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## THE LATGALIAN LANGUAGE AS A REGIONAL LANGUAGE IN LATVIA: A CHARACTERISATION AND IMPLICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGES IN EUROPE



*This article looks at Latgalian from a perspective of a classification of languages. It starts by discussing relevant terms relating to sociolinguistic language types. It argues that Latgalian and its speakers show considerable similarities with many languages in Europe which are considered to be regional languages – hence, also Latgalian should be classified as such. In a second part, the article uses sociolinguistic data to indicate that the perceptions of speakers confirm this classification. Therefore, Latgalian should also officially be treated with the respect that other regional languages in Europe enjoy.*

### LATGALIEŠU VALODA KĀ REĢIONĀLĀ VALODA LATVIJĀ (RAKSTUROJUMS UN SECINĀJUMI EIROPAS VALODU KONTEKSTĀ)

*Raksta mērķis ir sniegt latgaliešu valodas raksturojumu kā Latvijas, tā arī Eiropas un pasaules mazo, minoritāšu un reģionālo valodu kontekstā, skatot šo jautājumu no valodu klasifikācijas perspektīvas.*

*Raksta sākumā, balstoties uz teorētiskās literatūras studijām un empīriskajiem datiem, tiek skaidroti valodniecības termini, kas dažādos teorētiskajos avotos un normatīvajos dokumentos ir definēti atšķirīgi (valoda, dialekts, reģionālā valoda, minoritāšu valoda, autohtonā valoda). Nevienādā interpretācija atklājas arī dažādu valstu attieksmē pret noteikta statusa piešķiršanu valstī lietotajām valodām vai dialektiem. Tālāk pētījumā tiek raksturota latgaliešu valoda, tās lietojuma sfēras mūsdienās, oficiālais statuss Latvijā. Uzskatos par latgaliešu valodas statusu atklājas Latgales iedzīvotāju lingvistiskā attieksme. Raksta noslēgumā tiek dots kopsavilkums un secinājumi.*

*Pēc rakstā aplūkotojumiem kritērijiem un salīdzinājuma ar valodu situāciju citās Eiropas valstīs var secināt, ka latgaliešu valodai piemīt reģionālās valodas pazīmes. Tomēr atsevišķas valodas (reģionālās valodas) definēšana nenozīmē arī nošķirtu identitāti, latgaliešu subetnos var būt latviešu etnosa sastāvdaļa. Jaunākie pētījumi par valodas un etniskās identitātes attiecībām (Ammon 2010) atklāj arī citus terminus un identitātes interpretācijas iespējas: primārā (lokālā/reģionālā), sekundārā (nacionālā), terciārā (ultranacionālā, piemēram,*

*Eiropas) identitāte . Turklāt tiek uzsvērts, ka tās nav jāuztver opozīcijā, drīzāk otrādi – kā indivīda iespēja pretendēt uz vairāk nekā vienu piederību.*

*Izpratnē par latgališu valodas nozīmi gan reģionā, gan visā Latvijā nozīmīgs ir salīdzinājums ar Norvēģiju, proti, ar jaunnorvēģu valodu (Nynorsk). Gan latgališu, gan jaunnorvēģu valodas lietojums raksturīgs abu valstu teritoriālajai, sociālekonomiskajai un kultūras perifērijai, abās valodās tiek izdotas grāmatas un raksti periodikā, tās tiek lietotas gan neformālā, gan formālā saziņā, piemēram, radio un baznīcā. Tomēr jaunnorvēģu valodai atšķirībā no latgališu valodas 1885. gadā ir oficiāli noteikts vienlīdzīgs statuss ar „centra valodu” – bukmolu (Bokmål). Abas rakstu formas Norvēģijā tiek lietotas administratīvajās iestādēs un skolās, arī publiski pieejamā informācija tiek sniegta abās valodās. Turklāt paralēli tiek lietoti dialekti, kas radniecīgi ir tuvāki bukmolam vai jaunnorvēģu valodai (Karkonens-Svensons 2007). Norvēģijas piemērs rāda, ka ir iespējama divu standartizētu valodas formu paralēla apguve, lietojums un funkcionēšana vienas valsts līmenī.*

