

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Who assimilates whom?—The world and the Baltic region

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8ts240js>

Journal

Journal of Baltic Studies, 18(3)

ISSN

0162-9778

Author

Taagepera, Rein

Publication Date

1987-09-01

DOI

10.1080/01629778700000121

Peer reviewed

WHO ASSIMILATES WHOM?—THE WORLD AND THE BALTIC REGION

Rein Taagepera, University of California, Irvine

Assimilation here means linguistic assimilation. In the Baltic republics some immigrants are assimilated by the Balts. In districts where Russian immigration is heavy, the reverse assimilation of local people by the speakers of Russian can occur. Both processes proceed simultaneously. Which of the two is faster? Before even attempting an answer, the broader context has to be discussed. It may cast a different light on the Baltic regional issues even if one is not prepared to go along with all my claims. I invite the reader to toy with some crazy conclusions flowing somewhat logically from some well-known trends.

It will be argued that successful Russification would ultimately further more rapid Anglicization of the Baltic region. Hence the Russians would be better off if they gave up on Russification attempts and began to support the neighboring languages as a bulwark against the worldwide onslaught of English. The data analysis presented subsequently indicates that the current assimilation rate of Balts by Russians is negligible at the most, so that full Russification could not be accomplished before Anglicization becomes a serious competing process.

Will Russification Efforts Promote Anglicization?

Assimilation in the Soviet Union has mainly taken the form of Russification. However, in the non-Russian union republics some assimilation in the direction of the republic titular nation also is attempted or takes place spontaneously, especially among dispersed minorities which can even include Russians.

The educational system protects the Russians in the non-Russian republics, but the members of other nationalities (designated here as "third nationalities") often have only the choice between schools in the republic language or in Russian. If both of these languages are equally foreign to the parents' national

culture, they are likely to send their child to a Russian school, since the Russian language offers broader union-wide career opportunities. This can bring a negative reaction from the republic nationality when the latter feels threatened by Russification. In particular, what is construed by Jews as "antisemitism" may at times be resentment at their sending their children to Russian rather than republic-language schools and otherwise joining the linguistic community of the colonial masters.

Members of third nationalities still may undergo republic-language assimilation in cases of mixed marriages or where there is an overwhelming local majority of the republic nation. Under these conditions Russians too are liable to be assimilated. Cultural, religious and linguistic affinities can turn assimilation in a non-Russian direction even in the presence of large numbers of Russians. Many non-Kazakh Muslims, for example, in Kazakhstan are likely to interact socially more with Kazakhs than with Russians and assimilate in the Kazakh direction. In the Central Asian republics one can guess that assimilation of third-nationality Muslims goes overwhelmingly in the direction of the Muslim republic nationality rather than Russian, and successive census figures supply indirect evidence.

Autonomous republics (ASSRs) within non-Russian union republics offer especially useful cases because separate census data for such territories are available. Population growth for the Karakalpaks, who have an ASSR within the Uzbek SSR, is slower than for other surrounding Muslim nations, although birth rates must be equally high. The most likely explanation is assimilation in the Uzbek direction.

In the autonomous republics and oblasts within the Georgian SSR official assimilation pressures in both Georgian and Russian directions are known to exist. In particular, the Abkhazian language was made to switch from the Latin to the Georgian alphabet (1938) and then to the Cyrillic (1954). Given the past animosities and the future job opportunities, many Abkhazians and Ossetians might prefer to become Russians rather than Georgians, if assimilation is inevitable anyway. Georgian pressures on their minorities might then be counterproductive. If those minorities cannot be Georgianized, the Georgians would be better off by strongly supporting their linguistic minorities rather than pushing them toward the use of Russian as a safeguard against Georgian.

On a wider scale, the same could be said of Russification attempts in the Soviet Union. Worldwide, the English language is advancing, and practically all other languages are on the defensive. This includes Russian. If unsuccessful attempts at Georgianization play ultimately into the hands of Russification by weakening the ASSR languages, then unsuccessful attempts at Russification play into the hands of Anglicization by weakening the union republic languages.

