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Identity and the Language Attitude- Strategy Alignment

A Study of Balanced Bilinguals in Post-2022 Latvia

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Abstract

This research examines the relationship between the language attitudes and language strategies of balanced Latvian-Russian bilinguals in Latvia, in the context of the country's language policies, which shifted towards securitisation following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. To this end, the study proposes an explanatory model in which identity negotiation serves as the key mediating mechanism, whereby identity mediates the alignment of internal language attitudes and external language strategies across different domains. Employing a qualitative approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 balanced bilinguals. Data were analysed using narrative and discourse analysis, identifying four significant narratives. The findings reveal that, within the securitised linguistic context of post-2022 Latvia, there is no simple linear correlation between language attitudes and language strategies; rather, alignment between the two is achieved through the mediation of linguistic identity across different domains. The study further finds that identity not only serves as a mediating mechanism between attitudes and strategies but is also continually reshaped through a process of feedback, thereby altering the initial language attitudes and forming a dynamic loop of continuous identity negotiation within balanced bilinguals in Latvia.

Keywords: Post-2022 Latvia, Identity Negotiation, Language Attitude, Language Strategy, Balanced Bilinguals

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Historically, Latvia has long been a bilingual society, grappling with the linguistic issue of Latvian and Russian. From the mid-19th century onwards, intellectuals such as the “Young Latvians” (*Jaunlatvieši*) promoted Latvia’s first national awakening under the slogan “language is nation”¹. However, during the late 19th century, the Russian imperial government mandated the use of Russian as the exclusive language of the bureaucracy and education. These decrees were intended to facilitate the integration of the Baltic provinces more closely into the empire.² Nevertheless, merely two decades later, the conflict between national awakening and oppression from the Russian imperial government reached its zenith in 1905, when one of the most significant demands of strikers and local councils was the reintroduction of Latvian into public administration and the judicial system. Language has since transformed from a cultural symbol to a political weapon.³ Although new-born Republic of Latvia had offered a period of significant development and progress to its language prior to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939 and the subsequent incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940, the establishment of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic again drastically altered the linguistic situation within the country, as within Soviet Union, Russian functioned as the lingua franca, with immigration from other constituent republics gave rise to a form of asymmetrical bilingualism. This resulted in, again, a decline

¹ Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 91-92.

² *Ibid.*, 100.

³ Toivo U. Raun, “The Revolution of 1905 in the Baltic Provinces and Finland,” *Slavic Review* 43, no. 3 (1984): 453–67.

in the status of Latvian and an increase in that of Russian.⁴ In the aftermath of Latvia's restoration of independence in 1991, Latvian once again became the sole state language. This was not merely a policy shift, but rather a crucial step in the "re-Latvianisation" of the public sphere and the re-establishment of national identity after decades of Soviet occupation.⁵ Despite the apparent clarity of the status of Latvian and Russian languages following Latvia's restoration of independence, the 2012 referendum on the designation of Russian as a second state language revealed the intricacies of the linguistic issue as well as a wide gap between the Latvian and Russian communities in Latvia. Despite years of overt or covert competition between Russian and Latvian in Latvia, Russian continues to have a significant presence in the country; as of 2024, 37.7 per cent of Latvian citizens still identify as native Russian speakers. This proportion is significantly higher than in Lithuania, another Baltic state, and slightly higher than in Estonia, placing Latvia among the highest in all former Soviet states. For the Latvian populace, the rejuvenation of the Latvian language was seen as a means of safeguarding national sovereignty and the accomplishments of the 19th-century national awakening. Conversely, for a segment of the Russian-speaking community, it was an articulation of a long-standing marginalisation.⁶

The intensification of linguistic and ethnic tensions within Latvia has been further exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine war. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched its so-called "special military operation" against Ukraine, which has progressively escalated into an ongoing war. The Russo-Ukraine war has fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe, creating new political realities that will affect the region for years to come. The fact that Latvia, and indeed the Baltic states as a whole, occupy the most vulnerable segment of NATO's eastern flank, sharing direct borders with Russia or its ally Belarus, has resulted in a substantial degradation of the region's security environment.⁷ According to a survey conducted by the Latvian State Chancellery in March 2024, 51.5% of respondents reported experiencing fear for their own safety, that of their

⁴ Ina Druviete, "Linguistic Human Rights in the Baltic States," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 127, no. 1 (1997): 165.

⁵ Uldis Ozolins, "Upwardly Mobile Languages: The Politics of Language in the Baltic States," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 15, no. 2–3 (1994): 161–69.

⁶ David Lublin, "The 2012 Latvia Language Referendum," *Electoral Studies* 32, no. 2 (2013): 385–87.

⁷ Maria Mälksoo, "NATO's New Front: Deterrence Moves Eastward," *International Affairs* 100, no. 2 (2024): 531.

families, and the nation's future.⁸ This pervasive anxiety is closely mirrored by a media landscape where 79.9 per cent of respondents identified the Russia-Ukraine war as the most dominant topic.⁹ Saturation of war-related content in media has provided a platform for a political elite discourse that portrays Russia as an existential threat,¹⁰ Russia-related matters within the domestic agenda—including Russian speakers, Russian-language media, and Russian-language education—have shifted from conventional political issues characterised as “integration, minority rights, and education policy” to security concerns centred on “national security, information security, and potential internal risks” with increased significance in domestic political priorities,¹¹ which leads an accelerated transition of Russian from a “means of communication” to a “marginalized linguistic resource with potential risk” characterised by an ever-dwindling presence in public spheres, including information space, education and administration. For instance, in 2023, the Latvian Parliament elevated “information space security and social cohesion” to a national security priority¹². In the implementation of the national security concept, the Latvian language, as used in public media content, was linked to the “unified information space,” fundamentally ousting Russian as an equivalent source of information. The amendments to the Education Law (*Izglītības likums*) and the General Education Law (*Vispārējais izglītības likums*) adopted in 2022 explicitly stipulate that all minority schools must transition to Latvian-language instruction within three years.¹³ Moreover, the amendment to the Education Law adopted on 9 May 2024 stipulates the discontinuation of Russian as a second foreign language in basic education, whose objective is to completely abolish Russian as an optional subject in schools.¹⁴ The revised Administrative Penalties Law (*Administratīvo sodu likums*), amended at the end of 2024, transforms the use of the Latvian

⁸ Valsts kanceleja, Iedzīvotāju drošības sajūta un citi aktuāli jautājumi: Kvantitatīvs pētījums (2024. gada oktobris–decembris) [Citizens' Sense of Safety and Other Current Issues: A Quantitative Study (October–December 2024)] (Rīga: Valsts kanceleja, 2024), 8.

⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ J. L. Schulze and J. Pupcenoks, “Securitizing Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia: The Frame-Policy Nexus before and after Russia's Invasion of Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers* 53, no. 5 (2025): 1036.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Latvijas Republikas Saeima, “Saeima apstiprina jauno Nacionālās drošības koncepciju,” [The Saeima approves the new National Security Concept] September 28, 2023, accessed January 30, 2026. (saeima.lv)

¹³ Latvijas Republikas Saeima. “Grozījumi Izglītības likumā.” [Amendments to the Education Law] Latvijas Vēstnesis, no. 202 (2022).

¹⁴ Latvijas Republikas Saeima, “Grozījumi Izglītības likumā,” [Amendments to the Education Law] Latvijas Vēstnesis, no. 100 (2024), adopted May 9, 2024.

language from a “social norm” into a “legal liability” by substantially increasing the maximum penalty amounts,¹⁵ should there be any failure to “attain the prescribed proficiency level in the use of the national language while performing professional duties”.¹⁶ These domestic political issues and legislation constitute not merely a process of de-Russification, but also one of securitisation: by framing language as a security concern, and even elevating any threat to linguistic integrity to a threat against national sovereignty, the state is able to employ unconventional and more interventionist measures to transform public spaces into monitored domains, thereby maintaining citizens’ political loyalty to the state – or at the very least, their compliance with its directives, and potentially creating a high-pressure environment that challenges an individual’s internal language attitudes.

In this context, it is particularly important to study Latvian–Russian bilinguals who are able to achieve near-native proficiency in both languages across all contexts¹⁷, and more specifically those who can adjust their language use according to different domains¹⁸—namely, balanced Latvian–Russian bilinguals and balanced bilingual groups within Latvia. As when bilinguals can express themselves fluently in both languages, language choice transforms from a constraint of ability into a representation of the interplay between language attitudes and social survival:¹⁹ they can thereby present themselves through distinct language choices and, through this choice, articulate how they wish to be positioned within specific domains.²⁰ Just as an individual’s language choices manifest the highest degree of agency when proficiency in both languages is balanced,²¹ this study focuses on balanced

¹⁵ For the difference before and after the increase of maximal penalty, see Latvijas Republikas Saeima. "Grozījumi Administratīvo sodu likumā par pārkāpumiem pārvaldes, sabiedriskās kārtības un valsts valodas lietošanas jomā." [Amendments to the Administrative Sanctions Law for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order, and Use of the State Language] adopted November 14, 2024. and Administratīvo sodu likums par pārkāpumiem pārvaldes, sabiedriskās kārtības un valsts valodas lietošanas jomā [Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order, and Use of the Official Language], 19. pants. Latvijas Vēstnesis, Nr. 12 (2020).

¹⁶ Latvijas Republikas Saeima. "Grozījumi Administratīvo sodu likumā par pārkāpumiem pārvaldes, sabiedriskās kārtības un valsts valodas lietošanas jomā." [Amendments to the Administrative Sanctions Law for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order, and Use of the State Language] adopted November 14, 2024.

¹⁷ Earliest definition of “Balanced Bilinguals”: Hugo Baetens Beardsmore, *Bilingualism: Basic Principles* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1986), 7-10.

¹⁸ The holistic view of Balanced Bilinguals: François Grosjean, "The Bilingual's Language Modes," in *One Mind, Two Languages: Bilingual Language Processing*, ed. Nicol Janet (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 1-22.

¹⁹ Howard Giles, *Communication Accommodation Theory: Negotiating Personal Relationships and Social Identities Across Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 38-40.

²⁰ Aneta Pavlenko, “Bilingual Selves,” in *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, vol. 56 (2006), 1.

²¹ Ibid.

bilinguals to methodologically control the proficiency variable, ensuring that the language choices and code-switching and their alignment with language attitudes observed in research subjects are outcomes of identity mediation, occurring after they perceive social pressure gradients. In other words, Latvian-Russian balanced bilinguals represent the optimal group for investigating how language attitudes are shaped by social realities and translated into language strategies. Furthermore, in Latvian society—where language issues concerning Latvian and Russian are currently particularly prominent—examining how bilinguals who maintain a balance between Latvian and Russian reconcile their linguistic identities in relation to these two languages is of significant importance for gaining a deeper understanding of linguistic and ethnic issues in Latvia.

1.2 Research Gaps & Research Questions

Much of the current sociolinguistic research on Latvia focuses on how policy pressures influence language attitudes and shifts in Latvian use within public spaces. For instance, a 2024 survey released by Latvia's Ministry of Culture²² revealed that despite increased Latvian use in public spaces, a growing sense of “psychological alienation” exists among ethnic Russians. The research demonstrates inconsistencies between language strategies and language attitudes, though the study offers no further explanation for the causes of this discrepancy. This underscores why introducing the explanatory causal factors, in this study, the concept of identity, is necessary to address the research gap in explaining the non-linear relationship between language attitudes and language strategies. In existing research, the surveyed populations also exhibit a high degree of homogeneity, typically categorising Latvia's inhabitants as either “Latvian-speaking” or “Russian-speaking” and strictly dividing native Latvian speakers and native Russian speakers into two distinct groups. However, according to the 2023 Adult Education Survey published by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia,²³ although approximately 64.3 per cent of residents have Latvian as their mother tongue, while

²² Kultūras ministrija, Pētījums par sabiedrības saliedētību un piederības sajūtu: 2024. gada ziņojums [Study on Social Cohesion and Sense of Belonging: 2024 Report] (Rīga: Kultūras ministrija, 2024).

²³ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB), "Latvian is Mother Tongue of 64% of the Population: Results of the Adult Education Survey," press release, October 24, 2023, <https://stat.gov.lv/>.

37.7 per cent have Russian as their mother tongue, many identify as bilingual: among residents whose native language is not Latvian, 89.3 per cent indicated they can understand or use Latvian, with 35.7 per cent self-identifying as having reached a proficient level. Among residents whose native language is not Russian, a substantial 91.3 per cent reported being able to understand or use Russian, with 64 per cent considering themselves at an advanced level. Consequently, Latvia harbours a balanced bilingual population comprising approximately 50 per cent²⁴ of its citizens, yet this group remains largely unexplored by research. As previously noted, monolinguals' language choices are constrained by ability, whereas for balanced bilinguals, their choices depend on volition. Consequently, existing studies that fail to control the proficiency variable appear unable to pinpoint other factors, such as identity, mediating language attitudes and strategies. Nevertheless, investigating balanced bilinguals does not imply treating them as an ethnolinguistically neutral or homogeneous group. Rather, it requires exploring how their fluid situational strategies interact with their deeply embedded, structurally resilient ethnic and ethnolinguistic roots.

Based on identified research gaps, this study aims to examine the relationship between internal language attitudes and external language strategies among Latvian-Russian balanced bilinguals within Latvia's increasingly securitised linguistic environment post-2022. Identity as a pivotal mediating mechanism is particularly stressed to reveal how identity mediates the non-linear relationship between language attitudes and strategies across different domains. To achieve this objective, the study poses the following questions:

RQ1: How does the identity of balanced bilinguals relate to their language attitudes toward Latvian and Russian in the post-2022 context?

RQ2: How does identity influence the language strategies employed by balanced bilinguals across different social domains?

RQ3: How is identity involved in the relationship between internal language attitudes and external strategies among balanced bilinguals, and how does it "align" attitudes and strategies?

²⁴ This figure is an aggregate of native Latvian speakers with advanced Russian proficiency (~37%) and native Russian speakers with proficient Latvian skills (~13%), based on cross-referenced data from CSB (2023).

To address these questions, this study employs a qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews with Latvian-Russian balanced bilinguals. The research cohort will be selected based on self-reported proficiency to ensure linguistic competence does not function as a dependent variable, guaranteeing that observed language strategies reflect agency and identity mediation rather than linguistic inadequacy. Collected data will be analysed through narrative analysis and discourse analysis to identify patterns of identity negotiation across social domains among different individuals.

2 Theoretical Framework and Empirical Evidences

2.1 Chapter Overview

This study proceeds on the basis of the following hypotheses: firstly, given the proportion of balanced bilingual speakers of Latvian within the population and the prevalence of bilingual households, a Latvian-Russian bilingual community not only exists, but also has developed a relatively stable group identity that differs from those of monolingual groups. Secondly, given the post-2022 securitised environment in Latvia, there exists no entirely linear correlation between language attitudes and strategies. Thirdly, identity constitutes a significant factor underpinning this non-linear relationship. Ultimately, identity negotiation serves as the primary mechanism for maintaining psychological and social equilibrium within a securitised political environment.

Based on the aforementioned assumptions, this study introduces the following explanatory model: the securitisation context post-2022 does not linearly and directly precipitate changes in linguistic behaviour, but rather operates through individuals' subjective interpretative processes. Primarily, securitised linguistic narratives and tightened macro-level language policies shape or alter individuals' assessments of the value and risk associated with Latvian and Russian – that is, external factors induce the formation or modification of language attitudes. Subsequently, upon tangibly perceiving macro-level pressures within specific interactions and diverse domains, individuals activate identity negotiation mechanisms to align language attitudes and strategies. The same balanced bilingual may activate an “imposed identity” in public domains, employing instrumental attitudes to guide language choice and mitigate risks; concurrently, they may activate an “assumed identity” in private domains, maintaining self-consistency and

group belonging through affective attitudes. Consequently, a non-linear relationship emerges between language attitudes and language strategies, with identity serving as the pivotal mediating mechanism linking the two. Subsequently, the speaker adjusts their identity in response to external feedback regarding their language strategy. The adjusted identity, in turn, further modulates their language attitude, thereby creating a dynamic loop.

Therefore, in the subsequent subsections of this chapter, this study will first define key concepts and then elucidate the relevant theories underpinning this explanatory model.