*Valodas attīstībā nozīmīga ir ne tikai valsts attieksme, bet arī iedzīvotāju viedoklis un aktīva līdzdalība valodas plānošanas un saglabāšanas procesos. Pētījuma „Valodas Austrumlatvijā” iegūtie dati rāda, ka ievērojams skaits aptaujāto (35%) atbalsta latgališu valodas lietojumu pilsētas/pagasta pārvaldes iestādēs. Tikai nedaudz mazāk – 34% aptaujāto nevēlētos latgališu valodas izmantojumu municipālajās iestādēs, savukārt 31% aptaujāto nav viedokļa šajā jautājumā, kas norāda, ka Latvijā iedzīvotāji nav pieraduši brīvi un aktīvi paust savu nostāju valodas vai citu jautājumu plānošanā un lēmumu pieņemšanā.*

*Reģionālās valodas statusa piešķiršana latgališu valodai ir svarīga gan no sociolingvistiskā viedokļa, gan no formālās puses. Tas sekmētu valodas apguvi, valodas sociolingvistisko funkciju paplašināšanu, valodas izpēti un valodas korpusa papildināšanu, kā arī paaugstinātu valodas prestižu.*

## **1 Introduction**

This paper discusses the Latgalian language in Eastern Latvia in the context of sociolinguistic language classifications in Europe, in particular regarding its status as a regional language. The aim is to show with which other languages it can be compared from a perspective of societal status, and how it can be classified in the light of sociolinguistic relations to other varieties. For this purpose, we will at first discuss a number of relevant concepts and names of language types before looking more precisely at Latgalian. In a second part, we will look at current perceptions on usage, functions and status of Latgalian and at attitudes and comments by the Latgalian population on these issues.

## **2 Majorities, Minorities, Regional Languages and Dialects: Some Remarks on a Common Terminological Confusion**

### **2.1 Language**

The question of what is a *language* is, as is commonly known, difficult if not impossible to answer. Its perception depends on a variety of individual perspectives and academic traditions. One usually uncontested feature of what classifies as a full-fledged language is, however, that it

allows for a rather high level of variation such as having a (written) standard variety, non-regional sub-standards or vernaculars, and regional varieties which are often labelled as dialects (cf. Fishman 2010: xxiv). Regarding Latvian, for instance, we may identify the written standard (commonly referred to as the Latvian „literary language”), social varieties (known as slang or as vernaculars), functional varieties (e. g. styles or technical jargons), and regional varieties (often referred to as dialects).

## **2.2 Dialect**

A *dialect* is a variety of a language which is historically bound to a certain geographic area and which has certain structures (grammatical, lexical, phonetical) which in themselves form a complete system. A dialect is in the common understanding closely related to a certain supra-regional standard language, although the definition of what counts as a dialect and what is seen as a language in its own right usually depends on political decisions and historical developments of standardisation and political unity. In contrast to the wide-spread use of the term among the general public, the linguistic understanding of dialect is strictly neutral and does not assign any specific value to the term – it is not better or worse or of a higher or lower level than the standard language. Dialects may also be classified from a perspective of different geographical levels: So-called basic dialects are local varieties with a very limited range, possibly even only one village or, in mountainous regions, one valley with a very small number of speakers. Basic dialects are often contrasted to dialects of wider communication – moderately standardised oral varieties which enable speakers of a larger area to communicate without having to use a literary or national standard. Such regional standards are also frequently called regional languages – we will come back to this distinction when discussing regional and minority languages.

