



# „Diaspora varieties: living in the empire“

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„Language Empires in Comparative Perspective“



# Sketching a future research project

**Aim:** Describing and comparing Baltic diaspora varieties.

**Special interest:** Simplifications in the language system.

**Motivation:** First-hand experience as a member of a Latvian diaspora group → doubts about language preservation and the nature of the preserved variety.

# Is there a „diaspora variety“?

There does not exist ONE overall diaspora language, rather — if at all — several diaspora varieties at different locations.

RAIMO RAAG postulates at least the 4th generation to speak its own kind of diaspora vernacular before it can be labelled a variety (quoted by PRAAKLI & VIKBERG 2010).

JĀZEPS LELIS (1965) points out a so-called „dialectisation“ of Latvian spoken in the diaspora.

# Origins of the diaspora communities

Eastward migration during the Russian Empire (workers, settlers)

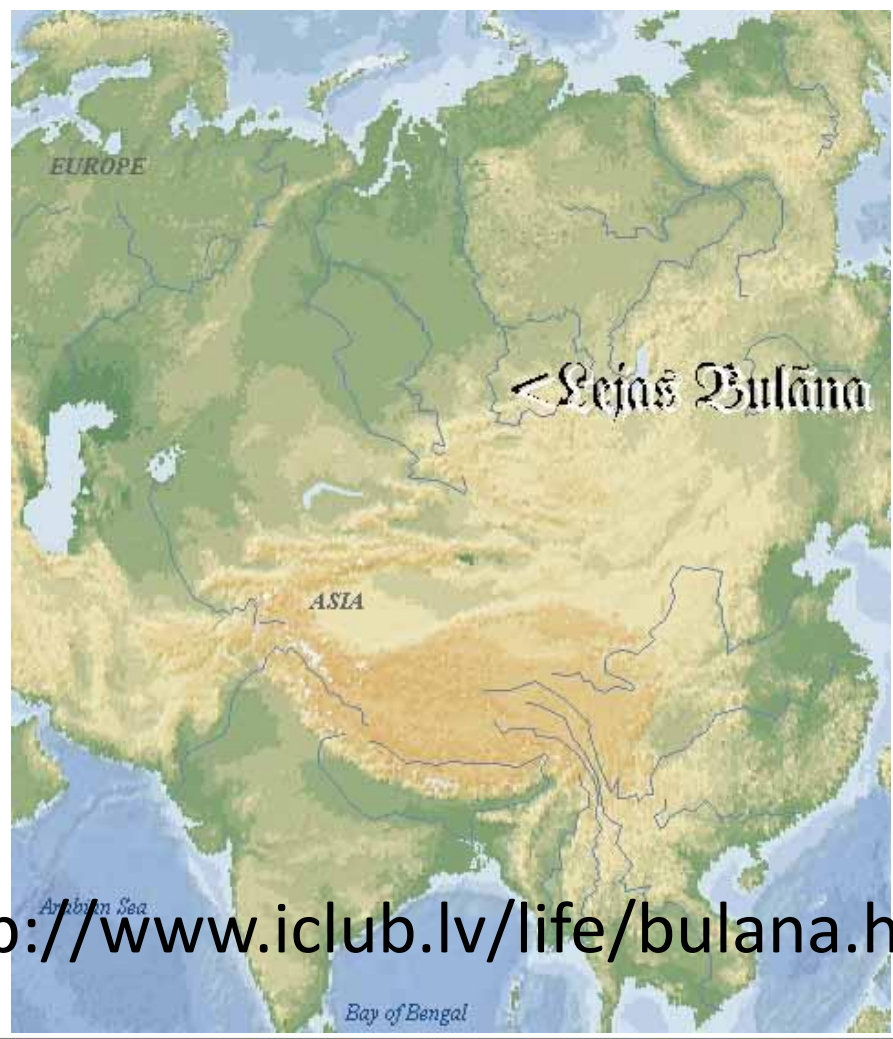
Westward migration during WW2 (refugees)

Year	Estonia	Diaspora East	Diaspora West
1897	880,000	125,000	—
1945	830,000	110,000	90,000
2000	930,000	40,000	85,000

Year	Latvia	Diaspora East	Diaspora West
1897	1,318,000	ca 110,000	—
1945	1,297,000 (1959!)	??	ca 130,000
2000	1,370,000	??	ca 100,000??