2.2 Key Concepts

2.2.1 Identity

Identity does not exist in isolation; it arises in the process of social experience and activity.²⁵ The works of Pavlenko and Blackledge back this argument, pointing out that identity is not only an awareness, but also a social, cultural and political construct, which is perpetually subject to negotiation, with language serving as the primary site for such negotiations.²⁶ Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's work similarly supports this conception that identity is dynamic and shaped through negotiation. They posit that identity functions as a coordinate across multiple social and psychological dimensions, projecting itself differently within varied contexts, while linguistic acts constitute the manifestation of identity's "positioning" within the social space.²⁷

In terms of categorisation of identities, Goffman similarly goes from the perspective of social interaction and distinguishes between three types of identity: social identity, whereby society presumes a person's category and attributes based

²⁵ J George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 135.

²⁶ Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge, eds., *Negotiating Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), 14.

²⁷ Robert B. Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity: Creole-Based Approaches to Ethnicity and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14.

on their appearance, occupation, and manner of speech and behaviour; personal identity, the unique markers that distinguish an individual from all others; and ego identity, an individual's subjective perception of themselves.²⁸ His theory is further developed by his successors: for example, according to Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT), social identity constitutes that "aspect of an individual's self-concept which derives from their awareness of belonging to one or more social groups, along with the values and emotional significance attached to such membership."²⁹ Giddens, on the other hand, argues that self-identity refers to the self that an individual understands through reflection, based on their life experiences.³⁰

In relation to language, based on the conception of identity as a dynamic social construct, Block defines linguistic identity as a socially constructed self-perception of "oneself as a user of a particular language, alongside the manner in which others perceive one as such a language user"³¹. Meanwhile, Norton's interpretation of linguistic identity places greater emphasis on its role as a "right to speak", representing the tension between an individual's desire for autonomy and societal constraints.³²

In light of Latvia's current social realities and securitised linguistic environment, it is clear that viewing identity as a static self-awareness reflecting value and emotional significance fails to capture its diachronic evolution, particularly given the major geopolitical shifts and domestic policy changes since 2022. Therefore, a constructivist perspective, such as Pavlenko and Blackledge's works, is crucial for defining identity. Furthermore, in such a high-pressure linguistic environment, Norton's "Site of Struggle" framework is particularly effective in explaining how identity adapts to or resists social realities while expressing selfhood. However, in post-colonial and multi-ethnic societies characterized by historical trauma, this site of struggle cannot be divorced from broader macro-structural forces; thus, the definition of linguistic identity must be augmented by the concepts of ethnic and ethnolinguistic identity. Language is posited not merely as a communicative tool

²⁸ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

²⁹ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 255.

³⁰ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 53.

³¹ David Block, *Second Language Identities* (London: Continuum, 2007), 40.

³² Bonny Norton, *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*, 2nd ed. (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013), 6, 47.

but as a primary vehicle and psychological index of ethnic persistence and group solidarity.³³ Within this dynamic, names, national languages, and ethnic group allegiances co-constitute an "existential identity" that individuals inherit historically rather than construct entirely *ex nihilo* in everyday interactions.³⁴

Consequently, when analysing balanced bilinguals in a securitized state like Latvia, their internal linguistic configuration is not an amorphous or neutral blank slate. Instead, it is underpinned by what can be termed an ethnolinguistic anchoring—a foundational cultural and historical alignment that inherently shapes how an individual experiences social belonging and marginalization. By incorporating these formulations, linguistic identity is conceptualized not merely as a fluid post-structuralist performance, but as a site where historical-ethnic structures intersect with individual agency. Consequently, the identity, especially the linguistic identity of Latvian residents, should be understood as a dynamic, multidimensional process of self-positioning, ethnolinguistic anchoring, and social negotiation that reflects both subjective self-perception and structurally embedded values.

2.2.2 Language Attitude

Collins Baker defined the scope of attitudes, specifying that attitudes are not equivalent to observable behaviour but rather constitute “hypothetical constructs” concealed within the mind.³⁵ Furthermore, he proposed three components of attitudes: the cognitive component, representing beliefs and thoughts about language; the affective component, representing emotional responses to language; and the behavioural disposition component, representing the willingness to act in specific situations.³⁶ The constituent elements of these three attitudes can be categorised into two types, corresponding to distinct linguistic functions. The first of these is an instrumental attitude, which views the language as possessing utilitarian value. The second is an integrative attitude, which perceives the language as involving a linguistic community’s identity and the desire to join that

³³ John Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 15–16.

³⁴ John E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4–6.

³⁵ Colin Baker, *Attitudes and Language* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1992), 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12–14.

community.³⁷ It is noteworthy that Baker proposed that language attitudes function as symbols of identity,³⁸ thereby establishing a correlation between identity and language attitudes. This finding suggests that language attitudes are not merely components of identity, but also represent its psychological projection. In his work, Baker critiques behaviourist perspectives, arguing that attitudes cannot be directly inferred from observable behaviour. He instead advocates for a mentalist approach, maintaining that behaviour does not always reflect genuine attitudes: attitudes are internal constructs, while behaviour is influenced by environmental pressures.³⁹

Peter Garrett likewise concurs that the Three-Component Model should be employed to explain attitudes.⁴⁰ Building upon Baker's work, he further contends that under social and situational influences, the consistency among the three components of language attitudes may be disrupted, and the inconsistency leads to a situation where an individual's behaviour fails to align with their affective and cognitive inclinations.⁴¹ Garrett further emphasised that language attitudes are not merely personal preferences but constitute a form of social evaluation—that is, attitudes as assessments of linguistic variants and their users can be acquired.⁴² Consequently, language attitudes are intrinsically part of the process of social categorisation,⁴³ a point that corroborates Baker's view concerning the connection between language attitudes and identity.

Synthesising both perspectives, this study defines language attitudes among Latvian bilinguals based on Baker's research, which posits that language attitudes are dynamic, internally constructed cognitions serving as manifestations of identity. Simultaneously, it must be acknowledged that within Latvia's increasingly restrictive linguistic environment, Garrett's view of language attitudes as socially constructed offers valuable insights.

2.2.3 Language Strategies

³⁷ Ibid., 31-32.

³⁸ Ibid., 132-134.

³⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

⁴⁰ Peter Garrett, *Attitudes to Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

⁴³ Ibid., 22.

When discussing language strategies, Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is inevitably central. Within his theoretical framework, language strategies are defined as the process by which individuals consciously or unconsciously adjust their linguistic output in response to the characteristics of their interaction partners, the social context, and the objectives of the interaction.⁴⁴ The Language Management Theory (LMT) proposed by Björn Jernudd and Jiří Neustupný, on the other hand, defines language strategies as a series of corrective activities undertaken by individuals to address "deviations" encountered during discourse production and reception. Unlike CAT, which emphasises language strategies as a preferential interaction, LMT views language strategies more as a planning process, placing greater emphasis on their procedural and reflective nature.⁴⁵

Bernard Spolsky, as a pioneer in language policy, on the other hand, redefined language strategy from a macro-policy perspective. He contends that language strategy is in fact a component of language policy, with individual language strategies regarded as a form of micro-language management:⁴⁶ every code-switching act constitutes the implementation, resistance, or reinterpretation of a particular language policy.⁴⁷ From a micro-level perspective, family language policy refers to the language strategies, whether explicit or implicit, that family members use to manage their language practices.⁴⁸ This approach places greater emphasis on maintaining and transmitting language.

Synthesising the aforementioned research, this study defines language strategies by integrating CAT and LMT perspectives, positing that language strategies constitute not only affective interactions but also deliberative processes. Furthermore, given Latvia's linguistic environment and language policies, examining language strategies from both macro (macro-language policy) and micro (family language policy) perspectives holds significant value.

⁴⁴ Howard Giles, *Communication Accommodation Theory: Negotiating Personal Relationships and Social Identities Across Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 35.

⁴⁵ Björn H. Jernudd and Jiří V. Neustupný, "Language Planning: For Whom?," in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Language Planning*, ed. Lorne Laforge (Quebec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1987), 71.

⁴⁶ Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁸ Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen, "Visible and Invisible Language Planning: Ideological and Socioeconomic Influences on Family Language Policy," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 30, no. 5 (2009): 352.

2.3 Interactions and Logical Connections Between Core Concepts

2.3.1 The Relationship Between Language Attitudes and Language Strategies

While the hypothesis from the 2.1 section posits that the relationship between language attitudes and language strategies is non-linear in the Latvian context, it remains undeniable that language attitudes form the bedrock of language strategies. In essence, the language strategies employed by all speakers can and must be traced back to their underlying language attitudes.⁴⁹

As previously mentioned, within Baker's tripartite model of language attitudes, the behavioural disposition component represents an individual's behavioural intention or action plan in specific contexts. Affective and cognitive attitudes serve as the determining factor in the language user's behavioural disposition, while the relationship between behavioural disposition and the strategies actually employed is influenced by other confounding variables, such as social and situational factors.⁵⁰

Despite the assertion that affective and cognitive attitudes dictate the behavioural tendencies of language users, cognitive and affective attitudes are not harmoniously unified. A particularly salient illustration of this phenomenon can be found in Hogan-Brun *et al.*'s paper on language planning in the Baltic states: despite the state policy in Latvia that fosters a highly instrumental attitude, the affective attitude has lagged behind. This phenomenon can be attributed to the emotional attachment to the mother tongue, which functions as a counterforce to policy intervention.⁵¹ Consequently, when "affect" and "cognition" conflict, behavioural dispositions become ambiguous.

In summary, a relationship exists between language attitudes and language strategies, yet this relationship is non-linear. The key mechanisms underpinning this

⁴⁹ Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy*, 14.

⁵⁰ Peter Garrett, *Attitudes to Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 21.

⁵¹ Gabrielle Hogan-Brun *et al.*, "Language Politics and Practices in the Baltic States," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 8, no. 4 (2008): 469–631.

non-linearity include the instability of behavioural disposition arising from inconsistencies between affective and cognitive attitudes, alongside other interfering factors in different domains, such as social elements like language policies, in the transition from behavioural disposition to actual language strategies. In this sense, the mediation between language attitudes and language strategies necessitates processes such as the negotiation of identity.

2.3.2 Domains as a Key Factor Inducing Non-Linearity Between Language attitudes and Language strategies

As previously discussed, the non-linear relationship between language attitudes and language strategies is influenced by external factors, with domains being the key concept for explaining the role of these external factors.

When examining the concept of domains within sociolinguistics, Bourdieu's 1991 work, *Language and Symbolic Power*, is essential reading. In it, he argues that communicative relations mediated by language constitute a form of economic exchange established within the power relations of specific symbolic capital between producers, consumers and markets.⁵² Within this economic exchange, the value of linguistic products hinges upon the relationship between the domain of production and the domain of reception.⁵³ All language strategies employed by speakers are designed to secure a certain "profit" within certain domains, such as social recognition, security, or economic gain.⁵⁴ To maximise personal advantage, individuals entering a specific domain will adapt their language according to market demands—a phenomenon termed "self-censorship". This self-censorship is not entirely coerced, but rather a deeply ingrained psychological anticipation.⁵⁵

The underlying reason why speakers adopt different language strategies based on various psychological anticipations across distinct domains is that linguistic societies comprise multiple domains, each of which demands distinct linguistic products. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in multilingual societies such as Latvia, regardless of the state establishing an "official language" through

⁵² Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 66.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

legislation and the education system, rendering it the sole legitimate capital within these domains and thereby diminishing the value of other languages, such as Russian.⁵⁶ This point can also be corroborated by Grosjean's Complementarity Principle, which explains the linguistic behaviour of bilinguals. He observed that, "Bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people."⁵⁷ The Complementarity Principle he proposed also explains why bilinguals' language proficiency in formal or everyday speech varies by domain, as functional needs determine language choice.⁵⁸

To summarise, in the field of sociolinguistics, the domains implicitly dictate preferred linguistic norms, thereby exerting a significant influence on the language strategies employed within that context. Psychological anticipations of different domains, as extensions of language attitudes, lead to varying language strategies adopted by speakers at the micro level. The domains in question facilitate the interconnection of behavioural dispositions with the employment of actual language strategies. However, due to the domains' diversity, a non-linear relationship between language attitudes and language strategies is likely to emerge.

2.3.3 Language Identity as a Regulatory Mechanism: Acting as a Filter and Mediator

As mentioned before, identity is not a static background variable but a dynamic mediating factor. The most authoritative literature supporting this assertion is Pavlenko and Blackledge's *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, wherein the framework of identity negotiation constitutes the core. In this literature, identity is divided into three components, each constituting a distinct dimension through which individuals position themselves within the social hierarchy of power. These are not merely labels, but rather the boundaries individuals encounter or the margins they occupy when negotiating identity across different domains. Imposed Identities refers to those that are forcibly assigned to individuals by macro-level

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁷ François Grosjean, *Studying Bilinguals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

⁵⁸ François Grosjean, "The Bilingual's Language Modes," in *The Psycholinguistics of Bilingualism*, ed. J. L. Nicol (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 285.

social structures, legal systems or dominant groups. Within specific temporal and spatial contexts, such identities are typically considered non-negotiable, leaving individuals with limited capacity for resistance or refusal. Conversely, Assumed Identities are those voluntarily accepted and enacted by individuals without active negotiation or questioning. These roles are frequently taken for granted in social life, where individuals feel comfortable or perceive good alignment with prevailing domain logic. The most dynamic form of identity is the Negotiable Identity, which encompasses identities that are subject to questioning, challenge, or debate by groups or individuals. Individuals employ language strategies to assert or reject these identities, with the aim of altering others' perceptions or acquiring social capital.⁵⁹

Particularly, negotiations concerning negotiable identities reflect the process by which individuals adjust their self-presentation in domains where linguistic requirements are ambiguous, in order to address pressures arising from such domains. This aims to resolve tensions between subjective inclinations and societal expectations. Moreover, even when assigned an imposed identity within a highly regulated context, individuals tend to internalise and assume this identity in order to avoid sanctions or achieve certain objectives, such as psychological consistency.⁶⁰ Whether through negotiations concerning negotiable identities or the process of internalising imposed identities, identity negotiation grants individuals a degree of agency. Consequently, individuals are not only subjects of social pressures but also agents navigating these constraints.⁶¹

Darvin and Norton take a further step by establishing identity as the primary arena for negotiation, aimed at resolving conflicts between internal convictions and external interests, manifested in the competition between capital and ideology across different domains.⁶² In this process, identity functions as a filter, guiding individuals' decisions on whether to invest in a particular language – that is, which language strategies to adopt. The role of identity as an intermediary is predicated on its inherent complexity and mutability, which enable speakers to enact different identities across distinct domains. Crucially, the structural weight of this

⁵⁹ Pavlenko and Blackledge, *Negotiation of Identities*, 21.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶² Ron Darvin and Bonny Norton, "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35 (2015): 46.

complexity becomes visible when considering that balanced bilinguals do not enter these domains as neutral or blank slates, but with specific ethnic and ethnolinguistic identity anchoring. As established in sociolinguistic theory, language serves as a primary psychological index of group solidarity and ethnic persistence, meaning these anchoring form an existential baseline that pre-determines how a speaker experiences social belonging or marginalization.⁶³ Rather than being fluidly reconstructed entirely *ex nihilo* in every encounter, these historical-ethnic structures intersect with individual agency to pre-categorize the psychological costs of domain entry.⁶⁴ For instance, when an individual's foundational anchoring aligns with the dominant language of a state, navigating formal domains demands negligible cognitive regulation. Conversely, when their primary anchoring resides in a securitized language, entering highly regulated spaces triggers immediate structural friction between their inner, assumed self and the outer, imposed civic roles. In these spaces of heightened tension, identity negotiation operates as a psychological shock absorber to manage this existential cleavage.

From an alternative standpoint, identity functions not only as a filter but also as a mediator linking language attitudes and strategies. This can be elucidated by synthesising Baker's assertion that attitudes symbolise identity, whereby long-term language attitudes solidify into stable identity inclinations or states of psychological readiness (see page [12](#)), with Bucholtz and Hall's Emergence Principle. The principle posits that identity is a product of language and other symbolic practices rather than their source, thus rendering it a social and cultural phenomenon rather than merely an internal psychological one.⁶⁵ A preliminary examination of the two literatures' perspectives may appear to present contradictory positions. However, when considered within the framework of a comprehensive causal chain, their theories embody discrete phases within this chain. Baker explores how psychological factors, such as language attitudes, constitute an internal sense of identity, and how this self-portrayed identity leads to different language strategies. In contrast, Bucholtz and Hall's Emergence Principle focuses on explaining how language strategies and specific linguistic practices constitute a speaker's

⁶³ Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity*, 50-52.

