

WRITING AND LITERACY



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WRITING AND IDENTITY: SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS OF WRITING

Writing often has a symbolic value, which can be seen, for example:

- in the use of writing systems and the choice of language for public signs;
- in official and private conventions of writing, including the writing of names;
- in the association of a writing system with ethnic, religious, cultural, or national identity;
- in the reasons for changing a writing system, or for opposing such a change.



MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY IN LATVIAN

- 1585, 1586 first Latvian books (catechisms)
- 1685-1694 first Latvian Bible
- 1680s first Latvian primers (teaching children to read)

18th century:

- second edition of the Bible 1739
- first calendars 1750s
- first non-religious prose 1766 (Stenders)
- first journal 1768-69 (*Latviešu Ārste*)
- first work of popular science 1774 (Stenders: *Augstās gudrības grāmata*)

all these publications were written by non-native speakers
(mostly Germans)

Die fünff Haupt-

stück des heiligen Cate-

chismi: Neben

Der Beicht/ Frage vnd Antwort/
die da sonderlich den einfeltigen Bauern vor
vnd nach der Predigt sollen fein deutlich vnd
langsam vorgelesen vnd gebetet werden.

I.

Die heiligen zehen Gebot.

Te Desmette Deme Boußle. Exodi
tan 20. wetan.

Tas pirmais Boußlis.

Loew nhe buus chittes Deme turreth
prexan man.

Tas Oteers

Loew nhe buus Deme touwe kunge
waerdenhepatthese walfoot.

Tas Treßches

Lhoew buus so sweete Dene sweetht.

Tas cettorg

Lõw buus touw Lhewe vnde touwe

A ij

Mathe

Latvian Lutheran Catechism of 1586

„The five main parts of the Holy Catechism: As well as Question and Answer / of the Confession / **that shall be read aloud and said in prayer articulately and slowly** to the simple farmers before and after the sermon.”

THE UNFOLDING OF LITERACY IN LATVIA: READING (1680S – 1780S)



Illustration of a
Latvian primer, 18th c.
(Author: Stenders)

*"Honor to mother
who kindly does
what father can't do
because of his work."*

- By the end of the 19th century, approximately 90% (or 80%) of Latvians could read...
- ... but less than 50% of Latvians could write.
- estimated percentage of native Latvian authors of all Latvian texts (Plakans 1993 after Švābe 1958):
1844 - 3%, 1858 - 6%, 1869 - 51%

TWO WRITING TRADITIONS IN LATVIA IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY

Example: ‘we Latvians’

	Latvian (German model)	Latgalian (Polish model)
old orthography (19th century)	mehs latweeschi	mies łatwiszi
current orthography	mēs latvieši	mes latvīši
pronunciation	[mɛ:s latvieʃi]	[mʲɛs latvi:ʃi]

Next slide: „Protestant” and „Catholic”
languages in the early 18th century.

Page from a German – Swedish – Polish –
Latvian dictionary of 1705.

Blackletter (German, Swedish, Latvian) =
Protestant, Antiqua (Polish, also Latgalian) =
Catholic

Von den Geschlechtern und Verwandschaften.

Om Elächte och Skyldskab.

Der Mann	Man
Das Weib	Quinna
Der Knab	Gäße / Pilt
Das Mägdlein	Plija
Der Jüngling	Yngling
Die Jungfrau	Jungfrum
Der alte Mann	Gammal Mann
Die Brill	Glasögou
Das alte Weib	Käring
Der Groß-Vater	Farfär / Moorfar
Die Groß-Mutter	Farmor / Mormoder
Der Vater	Fader
Die Mutter	Moder
Der Sohn	Son
Die Tochter	Dotter
Der Bruder	Broder
Die Schwester	Syster
Der Stieff-Vater	Styffader
Die Stieff-Mutter	Styffmoder
Der Stieff-Sohn	Styff-Son
Die Stieff-Tochter	Styff-Dotter

O Rodzaiu Látach y Pokre- wnosci.

No Zittim un Raddeem.

M ^{Az}	Za Wihrs
Zoná	Za Seewa
Chłopię	Zas Pufens
Dzieweczka	Za Meitine
Młodzieniaszek	Zas Sellis
Panná	Za Jumprawa
Stárzec	Zas wezzajs Wihrs
Okulary	Za Brille
Bábá	Za wezza Seewa
Dziad	Zas wezz-Tehws
Bábka	Za wezz-Mahte
Ociec	Zas Tehws
Mátká	Za Mahte
Syn	Zas Dehls
Corká	Za Meita
Brát	Zas Bráhls
Siostrá	Za Mahfa
Oyczym	Zas Patchws
Mácochá	Za Pamahte
Páfierb	Zas Padehls
Páfierbicá	Za Pameita

WRITING IN LATVIAN AS A POLITICAL ACT: 1850-1918

- Second half of the 19th century: Latvian "national awakening"
- Writing (publishing) in Latvian by educated Latvians becomes a political act, a symbol for nationalism
- Public writing (newspapers) in Latvian is followed by writing in Latvian in the private domain (letters)
- Reform of the written language: vocabulary
- Proposals for reforming the orthography

AT THE SAME TIME IN LATGALIA (EASTERN LATVIA)

- 1865-1904 ban of the Latin alphabet, only Cyrillic allowed in print
- people's solution:
manual copying of books -
a new literacy practice!



