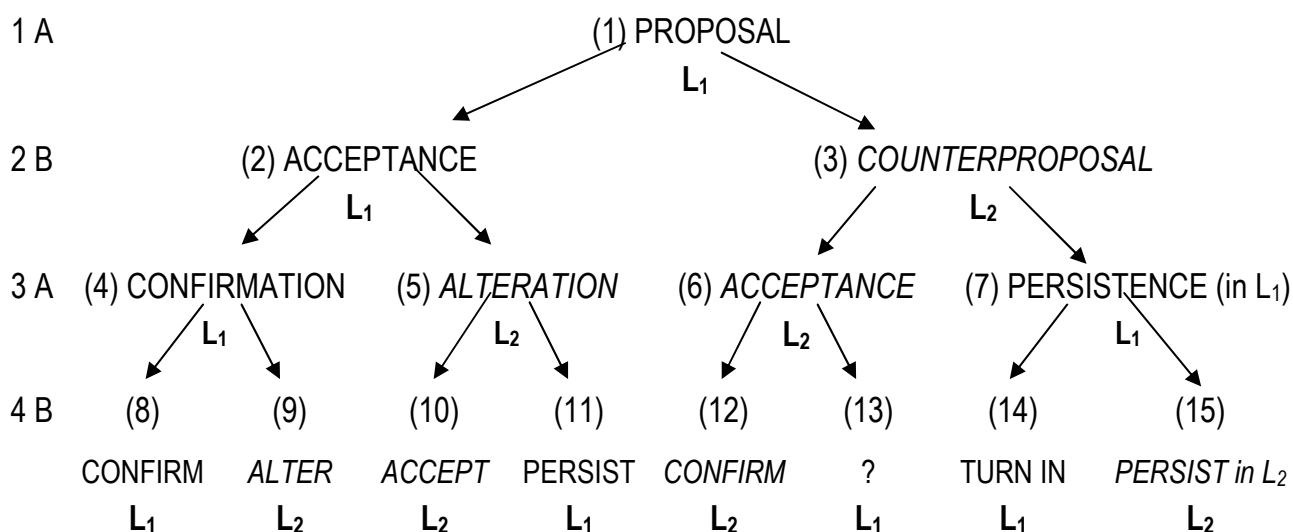|		
1 A	Labdien, Lattelekom klientu apkalpošanas dienests, Inese klausās.	Hello, this is Lattelekom clients' service, my name is Inese.
2 B	*Что нужно сделать, чтобы установить телефон?*	*What is necessary in order to get a telephone installed?*

In this example, the employee answers the phone in Latvian. There are two speech acts made in her turn: the explicit one, answering the phone, and the implicit one, proposing Latvian as the code for the conversation. The client, too, performs two speech acts in one: he asks a question about the company's services, and, by formulating his question in Russian, he implicitly asks for using this language. In the next turn, the first speaker may accept his choice or she may insist on her own. So, at each turn, code choice is meaningful, it has a communicative function, which is added to the overt communicative function of the turn (asking or answering a question, apologizing, thanking, etc.).

The meaning of code choice is closely linked to the position of the turn within the conversation. At each turn following the first, the speaker may use the same or another code as the previous speaker. We may therefore derive a tree diagram of code choice as follows:
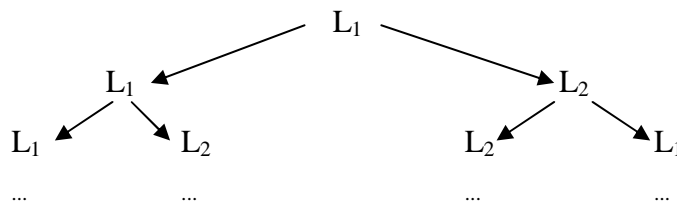
In this diagram, left branching symbolizes same language choice as in previous turn, right branching the choice of the other language. The communicative function, or speech act, of language choice depends on the position of the turn within the conversation and on the languages used in previous turns. Labeling the diagram with the implicit speech acts performed with each language choice, we get the following schema:

Code-selection as implicit speech acts

(1, 2... = turn; A, B = speaker; L_1, L_2 = languages of the talk)

1 A				(1) PROPOSAL L_1			
2 B		(2) ACCEPTANCE L_1			(3) *COUNTERPROPOSAL* L_2		
3 A	(4) CONFIRMATION L_1		(5) *ALTERATION* L_2	(6) *ACCEPTANCE* L_2		(7) PERSISTENCE (in L_1) L_1	
4 B	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
	CONFIRM L_1	*ALTER* L_2	*ACCEPT* L_2	PERSIST L_1	*CONFIRM* L_2	? L_1	TURN IN L_1	*PERSIST in L_2* L_2