⁶⁴ Joseph, *Language and Identity*, 45-48.

⁶⁵ Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach," *Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4-5 (2005): 588.

observable social identity. Social interactions conducted with social identity across different domains simultaneously influence an individual's psychological perceptions, leading to the maintenance or generation of new language attitudes. This process will be repeated until the social identities an individual displays across different domains achieve harmony—though not necessarily complete alignment—with their internal sense of identity, thereby organically integrating language, attitudes, and strategies. This phenomenon is further substantiated by Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that when an individual is prompted to act or speak in a manner contradictory to their personal convictions, they exhibit a propensity to modify their perspectives to align their beliefs with their actions.⁶⁶ Moreover, precisely because identity possesses both social and psychological dimensions, as well as multiple facets as proposed by Pavlenko and Blackledge, it effectively aligns language attitudes and strategies.

2.4 Related Empirical Studies

There is a wealth of empirical research supporting the theoretical interpretations outlined above. For instance, regarding the relationship between language attitudes and linguistic identity, in-depth interviews conducted by Nguyen & Hamid⁶⁷ with university students from ethnic minority groups in Vietnam revealed that students held an integrative attitude towards their mother tongue, whilst adopting an instrumental attitude towards the national language and English. As bilinguals, they also undergo a complex process of identity negotiation: whilst concealing their ethnic minority identity in public settings for fear of being labelled as backward or unsophisticated, they simultaneously experience an identity crisis regarding their mother tongue due to the loss of vocabulary resulting from prolonged urban living, perceiving themselves as “rootless individuals”. These findings are consistent with the premise of this paper, namely that the differing attitudes of bilinguals are reflected in and shape their identities. Regarding the relationship between language

⁶⁶ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 209.

⁶⁷ Trang Thi Thuy Nguyen and M. Obaidul Hamid, "Language Attitudes, Identity and L1 Maintenance: A Qualitative Study of Vietnamese Ethnic Minority Students," *System* 61 (October 2016): 87-97.

strategies and language attitudes, Maqfirah *et al.*⁶⁸ conducted a survey of Sundanese–Indonesian teachers and students at the University of West Java in Indonesia. They found that language attitudes and positive attitudes towards the mother tongue varied according to individual linguistic backgrounds, and that there were marked differences in the use of Indonesian and Sundanese in formal and informal settings: Indonesian is preferred in formal domains as a symbol of formality, while Sundanese is mainly used in private domains. Analysis indicates a significant correlation between language attitudes and language strategies, especially an instrumental attitude toward Indonesian and its use in formal settings. Regarding the language strategies of bilinguals in different domains, González Rojas⁶⁹ found that bilinguals frequently use code-switching to signal group affiliation, adapt to social roles, express emotions, and resist marginalisation; code-switching is not only a pragmatic language strategy but also a social behaviour reflecting cultural identity and power relations. This reflects how bilinguals adopt a form of negotiation mechanism when facing different interlocutors in different domains, resulting in varying language strategies, specifically manifested as code-switching. Yim and Clément's study⁷⁰ of Cantonese–English bilinguals in Canada, meanwhile, demonstrates the correlation between identity and language strategy: the study categorised the cultural identities of bilinguals towards Canada and China into several groups and found significant differences between these groups in terms of attitudes, comfort levels and preferences regarding code-switching. The study result reveals that code-switching was most frequent among those with the strongest dual cultural identification, whilst those with a strong identification with a single culture engaged in code-switching less frequently.

Overall, the empirical studies suggest that bilingual identity and language attitudes influence one another, whilst identity and language attitudes jointly influence the choice of language strategies. Gaps in the existing research include a lack of studies examining the causal links between bilingual identity, attitudes and strategies.

⁶⁸ Poetri AL-Viany Maqfirah and Sabil Mokodenseho, "The Influence of Bilingualism and Language Attitudes on Language Choice in Multilingual Communities in a West Javan University," *The Eastasouth Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2023):19-27.

⁶⁹ Benjamín González Rojas, "Code-Switching as Identity Negotiation in Multilingual Communities," *Bulletin of Language and Literature Studies* 2, no. 1.

⁷⁰ Odilia Yim and Richard Clément, "Acculturation and Attitudes toward Code-Switching: A Bidimensional Framework," *International Journal of Bilingualism* 25, no. 5: 1369-88.

There has also been academic research into the linguistic realities of Latvia and the Baltic region. Poriņa's research⁷¹ indicates that Latvia exhibits a unique situation in which both the majority and minority populations are generally bilingual, as the interaction between Russian and Latvian across different domains is frequent but distinct: whilst minority groups remain heavily reliant on Russian at home, Latvian is used more frequently than Russian and has become the primary means of communication in the workplace. Cheskin⁷², on the other hand, examined how Russian speakers in Latvia define their identity through various narrative modes, such as the media, political debates and everyday conversation. She argues that the identity of Russian speakers is constructed through discourse and fluctuates across different contexts: for instance, they may emphasise their identity as "taxpayers/citizens" when dealing with the Latvian government, whilst within the family they emphasise their identity as "bearers of Russian cultural heritage". These two studies demonstrate that identity negotiation manifests in different forms across various domains in Latvia.

Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, a body of literature has emerged in Latvia that examines language issues from a geopolitical perspective. A study by Barth⁷³ highlights the profound transformation faced by the Russian-speaking community in Latvia in terms of identity, linguistic power and sense of national belonging. Although Russian native speakers may identify more closely with Russian culture and Soviet history than Latvian native speakers, many Russian-speaking respondents (particularly those of the younger and middle generations) explicitly stated that they view Russian as both a cultural heritage and a tool for daily life, whilst fully identifying with European democratic values and remaining loyal to the Latvian state. Nevertheless, when the state employs legislative measures to completely remove Russian from the public sphere, even Russian speakers who do not support the Russian government may feel excluded and alienated. Consequently, native Russian speakers may develop a multifaceted,

⁷¹ Vineta Poriņa, "Code Switching between Bilinguals in Latvia," paper presented at the International Conference on Language Development "Estonian in Europe," Tallinn, 2001, 12–14.

⁷² Ammon Cheskin, *Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia: Discursive Identity Strategies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

⁷³ Florica Barth, "A Latvian-Russian Identity? Qualitative Research on the Formation of Identity of Young Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia," master's thesis, Osteuropa-Institut der Freien Universität Berlin, Abteilung Soziologie, 2024, 37–51.

defensive or even contradictory sense of identity. Volkovs⁷⁴ similarly elaborates on how the Russian-speaking community uses language to maintain and reshape its ethnic and cultural identity. The study involved qualitative interviews with 12 highly influential representatives of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia. The interviewees reckoned that the Russian language is not merely a tool for communication, but an indispensable bond for understanding Latvian society and strengthening social cohesion within the Russian-speaking minority. However, maintaining an identity rooted in Russian culture is compatible with an open attitude towards Latvian national laws and cultural values; this sense of identity is not, in essence, a form of political opposition.

Nevertheless, when one considers the Baltic region as a whole, it becomes apparent that different studies conducted in various areas have identified distinct linguistic patterns. For example, through a longitudinal study and qualitative interviews, Hilbig *et al.*⁷⁵ revealed how geopolitical upheavals have reshaped Lithuania's linguistic ideology. In Lithuanian society, as in neighbouring Baltic states such as Latvia, there has emerged a phenomenon of actively and consciously removing Russian from the social mainstream, whilst Russian-speaking communities simultaneously face severe cognitive dissonance. However, in contrast to Volkov's research, which posits Russian as a tool for maintaining intra-group cohesion, and even Barth *et al.*'s view that Russian-speaking communities have formed a mixed and defensive identity, this study found that many Lithuanians who were originally fluent in Russian began to consciously insist on using Lithuanian or switch to English when encountering Russian-speaking strangers, even though they were fully capable of conversing in Russian. Many respondents even felt that speaking Russian caused them shame, as if they were "endorsing a form of violence". Research by Schulze and Pupcenoks⁷⁶ on Russian-speaking minorities and language securitisation in Estonia and Latvia also indicates that members of these Russian-speaking minorities have become more reticent, tending to conceal their identity and language in public life.

⁷⁴ Vladislavs Volkovs, "Features of the Linguistic Identity of the Russian Population in Latvia," *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 7, no. 2 (February 2025): 882–902,

⁷⁵ Inga Hilbig and Smiltė Ivanovaitė, "Lithuanian Attitudes Towards the Russian Language: Before and After February 24, 2022" (paper presented at the 15th International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB15), San Sebastián, Spain, June 9–13, 2025).

⁷⁶ Schulze and Pupcenoks, "Securitizing Russian-speakers".

Research into linguistic attitudes, identity and strategies in the Baltic region indicates that a phenomenon of linguistic securitisation is widespread across the region, particularly following the 2022 Russia–Ukraine conflict, during which the identities of native-language and Russian-speaking communities, as well as their attitudes towards the Russian language, have undergone dramatic changes. However, the findings of these studies—particularly regarding the linguistic behaviour of Russian-speaking communities—vary considerably. This is not because some are “correct” and others “erroneous”, but rather because language attitudes, identity and strategies in Latvia and indeed across the Baltic region essentially form a spectrum rather than a fixed pattern, while these studies tend to focus on specific linguistic behaviours, which is also where their shortcomings lie. Furthermore, although much of the literature explores the relationship between language attitudes and identity, the deeper connections between language attitudes, identity and strategies have not been thoroughly investigated, especially within the Baltic region.

2.5 Chapter Summary

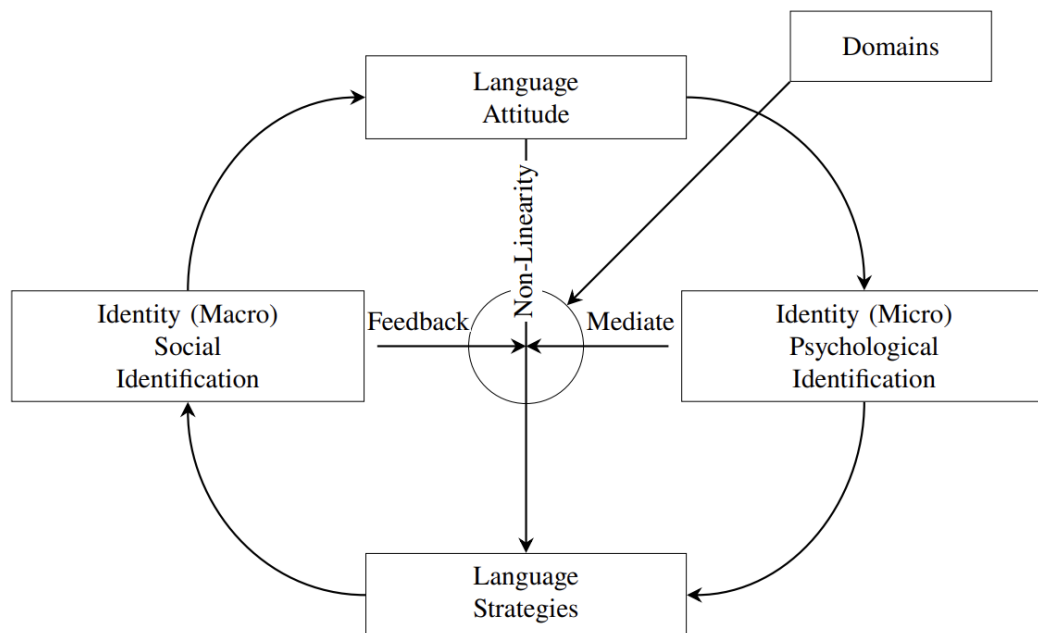
The present chapter commences with the formulation of research hypotheses, followed by the definition of pivotal concepts pertinent to the investigation at hand, and the subsequent explanation of their interrelationships. Yet it must be acknowledged that the relationship between bilingual identity, language attitudes, and language strategies cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical tradition, as in the context of post-Soviet Latvia, language practices are shaped simultaneously by individual evaluations, interactional adaptation, social positioning, historical memory, and state language policy. As a result, the present chapter employs theories to complement each other, to provide a more comprehensive definition of concepts and to better explain the interrelationships between concepts, rather than treating theories as competing explanatory systems.

Identity, language attitudes and language strategies are indeed analytically distinguishable, yet the study conceptualises their relationship as recursive rather than linear, holding the view that language attitudes may influence identity positioning, identity may shape linguistic strategies, and repeated linguistic

practices may subsequently reinforce or reshape both attitudes and identity. Building upon the explanation and research gaps identified in the related studies, this study proposes a theoretical framework to explain the relationship between language attitudes and language strategies among balanced bilinguals in Latvia, i.e., language attitudes, mediated by identity, are filtered through identity across different domains, ultimately shaping language strategies. The social identity constructed through adopted language strategies, in turn, exerts an influence on language attitudes, thus forming a closed loop. The following Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic relationships among the elements of this theoretical framework.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework: non-linear relation between language attitude and language strategies, mediated by identity (micro/macro) and shaped across domains.

Source: Developed by the author



Latvia's sociolinguistic context dictates that language strategies constitute not merely communicative acts, but practices imbued with social and political significance. The historical legacy of Soviet Russification policies, coupled with post-independence language policies, has rendered Latvian and Russian highly symbolic markers influencing ethnic affiliation and national identity. Since 2022, the securitisation of the linguistic environment and macro-level policy interventions

in formal domains have intensified the competition between the two languages in social use, resulting in both diversity and fragmentation within Latvian societal domains. For balanced bilinguals, language strategies thus emerge from complex attitudes and perceptions towards different domains, alongside ongoing negotiations of identity.

Thus, the proposed framework is particularly well-suited for the study of balanced bilinguals in Latvia, as it brings together complex influences from history, sociology, psychology, policy and linguistics within the explanatory variables of language attitudes, identity, domain and strategies, it proposes—without denying the existence of these influences—a relatively concise explanatory model suitable for analysing empirical research: namely, that the non-linear relationship between language attitudes and language strategies may be attributable to the negotiation of identity across different domains. However, it must be acknowledged that the theoretical framework developed in this study is intended not to provide a universal explanatory theory, but rather a layered theoretical model capable of capturing the multidimensional and processual nature of bilingual identity negotiation in contemporary Latvia.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm, Approach and Strategies

The theoretical framework established in the preceding chapter posits that the language strategies employed by Latvian balanced bilinguals do not constitute a linear reflection of their intrinsic attitudes, but rather the outcome of complex identity negotiation processes across different domains. Within this process, identity functions as a dynamic mediator and filter, seeking equilibrium between an individual's emotional inclinations and the structural constraints of specific social domains. However, the complexity of identity as a mediator, along with the iterative dynamics within the closed loop of attitude-strategy-identity, cannot be captured solely through static quantitative data.

Therefore, this study proposes to adopt an interpretivist paradigm, incorporating the social constructivist perspective that reality and identity are jointly woven through language and behaviour within social interactions,⁷⁷ which enables the research to transcend superficial linguistic acts and discern the underlying logic of identity regulation. Specifically, from an ontological perspective, this study adopts a social constructionist approach. Social reality is not considered to be an object independent of individuals; rather, it is constructed through the medium of meaning, which necessitates a critical stance towards knowledge that is taken for granted.⁷⁸ This stance is considered optimal for the study, as the alignment between language attitudes and strategies is not an inherent, permanent objective fact; rather, it is constructed by individuals within specific cultural and political logics. From an epistemological perspective, the present study eschews positivist perspectives in favour of interpretivism, seeking culturally derived and historically situated

⁷⁷ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 173–184.

⁷⁸ Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 2-3.

interpretations of the social life-world.⁷⁹ This position is adopted in light of positivism's inclination towards generalisation and prediction, a tendency that often neglects the significance of locally constrained, contextual meanings in comprehending human behaviour.⁸⁰ Given the study's highly contextual nature, shaped by historical, domain-specific, and policy factors, interpretivism is indispensable, whereas positivism cannot achieve sufficient research depth.