In scientific publication the hegemony of English has already reduced Russian to a parochial language. Because of its exotic Cyrillic-based alphabet, even international terms in Russian table headings cannot be deciphered by the world public. Top scholars often realize that, worldwide, only a few people can understand their most important findings or that the opinions of only a few such people matter for further propagation of their ideas. Such scholars would want to publish in English so as to maximize their impact worldwide. Only national pride could exert an opposite psychological effect. The extensive ban the USSR

has imposed on scientific publication in languages other than Russian destroys this mental bulwark. In the short run the decree that all dissertations must be in Russian would seem to promote Russification, but in the long run it opens the way for Anglicization. Consider the very argument against scholarly publication in "minor" Soviet languages: publish in Russian because your own language offers too limited circulation and quality control. Since Russian too is parochial on the world scale, the logical conclusion is to publish in English. Over the long run no official barriers can block such motives.

The inroads of English into popular culture already raise worldwide concern. In places like Finland the encroachment is resisted by pride in one's own language. In the neighboring Soviet Baltic republics resistance to English is reduced by concerns about Russification. In fact, English may be considered a welcome antidote to Russian in the eyes of those most concerned with the preservation of the national language. If a dissertation on Lithuanian literature can no longer be written in Lithuanian, it would make more sense to present it to the potential world readership in English rather than in Russian. If rock bands want to impress the audiences in a non-native language, let it be the fashionable English rather than the language of the local colonial masters. In terms of cultural attraction, English may already have surpassed Russian in the Baltic republics, despite the heavy injection of Russian culture and language in schools and mass media—despite this injection, and partly because of it.

It is ironic that Stalin's coarse methods probably caused more Anglicization than Russification of Balts. Of course, quite a few deported Balts who survived in Russian surroundings became Russified. However, at the same time nearly 10% of the Baltic population fled to the West. Most of them settled in English-speaking countries and are becoming Anglicized, much as they may pride themselves in being the cream of Baltic patriots. In the age of satellite TV similar linguistic attitudes can develop inside the Baltic region, if the Russians press too hard.

The Baltic republics are obviously not typical union republics; they are Western by location, history, alphabet, and orientation. Western influences are weaker in Slavic and historically Orthodox Ukraine, and weaker still in remote Central Asia. However, the Baltic republics are the bellweather republics in many respects, be that manifested by the modern lifestyles or by economic slowdown. In a world made smaller by the electronic mass media, the awareness that Moscow is not the world center in culture and science is bound to extend ever further toward the non-Russian populations from the Volga to Baikal.

Under these conditions, accelerated Russification pressures in the USSR can bring on two diametrically opposed results. The authorities hope that Russification will take root before the full electronic onslaught of English, so that a "Soviet" national pride based on the Russian language becomes a bulwark against English. However, the heavy-handed pushing of Russian may also produce a national reaction which could view English as something to be played out against the Russians. In the end, both Russian and the republic language may be the losers. The defenders of the republic languages have little choice. Only Moscow can continue or call off Russification measures like teaching Russian starting from the first grade or even kindergarten.

Moscow may be reluctant to desist from Russification, because it may be unwilling to recognize the seriousness and imminence of the challenge of Anglicization, and also because Russification may succeed in parts of the USSR—in particular in the autonomous republics within the Russian SFSR and in Belorussia. This may blur its utterly counterproductive effect in Central Asia and in the Baltic region. In Central Asia failure may become manifest rather soon. In the Baltic, Russification may prove an ultimate failure the more it appears to succeed at first.