# Latvian village „Lejas Bulāna” (Нижняя Буланка) in Krasnojarsk region



<http://www.iclub.lv/life/bulana.htm>

## Language situation in the diaspora today

- Bilingualism — Estonian & Latvian communities abroad are by now all (at least) bilingual, fully integrated/aculturated
- Overall positive attitude towards the inherited language
- Language attrition — reduced language use
- Language obsolescence — mixed marriages, semi-speakers
- But also: new immigrants arrive & take part in community life, frequent visits to Estonia & Latvia
- No authoritative language regulation (Also: standard valid in Latvia is not fully accepted by the diaspora speakers)  
→ different grades of language proficiency, even within a stable community!

# Prominent features of a diaspora language (which is no longer used as primary language)

- Phonetical adaptations (resulting in an American, Swedish etc. accent);
- Lexicon: borrowings on one hand, a tendency for purism on the other hand;
- Frequent code-switching (but also possible: employing loanwords or particles for reasons of identity marking);
- Loss of styles/registers, e.g. youth slang, abusive words;
- Non-standard forms, variations;
- Simplifications (e.g. in inflexional paradigms, grammatical rules)  
(Vago 1991)



# Focus on simplification

Several factors can play a role in language simplification:

- „Normal“ language change
- Contact-induced language change
- Language non-use
- Incomplete language acquisition





## Simplification due to non-use

"With nonuse, language knowledge becomes less accessible. The language needs to be used regularly in order to meet the time constraints of language production and perception. In communication, speakers will try to meet those constraints as much as possible, and elements (words, syntactical procedures) that are difficult to access will be avoided when other elements are more readily available. In terms of language use, this means that individuals losing their language will increasingly have access problems and accordingly tend to avoid difficult elements of that language as much as possible. [...]"

(de Bot 2001: 68f)

# Expected and observed phenomena (Examples from Latvian)

## Non-standard forms

- Dialectal features, e.g. in the lexicon or in the pronunciation (non-standard distribution of [ɛ] and [æ]);
- „wrong“ derivation, e.g. *rietrumi* ‘West’ (standard: *rietumi*) analogue to *austrumi* ‘East’;
- „wrong“ gender, e.g. *bulciņš* (m) ‘bread roll’ instead of *bulciņa* (f)
- „wrong“ inflexional class, e.g. *sniegs* (NOM) : *sniegū* (LOC) (standard: *sniegā*) ‘snow : in the snow’

## Simplifications: loss of rules

Partitive genitive and genitive of negation are no longer in use:

*Man nav nauda.*

I:DAT NEG:be:3 money:NOM

instead of *Man nav naudas.*

I:DAT NEG:be:3 money:GEN → 'I have no money.'

*Lūdzu mazliet kafiju!*

please little\_bit coffee:ACC

instead of *Lūdzu mazliet kafijas!*

please little\_bit coffee:GEN → 'Some coffee, please!'

## Simplifications: loss of categories

Loss of the imperative as a formal category:

2.PL forms for imperative *-iet(ies)* and indicative *-at(ies) / -āt(ies)* are mixed up or no longer distinguished

*Dariet ko gribiet!*

do:2PL.IMP what:ACC want:2PL.IMP

*Darāt ko gribat!*

do:2PL.PRS what:ACC want:2PL.PRS

Instead of *Dariet ko gribat!* → ‘Do what you [2PL] like!’

# Reinterpretations I

Unawareness of a partitive genitive can lead to its reinterpretation as nominative plural (applicable only for feminine nouns):

*Man nav naudas.* (NOM.PL?) → 'I have no moneys.'(?)

This does not work for masculine nouns, though, since the GEN.SG form is non-ambiguous:

*Man nav laika.* → 'I have no time.'

I:DAT NEG:be:3 time:GEN



## Reinterpretations II

After abandoning the formal distinction between imperative and indicative the suffixes *-iet(ies)*, *-at(ies)* / *-āt(ies)* could be conceived as 2.PL „alloforms“ in need of new distribution rules:

- Possibly on a morphonological basis (preference of the forms *-aties* / *-āties* in combination with the reflexive marker)
- Or as a means of distinction for other grammatical categories, eg tense  
(*-iet(ies)* present tense : *-at(ies)* / *-āt(ies)* past tense)
- Or even gender??  
(*-iet(ies)* masculine : *-at(ies)* / *-āt(ies)* feminine)

# Research hypothesis

Do diaspora varieties in contact with different dominant languages show different signs of simplification, according to the distinguishable categories in the dominant language?

→ Hypothesis: the model of Russian partitive and negative genitive prevents the simplification that can be observed in the Western diaspora (with English, Swedish and German as dominant languages)

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