Quite frequently, dialects have preserved more ancient forms than standardised varieties on e.g. the phonological, lexical or syntactical level, since dialects have not gone through systematical processes of levelling out differences for finding a normative compromise. Yet, it should not be forgotten that the standardisation of a language is often based on a specific regional variety. Standard Latvian, for instance, is based on the varieties of central Latvia (i.e. Southern Livonia and the areas around Riga and Cēsis), Standard Estonian is based on the Northern varieties from the region around Tallinn. Occasionally, however, standard languages may also be based on a compromise of different historical varieties from several regions, such as Standard Slovenian (Auty 1963).

The border between dialects and languages is often quite unclear and may be heavily disputed, as has frequently been the case in discussions whether the Baltic varieties in the region of

Latgale can be regarded as a separate language (Latgalian) or as dialects of Latvian (High Latvian dialectal varieties). Usually the distinction between languages and dialects may be based on three types of criteria: linguistic, social and political (cf. Mason, Gasser 2002, Fasold 2005). First, important linguistic factors which contribute to a perception of a variety as a separate language are (written) standardisation, a tradition of written texts, specific functions of that variety in society, and the question of the linguistic distance (often referred to by the German term „Abstand”), i.e. (non-)intelligibility with neighbouring varieties (Kloss 1967, Schiffman). Yet, there are many languages which have never been written (in fact the majority of the world’s languages), are by no means standardised, but are undoubtedly separate languages according to the criterion of distance and of intelligibility. Therefore, a distinction of languages from dialects only on such grounds does not do justice to the complex nature of this question.

Second, the social criterion relates to the ability of different individuals to perceive each other as being part of the same speech community. If individuals from different geographical areas may understand each other’s varieties and perceive each other as speaking the same language, although their speech shows systematic differences, we may speak of different dialects of one language. Yet, inhabitants of, for instance, Norway, Sweden and Denmark usually understand each other without too many difficulties, but their varieties are perceived as different languages. It is here where the third, the political criterion plays a role – each of these languages is perceived as a distinct language, based on their „belonging” to three different states and the perception of the inhabitants that these languages are national symbols.

Criteria which relate to the number of speakers of a variety are also difficult to maintain as relevant for the distinction between dialects and languages. Even if speakers of one dialect of a language are, as a fraction of the total speech community of that language, necessarily fewer in number than all speakers of that language, this does not imply that languages always have a lot of speakers. Quite the contrary – the vast majority of the world’s languages have only a few thousand speakers or less and thereby by far fewer speakers than many dialects of „big” languages. In Latvia, for instance, Livonian has only a few speakers left, amounting to only a few hundred when including learners and second language speakers (cf. Ernštreits).

### ***2.3 Regional Language and Minority Language***

*Regional languages* and *minority languages* are common names for languages which are spoken not as the dominant languages of a state. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which has been signed by 33 and ratified by 25 of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, refuses to provide a concrete definition of either term in order to avoid

pressing any speech community into a specific category. It only states that regional or minority languages are varieties which are „traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population” and are „different from the official language(s) of that State”. It explicitly „does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants” (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 1992).

In spite of the refusal to define these terms in the Charter, there is a certain tradition in the academic discourse how to understand them (cf. Wicherkiewicz 2004). Both terms refer to varieties which are most often spoken by numerically smaller speech communities in a certain area than a majority population in, a state (but not always, since minorities may also be defined by their socio-economic status and their participation in power rather than their size, e. g. in South Africa). The term *minority language* usually denotes clearly separate varieties, and its speakers often (but not always) have a distinct ethnic identity. A minority language in one state may be a majority language in another state – e. g. Hungarian in Romania, German in Italy or Polish in Latvia.