Assume for the moment that the dream of Russifiers (and the nightmare of Baltic patriots) is achieved. Russian immigration and denationalization through schooling produce a breakdown of national will in one of the Baltic republics, with a domino effect on the others, enabling Moscow to impose Russian as the only language of administration and culture. Forcing the Baltic languages to use the Cyrillic alphabet becomes politically feasible, and so does formal demotion to ASSR status, following the Karelian precedent. The reaction of a large portion of the Baltic population would follow the Mingrelian and Ossetian lines: if one's own language cannot be maintained, try to switch to the outside language with the broadest appeal and most future promise. Of course, the political power relations are different. Moscow can overrule Tbilisi in a way the English-speaking world cannot overrule Moscow in the Baltic republics. But on the other hand, Baltic affinities with the West are positive while those of Mingrelians toward Russian are at best neutral. Any factors promoting English in Russia, from science to pop culture, would be magnified in the Baltic, once the hope for one's own language is gone.

Changes in outlook among the Russian immigrants in the Baltic region could be even less to Moscow's liking. There is anecdotal evidence that Baltic Russians travelling in Russia at times try to pass themselves off as, say, Estonians, until ignorance of the language unmasks them. The Baltic Western traditions have prestige value, but the language barriers prevent the Baltic Russians from sharing them fully, and language is not easy to acquire. Destroy the Baltic languages, and a common Baltic regional identity may emerge, to include the local people and Russian immigrants. The new mix certainly would include affinity for the English-dominated West, since the Western atmosphere is the very ingredient that attracts many Russians to the Baltic countries. The new mix might even include resentment against the Russian conquest.

If such resentment within a Russian-speaking "Pribaltika" seems far-fetched, consider the feelings of the English-speaking Irish toward England or the mixed feelings of Estonian and Latvian Christians about the Christianization of their lands 800 years ago. A Russian-speaking "Pribaltika" may succumb to Anglicization much sooner than neighboring Finland, and any domino effect in Russia proper would be more likely precisely because of the shared language.

All this is fantasy, because I do not believe the Baltic languages are such pushovers. But the relentless worldwide pressure of English is not fantasy. The Russian language may come to feel its brunt precisely to the extent that it succeeds in eliminating surrounding safety barriers in the form of other language areas. What is the nightmare of Baltic patriots may begin as sweet success for the Russifiers, but it may end otherwise.

In sum, the processes of assimilation in the Soviet Union are not simply comparable to a big fish trying to swallow small ones. It is rather like the well-known picture of a medium fish swallowing a small fish while being swallowed itself by a still bigger one. An isolated Russian intermarrying in Karakalpakia may be assimilated by the Karakalpaks, while the latter are assimilated by the Uzbeks, while the latter feel Russification pressures, while the Russians already feel the breath of Anglicization at their necks.

Assimilation in the Baltic region cannot be meaningfully discussed in isolation from this wide panorama. It is conditioned by the broad context. Conversely, it also may supply detailed evidence regarding the multifaceted worldwide phenomenon of linguistic assimilation.

Assimilation in the Baltic Region

Assimilation in the Baltic area is almost as old as the history of human settlement. Some 5,000 years ago the presumably Finnic makers of comb-decorated pottery submerged the earlier settlers. A thousand years later the penetration by presumably Baltic bearers of cord ceramics led to a prolonged reciprocal assimilation process where Finnic prevailed north of the Daugava and Baltic south of it. Some 1,500 years ago the Daugava demarcation line broke down and what was to become the Latgallian language reached the present Estonian border. The assimilation of Livs during historical times could be the continuation of this advance. Many new immigrants came and were assimilated after the decimations of the Livonian Wars and the Great Nordic War. As in many regions of the world, languages have come and gone, while the physical characteristics of the population may have remained rather stable.

The past 50 years have brought new inroads by Slavs, whose major advances into Finnic and Baltic territories a thousand years ago had stopped for the previous 700 years at Lake Peipsi and the line due south of it. From a future vantage point the establishment and crumbling of the Peipsi line might look as puzzling as the establishment and crumbling of the Daugava line several millenia earlier—or it might be seen as a temporary advance bound to founder on the cultural strengths of the Baltic nations. At present, the question is how rapidly the new Russian-speaking immigrants flow in, and how quickly the existing population can assimilate them. There is appreciable anecdotal evidence of assimilation of isolated Russians in predominantly Baltic surroundings. In cities like Daugavpils and Narva, where the Russian oldtimers and newcomers form overwhelming majorities, assimilation most likely goes the Russian way. The crucial question is what will happen in cities with large proportions of both natives and Russians, and in particular in the capital cities—Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn.