AFTER WW I

- 1918 foundation of the Latvian Republic – the first Latvian state in history

Early 1920s:

- language laws (Latvian as the official state language),
- new orthography,
- printing in Latin (antiqua) typeface instead of Blackletter
- education in Latvian at all levels

LATVIAN BETWEEN TWO BIG LANGUAGES, GERMAN AND RUSSIAN

Next example:

A gravestone in a cemetery in Riga.

Family members who died in 1913 (middle), 1956 (third) and 1990 (on top), respectively, have their name spelled in different ways.

The example shows how political power affects the individual in a personal sphere.

THREE VERSIONS OF A FAMILY NAME



GILS –
Latvian

GIEL –
German
spelling

ГИЛЬ –
Russian

TODAY: POSTCARD PROMOTING LATVIA



The Latvian
alphabet
represents Latvia.

Letters with
diacritics typical
for Latvian are
highlighted (red).

The message?

- Russian is now a minority language much less visible in public space
- The Russian speaking minority is not always happy with the language policy of Latvia.
- Next slide: Poster in a campaign against Latvian-only instruction in Latvian highschools (2004)

Ā Б В Г Д Е
Ё Ж З Й Й К
Л М Н О П Р
Ѕ Т У Ф Х Ц
Ч Ш Щ Ъ Ы
Ь Э Ю Я ! ?

www.reforme-2004.net

The Russian alphabet represents the Russian language. It is distorted by Latvian diacritics (the macron indicating vowel length, a cedille under „k”, a hacek on „c”).

The highlighted letters read „gde ja” = Russian „where am I”.



CASE STUDY 2: AZERBAIJANI

SOME FACTS

- A Turk language, related to Turkish
- spoken in Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Georgia
- from the Middle Ages on written in **Arabic** (Perso-Arabic) script (as all languages of the Ottoman Empire);
- Several changes of the script within the 20th century;
- several scripts in use in various countries
- <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/azeri.htm>

- the literacy rate in 1920 was about 10%
- in 1920 Azerbaijan became a republic of the Soviet Union; here, the **Latin** script was implemented during the 1920s (why?)
- from 1939 on: **Cyrillic** script obligatory for Azerbaijani in the Soviet Union
- 1991: dissolution of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan independent republic (December 21) – parliament votes for returning to the **Latin** script (December 25)

PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

- Why change the writing system?
- How do you change a writing system – including literacy practices?
- What is needed to implement the new system and make people use it?
- What happens to books written in the old system?

“How can you speak about the identity of a people whose alphabet has been changed four times in the last seventy-five years?”

(Safizadeh 1998: 1)

quoted from Hatcher 2008

CASE STUDY 3: TURKISH

- From the Middle Ages on written in Arabic script
- 1862, 1863 – first proposals for changing the writing system (adaption of the Arabic script or change to Latin script) – not accepted, but ongoing discussions among intellectuals
- 1923 – foundation of the Republic of Turkey
- President Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) supports language and orthography reform (*dil devrimi* "language revolution")
- Campaigns; commission founded in 1928
- August 1928: public proclamation of the Latin alphabet, November 1928: parliament votes for the change
- From January 1929 the new script is compulsory
- What were the reasons for the change?
- Why was the implementation so successful?



"The goal of the alphabet reform is not to raise literacy rate. (Before the Latin alphabet) Literacy rate was low not because it was hard to learn the (Ottoman) alphabet; [...] One of the main goals of revolution was to close the doors of the past to the newer generations, break the ties with the Arab-Islam world and to lessen the influence of religion on the public (...)

"İsmet İnönü. "2" (in Turkish). Cited after Wikipedia: Atatürk's Reforms





MERRY CHRISTMAS

swedish

GOD JUL

norwegian

serbian

vesel dobo

malian

BON NATALI

albanian

lingua kaledu

thruarian

portuguese

FELIZ NATAL

chinese

圣诞快乐

polish

WESOLYCH SWIAT

english (uk)

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

serbian

ЩАСЛИВОГО РИЗДВА

MALIGAYANG PASKO

filipino

SHNGRHWOR SCORP TSANOONO

armenian

MERRY CHRISTMAS

ΚΑΛΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΑ

MERRY CHRISTMAS

turkish

NOELINIZ KUTLU OLSUN

romanian

BESELA KOPEDA

bulgarian

FRÖHE WEIHNACHTEN

MERRY CHRISTMAS

german

GLAUBT

christian

JOYEUX NOËL

french

slovak

veselie svadob

swiss german

FRÖHE WEIHNACHT

urdu

KRISHMAS MUBARAK

finnish

HYVÄÄ JOULUA

danish

GLADELIG JUL

spanish

FELIZ NAVIDAD

maltese

NADOLIG LLAWEN

maltese

BUON NATALE

italian

メリークリスマス

japanese

GELUKKIG KERSTFEEST

dutch

NOLLAIG SHONA DHUIT

irish

ЩАСЛИВОГО РОЖДЕСТВА

ukrainian

szilveszter

hungarian

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