Based on the aforementioned choice of paradigm, this study will adopt a qualitative research approach to explore in depth how Latvian balanced bilinguals achieve dynamic alignment of language attitudes and strategies through identity regulation under complex social pressures, rather than focusing on statistical analyses of surface-level frequency of linguistic behaviour. The choice of qualitative rather than quantitative methods stems from several considerations. Firstly, the core focus of this study lies in how identity mediates the alignment of attitudes and strategies – an objective that inherently points to a dynamic process rather than a static outcome. Whilst quantitative methods can certainly record the frequency with which a given language is employed, they fail to capture the real-time state of identity negotiations undertaken by specific individuals within particular domains. Only qualitative research can reveal how identity mediates the transformation from attitude to strategy in each moment of every interaction.⁸¹ Secondly, the complexity of the non-linear relationship between attitudes and strategies among Latvian balanced bilinguals necessitates that researchers enter the lifeworld of interviewees, even endeavouring to adopt their perspectives for meticulous examination. Though quantitative methods are capable of measuring the frequency with which there is consistency or inconsistency between strategy and attitude, they are not able to elucidate the deeper relationship between strategy and attitude – the very process of “alignment”. Qualitative methods, however, have the capacity to delve deeply into this process, as qualitative research emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality.⁸² Moreover, from an epistemological

⁷⁹ Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London: Sage, 1998), 67.

⁸⁰ Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 106.

⁸¹ Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 29.

⁸² Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 8.

perspective, interpretivism and qualitative approaches, in contrast to positivism and quantitative methods, rely heavily on contexts. Consequently, they are capable of supporting “context-bearing meanings that are essential for understanding human action.”⁸³ This is particularly crucial as macro-level policies and domains constitute vital contexts in this study, exerting an indispensable influence on the research process.

Having established a qualitative research approach, this study adopts narrative inquiry as its core research strategy. Narrative inquiry transcends mere transcription of interviewees’ words; its essence lies in examining how individuals reconstruct the coherence of their experiences through storytelling. Clandinin and Connelly propose a three-dimensional framework for narrative inquiry comprising place, sociality and time.⁸⁴ Referencing the research model outlined in the preceding chapter, it becomes evident that place is determined by distinct domains; sociality is manifested through the process by which individuals align attitudes and strategies through identity negotiation; and time is embodied in a continuous cycle of mediation and feedback. Within this three-dimensional space, narratives are co-constructed by the interviewee and researcher through the storytelling process. Moreover, as Riessman contends, narrative is not a mere mapping of reality but an active construction of the self.⁸⁵ In this study, the process by which interviewees recount their experiences is inherently one of regulation through identity: it demonstrates how they achieve alignment between attitudes and strategies through narrative logic. Finally, Polkinghorne contends that narrative serves as humanity’s organisational scheme for imparting meaning to fragmented experiences.⁸⁶ This holds significance for the present study: within Latvia’s highly securitised context, bilingual individuals’ strategic behaviours—such as avoiding Russian in specific domains—may appear objectively inconsistent. Yet through narrative, interviewees can subjectively rationalise these behaviours (e.g. for family interests or symbolic capital), thereby achieving an ultimate “alignment” between attitudes and strategies within the narrative.

⁸³ Guba and Lincoln, "Competing Paradigms," 106.

⁸⁴ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 20.

⁸⁵ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 8.

⁸⁶ Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 8, no. 1 (1995): 11.

Although this study proposed a preliminary “closed-loop regulation model” in Chapter Two, the empirical study does not adopt rigid deductive verification but maintains interpretative openness. As this study does not adopt Grounded Theory as an overarching strategy, because its aim is not to generate theory from scratch but to explore micro-mechanisms of identity regulation upon existing theoretical foundations, the study nevertheless draws upon the Constant Comparative Method from Grounded Theory for data analysis. This approach ensures the study can both leverage the guiding role of Chapter Two’s model and sensitively capture emerging categories within Latvian bilingual narratives, thereby refining and elaborating the initial framework.⁸⁷

The following subsections will develop specific research methods based on the research paradigms, approaches, and strategies proposed herein.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Participants and Sampling

This study employs purposive sampling, as this method aligns with the interpretivist paradigm’s pursuit of “deep understanding” and permits researchers to extract subjective meanings from experiences.⁸⁸ On the other hand, within the narrative inquiry strategy, purposive sampling treats participants not as passive data but as “key informants” regarding specific social phenomena, capable of providing detailed insights into the research topic.⁸⁹ Moreover, the purposive sampling approach is also well-suited to small-scale studies such as this one, as it emphasises a deep understanding of a relatively small sample rather than empirical generalisation.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), 104.

⁸⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 22.

⁸⁹ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015), 284.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

Regarding the selection criteria, firstly, as repeatedly emphasised throughout this paper, the study focuses on balanced bilinguals of Latvian and Russian, namely individuals possessing “equivalent or near-equivalent proficiency in both languages”.⁹¹ Selecting balanced bilinguals eliminates the confounding variable of language proficiency. If an individual has limited proficiency in Latvian, their non-use of Latvian in administrative domains may stem from an inability rather than an unwillingness to do so. The same principle applies in the converse, in domains where Russian is predominantly used. For balanced bilinguals, however, each instance of language switching constitutes an active, agency-driven strategic choice. This enables the regulatory function of identity to manifest in its purest form. Moreover, when selecting participants for this study, preference is given to individuals possessing extensive experience within domains characterised by high expectations or strict norms regarding language use. The rationale is that, according to Bourdieu’s theory⁹², such domains exert the most potent pressure to conform to legitimate linguistic standards. Within these spaces of heightened linguistic security, the tension between individuals’ internal attitudes and external strategies is likely to be most acute. Their identities must mediate this relationship under the greatest strain, thereby offering this study the optimal vantage point for observing the logic of “alignment”.

Regarding the implementation of these selection criteria, distinct measures apply to the two standards mentioned above. Firstly, concerning the selection of balanced bilinguals, participants will be asked to assess their language proficiency (listening, speaking, reading and writing) on a two-tier scale: “close to or at native speaker level” or “below native speaker level” prior to the interview. Participants will only be invited to take part in the interview if they self-assess three out of the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—as being “close to or at native speaker level”.

The second selection criterion is a matter of preference rather than strict enforcement, and as such, it is considerably simpler than the first. The specific method involves the selection of individuals working in the public service sector –

⁹¹ Colin Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 5th ed. (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011), 8.

⁹² Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 52.

such as doctors, civil servants, and professors – to ensure that they constitute 60 per cent or more of the overall respondent pool.

With regard to demographics such as gender, age, residence, and economic status, every effort was made during the sampling process to ensure diversity and population representativeness. Crucially, rather than treating ethnicity and ethnolinguistic background as mere confounding factors to be minimized, this study embraces them as key interpretive axes. This ensures that the dynamic alignment of attitudes and strategies among balanced bilinguals is analysed with full sensitivity to the participants' structural identity positionings and foundational cultural anchoring, thereby minimizing superficial research bias while maintaining interpretive depth.

3.2.2 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews

This study employs semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool to strike a balance between the predefined research focus and the interviewee's narrative freedom. Semi-structured interviews provide sufficient structure to address specific dimensions of the research questions while simultaneously allowing participants space to offer “new meanings” concerning the research theme. Moreover, the probing technique during the process allows researchers to acquire more nuanced and in-depth descriptions of the interviewees' lived experiences.⁹³ Through an ongoing exchange of questions, responses and probes, semi-structured interviews enable researchers to draw out details of interviewees' subconscious experiences and perceptions, which helps them to weave these details into coherent, logical narratives, where meaning is dynamically co-constructed through dialogue.⁹⁴

The characteristics of semi-structured interviews are of paramount importance to this study, as they, together with the “probing” technique therein, are far more suitable than structured interviews for addressing the complex issue of identity as a mediator, which encompasses psychological, social, linguistic and other dimensions, despite the advantages of standardisation and comparability offered by the latter. While focus groups facilitate the observation of group dynamics, the

⁹³ Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007), 60.

⁹⁴ James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Active Interview* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 4.

heightened sensitivity surrounding linguistic identity and attitudes in contemporary Latvia means that using this method could result in an inability to recruit significant respondents or biased interview data. The one-to-one nature of semi-structured interviews provides respondents with a less pressured environment, thereby enhancing the authenticity of the interview data.

The specific design of the interview outline (see Appendix 1) strictly follows the model outlined at the end of Chapter Two, comprising four sections, each corresponding to a distinct phase within the dynamic model:

1. Background information. The purpose is to establish an initial baseline for identity and attitudes, understanding the respondent's original identity and attitudes prior to 2022, and before formally entering formal settings (e.g., before commencing employment). Relevant questions include:

What were your attitudes towards Latvian and Russian prior to 2022?
Has your attitude towards these languages changed since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, and why?

Do you believe your language attitudes and identity differed before entering the workforce or commencing studies compared to now? If so, please describe the differences before and after. Was this shift in attitude also influenced by the events of 2022? In what specific ways do you think entering the workforce/studies and the 2022 events respectively, impacted your attitudes?

2. The activation of identity mediation mechanisms across different domains. The objective is to provide specific domains, encompassing both formal and informal settings, and to require respondents to answer accordingly, thereby capturing how domains trigger identity as a mediator linking attitudes and strategies. Relevant questions include:

Can you describe an instance in a particular domain (such as a government agency) where you felt strongly compelled to use Latvian, even though you might have preferred to communicate in Russian at the time? Conversely, have you ever felt you should use Russian but ended up using Latvian instead?

When you find yourself in a particular domain, do you feel that the surrounding environment—including colleagues, policies, atmosphere, friends, family, and so on—has expectations regarding your language use? If so, what kind of expectations are these? Do these expectations make you feel like you're playing a specific role?

3. Identity-mediated strategy selection and specific implementation processes. The objective is to examine how identity, once activated as a regulator in specific domains, guides respondents' language strategy choices. Relevant questions include:

Please recall a recent conversation in which you actively switched from Russian to Latvian (or vice versa). What happened at that moment? What specific details prompted you to make this switch? What were your mental reactions and state of mind at the time? Did you perceive this switch as a natural, or as a deliberate choice?

4. The effects of alignment and the feedback process. The objective is to observe whether long-term strategy implementation reverses initial attitudes, and whether attitudes and strategies undergo continuous adjustment—as predicted by the model—under the influence of identity regulation and feedback. Relevant questions include:

Now that you speak Latvian fluently in formal settings or consistently use Russian in certain other contexts, do you still perceive this as merely a “strategy,” or has it become a natural part of your identity?

How do you evaluate yourself now? Do you feel that your inner attitude has reached a state of “reconciliation” or “alignment” with your daily language choices?

Regarding the specific operational procedures for interviews, interviewees must sign an informed consent form (see Appendix 2) prior to the interview. This document outlines essential considerations related to the interview and research, including the researcher, research objectives, institution, interview methodology, data processing methods, and ethical information. Following the signing of the

consent form, the interview is conducted in a private setting—either in person or via an encrypted video channel online. Throughout the interview, follow-up questions are employed appropriately and thoroughly to elicit deeper insights or clarify ambiguous points. Given the researcher’s language capabilities, respondents may answer questions in English or Latvian. However, code-switching between Latvian and Russian is permitted during the interview (Russian segments will be promptly identified and requested to be translated), aiming to observe the real-time manifestation of their language strategies.

There are several ethical considerations involved in this process. Should respondents admit to non-compliance with national regulations in certain formal contexts, they may face legal risks and social stigma. Consequently, this study employs anonymisation and conducts interviews in a private setting. Prior to the interview, it should be emphasised that the content is intended solely for academic analysis and carries no administrative or legal weight. Moreover, interview recordings must comply with GDPR standards, and all information that could identify specific individuals must be removed from transcripts and analyses. Furthermore, discussions regarding war, ethnic conflict and identity crises related to language issues may trigger anxiety or psychological distress in participants. Mitigation measures in this study include allowing participants to pause the interview if they feel uncomfortable, and participants retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.2.3 Data Interpretation: Narrative Analysis and Discourse Analysis

According to the proposed theoretical model, identity regulation is not a static state but a dynamic process that evolves over time. This characteristic renders narrative analysis a superior mode of data interpretation, as it treats the interviewee’s story itself as the object of study, focusing on how the narrative is structured.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the “holistic-content” perspective employed in narrative analysis concentrates on the meaning of the narrative as a cohesive whole, thereby effectively facilitating deep-level understanding.⁹⁶ Compared to categorical

⁹⁵ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 2.

⁹⁶ Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber, *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 12.

thematic analysis, which dissects interview transcripts into isolated codes and severs causal chains within narratives, narrative analysis preserves this logic through “theorising within the case”.⁹⁷ This is particularly crucial for the present study, as it seeks to validate the closed-loop theoretical model.

Narrative analysis approaches narratives holistically at the macro level, focusing on the overall structure and meaning of the account. In contrast, discourse analysis operates at the micro level, examining specific words, phrases, and linguistic features to identify patterns in respondents’ tendencies and the strategies through which they construct their narratives. Ultimately, these two approaches are complementary in the present study.

Discourse analysis, as a methodology for studying language in use, focuses not only on what the interlocutor “says” but more significantly on how they employ specific linguistic choices to produce, maintain, or alter their social reality. As Phillips and Hardy observe, “We cannot understand social phenomena without a method that analyses the discursive processes that constitute them.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, discourse analysis examines supra-linguistic elements such as pauses, overlaps, and self-repairs, enabling researchers to understand with greater nuance how participants navigate sensitive or challenging aspects of identity formation that remain unexpressed in literal content.⁹⁹ Consequently, this study employs discourse analysis to observe how language and the use of language are employed to interpret or constitute identity, which lies at the core of this research.

As raw qualitative interview data often exhibit non-linear and fragmented characteristics, this study first employs Creswell’s “restoring” technique¹⁰⁰ for data pre-processing. This technique involves organising participants’ scattered experiential accounts within logical and temporal frameworks, thereby eliminating redundancy and discontinuity within the original material. The operational procedure entails reorganising the transcribed raw material according to three axes: a temporal axis (stages of personal development and career progression), a spatial axis (public versus private domains), and a narrative axis (conflict, mediation, and

⁹⁷ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 53.

⁹⁸ Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 2.

⁹⁹ David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 5th ed. (London: Sage, 2015), 336.

¹⁰⁰ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 74.

alignment). A narrative dossier is established for each participant to ensure subsequent analysis proceeds within a logically coherent story context.

The subsequent data coding will employ Lieblich *et al*'s "holistic-content" coding methods¹⁰¹ within the overarching narrative analysis structure. The initial round of coding constitutes structural coding, aiming to identify pivotal narrative turning points—typically moments when identity functions as a mediator. In accordance with the theoretical model, this round of coding will be categorised into four nodes:

[ATT] (Attitude): Segments expressing (initial) language attitude.

[TEN] (Tension): Moments depicting pressure in the domains and internal conflict.

[STR] (Strategy): Descriptions of specific language strategies employed.

[FBK] (Feedback): Changes in self-identity perception following behavioural execution.

After identifying these structural nodes, the second round of coding will employ thematic coding to extract shared subjectivities across cases. The categories and codes include, for example:

Table 1. The examples of categories and example codes in the second round of coding

Source: Developed by the author

Category	Example Codes
Identity as a Regulator	"Maintaining Russian as the language of inner thought"; "Forcing myself to use Latvian"
Consistency or Inconsistency between Attitudes and Strategies	"My language strategy is solely for better social integration"; "I say whatever I think"
Feedback and Adjustment	"I now feel that switching between the two languages is natural"; "Bilingualism is an important asset to me"

¹⁰¹ Lieblich et al., *Narrative Research*, 12.

Subsequently, the coding process will delve into the transcript itself, conducting discourse analysis and coding key lexical items and metalinguistic elements used by the interviewee. Examples of coded components include personal pronouns, modal verbs, metaphors, words denoting boundaries and time.