3. A closer look at code choice and code selection

3.1 Openings

In the given example, the employee's choice of Latvian when answering the telephone hot line is conditioned by the company's policy, based on the national language policy, to ensure that anyone who wants to speak Latvian is encouraged to do so. It may be added that *Lattelekom*, in order to reach a broad auditory, usually publishes its advertisements in the respective language in both Latvian and Russian language media. However, as the advertisement considered here mimics a "real-life" dialog, the opening is in Latvian, although the advertisement is aimed at a Russian speaking auditory. The choice of Russian by the second speaker, who makes the call in order to get information, is based on several factors: his language preference - based on his competence, maybe also on the wish to mark his linguistic identity - and the assumption that the person he talks to is bilingual and will have no problems in understanding him. Note also that the directness with which the speaker in his first turn goes right into matters is common practice in Latvia, regardless of the language chosen, and is not considered rude as it might be in other cultures.

In the advertisement, the dialog doesn't go on, so we may only guess in which language the employee will answer the client's request. More likely than not, she will accept the client's choice and the conversation will proceed in Russian. This is due to the general rule "the client is always right", more specifically, "the client chooses the language". This is common practice in Riga in most private companies as well as in public institutions. In state owned companies and in offices of public administration, openings by a clerk will always be in Latvian. Many private companies and shops, at least in the centre, follow this practice, too. If the client

answers in Russian, clerks and salespersons usually accept this language choice and follow it. On the other hand, if an opening had been in Russian, but the client chooses Latvian, Latvian will be the language of interaction, not only because of the client's general right, but also according to the language law.

In situations, where the one who opens the dialog is not the one licensed to choose the language, doubling may be used as a strategy of neutrality (cf. Apple&Muysken 1987: 135). Salespersons may address an unknown client with a phrase in both languages, for example, the phrase "yes, please?" uttered as "lūdzu - požalujsta", thereby marking their willingness to use either language. This is more common in small shops, but even there, it is apparently getting out of use.

OFFER   Latvian+Russian   Latvian+Russian
$(L_1 + L_2)$
                    ↓   ↓
  ↓

CHOICE   Latvian   Russian
$(L_1$ or $L_2)$

3.2 Establishing the code

In many cases, the code used for the interaction is established within the first three turns, following either the line "proposal - acceptance - confirmation (1 - 2 - 4)[3]", or "proposal - counterproposal - acceptance (1 - 3 - 6)". The negotiation may be prolonged, if a counterproposal is not accepted (1 - 3 - 7). In this case, the second speaker may withdraw his counterproposal and accept the first language (14), or he may insist on speaking his chosen language (15). In the latter case, it may seem that the negotiation has failed - no common language has been found. Still, the main interaction (for example, question - answer) may go on successfully in two languages. The outcome of the negotiation, then, is a bilingual conversation, where each participant speaks his or her language, while silently accepting the other language as a listener. This pattern is not usually followed in longer conversations, but it is not uncommon for short encounters. A bilingual talk of this kind may also be negotiated overtly. If the participants do not share sufficient active skills in one of the languages, one of them may ask to be allowed to switch to the other language, or he may, while talking in his preferred language, encourage the other to make his contribution in language two.

It is interesting to note that more ritualized interactions, as for example exchanging greetings, asking what time it is and answering this questions, apologizing and accepting an apology, do not require a common language, and overt comment on the language choice is almost never made - it is unnecessary and may even be impolite. This finding is in opposition to Auer's observation that "there is more pressure to accommodate to co-participant's language choice for turns or turn components with a high degree of cohesion with previous turns - such as

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[3] Numbers refer to position in the diagram above.

reformulations, repairs and second pair parts - than in initiative turns or turn components, showing little cohesion with previous turn." (Auer 1995: 130).

3.3 Code-alternation

I would now like to turn to cases, where a code established within the first two or three turns is altered, that is, where the chosen language of a turn differs both from the language of the previous turn and the language the same speaker had used before ("alteration", 5 and 9). The most common reason for this behavior is a perceived mismatch between language choice and ethnolinguistic identity. In other words, the speaker alternating the code thinks: "My partner does not belong to the community associated with this language, therefore I should use the other language." Two examples of my personal experience in Riga may illustrate this point.

Example 2: Plester

reconstructed dialog in a drugstore, January 2002

A = client (N.N.), B = salesperson, male, presumably Latvian

1 A	Es atvainojos, kur atrast plaksteri[1]?	Excuse me, where may I find plester?	Latvian
2 B	Kā, lūdzu?	Pardon?	Latvian
3 A	Plaksteris - es meklēju plaksteri.	Plester - I'm looking for plester.	Latvian
4 B	(slowly, pointing with his hand)		
	Tut - v kase.	*There - at the cash-desk.*	**Russian**

[1]Standard Latvian *plāksteris* 'plaster'

Example 3: Internet

Reconstructed dialog in an internet café, January 2003

A = employee, male, Russian, B = client (N.N.)