The detailed demographic documentation needed is largely unavailable. What is available has been analysed for different purposes by Dreifelds, Levits, Taagepera, and others.¹ Local trends go at times against the main trend. For example, two small towns on Lake Peipsi that had Russian majorities 50 years ago are becoming Estonian. Assimilation of Poles by Lithuanians seems to be counteracted by an influx of semi-Russianized Poles into Lithuania from elsewhere in the Soviet Union.² The Latvian census of 1979 indicates a recent emigration of at least 10,000 Latvian-speaking Latvians from their homeland to

Russia, a type of emigration that does not show up in the Estonian and Lithuanian population balances.³ The basic issue hinges around the intensity of immigration. The next question is the natural growth rate of the immigrant and native populations, and the assimilation directions and rates. Disregarding the third nationalities (although their effect is not negligible), I will focus on the following variables (and their rates of change):

- The number of Balts who consider Russian as their main language
- The number of Russians who consider the republic language their own
- The number of Balts fluent in Russian, in addition to their own language
- The number of Russians fluent in the republic language
- The percentage of mixed-marriage offspring who declare themselves Balts

The mixed-marriage data are limited to much-quoted figures for the capital cities 20 years ago; these gave the republic nations a slight edge. In the absence of further figures no trends can be estimated except indirectly.

TABLE 1
Language incongruence for republic nations and Russians,
1959-1979

	1959	1970	1979
LITHUANIAN SSR			
Russians adopting Lithuanian	3,361	5,291	6,641
Lithuanians adopting Russian	2,534	4,553	5,745
Difference	+827	+738	+896
Sum as % of republic population	0.21	0.31	0.36
ESTONIAN SSR			
Russians adopting Estonian	5,011	5,029	6,385
Estonians adopting Russian	5,895	6,934	9,419
Difference	-884	-1,905	-3,034
Sum as % of republic population	0.90	0.88	1.07
LATVIAN SSR			
Russians adopting Latvian	8,237	8,351	7,989
Latvians adopting Russian	19,023	24,705	28,922
Difference	-10,786	-16,354	-20,933
Sum as % of republic population	1.24	1.40	1.46

Calculated from data compiled by Levits, pp. 75, 103, 131

Language incongruence. This term refers to people who declare a main ("native") language different from their national language. If a person shifts gradually from one nationality to another, he is likely to pass through a prolonged stage where he already uses the new language while still professing to belong to his original nationality, the more so if this nationality is entered in his passport as is the case in the USSR. The reverse situation is less likely—where a person declares a new nationality while still feeling more at home with his original language. Thus language incongruence indicates that a person is in

the middle of an assimilation process, and it also indicates the probable direction of the process.

Language incongruence for third nationalities in the Baltic republics is also of interest, but the present study will limit itself to Russians and the republic titular nationality. The data are shown in Table 1 above.

In Lithuania slightly more Russians have adopted the Lithuanian language than vice versa, throughout the three postwar census reports. While assimilation goes more in the Lithuanian direction, the numbers involved are minimal. Language incongruence in both directions sums up to less than 0.4% of the republic population, and this share has lately increased hardly at all. Mixed marriages are probably the main cause of language incongruence. Thus the data suggest that mixed Lithuanian-Russian marriages are few and that in these few marriages Lithuanian is the home language in slightly more than half the cases.

In Estonia the numbers are of the same order, but the difference is in favor of Russian and shows signs of widening. Mixed marriages (and whatever else causes language incongruence) seem to work slightly to the disadvantage of the Estonian language. Still, the cases sum up to only 1.1% of the republic population, and this share has increased very slowly.