4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Participant Profiles

For clarity, the participant code format “P[X][M/F][Age]” represents the sequence number, gender, and age, respectively. For example, the code for the first respondent is P1F42, which indicates that the first respondent is a 42-year-old female. Based on this coding convention, the basic details of 11 respondents are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Profile of respondents who took part in the study

Source: Developed by the author

Participant Code	Occupation	Subjective Preferred Language	Residence / Birthplace	Self-Identification as a Balanced Bilingual
P1F42	Shop Assistant	Russian	Riga	Yes
P2F21	Museum Guide	Latvian (Latgalian dialect)	Daugavpils	Yes
P3M19	Unemployed	Latvian	Latgale region	Yes
P4M25	Programmer	Latvian	Riga	Yes
P5M26	Programmer	Latvian	Riga	Yes
P6M25	Medical Student	Latvian	Riga	Yes
P7F28	Doctor	Russian and Latvian	Riga	Yes
P8F24	Medical Student	Russian and Latvian	Riga	Yes
P9M25	Medical Student	Russian and Latvian	Riga	Yes
P10F67	Corporate Manager	Russian and Latvian	Riga	Yes
P11F30	Shop Assistant	Russian	Riga	Yes

As can be seen from the table, the interviewees were selected using purposive sampling, with each identifying themselves as a balanced bilingual. The majority of the respondents work in high-pressure domains where they are required to make frequent linguistic choices, placing high demands on their ability to adapt their identity. Excerpts from the original transcripts of the anonymous interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

A preliminary analysis of the 11 respondents reveals that the vast majority tend to view language (particularly non-official languages such as Russian or English) as a purely communicative medium, rejecting any forced association with national politics or core identity. Most respondents used the term “tool” to define language; P6M25, P7F28, and P9M25 even explicitly stated that language is a tool for communication and should not be “politicised”. P6M25, P10F67, and P11F30 indicated that their core identity would not change as a result of switching languages. P1F42, P2F21, P9M25 viewed proficiency in two or more languages as a “significant advantage” and a “convenient asset” for navigating daily life.

Although most participants viewed language as a tool, many made a fine distinction in their minds between the functions of different languages. Whilst Latvian was strongly associated with emotional expression among bilinguals who had a subjective preference for Latvian (P2F21, P3M19, P4M25), almost all participants associated Latvian with formal, academic and public identities. By contrast, Russian is used more frequently to express private emotions or engage in deep reflection. For example, several participants noted that Russian possesses an irreplaceable precision in expressing certain types of humour, emotions or specific slang that Latvian cannot match (P1F42, P3M19, P8F24). One participant even considered Latvian a relatively “poorer” language than Russian (P1F42).

The external environments in which the interviewees found themselves were highly similar; they were all subject to both top-down institutional norms and bottom-up social scrutiny. All respondents considered the use of Latvian within state institutions, hospitals, schools and administrative spaces to be an inviolable “law”, “standard” and “accepted norm”, regardless of whether they had a preference for Russian. The majority of respondents believed it was logical to use the official language, namely Latvian, in formal settings, for example, P1F42, P11F30 and P2F21.

However, although the social context is relatively similar—particularly following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, when almost all respondents reported feeling increased social pressure—they did not uniformly experience anxiety about using Russian in their day-to-day social interactions. On the contrary, respondents’ attitudes towards “speaking Russian in public” were highly divided. For example, P10F67 stated that even in public settings, if bystanders believed one should speak only Latvian, she “cannot understand that viewpoint at all”; she firmly believes that “others cannot interfere in my private life, nor dictate which language I should use with my family and friends”. Another example is P1F42, who felt that society does not scrutinise people to such an extent; even in public places such as parks or shops, “you can speak whatever language you wish. No one pays you any mind; it doesn’t matter”. She emphasised that she feels “equally comfortable” using both languages anywhere. Even P11F30, who identifies Russian as her preferred language, remarked: “I am a Russian-speaking girl... why should I be afraid?” This highlights that, for these respondents, language is purely a tool for communication; they separate the political attributes of language from its everyday use.

Meanwhile, another group of respondents genuinely felt that social attitudes had become polarised. For example, P6M25 admitted that, having witnessed Latvian nationalists making harsh remarks towards people speaking Russian in public, they now “feel a little afraid when speaking Russian with my mother in public”, worrying that they might be “judged”. P3M19 also mentioned that there is indeed an extreme phenomenon where “if people speak Russian, some might attack them, assuming they support the war in Ukraine”. In such a polarised society, bilinguals are not only scrutinised by nationalists but also feel a sense of helplessness towards certain Russian communities that refuse to integrate. For instance, when P9M25 observes local young people taking “pride” in not speaking Latvian or deliberately mocking the national language, the respondent finds such behaviour “absurd” and “incomprehensible”, and may even resort to confrontational questioning. P3M19 also expressed bewilderment at those who, despite being able to speak Latvian, “stubbornly” insist on speaking only Russian in public institutions.

Although respondents’ attitudes towards the use of Russian in public spaces varied, almost all had engaged in identity negotiation, leading to alignment between their language attitudes and strategies. For example, when discussing the state’s

macro-level policies restricting the use of Russian and promoting Latvian, the vast majority of respondents not only expressed “full support” or stated that they had “no problem” with these policies, but had also achieved a deep internalisation of their identity. They no longer view these laws as externally imposed constraints, but rather employ civic identity discourse such as “our country” and “our policy” to rationalise and defend them (P8F24, P2F21, P10F67, P11F30, P7F28, P9M25). Some respondents even considered protecting the Latvian language and maintaining national independence to be of paramount importance (P3M19, P6M25, P9M25).

Furthermore, despite the highly polarised external environment and the fact that respondents switch languages frequently on a daily basis, the vast majority stated that they had not experienced any serious internal identity crisis. Respondents typically draw a clear distinction between “obeying national laws” and “meeting personal communication needs”; they feel that their current language choices are “very natural” and “comfortable”, and claim that their language system is in a state of complete “harmony”. (P1F42, P6M25, P7F28, P8F24, P10F67, P11F30) In other words, they have achieved alignment between their language attitudes and strategies.

4.2 Narrative Analysis

Following the macro-level analysis of the respondents’ overall situation in the previous section, this section aims to reconstruct the narratives of the selected samples to examine how they achieve alignment between language attitudes and strategies, and to identify different patterns of alignment within these narratives.

4.2.1 Performative Compliance Model (P1F42)

P1F42 does not view her bilingual identity as consisting of two separate entities, but rather as “a vast and unified system” that has been naturally integrated since childhood. However, the two languages carry vastly different and unequal weight in terms of expression. The interviewee explicitly stated a preference for Russian when expressing emotions, noting that Russian possesses a “rich vocabulary” and

“more words for expressing emotions”, which allows her to convey “more nuanced” humour in Russian. Conversely, she regards Latvian as a “rather limited language”, believing its vocabulary to be insufficient for fully expressing her thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, due to recent changes in the social context, she feels that using Latvian now feels “more burdensome and complicated”, whereas she always feels comfortable and secure when using Russian. Nevertheless, she does not feel caught between a rock and a hard place; rather, she regards this balanced bilingualism as a unique professional and social advantage.

In her daily life, this interviewee must navigate a space between strict legal requirements and elusive social hostility. She acknowledges that using Latvian in state institutions and formal settings is “the law” and “the accepted norm”. Furthermore, she is highly aware of intense social friction, noting that “if I start speaking in Russian, Latvians usually take offence”.

To survive in a polarised social environment, the interviewee employs a context-dependent language-switching strategy. As she works in the public sector, she “always opens with Latvian”; this has become an instinctive reaction, as it feels “safer” and more comfortable. She strictly compartmentalises social contexts, refusing to mix languages when speaking with Latvians, as she does not wish to “taint” the language. Although she maintains the use of Latvian in official settings, viewing this as “respect for the state”, she candidly admits that this is essentially a matter of compliance with the law and a means of “self-protection”. In private settings with another bilingual person, she tends to favour Russian because it offers greater expressive power.

On the surface, the interviewee has achieved a highly successful and harmonious linguistic alignment. She believes she can accept a state of “equal status for both languages” and emphasises that she feels “equally at ease” using either. Furthermore, she considers her “professional self” and “domestic self” to be “one and the same person” and thus sees no need to use Russian at home to compensate for linguistic restrictions in public settings.

However, the interviewee’s profound psychological conflict reveals the truth behind this seemingly effortless alignment. Although she claims that switching languages causes her no discomfort, maintaining this “perfect linguistic competence” can sometimes feel “like wearing an exhausting mask”. The powerful metaphor of the “mask” reveals the hidden cost behind her utilitarian compliance.

Whilst her “self-protective” strategy avoids legal and social conflict, the constant, conscious enactment of the “correct” linguistic identity conceals significant psychological friction. Crucially, P1F42’s linguistic strategy cannot be reduced to a sentimental aesthetic preference for Russian vocabulary. In her narrative, Russian operates as the primary sanctuary for her ethnolinguistic identity within an increasingly restrictive public sphere. Her alignment strategy represents a sophisticated negotiation between structural survival and identity preservation: she adopts a performative civic alignment in formal domains to mitigate political and legal risks, yet she actively guards her private domain to maintain self-consistency as a historical Russian speaker. The “tiring mask” is not merely an indicator of personal fatigue, but a symptom of the profound psychological friction caused by a securitized state apparatus that demands the suppression of one’s primary ethnolinguistic identity in public. Under this performative compliance model, the bilingual’s initial attitude is a preference for Russian, and they harbour a sense of aversion towards the rigid requirements imposed by macro-level policies. However, in order to maximize social benefits, through frequent self-reflection and gradual identity negotiation, they come to understand and acquire the linguistic performance requirements in different contexts, ultimately achieving alignment between their language strategies and instrumental attitudes, yet their affective attitudes remain consistently misaligned with their language strategies.

4.2.2 Contradictory Model (P3M19)

For P3M19, the bilingual experience is one of stark separation rather than integration. He explicitly states that Latvian and Russian “do not blend at all”, describing how, when using the two languages, he finds himself in “two different worlds”. The interviewee believes that language shapes and alters his sense of identity, noting that his “personality does indeed change depending on the language”. He is acutely aware of the unique emotional and cultural resonance of Russian, citing highly context-dependent and untranslatable expressions such as “Davaj” and “Molodec”. However, when it comes to emotional expression, whilst discussing sensitive topics in a foreign language such as English makes it “easier to express oneself”, it is fundamentally “not as intimate as conversing in one’s mother tongue”.

The interviewee operates under immense socio-political pressure and, in a highly polarised society, often feels “caught between two opposing camps”. He believes that, with recent changes in the geopolitical landscape, language choice has become heavily politicised. Speaking Russian may invite unnecessary political speculation or attacks, whilst failing to use Latvian in official settings is considered a “dangerous” act. Furthermore, he is highly sensitive to interpersonal friction, as he perceives some Russian speakers as “stubbornly” and deliberately refusing to use the state language.

To cope with these pressures, this interviewee adopts a highly conscious and context-dependent strategy. He occasionally adapts to his surroundings, for example, by using Russian when speaking to elderly people who lack proficiency in other languages. However, when interacting with younger groups or bilingual peers, he refuses to use Russian. If the other person cannot speak Latvian, they should at least speak English. Even when faced with peer pressure to switch to Russian within bilingual social circles or institutions, he adopts a strategy of firm refusal: “I stand my ground” and strictly “insist on speaking Latvian”.

Ultimately, the interviewee’s attitude towards Latvian has been internalised as a relatively fixed ideology and has developed into a defensive mindset. He does not view adherence to the standard of using Latvian in public as a “performance”, but rather as an “achievement” and a state of affairs that is “only right and proper”. His insistence on using Latvian does not stem from negative feelings towards Russian, but is framed as an act of “respect for his nationality and the official language”. He elevates language choice to a matter of moral and national responsibility, believing that for a “minority” group, upholding the national language is a necessary step to “protect their own language”.

Despite having achieved this firm sense of social identity, his language strategies and attitudes remain not entirely aligned. For P3M19, the insistence on strictly using Latvian in public spaces is not a casual personal volition, but a highly political act of ethnolinguistic defence. Embedded in a narrative of collective vulnerability—vividly captured in his statement that “our population is very small... you must protect your own language”—his linguistic strategy reflects an acute awareness of ethnolinguistic survival. He elevates micro-level language choice to a matter of moral and national responsibility, believing that upholding the national language is a necessary step to protect their own culture. Consequently, his

occasional, almost involuntary lapse into Russian across certain domains is not a sign of random personal inconsistency, but highlights the unresolved tension between his rigid ideological commitment to Latvian nationalism and the historical, embodied reality of his bilingual upbringing. It may well be because of his preference for Latvian and strong Latvian identity that he considers his attitude towards language to be “correct” and his language choice to be socially accepted; consequently, he may not have engaged in deep self-reflection regarding his language choice, leading to a certain degree of neglect, and this neglect has resulted in a misalignment between his language attitude and his language strategy, contributing to a situation that he continues to use Russian even whilst clearly rejecting it .

4.2.3 Pragmatic Mediator Model (P9M25)

P9M25 grew up in a bilingual household where his parents spoke Latvian and Russian, respectively. He considers his emotional attachment to both languages to be “equally close” and believes that the use of language in his family environment at the time was “very balanced”. He does not view Latvian or Russian as having any profound political or ideological significance; for him, language is merely “a tool for facilitating everyday communication and travel”. Prior to the outbreak of the war in 2022, he maintained a completely “neutral” stance on the language debate, firmly believing that language should not be politicised, as he had “never given any thought to language conflicts” whilst growing up.

Following the war, the socio-political landscape underwent dramatic changes, placing new pressures on the interviewee. The interviewee observed a gradual deepening of social polarisation: some locals who had lived in Latvia for many years deliberately refused to use the official language, and some young people even mocked Latvian as a “useless” language. On the other hand, he also noted that a certain doctor adamantly refused to communicate with patients in Russian, even though the patients were better able to describe their symptoms in Russian. This polarised social environment, along with the increasingly divergent language choices of different people, caused him distress.

To cope with these social pressures, he adopted a context-adaptive strategy, acting as a mediator in conversations. In public places such as shops, he initiates

conversations in Latvian “95 per cent of the time”. However, if the other person has a distinct Russian accent, he immediately switches to Russian to make communication easier for both parties. As a medical student, he prioritises empathy over administrative protocols. When seeing patients, he proactively asks, “Which language would you feel more comfortable using?”, as he believes that “at times, language restrictions are absurd; communication is the primary task, particularly in the medical field”. He adopts a firm stance only when the legitimacy of the national language is challenged, such as when confronting teenagers online who “take pride in not knowing Latvian”.

Influenced by the social impact of the war, his stance has shifted from neutrality to staunch support for the state language. He states that he now “strongly supports” the mandatory use of Latvian in official settings and actively advocates for schools to strengthen Latvian language teaching, making it clear that “since the war began, my awareness of the need to protect the Latvian language has grown significantly”.

Although he supports “tough measures” in the political sphere, he feels deeply conflicted about the cultural costs incurred—such as the banning of purely non-political Russian-language activities. He believes this is not only “heartbreaking” but also means that “many possibilities have vanished forever”. However, in his personal interactions, there is no contradiction whatsoever between his language use and his stance. This is because he separates macro-level policy from micro-level linguistic behaviour, thereby achieving a sense of psychological harmony. He still regards multilingualism as an opportunity rather than a burden. In short, his language choices remain “true to himself”, reflecting both respect for the nation and deep empathy for others, whilst striking a balance between the two.

An analysis of this respondent’s narrative reveals that his initial attitude towards language was moderate and balanced; following external pressures, he actively engaged in identity negotiation and demonstrated remarkable resilience across different contexts. His language strategies are also highly consistent with his attitude towards language, namely a pragmatic approach that treats language as a tool. The positive social feedback regarding his language choices serves as validation of this pragmatic language attitude, which is why the interviewee has consistently maintained this stance. However, it cannot be denied that he is acutely aware of social pressures, and the burden of identity negotiation has increased.

4.2.4 Boundary Defender Model (P10F67)

P10F67 maintains a balanced and pragmatic attitude towards language. Although she was born in Latvia, she has lived in Russia for over twenty-five years, which has given her a deep affection for both Latvian and Russian. The 2022 Russia-Ukraine war has not altered her stance in any way. When she reflects, she uses Latvian or Russian, or even a mixture of the two. Consequently, she does not believe that “speaking a particular language makes one a certain kind of person” and firmly maintains that she remains the same person throughout. For her, language is simply a “tool for communication”; it carries little political weight in itself, nor is it imbued with deep personal sentiment. Whichever language she speaks, she strives for accuracy and propriety. This has nothing to do with how others judge her; she simply believes that using any language correctly is essential.

Her daily environment is multilingual, with Russian being the primary language at work. Yet she is acutely aware of the external pressures: since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, speaking Russian in public has drawn attention from others, with some even equating the language directly with aggression.

