MAINTAINING HERITAGE LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE FAMILIES IN THE LATVIAN DIASPORA

Ginta Elksne*, Ilze Koroļeva

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia, Kalpaka blv. 4-325, Riga, Latvia

Abstract

As one of the European most mobile European nations due to migration, Latvia provides rich opportunities to trace identity changes through the revelation of an individual's experience. The study analyses the experience of transmitting Latvian as a heritage language in the emigrant families, emphasizing the importance of language as a carrier of ethnic identity, and with a special focus on language and identity transmission, viewed from a multi-generational perspective. The peculiarity of individual memories and experiences during generational change opens a new view of historical events as impulses for human reaction and action.

From the theoretical point of view, the data is approached with reference to P.Bourdieu`s view on language skills as linguistic capital, a form of cultural capital. Knowledge of the language of the host country is one of the key skills for successful integration. In turn, knowledge of the mother tongue is an important dimension of ethnic identity and belonging and many of the migrants try to nourish their ethnic identity by preserving traditions and maintaining their mother tongue in the family and in the nearest social network. The data confirms the most important factors contributing to the preservation of the heritage language of emigrant children are parents who speak their mother tongue at home, as well as friends of the same ethnic background and supportive ethnic networks.

The paper uses a combination of both large-scale quantitative longitudinal survey data and in-depth interviews with Latvian emigrants from the Latvian National Oral History Archive.

Keywords: *cultural capital, heritage language, language and identity, migration*

1. INTRODUCTION

Latvian low fertility rate does not ensure generational change, and this is exacerbated by the economic migration of the working-age population. Although even after the economic crisis of 2008-2009 the most common practice in Latvia was for parents to emigrate, leaving the upbringing of their children to family members, trends in the following years show that families more often emigrate with their children or children move in with their parents immediately after the parents have settled in the new country (Kamerāde & Skubiņa 2019). When analysing the language and identity formation of children of Latvian emigrants, special attention has been paid to the so-called “one and a half generation”, or children who were born in Latvia but emigrated as children (Kārkliņa & Kamerāde 2015). More and more children born outside Latvia must learn Latvian as a second or third language. Given the age of emigration, the number of children born in emigration whose connection to Latvia is largely due to the efforts of their parents and relatives is increasing.

One of the main tasks of the diaspora policy in Latvia is the preservation of the Latvian language and culture (“Diaspora Law” 2018). The Latvian language is given a significant role in the law about the Latvian identity of the diaspora, language preservation (maintenance), and learning (mostly for children), and the law includes support measures and actions that the Latvian state should take to implement the diaspora policy tasks (Grosa 2020, p. 47). This is particularly important for those members of the Latvian diaspora who live abroad with young children and are concerned about preserving their language and Latvian identity.

Diaspora Latvian schools play an important role in strengthening language and identity (Lulle & Kļave 2015; Grosa 2020) and are also supported by Latvia. However, the most important influence in preserving Latvian language, culture, and national identity outside Latvia and the key to ensuring that

children learn and do not lose Latvian language skills is the use of Latvian in the family. Parents play the most important role in the child's acquisition of the Latvian language, and they also bear the main responsibility in the process of Latvian identity as a value.

Research so far shows that parents care about and value the transmission of their language and culture to their children, even when they are in emigration. But it often takes effort – extra time, resources, and motivation. This is particularly challenging in ethnically mixed families. Parents are not obliged to teach their children the Latvian language and give them insight into their culture and values; on the contrary, it is sometimes much easier to integrate into a new society, especially for the children themselves, who receive their education and communicate with their peers, not in Latvian, but in another language – the dominant one in their home country.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Theoretical Basis

Transnational migration, when people choose to move to another country and start a new life in a place with a different culture and language, causes significant changes in a person's life course (Gu 2019). The individual enters a new cultural and social environment, and the process of adaptation often entails a reassessment of values, life strategies, and previous experiences. Migration is much more than crossing geographical borders. It also involves moving from one society to another, with its inherent substructures, and contributing to large-scale social, economic and cultural change. Language is a fundamental condition for integration and participation in the new social space and plays a major role in the experience of social mobility (Zschomler 2019).