1 A	*Požalujsta?*	*Yes, please?*	Russian
2 B	*V internet...*	*I want to use the internet.*	Russian
3 A	*V internet ... Jess...* Pa čeesmit, piecdesmit vai sešdesmit?	*The internet ... Yess...* At fourty, fifty or sixty [santims]?	Russian **Latvian**
4 B	Vienalga.	I don't care.	Latvian
5 A	Lūdzu, vienpadsmitais.	Number eleven, please.	Latvian

Note that in both examples, the code is altered, although the first code already had proven to be efficient for the interaction. In both cases, code-alteration is partner-oriented: the speaker switches to a language, which is not "his own", but which he supposes his partner will be

more comfortable with. On the one hand, this is a form of politeness. On the other hand, this behaviour may in some cases be considered impolite, too, for the implicit message is "I do not want to speak to you in this language" - either, "because you apparently do not know it well enough", or "because you are not one of us". This kind of code-alteration has been most common among native speakers of Latvian switching to Russian when speaking with non-Latvians, but its use is increasing among speakers of Russian, who more and more deliberately switch to Latvian when talking to non-fluent speakers of Russian.

4. Summing up: Markedness and factors determining code-choice

As I have pointed out before, both Latvian and Russian are unmarked choices for a wide range of verbal interactions. The language used in a conversation depends neither on the topic nor on the activity type. We may state that there is no diglossia in Riga, as far as oral communication is concerned.

The choice of Latvian or Russian by a bilingual person depends on a variety of interplaying factors, most of all their role in the interaction, their personal preference, and the position of the turn within the conversation. While the use of one of the two languages for an interaction is not marked as such, it may be marked in a certain linguistic context. In service-encounters, the most widely followed rule is that the client chooses the language. Clients show their preference at the first turn they make. A clerk's not following the client's choice is marked and gives rise to interpretation.

If a clerk has to open the conversation, more often than not he or she either uses Latvian or avoids to show preference. In any case, the language a clerk or salesperson uses when addressing a client is not interpreted as a preference, but only as a proposal. A client's counterproposal is unmarked.

After the first two turns, when both participants of a dialog have made their proposals, there is a preference to conform to the language of the previous turn. The more the dialog proceeds, the more the use of the other code (symbolized by a right-branching in my diagram) becomes marked. Non-conformity to the preceding turn is based on language competence and ethnolinguistic identity, either with regard to the speaker himself (in steps 7 and 15 of the diagram), or with regard to the conversation partner (5, 9, 13).

5. Evaluation and comparison with the past

Maybe the most interesting aspect of the findings presented in this paper is the fact that almost everything described here is of recent origin. If we compare the current situation with the pragmatics of code-choice within the mid-1980s, the changes are as great as possible. Only 15 years ago, the situation was completely different. At that time, Russian had been, or was at least on the way to become, the unmarked language for public communication in Riga. There were no widespread strategies for language negotiation or bilingual talk; an opening in Russian triggered a replique in Russian, and an opening in Latvian was only successful, if

both partners were native or near native speakers of Latvian. There are in fact many reports by Latvians of unsuccessful trial to negotiate the language (cf. Blinkena 1999).

There are several interrelated factors that have brought about the enormous changes in bilingual discourse strategies. What has changed in particular is the following:

☆ the status of the languages,

☆ linguistic attitudes towards both languages in question,

☆ competence: competence in Latvian as a second language has increased, second-language competence of Russian has remained stable (compare bold figures in table 2);

☆ general rules for interaction, especially in service encounters - as is widely known, there was no such rule as "the client is always right" in Soviet times, it was rather "the clerk is always right".

The change of verbal behavior among the inhabitants of Riga thus directly reflects social and sociolinguistic changes. It also shows the success of language policy in Latvia, which, while promoting only one language, has given rise to true bilingualism within a great part of society.

Many people seem to be comfortable with the current situation, so it may stabilize and last. Still, it may also be just a transitory stage, before Latvian will be the dominant language for interactions in public.

6. Further questions

In this paper I have been able only to sketch some general observations on the strategies of code-selection in bilingual conversations. More thorough investigations are needed to proof my claims and to uncover tendencies of future development. There are also other factors to be considered, which I had to leave out here, for example, the role of bystanders (see Goffman 1979/1981) - how does the presence of other persons, who are listening to the conversation but are not directly addressed, influence the selection of a language?

In addition, it would be interesting to compare the pragmatics of code-choice in Riga with the situation in other places in Latvia, for example the two next biggest towns Daugavpils and Liepaja. It would also be worth to investigate, whether the same strategies are used in bilingual talk with other languages involved, for example English in interactions with foreigners.

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