*Regional languages*, on the other hand, are more difficult to characterise and are more often disputed in status. Speakers are often characterised as having an ethnic sub-identity, i. e. they have a distinct regional identity within the main ethnic identity of a state, and their language is thereby often closely related to the dominant language. That means that speakers of a regional language have a regional identity which is complementary to the identity of the main ethnic group, not in opposition to it. In this, there is a possible notion of primary (local/regional), secondary (national) and possibly tertiary (super-national, e.g. European) identities (cf. Ammon 2010: 208) which co-exist rather than being in opposition to each other (although the designation as primary, secondary and tertiary implies that the local/regional identity is more important than the national and the super-national which does not necessarily have to be true). Some authors (cf. Spiekermann 2010: 350) use the term *regional language* also for geographically-bound regional vernaculars which are used as slightly standardised means of communication between speakers from different smaller areas in one larger region with certain linguistic similarities. In this understanding, regional languages as varieties spoken on an intermediate level stand in opposition to basic dialects in the smallest geographical units (cf. above). In this sense, regional languages may or may not have a written standard, although the recognition as a regional language is supported if there is a written tradition.

One important step in the classification of a variety (or a group of varieties) as a regional language, besides the historical tradition and/or the development of a written version, is political

recognition and the prestige that is connected to it. In this, regional languages are clearly distinct from dialects or dialect groups. Low German was recognised by the German state through its inclusion into the German ratification of the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages (cf. Hahn). Similarly, Kashubian in the North of Poland has since the 1990s continuously expanded to schools and media and is today occasionally also used on road signs. Thereby, both individual activists and later also the Polish state have helped to create the prestige for the Kashubian language needed to be recognised as a regional language (<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/kashubian.htm>).

The example of Low German (Niederdeutsch, Plattdeutsch) clearly illustrates the concept of regional language. The speakers of Low German in Germany generally perceive themselves as ethnic Germans with a specific linguistic tradition. After a century of functional decline, almost all Low German speakers today also have a fluent command of Standard High German, but there are still several millions of speakers. Low German varieties are largely distinct from High German varieties on all linguistic levels – phonetically, lexically and morphosyntactically – but also show quite a lot of variation among each other. Written Low German is therefore a standardised compromise between the large number of different basic dialects extending over almost the entire Northern half of Germany. On the other hand, speakers of Low German varieties in the Netherlands usually have a command of Standard Dutch and see themselves as having Dutch ethnicity and of being loyal to the Dutch state, with a certain regional linguistic and ethnic sub-identity within the Dutch paradigm. For this constellation it is essential that Low German varieties, even if they are systematically distinct from both Standard High German and Standard Dutch, are closely related to both standard languages, and so are Standard High German and Standard Dutch, with Low German being linguistically in between the two. Therefore, there is no unpenetrable boundary and speakers may see themselves and their varieties as part of a linguistic and ethnic continuum.

As another example, many speakers of English in Scotland also use oral varieties of the regional language of Scots (cf. Marten 2009). There is also a standardised written version of Scots based on a medieval tradition of writing, and it is said that the majority of the Scottish population uses some features of Scots even when they speak English. The border between Scottish English and Scots is thereby not always clear; here, we can again rather speak of a continuum of varieties. In this, Scots is no marker of a distinct ethnicity in contrast to Scottish English, but rather a feature which reassures Scottishness in contrast to English identity. Scots is thereby clearly a regional language, in contrast to Scottish Gaelic which as a Celtic language belongs to a different language family. Scottish Gaelic is therefore a minority language, and its speakers show by far

more features of a distinct ethnicity – although this is disputed and also most Gaelic speakers would see themselves as both Scottish and Gaelic, but on a different branch of sub-ethnicity as non-Gaelic Scots. Many Scots speakers, in contrast, would not see a difference between their ethnicity and the ethnicity of non-Scots speaking inhabitants of Scotland.

In Latvia, most speakers of Latgalian consider themselves to be both Latvian and Latgalian at the same time. Being Latvian relates to being part of the majority population and belonging to the Latvian State, whereas the Latgalian part of their identity exists as a regional and ethnic sub-identity in addition to being Latvian. In this sense, Latgalian shows clear features of a regional language concentrated in a limited territory of the State and strongly connected to a specific regional identity. At the same time, it has to be stressed that these territorial and ethnic boundaries are flexible, penetrable, and subject to changes in society and in the lives of individuals, for instance through migration within Latvia, marriage between Latgalians and other Latvians, and the question where and with which languages children are raised.