In Latvia the number of Russians adopting Latvian has actually decreased slightly, while the number of Latvians adopting Russian has increased from 1959 to 1979. In Latvian-Russian intermarriages the Russian language seems to predominate. The cases sum up to 1.5% of the republic population, with negligible increase in the 1970s. Over 2% of Latvians use Russian as their main language, which may raise some concern for Latvian survival until one looks at the current rate of increase of this figure. In the 1970s about 470 Latvians per year seemed to switch from Latvian to Russian. At this rate it would take 2,800 years before all Latvians would have switched to Russian. If one goes by past precedents, neither Russian nor Latvian will survive that long.

In sum, language incongruence among the Russians and the titular nationality involves less than 1.5 % of the population in all three republics and this percentage has hardly increased in the period 1959-1979. By this measure, assimilation is not proceeding in either direction at a significant rate in any part of the Baltic region.

Second language fluency. While language incongruence may look limited and stable, the preconditions for its future increase may be set by current changes in second language fluency. Members of one nationality must first become fluent in another language before that language can start competing with their native language. In the absence of widespread bilingualism there is no basis for the development of widespread language incongruity. The reverse is not necessarily true: extensive bilingualism need not lead to loss of one's own language. The equilibrium may be stable, with the native language always better known and more extensively used than the other language. However, if one of the interacting groups is fully bilingual and the other is fully monolingual, then one language dominates and the bilingual group is likely to lose out in the long run. Mixed marriage households will use the dominant language. Extensive bilingualism also makes it more likely that many members of the group are not just marginally fluent in the other language but know it

fairly correctly.⁴ Thus growing bilingualism within a national group prepares the ground for assimilation, unless there is reciprocity.

Table 2 shows the percentages of monolingualism and bilingualism among the Russians and the members of the republic nationality, as reported in the censuses of 1970 and 1979. (The question about second language was not asked in the 1959 census.) The weightings shown in the right column will be explained further on. The data neglect those who speak a third language as their main language.⁵

TABLE 2
First and second language knowledge
for republic nations and Russians
(in percent)

	<u>Republic Nation</u>		<u>Russians</u>		<u>Weighting,</u> for Rep. Nation
	1970	1979	1970	1979	
LITHUANIAN SSR					
LIT, no rus	64.7	47.5	0.5	0.5	+1
LIT and rus	34.8	52.2	1.5	1.7	+0.33
RUS and lit	0.2	0.1	30.8	35.2	-0.33
RUS, no lit	0.0	0.1	67.0	62.5	-1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
ESTONIAN SSR					
EST, no rus	71.6	75.9	0.4	0.4	
EST and rus	27.6	23.1	1.2	1.2	
RUS and est	0.5	0.6	12.5	11.4	
RUS, no est	0.3	0.4	86.1	87.0	
LATVIAN SSR					
LAT, no rus	52.8	39.5	0.3	0.2	
LAT and rus	45.3	58.3	0.9	0.8	
RUS and lat	0.9	1.1	17.0	19.1	
RUS, no lat	1.0	1.1	81.8	79.9	

LIT, LAT, EST, RUS—declared main language.

lit, lat, est, rus—declared second language fluency.

Calculations based on data compiled by Levits, pp. 79, 108, 135.

The percentage of Estonians not fluent in Estonian (0.4%) equals that of Russians not fluent in Russian. The degree of bilingualism in both groups is too limited to enable main language incongruence to expand in the foreseeable future.

In Latvia the Russians' fluency in the republic language (19%) is intermediate (compared to Estonia and Lithuania), and increasing very slowly.

The Latvians' knowledge of Russian is very high (58%), and the reported strong increase during the 1970s may not be an artifact and reflects schooling and daily interaction imposed by the large number of immigrants. The percentage of

self-declared Latvians with no fluency in Latvian (1%) is much higher than the percentage of Russians not fluent in Russian (0.2%), but it does not seem to increase. The disparity between the high bilingualism of Latvians and low bilingualism of Russians in Latvia may create conditions favorable to the increasing use of Russian as the main language by the Latvians. Age structure of bilingualism becomes of interest; this will be discussed in a later section.