Cultural capital has the same value as economic and social capital. Cultural capital can take the form of linguistic capital, which is also predominantly transmitted within the family. Although capital in its various forms is inherited by children from their parents at home, it can also be acquired in other ways (Bourdieu 1991). Linguistic capital, as a component of cultural capital, has an incalculable impact on educational achievement. Bourdieu and Passeron stress that "moreover, language is not simply an instrument of communication: it also provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to dechiper and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p. 73). But the value of capital depends on the context. As the context changes, the values of capitals can be revised and reassessed. By changing the country of residence, by emigrating, the mother tongue may lose its value as linguistic capital when the individual ends up in a country with another dominant language.

Language maintenance while living outside the country of origin is different from first language (L1) acquisition as well as second language (L2) acquisition, and has only recently gained more attention in the field of second language acquisition research (Polinsky & Kagan 2007). So far, in large immigrant-receiving countries such as Canada and the USA, it has been referred to as the heritage language and refers to any language spoken by immigrants and their children in the home country (Montrul 2020).

Thus, the speakers of the heritage language are the first- and second-generation children of immigrants, who have contact with the heritage language, even though the dominant language in everyday life is the language of the home country. Speakers of the heritage language speak and maintain this language at different levels, and often their knowledge of the heritage language is incomplete (Montrul 2008). For speakers of the mother tongue, it is the first language (L1) in terms of the sequence in which the language is acquired, but for most, it is a less important language because it does not dominate their daily life and its role becomes less important as they progress through life (Polinsky 2006).

Studies have shown that maintaining the heritage language (including the mother tongue) is very important for multilingual children: proficiency in this language has a positive impact on children's academic success (Thomas & Collier 1997), ethnic identity and social integration (Cho 2000), as well as a positive impact on the wider host society (Brown 2011). Researcher Rennie Lee, in discussing the

maintenance of mother tongue proficiency in future generations in the diaspora in Canada, highlights its relationship to immigrants' national and ethnic identity as well as to immigrant integration (Lee 2018).

Bourdieu stresses that language as symbolic power is of paramount importance in the symbolic struggles of migrants in the different social hierarchies in which they find themselves – on the one hand, within the migrant population itself and, on the other hand, within the host society in relation to the local population (Sayad 2004). The language proficiency is a key factor influencing migrants' differences in terms of educational attainment, income, and social status, such as whether they experience inclusion or exclusion in different social spheres in their new neighbourhood (Adsera & Pytlikova 2015).

If knowledge of the host country's language is one of the key skills for successful integration, knowledge of the mother tongue or the heritage language plays an important role in building and maintaining belonging and ethnic identity. The link between language and ethnicity is characterised by identification with a particular cultural community. This belonging to a cultural community and the degree to which people identify themselves as members of a cultural community can vary from deep involvement to denial of belonging. An individual may choose to prefer learning and knowing a language, but unlike this, it is not possible to choose a mother tongue.

In academic research and in everyday contexts, the term “heritage language” is used to refer to the maintenance of a mother tongue outside the country of origin. Alongside this, the terms 'home language', 'mother tongue', 'ethnic language', 'community language', and 'language of origin' are also used. These terms refer to non-dominant languages spoken by minorities living in a country (Van Deusen-Scholl 2003). In this study and article, a heritage language is understood as a language that is a mother tongue, through which a link to one's culture of origin is established and maintained, and which is passed on to future generations. As Rothman points out, “a language qualifies as a heritage language if it is a language spoken at home or otherwise readily available to young children, and crucially this language is not a dominant language of the larger (national) society”. (Rothman 2009, p. 156)

The retention and loss of the heritage language are influenced by various factors, which fall into two categories: the individual level and the group level. Individual-level factors include age, gender, place of birth, education, marriage pattern, the reason for migration, length of stay in the host country, prior knowledge of the dominant language, and linguistic diversity in the host country. Group-level factors include the size and dispersion of the ethnic group in the host country, the national language policy and the linguistic differences of the mother tongue from the majority language (Kipp, Clyne & Pauwels 1995).