Her approach is both flexible and resolute. When dealing with strangers or discussing serious matters, she always begins by speaking Latvian, as she feels this is more formal and shows greater respect. If the other person does not understand, she naturally switches to Russian. She considers her choice of language to be entirely natural: she speaks Latvian in Latvian-speaking circles and Russian in Russian-speaking environments, even using Russian to communicate with Ukrainian refugees temporarily residing in Latvia. Whilst she is willing to adapt in work and social situations, she maintains clear boundaries in her private life. She believes that in informal, private settings, others have no right to interfere with her choice of language. Consequently, she continues to converse with those close to her in the language she is accustomed to, whilst never imposing her linguistic preferences on others.

Although Russian holds personal emotional significance for her, she “fully understands and supports” the state’s requirement to use Latvian in public spaces and formal settings. She believes this is a rule that every citizen of a country ought to abide by—wherever one lives, one should use the official language of that place. She endorses restrictions on the use of Russian in the public sphere, viewing this as

a mark of respect for Latvia and its culture. Yet somewhat paradoxically, during the 2012 referendum on Russian as a second state language, she attempted to cast a vote in favour.

An analysis of this interviewee's narrative reveals that her initial attitude towards language was relatively balanced. Although her language strategies have become more pragmatic following the social changes of 2022, she does not believe that external events have influenced her attitude towards language. To maintain her consistent language attitude, she draws a very clear line between her public and private identities: she responds to social demands with a compliant attitude in her public life, whilst steadfastly upholding her private linguistic choices in her private space. Although her advocacy for restricting the use of Russian after 2022 appears to contradict her support for Russian as a second language in 2012, both reflect her attempt to align her language attitude with policy, whether through compliance with regulations or by seeking to alter them. Her pragmatic, strictly compartmentalised approach means she is, to a certain extent, less susceptible to external evaluations of her language alignment strategies; her linguistic identity has undergone minimal change, and she exhibits a low level of responsiveness to feedback on her language attitudes, resulting in a relatively stable stance on the matter.

4.3 Discourse Analysis

Respondents' evaluations of language attitudes, strategies, contexts and even personal identity are key to analysing their emotions and attitudes. Therefore, by examining the evaluative adverbs and adjectives used by respondents, one can infer whether their language strategies align with their attitudes and to what extent identity regulation plays a role. When respondents' attitudes align with their language strategies, they tend to use positive vocabulary that conveys a sense of ease and naturalness. For example, P10F67 stated that switching languages felt "very natural"... "It's absolutely not tiring." P5M26 mentioned that because he could speak Latvian naturally, he not only did not find it a burden but even felt that speaking Latvian was a form of "rest". P9M25 also repeatedly used terms such as "comfortable", "fluent" and "fine" to describe their language use. P7F28 even described her relationship with Latvian and Russian as being "in harmony".

These positive terms indicate that when respondents successfully internalise the demands of the social context (such as viewing them as civic duties or means of facilitating communication), their adjusted identity fosters alignment between their attitudes and strategies. Respondents' language strategies are no longer a performance that requires deliberate maintenance, but have become second nature, closely connected with their attitudes and identity.

Conversely, when respondents merely conformed to the pressures of the domain in their behaviour without truly identifying with it internally, they tended to choose negative adjectives. For example, P1F42 stated that she spoke Latvian in public to meet social expectations, describing this linguistic behaviour as a "tiring mask". When imagining a domain in which he is forced to speak only Russian, P4M25 felt "weird" and "almost alien", even going so far as to describe it as "putting on an act". In Latvia's polarised society, respondent P6M25 admitted to feeling a distinct sense of "fear" when speaking Russian with her mother in high-pressure domains, constantly worrying about being "judged" by others.

These negative terms reveal that, in the process of attempting to align their attitudes and strategies, the respondents experienced significant psychological strain because their attitudes and identities conflicted with social norms, placing a heavy burden on their identities as mediators. Even when respondents' outward behaviour conforms to the requirements of different domains (such as speaking Latvian as required, or refraining from speaking Russian in public), they have not truly achieved a closed loop between language attitude, identity and strategy; they must expend considerable psychological energy to maximise their social capital.

Another point worthy of analysis is how respondents use locative terms to define different domains and their linguistic behaviour within them. Discourse analysis reveals that respondents frequently describe the insurmountable nature of the boundaries between different social domains, expressing a perception of the limits of rights and implying how "the right to speak" is allocated within these domains. For example, P11F30 directly links different domains to specific language strategies, with no overlap between them: "Because in certain institutions you must speak Latvian, whereas at home, we can speak Russian". P3M19 places particular emphasis on linguistic norms within formal domains. He points out that failing to use the national language in official settings is not merely a breach of the rules, but constitutes crossing a "dangerous social boundary"; simultaneously, speaking a

language other than the dominant one in a public space where that language prevails would result in a strong sense of being “out of place”. Similarly, P9M25 also states that he has observed Russian-language cultural activities being “removed from the public space”.

These accounts reveal that so-called “domain pressure” is not merely a conceptual construct, but an intangible yet perceptible constraint in real life. For the interviewees, the greatest source of conflict is not a cognitive clash between the two languages, but rather the need to repeatedly prove, in different social contexts, that they have “spoken the right words and taken the right side”. Consequently, the identity mediation they practise resembles more a process of assessing and navigating social spaces. By discerning the boundaries between different domains, they are able to prevent the rules of one domain from spilling over into other domains of their lives, especially private ones, thereby maintaining, to a certain extent, their sense of social security and psychological boundaries.

Having recognised the boundaries of the social domain, participants frequently employ causal conjunctions and transitional structures to cognitively persuade themselves to adhere to the different rules of that domain, thereby resolving the conflict between their language attitudes and external domain pressures. Through identity negotiation, they thus achieve a transformation from passively enduring pressure to actively implementing strategies. Some respondents, whilst preferring Russian in their hearts, are obliged to comply with regulations in public domains; they often use the phrase “because the law requires it, I am protecting myself” to rationalise their language strategy and dissociate this strategy from their emotions. For example, when explaining why she speaks only Latvian in public, P1F42 stated: “**Because** it is the national language... **So** in that sense, it can be seen as a form of self-protection.” P11F30 expressed a similar view: “You have to obey the law, **because** if you don’t, there will be fines or even worse.”

The logic that “I comply because of external rules and penalties” reflects the interviewees’ view that their change in language strategy is entirely due to “irresistible external domains comprising laws and regulations”. This logic enables respondents to dissociate their language choices from the underlying political and emotional entanglements: refraining from speaking Russian in public does not imply a betrayal of their identity, but is merely a pragmatic “survival strategy”, the ultimate aim of which is to minimise the conflict between their language strategies

and the resulting social evaluations, on the one hand, and their self-identity and language attitudes, on the other.

Other respondents also used these strongly associative causal conjunctions, yet expressed entirely opposite views: their logic no longer sought a compromise between external pressures and identity, but rather sought to thoroughly internalise external demands and regulations as an integral part of their identity. For example, P10F67 regarded compliance with the state's language requirements as a civic duty: "I call it (the state's language policy) "our" policy, **because** I live in this country. I am a citizen, and this is my stance as a citizen." Similarly, P3M19 also considers speaking Latvian to be an obligation: "Personally, I feel that switching to Russian is wrong, **because** our population is very small; in such circumstances, it feels as though you must protect your own language."

The logic that "because I am a citizen of this country or because our culture needs protecting, I support and strictly adhere to the language requirements" reflects that the interviewees have fully completed the loop of identity negotiation. The respondents' statements indicate that what was originally top-down domain pressure has been transformed into a bottom-up moral or civic duty. At this stage, the respondents have progressed from passive acceptance to active compliance; the implementation of their language strategies and the subsequent alteration to their identity have changed their attitudes towards language, and a new identity has emerged.

It is also worth noting that some respondents used concessive constructions to express their resistance to pressures in the domain in certain circumstances. For example, P6M25 stated that, as a healthcare professional, "**Even though** I know how to express myself in Latvian... **However** as a healthcare professional, my job is to help people, **Therefore** I use the language that is best for the patient (Latvian or Russian)". P9M25 indicated that empathy and altruism were more important considerations in everyday interactions: "If I notice a seller has a Russian accent, I usually switch, **because** I know it's easier for them." P8F24 also noted: "In order to convey my question clearly or achieve my objective, I switch to Russian, **because** I am capable of doing so, and I need to get the job done."

The logic that "despite macro-level pressures from the domains, I choose to speak Russian in certain domains out of professional ethics or altruism" is a key factor by which interviewees rationalise their use of Russian in a polarised society.

In this way, they elevate their deviation from social norms to the noble goal of altruism, enabling them to support state policy at the macro level whilst still feeling at ease using Russian at the micro level. These interviewees emphasise their professional or altruistic identities, using them as primary mediators, thereby achieving a better alignment of language attitudes and strategies.

The final point of analysis concerns the respondents' use of vocabulary relating to time. By comparing their statements regarding different periods, it is possible to verify whether their sense of identity has changed, as well as the long-term effects of the closed-loop model. For example, P9M25 compared his attitudes before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war with his current stance. He said, "I've noticed that **before the war**, if someone wrote about the language issue on the internet, I would be very neutral. But **now**, in a political sense, I am strongly in favour..." P2F21, meanwhile, noted: "In **early 2022**, you could really feel the tension; people were on edge with one another. **Back then**, if you said even a word in Russian, you'd get suspicious looks. However, living in Daugavpils **now** as a student, I don't really feel that friction..."

These terms, which denote the "past-present" dichotomy, reflect a shift in the respondents' attitudes; they also demonstrate that the impact of geopolitics, coupled with the respondents' long-term cross-domain language practices, has transcended the strategic realm of language choice and has instead profoundly reshaped their initial attitudes, marking the operation of a closed-loop feedback mechanism.

5 Discussions

5.1 The Interplay Between Identity and Attitudes in the Post-2022 Context

Since 2022, Latvia's overarching narrative has directly portrayed Russia as a threat to its very existence,¹⁰² leading bilingual Latvians to reassess the value and risks associated with both Russian and Latvian. For example, P9M25 stated that prior to the war, they had never given any thought to language conflict and had maintained political neutrality, whereas after the war, they "strongly supported" the state's language policy. This shift from "neutrality" to "support" is precisely the change in the cognitive component of language attitude proposed by Baker.¹⁰³ The repeated use of terms such as "legal requirements" and "self-preservation" in the interview data of P1F42 and P11F30 also demonstrates that their assessment of the risks associated with the Russian language has come to take precedence over its value as a tool.

As Baker suggests, attitudes towards language serve to symbolise identity, just as long-standing attitudes towards language can solidify into stable identity tendencies.¹⁰⁴ Taking P9M25 again as an example, after acknowledging that his attitude towards language had changed, he went on to say that the most significant change for him was that "since the war began, I have been more proactive in protecting the Latvian language". This clearly reflects how, following this shift in attitude, his identity as a Latvian citizen and a native speaker of Latvian was simultaneously reinforced. This shift in the respondent's identity can also be explained by Festinger's theory¹⁰⁵ of cognitive dissonance: when the external environment alters an individual's cognition, their original neutral stance gradually

¹⁰² Schulze and Pupcenoks, "Securitizing Russian-speakers," 1036.

¹⁰³ Baker, *Attitudes and Language*, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 132-124.

¹⁰⁵ Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 209.

becomes dissonant, and the individual must adjust their identity in order to explain and support their newly formed attitudes.

In summary, this paper argues that, in the post-2022 context, macro-level geopolitical shifts and changes in national language policy first influence the language attitudes of bilinguals; these attitudes then gradually solidify into new cognitive tendencies, ultimately leading to a subtle shift in identity.

However, the causal chain of “macro-environmental changes–attitudes–identity” proposed in this paper to explain the relationship between identity and attitudes after 2022 still has some shortcomings. Firstly, the theoretical model presented in Chapter 2 assumes that shifts in attitude precede changes in identity. Yet it is difficult to determine, for example, whether an individual first perceives that “the Russian language poses a risk” or first feels that “my Latvian identity is under threat”. Nevertheless, focusing solely on the causal chain from attitude to identity helps to maintain the clarity of the analysis. Furthermore, existing data, such as P9M25, also supports the view that the causal chain from attitude to identity is both present and reasonable. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that language attitudes and identity co-evolve and reinforce one another. This is why, in theoretical models, attitudes and identity ultimately influence one another after the execution of the closed loop.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that, in Latvia’s current highly securitised context, respondents may be inclined to express more “politically correct” attitudes, thereby affecting the validity of the link between attitudes and identity. However, the discourse analysis in Chapter 4 captures underlying causal links by focusing on the metaphors underlying the discourse. For example, P1F42 described her dual linguistic identities as harmoniously unified, yet she referred to speaking Latvian in formal settings as a “tiring mask”. It can be inferred from her attitude towards speaking Latvian that her linguistic identity is not entirely harmonious. Once the contradictions between attitude and identity have been filtered out through discourse analysis, a strong correlation becomes evident.

5.2 The influence of identity on language strategies in different domains

Pavlenko and Blackledge note that an individual's identity can be categorised into "imposed identity", "negotiable identity" and "assumed identity".¹⁰⁶ Analysis of the interview data reveals that these different identities are often activated in distinct domains and correspond to different language strategies. In formal, highly regimented domains, such as government agencies and banks, the strategies employed by balanced bilinguals are primarily dictated by their imposed identity. For example, P11F30 states, "Speak Latvian [in public spaces], because it is best to use the national language there. ... If you don't comply, you'll be fined or face even worse consequences." Bourdieu's theories on symbolic capital and domains help to explain why, in formal domains governed by the state's sole official language—Latvian—the imposed identity is activated. In these domains, the state has established the absolute dominance of the Latvian language through legislation. A system of censorship operates within these domains, determining what is permissible; language use that does not conform to these norms can result in adverse consequences.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the purpose of bilinguals activating an "imposed identity" and adopting strategies of self-censorship (manifested in this study as the use of formal Latvian) within this domain is to secure symbolic benefits such as state-level recognition and the reduction of political risks.

Secondly, in domains where professional standards and interpersonal interaction are equally important—such as healthcare, education and the service sector—the identity that balanced bilinguals primarily activate in these domains is a "negotiable identity", reflecting a high degree of agency. P6M25 stated, "As a healthcare professional, my job is to help people. I use all available resources to provide assistance, which means using Latvian and Russian—whichever is best for the patient." Similarly, P8F24 believed, "A key factor is my duty as a doctor. I feel a strong need to communicate with patients in whatever language they feel comfortable with." The remarks made by the interviewees mentioned above can be effectively explained using Giles's Communication Accommodation Theory, particularly the section on convergence strategies. Giles defines convergence strategies as the adjustment of one's communicative behaviour based on one's perception of others' verbal and non-verbal cues. The aim is typically to gain social approval, enhance the efficiency of communication, or demonstrate empathy

¹⁰⁶ Pavlenko and Blackledge, *Negotiation of Identities*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 37.

towards others.¹⁰⁸ Although there are indeed linguistic norms in these domains, as P6M25 also stated, when speaking with patients, he “must start a conversation in Latvian”. However, the symbolic capital that bilinguals can acquire in these domains is not merely social recognition; it also includes the recognition of interlocutors gained through improved communication efficiency. Consequently, in order to maximise benefits, and also driven by altruistic considerations, bilinguals in such situations typically exercise their agency whilst simultaneously paying attention to their “imposed identity” as law-abiding citizens. They actively engage in identity negotiation, adjusting their language strategies according to different circumstances, such as varying interlocutors or different workplace scenarios.

Finally, in private settings where external pressure is minimal, bilinguals’ assumed identity becomes the key determinant of their language strategies, thereby affording them greater freedom. For example, P10F67 stated, “I believe that others cannot interfere in my private life, nor can they dictate which language I should use with my close relatives.” Similarly, P2F21 believed that “in our family, national policy has no influence.” Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory (SIT) can explain why bilinguals, in private spaces, disregard external pressures and determine their own language strategies—particularly those aimed at maintaining their use of Russian. SIT suggests that when an individual’s social identity is threatened, they may employ a mechanism of “social creation”, whereby they construct certain dimensions in which they perceive their social identity to be superior to the dominant social identity, in order to achieve a positive cognition.¹⁰⁹ Certain bilinguals inevitably possess a Russian identity, which is under threat in contemporary Latvian society. Consequently, these bilinguals have altered the comparative dimensions of Latvian and Russian in order to maintain a positive sense of identity, particularly in private domains. For example, many respondents held such a view that Russian is “closer” or “vivid” in private sense.