Index of resistance to assimilation. A combined index to condense the data in Table 2 is shown in Table 3. For the republic nations, its value is obtained by multiplying the percentages in Table 2 by weightings shown facing the Lithuanian data and then adding the results for the entire national group. For Russians, the signs of weightings are reversed. This is a kind of index of resistance to assimilation.

TABLE 3
Index of resistance to assimilation
for republic nations and Russians

	Republic Nation		Russians		Balance	
	1970	1979	1970	1979	1970	1979
LITHUANIAN SSR	0.76	0.65	0.76	0.73	0.00	-0.08
ESTONIAN SSR	0.80	0.83	0.89	0.90	-0.09	-0.07
LATVIAN SSR	0.67	0.57	0.87	0.86	-0.20	-0.29

Calculated from percentages and weightings in Table 2. The index can vary from +1 to -1. Balance = Republic Nation Index - Russian Index.

The highest value the index could take is +1 (when the entire group is fluent in its own language only). The lowest value is -1 (when the entire group has lost fluency in its own language).

In Lithuania the index values are moderate and almost equal for Lithuanians and Russians. The balance for the republic is close to 0, indicating no clear direction of assimilation. No trends are visible; the decreased index value for Lithuanians is likely to be artificial because of the aforementioned preclassification of high school graduates.

In Estonia the balance is also close to zero, with only a faint tendency toward more assimilation proneness in the Russian direction. But the index values for Estonians and Russians are markedly higher than is the case in Lithuania. While Lithuanians and Russians assimilate mutually to some degree, Estonians and Russians seem to remain quite apart.

In Latvia the index value for the Russians is practically as high as in Estonia, while the index value for Latvians is even lower than is the case for Lithuanians. The resulting balance is clearly negative and is becoming more negative rather rapidly. This means that assimilation proneness is higher for Latvians.

The answer to the question "Who assimilates whom?" is quite different in each republic. Estonians and Russians keep apart, Lithuanians and Russians

interact on an equal basis, and Latvians are more prone to assimilation than are the Russians in Latvia. The conclusions from all three tables point in the same direction: assimilation processes (as distinct from immigration) are negligible in Lithuania and Estonia but may be significant in Latvia.

Age Pattern of Assimilation Resistance in Latvia

Since Latvia seems to be the only Baltic republic which might be prone to one-sided assimilation, the age structure in Latvia becomes of interest. How does language knowledge vary by age? Some data by age cohorts are available for the Latvians but not for Russians in Latvia.

Table 4 shows the nonfluency in Russian by age groups of Latvians in the LaSSR. Compared to 1970, this nonfluency decreased in all age brackets by 1979.

TABLE 4
Nonfluency in Russian of Latvians in LaSSR,
by age groups in 1970 and 1979

Age	Percent nonfluent in Russian		Relative decrease (%)	Relative decrease within cohort (%) ^a	Expected % nonfluent in Russian by census of 1989 ^b
	1970	1979			
Total	52.8	39.6	25		29
0-10	88.0	84.2	4		81
11-15	61.6	41.0	33	68	24
16-19	33.0	16.0	52	68	24
20-29	24.2	11.3	53	66	9
30-39	31.2	14.8	53	39	7
40-49	47.7	22.8	52	27	10
50-59	60.8	40.1	34	16	19
60+	59.7	57.0	5	5	46

Calculations based on *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 godu*, Vol. 4 (Moscow: Statistika, 1974), 381 (as compiled by Dreifelds); and *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1979 goda po Latviiskoi SSR* (Riga: TsSU LaSSR, 1982), 90-91.

- a Nonfluency of the 11-19 group in 1979 compared to nonfluency of the 0-10 group in 1970, etc.
- b Calculated by multiplying the appropriate cohort figures in 1979 by the complement of the "relative decrease within cohort" to the power 10/9. The factor 10/9 comes from the different interval between censuses (10 years for 1979-1989 vs. 9 years for 1970-1979). For ages 0-10, assume a 4% decrease. For the Total, divide the average of the 7 age groups by .95. The term .95 corrects for unequal populations in the age groups.