#### ***2.4 Autochthonous Language and Migrant Language***

The last terminological explanation shall clarify the terms *autochthonous language* and *migrant language*. This distinction relates to the question of whether a language has traditionally been used in a territory or not. If a speech community has historically lived in an area, we speak of an autochthonous language of that area, whereas migrant languages are varieties more recently imported through migration processes. The identification as either of these may be difficult in the sense that it is unclear for how long a speech community has to have been present in the area to be counted as autochthonous. Regional languages are, because their basis are varieties of the local population related to the main language of a country, usually autochthonous languages. Minority languages are more difficult to classify – languages of recent migrants are certainly not considered to be autochthonous, but the limit can be very arbitrary such as in Poland, where the state language law defines that languages are autochthonous if they have been spoken in a territory for at 100 years at the time of passing the law. Problems of classification also arise where a language is spoken by both traditional inhabitants and migrants. An example of this is Russian in Latvia: a relatively small proportion of Russian speakers are traditional inhabitants who settled on today's Latvian territory as religious refugees (Old Believers) several centuries ago or who came as part of the administrative elite during Tsarist times. The vast majority of today's Russian speakers, however, are Soviet-time migrants or their descendents, i.e. they have come to Latvia only within the past few decades (cf. Apine/Volkovs 2007: 238). In Latvia, the only autochthonous language which is recognised by law is Livonian, although many other

languages such as Polish or Lithuanian are also spoken by traditional speech communities ([http://www.vvk.lv/doc\\_upl/Valodas\\_Latvijaa\\_LV.pdf](http://www.vvk.lv/doc_upl/Valodas_Latvijaa_LV.pdf)).

### 3 Latgalian

From the above it has become quite obvious why Latgalian rightfully can be considered to be a regional language. Similarly as the examples of Low German, Scots or Kashubian, Latgalian oral varieties are a continuum within the traditional basic dialects spoken in Latvia, and its speakers have a clear distinct regional linguistic and ethnic identity within Latvian identity. At the same time, the tradition of written Latgalian in the 19th and 20th centuries, which in spite of its suppression never entirely ceased to exist, and the re-adaptation of a written standard in 2007 as a compromise between basic dialects – just as in the examples of Low German or Scots – also show from a point of view of linguistic and social prestige how Latgalian is more than just a group of dialects. Whereas Latvian is the language of prestige, of official functions and of wider communication within Latvia as a whole, Latgalian is of regional importance and has as such, in addition to oral usage, also been used in regional media.

The question is now to consider how Latgalian as a regional language manifests itself when looking at its speakers and their attitudes to Latgalian. The number of users of Latgalian, their linguistic identity, the functions in which Latgalian has been used, and the practice of writing all point to a level of practical vitality of Latgalian in modern Latgale. The survey *Valodas Austrumlatvijā/Languages in Eastern Latvia* conducted between 2006 and 2009 at Rēzeknes Augstskolā (RA) in cooperation with the University of Milano and the CELE research centre (also Milano) interviewed 9076 respondents in all parts of Latgale on their language use and attitudes. Data from this survey show that 27% of the respondents consider themselves predominantly as Latgalian. 33% use Latgalian for different functions and 57% consider Latgalian to be important or necessary for integration into local society (Šuplinska, Lazdiņa 2009). At the same time, research for a linguoterritorial dictionary of Latgale (RA, 2010) show that the Latgalian language is considered to be the second most characteristic concept of Latgale (the most important being Aglona, the famous Catholic church and place of pilgrimage) – 1763 of 1959 respondents considered the Latgalian language to be of importance for Latgalianness.