The empirical evidence strongly supports the proposition that identity functions as a dynamic regulatory mechanism, moderating the alignment between internal language attitudes and external strategic choices across divergent social domains.

¹⁰⁸ Howard Giles and Tania Ogay, "Communication Accommodation Theory," in *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars*, ed. Bryan B. Whaley and Wendy Samter (New York: Routledge, 2007), 295.

¹⁰⁹ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 43.

However, a nuanced interpretation of the data reveals that the variations observed among balanced bilinguals extend far beyond superficial, volatile individual variations. In the highly securitized and politically charged landscape of post-2022 Latvia, these divergent alignments must be understood as structural manifestations of deep-seated ethnic and ethnolinguistic identity anchoring.

By controlling for linguistic competence methodologically, this study highlights that balanced proficiency does not equate to ethnolinguistic neutrality. Instead, the pressure gradients exerted by institutional and public domains are experienced unevenly depending on an individual's foundational structural anchor. For instance, an informant primarily anchored in a Russian ethnolinguistic identity, such as P1F42, does not perceive the state's mandatory linguistic shifts merely as an administrative adjustment. Rather, the context inflicts a profound structural burden that creates existential friction between internal self-consistency and public civic performance. Conversely, an individual whose identity is anchored within the Latvian ethnolinguistic lifeworld, such as P4M25, experiences the exact same institutional constraints as a natural reinforcement of their public and cultural identity. Therefore, rather than treating these deep-seated attachments as peripheral or confounding individual variables, they must be integrated directly into the conceptual framework as existential anchors. These anchors pre-determine the specific interpretive pathways through which macro-level policies are filtered, negotiated, or resisted across the societal domain spectrum.

5.3 The Alignment of Language Attitudes and Strategies Through Identity Mediation

Firstly, it must be noted that, based on the interview data and reconstructed narratives, the alignment of language attitudes and strategies does not follow a single pattern, but rather exists along a spectrum. Identity negotiation plays varying roles within this process. Of the four typical identity regulation models analysed in Chapter 4, P1F42's model indicates that her language attitudes and strategies are not fully aligned, or rather, that only a superficial alignment has been achieved—namely, an alignment of instrumental attitudes and strategies—whilst her cognitive or affective attitudes have never been aligned. Her instrumental attitudes dominate

her linguistic practice, leading to the most frequent activation of her imposed identity; ultimately, her language strategies are adopted out of a sense of obligation, which is evident in the fact that she knows she should adopt different language strategies in different domains, yet she describes this switching of strategies as a heavy mask.

The contradictory model of P3M19 can also be regarded as an example of superficial alignment. P3M19 strongly identifies with his imposed identity as a Latvian citizen, and both his affective and instrumental attitudes are consistent with this identity; he ought, therefore, to completely reject the use of Russian and adopt a language strategy based entirely on Latvian. Yet he frequently uses Russian. This may suggest that he is either deliberately concealing or inadvertently overlooking his deep-seated linguistic identity in Russian, leading him to appear self-consistent and psychologically well-adjusted, whilst in reality his language attitudes and strategies are not fundamentally aligned.

The models that truly achieve alignment between language attitudes and strategies are likely P9M25 and P10F67. They are characterised by relatively balanced initial language attitudes: P9M25 states that “language is a tool”, whilst P10F67 also believes that language is not closely linked to self-identity or personal emotions. Both feel comfortable adhering to national language norms and do not perceive significant conflict between their imposed identity and other components of their identity, such as their assumed identity. Their identities are also relatively diverse, enabling them to adapt well to the pressures of different domains. For example, P9M25 actively engages his negotiable identity in professional medical settings, striking a good balance between adhering to language norms in public spaces and ensuring effective communication; whilst P10F67, by keenly perceiving the boundaries of different domains, activates the appropriate identity in the appropriate domain, meanwhile maintaining her assumed identity in private contexts. The ultimate result is that they have essentially achieved a genuine alignment of their language attitudes and strategies, as they contend that their thoughts to Latvian and Russian are “in harmony”.

Although the specific ways in which different respondents perform alignment may vary, it is undeniable that, in the context of Latvia post-2022, identity is a key factor in mediating language attitudes and strategic alignment. This can be understood through Bonny Norton’s concept of identity as a “site of struggle”.

Norton argues that within specific institutions or communities, individuals are both agents and objects of power relations.¹¹⁰ Identity is the foundation upon which individuals understand and construct these power relations.¹¹¹ Consequently, the struggle to secure the right to speak (or to adopt language strategies) within these domains must rely on identity. Furthermore, given that language attitudes and strategies are not necessarily equivalent (as Norton puts it, “motivation does not necessarily lead to investment”¹¹²), it follows that identity plays a crucial role in mediating language attitudes and strategies.

The final point to be addressed is why respondents’ initial attitudes may ultimately change, and why identity can consistently and universally moderate the alignment between attitudes and strategies. According to Bucholtz and Hall’s theory, identity is a product of linguistic practice rather than its source.¹¹³ New identities emerge as an individual’s linguistic practices are subject to social evaluation. For example, P8F24 stated, “Almost every Russian speaker I’ve encountered will correct me if I make a small mistake with word endings or tenses. They’ll say, ‘You said it wrong; you need to pronounce it this way.’ That creates a distance.” This suggests that negative evaluations from native Russian speakers alienated her from her identity as a Russian speaker, ultimately leading to a new attitude—one of greater resistance to the Russian language. The relationship between her newly formed identity and her new attitude can again be explained by Baker’s theory, namely that language attitudes are projections of identity.¹¹⁴ Norton’s “Site of Struggle”, as discussed above, posits that identity is dynamic; coupled with the fact that the linguistic environment in Latvia is not only highly securitised but also becoming increasingly restrictive, individuals have to constantly resolve conflicts between their inner beliefs and the symbolic capital they seek to acquire through identity negotiation. Furthermore, the universality of identity regulation stems from the fact that identity is multifaceted, comprising multiple components—including imposed, negotiable and assumed aspects—which ensures that identity serves as a key guide for individuals in adopting appropriate language strategies across different domains. Consequently, identity is

¹¹⁰ Norton, *Identity and Language Learning*, 47.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹³ Bucholtz and Hall, "Identity and Interaction," 606.

¹¹⁴ Baker, *Attitudes and Language*, 132-134.

able to continuously coordinate attitudes and strategies, thereby creating a closed loop.

As can be seen from the analysis above, the closed-loop model proposed in Section 2.4 can largely explain how balanced bilinguals in Latvia achieve alignment between their language attitudes and language strategies through identity regulation. However, the model still has shortcomings: the closed-loop verification proposed by the model relies solely on respondents' self-reports and can only be established through deductive reasoning; it is difficult to verify its validity empirically at the factual level.

5.4 Research Limitations and Possible Future Research

Although this study employed qualitative analysis to explore in depth the mechanisms by which identity mediates language attitudes and strategies among balanced bilinguals in Latvia, the following limitations remain due to objective constraints and the research design:

This study interviewed 11 participants and conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of the interview data. Although the core focus of qualitative research is the depth rather than the breadth of empirical data, the small sample size—particularly the absence of participants in the 30–50 age group and the homogeneity of participants' educational backgrounds—limits the generalisability of the findings to the wider bilingual population in Latvia.

Secondly, given the highly securitised linguistic environment currently prevailing in Latvia, respondents generally perceive significant pressure from society and macro-level policies; this may lead them to adopt a more “politically correct” stance in their interviews, thereby introducing a bias into the research.

Furthermore, as this study is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, the approach used to demonstrate how identity mediates language attitudes and strategies over the long term and forms a feedback loop relies primarily on respondents' retrospective accounts and logical deduction, and lacks long-term empirical observation at the factual level.

Finally, whilst this study identified balanced bilinguals based on self-assessment—thereby eliminating proficiency as a variable from a methodological perspective—the findings suggest that respondents may still harbour strong subjective language preferences even when their proficiency levels are balanced. The ways in which language preferences influence initial language attitudes, as well as the process by which identity mediates language attitudes and strategies, were not explored in depth in this study.

Looking ahead, given that the closed-loop feedback model employed in this study relies primarily on respondents' retrospective accounts to explain long-term identity-mediated language attitudes and strategies, future research could involve multi-year longitudinal studies to empirically observe the long-term, dynamic evolution of individual identity-mediation mechanisms under geopolitical pressures.

Furthermore, future research should encompass a broader range of participants, such as individuals from other regions of Latvia, with varying levels of education, ages and social classes, in order to verify whether the theoretical framework proposed in this study is universally applicable.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, even when language proficiency is balanced, an individual's preference for a particular language will still profoundly influence the process of how identity mediates language attitudes and strategies. Future research could further quantify the extent to which such preferences influence this mechanism.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Research Summary and Conclusion

This study conducted interviews with 11 Latvian balanced bilinguals and carried out a qualitative analysis of the interview data to explore how individuals align their language attitudes and strategies through identity negotiation within a highly securitised linguistic environment following 2022. The main conclusions of the study are as follows:

Regarding RQ 1, the major geopolitical shifts and adjustments to national language policy since 2022 have had a significant impact on the language attitudes of balanced bilinguals towards Latvian and Russian. As these individuals had differing initial stances, the specific manifestations of these changes in attitude vary from person to person. This study identified several patterns: some individuals who were originally politically neutral became more inclined towards Latvian in their language attitudes following the outbreak of war, thereby reinforcing their imposed identity as Latvian citizens. For those who originally held a strong emotional preference for Russian, the dramatic geopolitical shifts led to the emergence of, or a further intensification of, conflicting attitudes towards both Latvian and Russian. In particular, this was reflected in an affective attitude toward Russian and an instrumental attitude toward Latvian, with the gap between their imposed and assumed identities widening further. Meanwhile, individuals who had previously favoured Latvian saw their pro-Latvian stance further consolidated under geopolitical pressure, and their identities as Latvian citizens and patriots were further reinforced.

In terms of RQ 2, the language strategies employed by bilinguals are not simply determined by their attitudes towards language, but are the result of identity mediation in different domains. In formal domains, regardless of the respondent's initial attitude, their imposed identity is activated, because the primary

consideration for individuals when implementing language strategies in these domains is the acquisition of symbolic capital; consequently, self-censorship is widespread. In domains where administrative regulations and interpersonal interaction are equally important, individuals primarily activate their “negotiated identity”, demonstrating greater agency. Bilinguals are able to switch strategies flexibly to enhance communication efficiency, whilst adhering to national language regulations. In private domains, respondents tend to activate their “assumed identity”, employing language strategies that fully align with their preferences.

Finally, the conclusion to the RQ 3 is as follows: the alignment of bilinguals’ language attitudes and strategies is ultimately achieved through identity mediation. Firstly, identity serves as a cognitive filter. Rather than passively enduring the pressures of national language policies, bilinguals use their identity to transform these pressures into a behavioural logic that aligns with their own identity. This filtering mechanism enables bilinguals to clearly perceive the pressures imposed by different domains and, consequently, to select appropriate language strategies. Secondly, identity mediates the relationship between internal attitudes and external social relations by activating different identities across different domains. Finally, identity, as a “site of struggle”, allows balanced bilinguals to continually refine itself, ensuring that alignment between language attitudes and strategies can still be achieved amidst a multifaceted linguistic environment and political pressures.

Furthermore, narrative analysis suggests that this identity-mediated alignment is not a static state, but rather a spectrum determined by a combination of factors, including the bilingual speaker’s initial attitudes, identity and domain, as some interviewees were able to achieve only superficial alignment, others were able to achieve genuine, long-term alignment. The profound shifts in the interviewees’ language attitudes and identities before and after the war, on the other hand, demonstrate that language attitudes, identity and strategies form a dynamic cycle of co-evolution; that is, identity mediation not only aligns language strategies and attitudes, but also facilitates the emergence of new strategies and attitudes, even new identities.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study challenges the behaviourist view that regards language strategies as a direct reflection of attitudes. Firstly, using the example of the increasingly tense security situation in Latvia since 2022, this study reveals a clear inconsistency between attitudes and strategies. Furthermore, language attitudes alone cannot fully account for the complex phenomenon of code-switching; consequently, by integrating Baker's three-component theory of language attitudes¹¹⁵ with Bourdieu's field theory, this study proposes that identity serves as a key mediating variable in the relationship between language attitudes and strategies, explaining why an individual may adopt radically different language strategies within a given domain despite holding certain attitudes.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis of the interview data in this study provides empirical evidence for the practical application of the three dimensions of identity proposed by Pavlenko and Blackledge¹¹⁶ across different contexts. The discussion in this paper regarding the functioning of identity in different domains also provides concrete evidence for Norton's theory of identity investment¹¹⁷, and demonstrates that the process of identity mediating attitudes and strategies is, in essence, a process whereby individuals strive to secure the "right to speak" within power structures.

Thirdly, this study refines contemporary investment and identity negotiation theories by demonstrating that ethnolinguistic anchoring acts as a baseline filter prior to domain interaction. In highly politicized and post-colonial contexts like Latvia, ethnic and ethnolinguistic identities cannot be treated as fluid, agentive choices or volatile emotional states; rather, they function as resilient cultural and historical structures that dictate the psychological cost of communication accommodation. Genuine alignment is achieved not when an individual successfully switches languages, but when the domain rules do not violate their foundational ethnolinguistic anchoring.

Finally, the most original theoretical contribution of this paper is the proposal of a closed-loop feedback mechanism whereby identity mediates language attitudes and strategies. This theoretical model supports Bucholtz and Hall's principle of

¹¹⁵ Baker, *Attitudes and Language*, 34.

¹¹⁶ Pavlenko and Blackledge, *Negotiation of Identities*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Norton, *Identity and Language Learning*.

emergence¹¹⁸, namely that identity is not only the source of language strategies but also the product of social evaluation following linguistic practice; furthermore, the model successfully explains the dynamic and long-term nature of identity's mediation of language attitudes and strategies.

6.3 Practical Implications

This study indicates that, whilst mandatory national language policies can use legal instruments to ensure citizens comply with linguistic norms and safeguard the nation's linguistic security, they may also cause severe cognitive dissonance in individuals. Therefore, when implementing language policies, the state's legislative bodies should recognize that language securitization policies affect individuals not merely as legal subjects, but as members of deeply-rooted ethnolinguistic communities. Policy implementations must therefore balance national security concerns with the psychological preservation of minoritised ethnolinguistic identities to foster long-term social integration rather than structural alienation. Finally, at the societal level, the value of language as a cultural asset and social resource should be emphasised, rather than simply viewing it as either a risk or risk-free, in order to foster mutual understanding between different linguistic groups.

¹¹⁸ Bucholtz and Hall, "Identity and Interaction".

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Appendix 1: Interview Outline

1. How would you describe your emotional attachment to Latvian and Russian respectively prior to 2022?
2. Has the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 and the subsequent restrictive national language policies altered your perspective on the two languages?
3. Do you believe your language attitudes and identity differed before entering the workforce or commencing studies compared to now? Was this shift in attitude also influenced by the events of 2022?
4. In your private life, which language do you consider to be your primary medium for expressing personal feelings?
5. To what extent do you feel that your personality changes depending on which language you are using?
6. In your workplace, in which specific situations do you feel a conflict between the language you must use and the language you want to use?
7. Do you feel that the surrounding environment—including colleagues, policies, atmosphere, friends, family, and so on—has expectations regarding your language use?
8. How do you perceive the social expectations regarding language choice when you are in a public or administrative space in Latvia?
9. In an informal social group, how do you determine which language is “appropriate” to start a conversation with a new person?
10. When you are in a Latvian-dominant environment, what specific factors trigger your decision to switch to Russian?
11. When you are in a Russian-dominant environment, in what circumstances do you feel the need to switch to Latvian?
12. How much conscious effort do you expend on monitoring your grammar or accent when using Latvian in a formal setting?
13. Do you ever deliberately maintain a certain language choice even when it creates social discomfort? Why?