The most marked relative decreases came at the middle of the range in the ages from 16 to 49. The constancy of the decrease throughout this range (52 to 53%) might look suspect at first glance, but the picture becomes more credible if we consider cohorts with the same birth dates. The same cohort is of course 9 years older in 1979. Therefore it makes sense to compare the 11-19 group of 1979 to the 0-10 group in 1970, etc., although this involves an error of about one year. Now it becomes apparent that the relative rate of becoming fluent in Russian is not constant but decreases with age, as one would expect.⁷

If the relative decreases in nonfluency follow the same age-specific pattern in the 1980s as they did in the 1970s, then the 1989 census might yield figures like those shown in the last column of Table 4. One could then expect about 70% fluency in Russian by the 1989 census. By 1999 it would be about 75%, with 95% fluency among those aged from 30 to 50. In countries like Mordvinia this would represent a first step toward assimilation, but in Latvia the national culture is so much stronger than in Mordvinia that the next step (adopting Russian as main language) may never come. A more detailed look at the language fluency and age in 1979 might be useful.

Table 5 shows the age distribution of fluency in Latvian, Russian, and other Soviet languages for Latvians in the LaSSR, in 1979. Comparable information by age groups was not available for the Russians in the LaSSR. Except for adding the rather negligible "Other" main language category, the format is similar to that in Table 2. The index of assimilation resistance defined in connection with Table 3 is also shown (with "Other" carrying zero weight).

Among self-declared Latvians more than 96% gave Latvian as their main language in all age groups; the lowest figure (96.4%) occurs for the 11-15 age group. The percentage of those who are not fluent in Russian even as a second language decreases from 91.6% for the 0-6 age group to a minimum of 11% for the 20-24 group, reflecting school training and contacts with immigrants. Nonfluency in Russian remains below 20% for those under 45. The 45-year olds were born in 1934 and were in the third grade at the time of the second Soviet occupation. The older age groups had less Soviet schooling (or none), and fluency in Russian among them decreases rapidly with age to 50% and more.

It would seem that the effect of schooling has not much changed during the Soviet rule, and one can expect that there will always remain a residue of close to 10% of adults not fluent in Russian. The recent introduction of Russian in the first grade will accelerate acquisition of Russian but probably will not affect the residue.

Among those who declared a Latvian nationality, 2.15% declared Russian as their main language. This percentage is higher for the younger population but reaches a plateau of about 3.5% for those under 20. If this plateau continues, the share of Latvians with Russian as their main language would eventually stabilize at around 3.5%. If we consider this plateau a temporary fluctuation and use a linear best fit for all age groups, then the result is an increase of about 0.05% per year. At this rate, it would take 2,000 years before all Latvians have shifted to Russian as their main language.

TABLE 5

Main (native) and other language fluency percentages for ethnic Latvians in the LaSSR, by age groups in 1979

Age	<u>LATVIAN</u> MAIN LANGUAGE			<u>RUSSIAN</u> MAIN LANGUAGE			OTHER	Assimil. Resistance Index
	TOTAL	NoRus	Rus	TOTAL	Latv	NoLatv		
Total	97.80	39.50	58.30	2.15	1.07	1.08	0.05	0.575
0-6	96.55	91.59	4.95	3.43	0.37	3.06	0.02	0.90
7-10	96.42	71.63	24.79	3.56	1.17	2.39	0.02	0.77
11-15	96.39 _m	41.03	55.36	3.59 _M	1.65	1.94	0.02	0.57
16-19	96.44	16.01	80.43	3.53	1.92 _M	1.61	0.02	0.41
20-24	97.10	10.78 _m	86.32 _M	2.87	1.69	1.17	0.03	0.38 _m
25-29	97.68	11.74	85.94	2.29	1.46	0.83	0.03	0.39
30-34	98.05	13.76	84.29	1.92	1.27	0.65	0.03	0.41
35-39	98.31	15.50	82.81	1.64	1.05	0.59	0.05	0.42
40-44	98.06	19.09	78.97	1.89	1.16	0.73	0.05	0.44
45-49	98.46	26.46	72.01	1.50	1.03	0.47	0.04	0.50
50-54	98.32	35.76	62.57	1.62	1.08	0.54	0.05	0.56
55-59	98.47	45.70	52.77	1.48	1.07	0.41	0.04	0.63
60+	99.03	56.93	42.10	0.88	0.55	0.33	0.08	0.70