#### 3.1 Functions of Latgalian today

As the survey „Languages in Eastern Latvia” shows, oral Latgalian is used today on an everyday basis in the private sphere, in education and culture, in the church, but on an ad-hoc basis also in



local administration. One respondent revealed in an interview that the Latgalian language „*has its own cultural richness, it is used (...) in schools as well as in administrative institutions, but also in different situations of social life and communication*” (Mežāre, 2008).

In 2007, the state-run central language centre in Latvia officially recognised a Latgalian orthography and developed general principles of writing and grammar (LR Tieslietu ministrijas Valsts valodas centrs 2008). Fundamental for spreading and teaching Latgalian are the Latgalian primer „Latgališu ābece” (Iementars, 1992) and the textbooks „Vasals” (2003) and „Latgališu volūda 1” (2003) by Lidija Leikuma and Juris Cibuļš. Written Latgalian is today used in several media, e. g. the monthly insert „Mōras Zeme” in the daily „Rēzeknes Vēstis”, the monthly insert „Latgališu Gazeta” in the daily „Latgales Laiks” and the Catholic journal „Katoļu Dzeive”. In average five books annually are published in Latgalian by the publisher *Latgales Kultūras centra izdevniecība/Publishing House of Latgalian Culture Centre*. In addition, there are scientific publications such as „Via Latgalica”, internet blogs and web sites (e. g. [www.naktineice.lv](http://www.naktineice.lv), [www.lakuga.lv](http://www.lakuga.lv), [www.ru.lv](http://www.ru.lv), <http://lgsc.lv>). On a more day-to-day basis Latgalian can be found on menus (e. g. in the cafēs „Olmāra” and „Mōls” in Rēzekne), on stickers (e. g. „*Latgališu volūdai draudzeiga vīta*”), on decorative car number plates (e. g. „*Vasals*”), and printed on T-shirts, cups, bags etc. In the linguistic landscape of Latgale, research between 2008 and 2010 found Latgalian on only 29 of more than 1,000 signs (company names, graffiti, advertisements, stickers, memorial signs). Only four of these signs were government signs, all the others being private signs (cf. the pictures in this article). Occasionally Latgalian is also used on bilingual information such as on announcements for theatre performances or concerts.



Picture 1 *Signs in Latgalian in Daugavpils (the Name of a Hotel, 2010) and Rēzekne (the Name of a Real Estate Agency, 2008)*

1. attēls *Uzraksti latgaliski Daugavpilī (viesnīcas nosaukums, 2010) un Rēzeknē (2010)*

### ***3.2 The official status of Latgalian in Latvia***

The protection of linguistic diversity is one of the officially declared aims of the European Union, as can be seen also from the European Charter of Fundamental Rights whose Article 22 reads: „The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity“ (European Charter of Fundamental Rights 2007). Reality, however, often looks different – not all languages are given equal value and protection. The 1999 Latvian language law declares that „the State language of the Republic of Latvia is Latvian” and that „the state guarantees the maintenance, protection and development of written Latgalian as a historical variety of Latvian” (Valsts valodas likums 1999). Yet, the support of Latgalian by the state has so far been mostly symbolic. Since 2004 the State language agency (today Latvian language agency) has supported only two scientific projects related to written Latgalian; one other project has been supported jointly by the Ministry of Education and Science, the „Letonika” programme and the State Culture Capital Foundation. The Latvian state has in no way developed a coherent programme for the maintenance of Latgalian, there is no state-administered institution which has been assigned responsibility for Latgalian, and there is no separate budget item for Latgalian in the state’s budget. It is therefore obvious that the state does very little to fulfil its self-imposed duty to maintain, protect and develop Latgalian.

In principle, the situation of the Latvian and Latgalian written languages may be compared to the situation of e.g. the written standards of Bokmål and Nynorsk in Norway. In Norway, both written norms are used in administrative, socio-economic and cultural contexts, in books and periodicals. Oral varieties related to either written standard are used in both formal and informal situations. Nynorsk as the by far less wide-spread of the two written versions has since 1885 been officially recognised, and both languages are used in education and for public information. In addition to the promotion of the written norms of Bokmål and Nynorsk, the use and maintenance of dialects is officially supported (Karkkonens-Svensons 2007). This example shows clearly that the maintenance and support of two closely related written standards in one state is possible and may be successful – and that the maintenance, protection and development of a smaller written standard does not imply a weakening of the speech community in total or even a danger of separatism.