14. When discussing the national language policy, do you refer to it as “their” policy or “our” policy? What is the reason for this choice?
15. What terms or adjectives do you use to evaluate your own performance when you use Latvian in your professional life?
16. How do you justify to yourself the moments when you have to compromise your linguistic preference for a social or professional goal?
17. How has your consistent use of Latvian in professional fields changed your personal attitude toward the language over the years?
18. To what extent do you feel that your current language strategies are now in harmony with your inner identity?
19. Looking at the current social context in Latvia, how has the pressure on your “identity regulation” increased or decreased in the last two years?
20. Please state one or more points or issues that you consider important but were not covered during the interview.

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Academic Research

Project Title: Identity and the Language Attitude-Strategy Alignment: A Study of Balanced Bilinguals in Post-2022 Latvia.

Researcher: Jingsong Lin, Master's Student.

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Tomas Sniegón, Lund University.

Data Holder: Jingsong Lin

Purpose of the Research:

This study uses semi-structured interview to explore the relationship between linguistic identity, language attitudes, and strategies among balanced bilinguals (Latvian/Russian) in the current social context of Latvia.

Participation and Procedures:

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 40-60 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any specific question, or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

All data collected will be handled with strict confidentiality. In accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), your personal data will be processed based on your explicit consent. You have the right to access, rectify, or request the erasure of your data ("right to be forgotten"), and the right to withdraw consent at any time without prejudice.

Your real name and any identifying details will be replaced with a pseudonym (e.g., "Respondent A"). You may use pseudonyms referring to yourself or any other people that you might mention during the study.

The interview will be audio-recorded and for transcription only. To ensure maximum security, the recordings will be stored exclusively on a local, encrypted, password-protected device belonging to the researcher. No cloud storage or third-party servers will be used for the raw audio data. The anonymized transcripts will be processed using qualitative coding analysis software *NVivo*, this process

involves labelling themes (e.g., “emotional attachment to language”) to identify patterns across different participants.

Raw audio files will be destroyed immediately after the successful defence of the Master’s thesis. Anonymized transcripts may be kept for 2 years for academic verification as per university policy.

Potential Risks:

Participation in this study involves no physical risks. However, given the current socio-political context, discussing language identity and linguistic choices may be perceived as sensitive or evoke personal emotions. You are under no obligation to share experiences that make you feel uncomfortable. You may choose to skip any question, take a break, or terminate the interview at any time without providing a reason.

I hereby agree to the Consent Form and voluntarily participate in the study mentioned above.

Participant’s Name and Surname: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 3: Anonymous Interview Transcription Excerpts

P1F42

Interviewer: Since 2022, society has placed a great deal of focus on language. Has this external pressure changed your personal attitude toward either the Latvian or Russian language?

Interviewee: No, it hasn't changed. Not at all.

Interviewer: Does either language now feel "heavier" or more complicated to you than it did before?

Interviewee: Yes, perhaps Latvian, slightly.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Interviewee: Why is Latvian more complicated?

Interviewer: For example, Latvian now holds a higher status in Latvia, which might make it feel more "heavy." Conversely, Russian might feel more complicated because its status is now linked to the war. In your view, is Latvian heavier and Russian more complicated?

Interviewee: I think Latvian is both heavier and more complicated.

Interviewer: And what about Russian?

Interviewee: No, I think Russian remains at the same level as it has always been for me.

Interviewer: Do you feel that others perceive your choice of language as a political statement? Does this affect your personal relationship with these languages?

Interviewee: No, I don't feel it is perceived as a political statement. It doesn't affect me as a person in any way.

P2F21

Interviewer: Have you encountered language-related misunderstandings in your past work or other situations?

Interviewee: Not really. I previously worked in a museum and other fields, but I haven't faced significant misunderstandings.

Interviewer: Do you think that is due to the multinational environment of Daugavpils, or are there other factors?

Interviewee: It's both. It's not just the diverse environment; it's the variety of languages combined with factors like the specific professional field or an individual's personal attitude.

Interviewer: Do you practice internal censorship before starting a conversation in a specific language?

Interviewee: Yes, I "filter" myself a lot with professors. I've noticed that living in Daugavpils, more Russian words have entered my vocabulary—terms that have become part of my daily routine. When meeting professors or people with whom I must speak Latvian, sometimes the Latvian word just escapes me completely. In my head, I'm frantically filtering and searching for the right term so I don't accidentally say it in Russian. I definitely notice those forced situations.

Interviewer: How do you decide which language to use within your family, and does state policy affect this choice?

Interviewee: I'm only 21, and for as long as I can remember, we have always spoken Latgalian at home. It's always been the Latgalian dialect; while some words were Latvian, policy doesn't really affect me. It might have affected my parents in the past, but it doesn't impact me at all. Within our family circle, state policy has no influence.

P3M19

Interviewer: Are there specific expressions you will only say in Russian?

Interviewee: For sure, like "Davaj."

Interviewer: Why would you only say that in Russian?

Interviewee: There are no similar words in other languages. You can try to say it in Latvian, but it sounds very different. "Davaj" is more about encouraging or motivating someone. For example, in the phrase "Davaj, saņemies" (Come on, pull yourself together), it is not just a literal command; it is a form of encouragement.

Interviewer: Question 5: Are there words or expressions that you refuse to translate because the meaning would be lost? What do those words represent to you?

Interviewee: There are a few. For instance, "Davaj" is hard to translate into Latvian or English. In English, you might say "let's go," but the feeling is still very different. Another example is the word "Malacis" in Latvian and "Molodec" in Russian,

which are words of appreciation. They mean you did something good, but they don't sound the same in English. In Latvian, "Malacis" is essentially a translated form of the Russian "Molodec." These words are unique; if you speak another language, you can't truly replicate them, and the sentiment becomes completely different.

P4M25

Interviewer: Describe a situation where you started a conversation in Latvian but switched to Russian, or vice versa, halfway through. What triggered that shift?

Interviewee: There have been times like that, mostly when speaking to people of foreign nationalities. If I approach them in Latvian and see they are confused, I switch to either English or Russian just to make the conversation work.

Interviewer: So you are trying to adapt to others. Why don't you insist on speaking Latvian and let others adapt to you?

Interviewee: If it's a tourist, I can't force them to speak Latvian. If it's foreign exchange students working a part-time job, like a delivery driver, and they don't understand my question in Latvian, I will switch to English.

Interviewer: What about the situation between Latvian and Russian? For example, if someone is speaking mostly Russian and you are speaking primarily Latvian?

Interviewee: It's the same thing. If I see from their expression that they don't understand what I'm saying, I can use Russian. But if I see that they get the gist of what I'm saying but refuse to acknowledge it, then that's on them. If I really need to get a point across, I will switch to Russian if needed.

P5M26

Interviewer: Could you please share your earliest memories of using both Latvian and Russian? What did each language represent to you back then?

Interviewee: Latvian is my native language, so my earliest memory is simply when I learned how to speak. Regarding Russian, I was likely around five years old, learning it while watching cartoons and speaking to neighbourhood kids. Back then, both languages just represented a way to communicate with others.

Interviewer: So, you mean there was no difference to you? They were just languages of communication.

Interviewee: When I first started using them, yes. They were just a way to communicate with others.

Interviewer: How do you feel now? What do these languages represent to you today?

Interviewee: In general, they are still vehicles for communication. I haven't really thought deeply about what they "represent" because, ultimately, if one person speaks a language and I speak another, it's just a way to connect.

Interviewer: In your private life, which language feels like the "language of your heart," and has this changed over time?

Interviewee: The language of my heart is Latvian, as it is my native language and I speak it most of the time. That has never changed.

P6M25

Interviewer: In a Russian-dominant environment, in what circumstances do you feel the need to switch to Latvian?

Interviewee: I don't feel any need to switch to Latvian except for what is mandated by law—that you should start a conversation in Latvian.

Interviewer: So the law and policy are the only reasons you would switch to Latvian while speaking Russian?

Interviewee: Yes. For example, during my internship in Daugavpils, you have to greet the patient in Latvian. If the patient then starts speaking Russian, you continue in Russian with them.

Interviewer: What do you think of this switch to Latvian? Is it natural for you because of the law, or do you find the law restrictive?

Interviewee: I don't think the law is restrictive. I believe the Latvian language should protect itself because it is becoming a very small language. In a hundred or two hundred years, it could go extinct. So, trying to preserve the language through laws is a good idea.

Interviewer: How much conscious effort do you expend on monitoring your grammar or accent when using Latvian in a formal setting?

Interviewee: In a formal setting, I always try to be very precise and articulate so the maximum number of people can understand and feel good about what I'm saying.

Interviewer: What do you mean by "good feeling"? Do you think if you speak with a strong Russian accent, people will have a worse view of you?

Interviewee: No, I think if you try to speak Latvian, people view it positively even if they can hear a Russian accent. It's good that you are speaking Latvian, and people generally don't say anything bad about it.

P7F28

Interviewer: First question: how would you describe your emotional attachment to Latvian and Russian, respectively?

Interviewee: Obviously, Russian is my mother tongue. I started speaking Russian in my family and I continued to speak it with my mom and dad. I started speaking Latvian in kindergarten, so it has a big part in my heart. When I was younger, I even preferred to speak in Latvian—even at home—and watched TV in Latvian. Nowadays, I don't really use Russian as much because I speak English to my husband, most of my studies are in Latvian, and my friends speak Latvian. I would say it's just a fact that I was born in a Russian-speaking family, but overall, I think I'm more emotionally attached nowadays to the Latvian language because I can express myself even better in it.

Interviewer: Why are you not more attached to Russian right now, given that it is your mother tongue and your family speaks it?

Interviewee: Because I wasn't brought up reading Russian books. I used to listen to Russian songs, but I don't have many Russian-speaking friends anymore either. I only use it to communicate with my mom and my dad, but they don't really put a lot of emotional value into that language; it's just a means of communication. Compared to Latvian, I have more attachment to Latvian because I spoke it at school. I know the Latvian national anthem and I used to read more classical literature in Latvian, so I have a stronger bond with that language.

Interviewer: You mentioned that when you were small, you already started watching Latvian content, such as TV shows. Why did you choose to watch that content intentionally at that time?

Interviewee: I don't know if it was intentional or unintentional; it's hard to say because I was only around four or five years old. At that time, I spent more of my time in the Latvian-speaking community at kindergarten. That was where I formed a bond with the Latvian language, Latvian TV shows, and Latvian-speaking people. When I came home, I only spoke Russian a little bit with my parents. I was probably

unintentionally choosing Latvian shows because most of the people around me spoke that language.

P8F24

Interviewer: In your private life, which language do you consider to be your primary medium for expressing personal feelings, and why?

Interviewee: That is a difficult question. In my private life, I mainly express personal feelings in English, provided the other person understands it. But if I had to pick between Russian and Latvian, it would be Latvian.

It feels the most natural when discussing emotions, personal experiences, and important topics with close family or friends. Even though I sometimes switch languages in conversation, Latvian remains the language in which I can express myself most precisely. Because my environment is primarily Latvian-speaking, I can find specific terms that I might struggle to explain in Russian.

Interviewer: Why do you think your Russian proficiency isn't higher, despite being raised in a bilingual family?

Interviewee: In my experience, the bilingual side of my family never really held together. My parents are separated, and I stayed in closer touch with my Latvian family because they were more willing to communicate.

The Russian side of the family has specific biases and "USSR-style" rules—for example, strict protocols on how to call your grandmother on her birthday or how to behave at events. I don't agree with those. I've become quite distant from them. It isn't just about the language; while they understand Latvian, they aren't as open-minded to other perspectives as the Latvian speakers I know.

Interviewer: When did you start feeling this distance toward the Russian side of your family?

Interviewee: Around the age of 16, when I began developing my own perspectives. I was raised in a trilingual environment—studying in English with English-speaking friends, while also having Latvian and Russian social circles.

At 16, I purposely began distancing myself from people who didn't align with my views or my psychological well-being. To be honest, they were harming my mental health. My Latvian peers were much more welcoming of my mixed identity, whereas my Russian side would often deny my experiences. Regarding the broader

debate, I remain neutral; I think it's always better to know both languages, but I believe if you live in Latvia, you should know Latvian.

Interviewer: You mentioned that your Russian-speaking family and friends are more narrow-minded. Do you think that is because the Russian language is gradually being restricted in this country and they are trying to protect their identity?

Interviewee: Yes, I would definitely agree with that. I used to be a narrow-minded "Latvian-Russian" girl myself until I studied abroad. That experience shaped my perspective and taught me that there are multiple narratives to the same story. I learned that you should try to see everyone's point of view, because emotions and experiences are not the same for everyone, even within the same culture.

P9M25

Interviewer: After work, do you ever feel "tired" of one language and want to use another to "wash your brain" a little bit?

Interviewee: I've never thought about it that way, but I guess it happens, and I like it. During my university rotations, I use Latvian with doctors and a mix of Latvian and Russian with patients. The day is very mixed. But I know when I come home to my girlfriend, we will speak English 95% of the time. I enjoy this mix and am grateful for the opportunity to use so many languages daily. I see only positives in that.

Interviewer: How do you justify it to yourself when you have to compromise your linguistic preference for a social or professional goal?

Interviewee: I justify it based on how it makes the other person feel. As I've said, language plays no role in how I value a person, but I want to make things easier for the person I am talking to. If switching languages makes the interaction better for them, then that is the right choice.

If the other person doesn't have a preference, I stick to Latvian because I start 90% of my conversations in Latvian anyway. My justification isn't about my own preference; it's about whatever makes communication most effective for the other person.

Interviewer: Beyond the social goal of better communication, there are professional goals. For example, in professional meetings, such as on a student union board, you have to use Latvian and cannot use Russian. How do you justify this requirement to yourself?

Interviewee: I don't really see it as my personal choice. We are an association with our own "small constitution," which clearly states that meetings must take place in the Latvian language. I simply follow that rule. As an organization operating under our national law, where we have one official language, that is how it should be. I see no fault in that.

Interviewer: Let me put it more simply. If there is a rule you must obey regardless of whether you like it, how do you justify it to yourself and maintain your mental stability while obeying a rule that might not make you happy?

Interviewee: I think that applies to rules in general. A good example might be driving rules; you could break them, but you know there will be consequences. With these language issues, there usually aren't consequences if you speak Russian for a bit during a meeting. However, the rule makes sense to me, so I follow it. If there is a rule I don't agree with, I can't really change it; I just have to obey it. That is my stance.

P10F67

Interviewer: I see. But when you talk to yourself in your mind, which language do you use?

Interviewee: Please repeat the question.

Interviewer: I mean, in your internal monologue with yourself...

Interviewee: I speak both Latvian and Russian. In fact, with people who speak Latvian, I speak Latvian. With Russian speakers, I speak Russian.

Interviewer: Okay. But when you talk to yourself—specifically to yourself—in your head?

Interviewee: In my head? It's hard to say because it's a jumble. [Laughs] It's both; one language and the other.

Interviewer: Okay. Next question: To what extent do you feel your personality changes depending on which language you use?

Interviewee: I feel that my personality does not change.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Interviewee: It just doesn't.

Interviewer: Think about it. Why doesn't it change?

Interviewee: It doesn't. Both languages are close to me. It doesn't affect my personality. In my understanding, language is simply a means of communication. It doesn't affect me as a person.

Interviewer: So, in your view, language is not linked to your personality?

Interviewee: In my case, it isn't.

P11F30

Interviewer: Next question: regarding national language policy, do you call it "their" policy, or the "government's" policy, or "our" Latvian language policy? What is the reason for this choice?

Interviewee: I don't talk about politics with anyone, but if I had to say, it's not "theirs" but rather "ours," because we are one country and one people. Therefore, it is "ours," as the policy is collective.

Interviewer: Do you have a negative attitude toward the government restricting the use of the Russian language?

Interviewee: Yes, a little bit. I just don't like it. For me, it doesn't cause any discomfort, but for people who have poorer Latvian or Russian language skills, they simply cannot understand each other because of those restrictions.

Interviewer: Okay, next question: do you still follow the state language laws or other regulations?

Interviewee: I follow them.

Interviewer: And when you have to follow a law or a regulation, does it cause you any discomfort?

Interviewee: You have to follow the laws because if you don't, there are fines or even something worse.

Interviewer: Is it only about the fines? Do you follow the laws just because the consequences are scary? Or do you follow the law even if you disagree with it?

Interviewee: I agree with the laws.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I just do. My personal views align with them.

Interviewer: Even though the law restricts your use of the Russian language?

Interviewee: It doesn't restrict it that much. Besides, I don't actually know the specifics of the laws that well.