Calculated from data in *Itogi LaSSR 1979*. 90-91.

LAT TOT + RUS TOT + OTHER = 100, for each age bracket.

"Rus" indicates fluency in Russian as second language; No Rus + Rus = LAT TOT.

M = maximum, m = minimum value for given column.

Thus the shift to Russian as one's main language has not become more extensive during the last decades (or has become so by a negligible amount), although bilingualism has increased. The number of Latvian children under 7 who are fluent in Russian (as their main or second language) is 8.4%, and this may reflect the proportion of mixed Latvian-Russian marriages in the 1970s. Most of the young Latvians with Russian as their main language gradually master Latvian too by the time they become adult, leaving a hard core of about 1% with no fluency in Latvian.

The conclusion is that Latvians are becoming extensively bilingual (provided that the 1979 figures are not padded), but there is no appreciable shift to Russian as the main language. Thus the issue of assimilation is still open not only in Lithuania and Estonia but also in Latvia. Much will depend on slight changes in immigration rates and on the race between Russification of education and the attractiveness of Western ideas. As pointed out in the first part of this article, the Russifiers are likely to lose the game even if they should win it. Their safest bet would be to desist from striving for Pyrrhic victories.

NOTES

- 1 Juris Dreifelds, "Demographic Trends in Latvia," *Nationalities Papers*, 12 (1984), 49-84; Egil Levits, "Die demographische Situation in der UdSSR und in den baltischen Staaten unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von nationalen und sprachsoziologischen Aspekten," *Acta Baltica*, 21 (1981), 18-142; Rein Taagepera, "Baltic Population Changes, 1950-1980," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 12 (1981), 35-57; Rein Taagepera, "The Population Crisis and the Baltics," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 12 (1981), 234-244; Rein Taagepera, "Size and Ethnicity of Estonian Towns and Rural Districts, 1922-1979," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 13 (1982), 105-127.
- 2 Taagepera, *Baltic Population*, 52.
- 3 Levits.
- 4 The difference is illustrated by an Estonian whom I observed in a Tallinn hotel lobby talking with what looked like a visiting colleague from Russia. He was quite fluent, but all sibilants (z, sh, zh) were reduced to "s."
- 5 Neglecting the third nationalities tends to overestimate the percentages in the table. On the other hand, since the census form constrains people to report fluency in only one second language, underestimates of language fluency also can occur. For this reason, the percentage of Russians fluent in Latvian could in principle be more than 1 percentage point higher than is shown in Table 2, but this is unlikely.
- 6 This decrease has widely been interpreted (also by myself) as an Estonian refusal to admit fluency in Russian, in reaction against the intense Russification since 1978. However, it might only reflect an increase in the Estonians' fluency in Finnish, thanks to steady watching of the Finnish TV. Not being one of the "languages of the USSR," Finnish should not be reported on the census form. However, either by mistake or by design, many Estonians more fluent in Finnish than in Russian may report Finnish in contravention of instructions. That leaves them no space to report fluency in Russian.

- 7 The picture would look appreciably different if one used absolute decreases ($52.8 - 39.6 = 13.2$ percentage points, etc.) instead of relative decreases ($[1 - 39.6 / 52.8] 100\% = 25\%$, etc.), or if one used relative increases of those fluent rather than those nonfluent in Russian. I assume that further acquisition of Russian depends on the pool of nonfluent people still available and on the age-specific rate of acquisition. These assumptions lead rationally to the approach used here.