### ***3.3 Attitudes towards Latgalian by the Population of Latgale***

If Latgalian counts as a regional language, and if there are examples of how a state can function with two written standads, the question may be asked if this would be desirable for Latgalian. The President of the Latvian Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (Latblul), Jānis Mednis,

explained in an interview how important it would be for Latgalian to gain official status as a regional official language: Being recognised as „a regional language means that there is legal protection; this implies a role of the state in solving problems related to the language. In addition, there is a financial implication for e.g. the education of teachers of Latgalian, so that children get the possibility to develop Latgalian at school, and to support textbooks, literature and electronic media in Latgalian” (Krauze 2009). A similar view is explained by the two linguists Ilga Šuplinska and Lidija Leikuma in an interview in January 2011 (Mūrniece 2011). More important than an activist’s view in this, however, is arguably the attitude of the speakers of Latgalian and of the population of Latgale in general. As the survey „Languages in Eastern Latvia” reveals, 35% of the respondents would support the use of Latgalian in local administration, whereas 34% are against and 31% have no opinion on that. This result shows on the one hand that the population is divided in its attitude to Latgalian, but also that many inhabitants are not used to caring about their linguistic environment.

The following are a number of exemplary comments on Latgalian from the survey:

- *In those areas of Latgale where a larger number of people know Latgalian, it should of course be allowed to speak Latgalian in official contexts (Vīpe, 2008).*
- *From a Latgalian perspective, of course it should be taught at school and all forces should be used to support and develop it. On the state level, I don’t know. Do people from Kurzeme (Curlandia) need it? (...) I assume that Latgalian should get status as a regional language (Vīpe, 2008).*
- *Latgalian has to get the status as a language in its own right, so that it will survive in competition with other languages, in order to maintain both oral and written traditions (Vārkava, 2008).*
- *The level of Latgalian usage in the public sphere is tragic. If we wish that those who feel Latgalian (...) and those who speak Latgalian and wish that Latgalian would get its place at school as an elective, this would be a first start, with something we have to begin, and why not use use Latgalian on the streets? And the language law says that Latgalian is a form of Latvian, why then can’t Latgalian be used? (Rēzekne, 2010).*
- *The Latgalian language shapes Latvian identity, therefore any type of its usage is important (Aglona, 2010).*

#### 4 Conclusion

As this overview of Latgalian in the light of a sociolinguistic classification of languages has shown, Latgalian is comparable to other languages in Europe which are usually considered to be regional languages. These examples also show that being a regional language does not imply a separate identity, but that Latgalian linguistic identity may be seen as a sub-ethnos within Latvian identity. Yet, attitudes by the Latvian State do not pay justice to this classification. In spite of the self-imposed legal duty by the Latvian State to maintain and develop Latgalian, there are only very few and inconsistent steps by the state to recognise it. An option would be to declare Latgalian a regional language also in the official sense – for instance to assign a number of parishes in the core Latgalian area where Latgalian may be used in administration, education etc. and where it thereby gains official status as a regional language. The example of Norway shows that two written norms may exist in society under the roof of one national language – and by declaring Latgalian a regional language and a second written variety of Latvian, there would be no sign of excluding Latgalian identity from the main Latvian State identity.

A fundamental prerequisite for this, however, is sufficient support for such measures by the Latgalian-speaking population. As the research results quoted have shown, there is such support by a substantial proportion of the population in Latgale. Therefore, declaring Latgalian a regional language – both from a sociolinguistic and from an official point of view – should be high on the agenda of the Latvian state in order to fulfil its linguistic duties towards its population.

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