Analysing the results of scientific studies, Olena Nesteruk points out that the most important factors contributing to the preservation of the mother tongue of immigrant children are parents who speak the mother tongue at home, friends of the same ethnic origin, and supportive ethnic networks. In immigrant environments, the desire to teach children their mother tongue, thus promoting the transmission of the native culture and positive interactions within this aspect of the family, is prevalent, and the practical use of the language at home is one of the strongest factors in maintaining the heritage language (Nesteruk 2010). In addition, some communities motivate children to learn their heritage language, emphasising not only the need to maintain culture and identity but also the potential economic benefits of using the language (Diskin 2020).

Grzymala-Kazlowska proposes the concept of `social anchoring` when analysing the Polish community in the UK and theorising the different mechanisms of adaptation and `settlement`. Anchoring is defined as searching for footholds that allow migrants to gain socio-psychological stability and security and to function effectively in a new or significantly changed living environment (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2017). If a family emigrates with children, parents also must reckon with the children's adaptation to the new environment, as most child migrants “saw themselves now as belonging 'here and there' - in the country of birth through relationships left behind and in their new country through new relationships – and found themselves at the centre of complex interactions between material, emotional and ontological (in)securities” (Sime 2018, p.50). Grzymala-Kazlowska cites attachment to one's language and culture (including religious and food practices) as essential `anchors` for migrants' sense of security and

stability, while family and children, as well as the desire to find or create a `real home`, are crucial for stability (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2017).

Research shows that national identity and language are closely linked, and that it is constructed through language. The development of national identity goes hand in hand with social integration and language acquisition, and by learning the language of the new host country, migrants can better internalise its values, traditions and culture (Kamerāde & Skubiņa 2019). Family ties and participation in various transnational family rituals, cultural practices, and activities are key means of maintaining an understanding of ethnic identity and a sense of home and belonging (Goulbourne et al. 2011). Both previous research (Nesteruk 2010) and the authors' research experience suggest that alongside parental input, access to schools that provide instruction in the heritage language plays an important role in the maintenance and cultural transmission of the heritage language. The use of ethnic community resources through churches, community centres, etc., is also important in promoting access to the heritage language in schools, day centres, and language training classes.

2.2. Data and methods

The aim of the research is to analyse the role and possibilities of the family in preserving the Latvian language in emigration, as well as the transmission of identity and culture to the next generation through language and parental experience.

In order to characterize in general, the attitude of parents towards the use of the Latvian language and the role of language in the formation of children's identity, data from quantitative longitudinal surveys of Latvian emigrants have been used. The first wave survey was conducted under the ESF project “The Emigrant Communities of Latvia: National Identity, Transnational Relations, and Diaspora Politics” in 2014 (sample n = 14 048 respondents from 118 countries). In the second wave of the study, carried out in 2019 under the Latvian Council of Science project “Exploring Well-Being and Social Integration in the Context of Liquid Migration: A Longitudinal Approach”, 6242 Latvian nationals living outside Latvia were surveyed. In addition, in the survey of longitudinal panel respondents 1,452 parents living with minor children were surveyed (The project financed by the Latvian Language Agency “Latvian language in the diaspora”, 2020)

To deepen the understanding of culture and language transfer in emigrant families, to explain the views of parents on the language situation of children in the Latvian diaspora, as well as to illustrate the quantified attitudes, life-story interviews and in-depth interviews with Latvians living in Latvia and in emigration from the Latvian National Oral History archive were used. The value of stories or narratives is not only in the extraction of information, but also in the analysis of the complex relationship between the narrative, time, and memory itself when the past is reviewed and is being reevaluated to find a link to the current identity (Riessman 2008).

Twenty-five life-story interviews with respondents who emigrated from Latvia after the restoration of independence in 1991 were selected for the study. Those interviews were recorded between 2010 and 2019 in Sweden and the United Kingdom. As well as ten interviews with parents and grandparents in Latvia whose relatives have emigrated were also selected for analysis. The thematic analysis of the narratives explores the respondents' attitudes towards the preservation of ethnic culture and language in emigration, as well as the experiences of relatives who have remained in Latvia.

To ensure the confidentiality of the data, the names of the respondents have been changed in the text. Interviews are abbreviated in the text, where 'NMV' refers to the National Oral History Archive, and the following number indicates the location of the interview in the collection.

3. RESULTS

3.1. The role of the family and parents in the preservation of heritage language: evidence from a quantitative survey

By emigrating and living outside their country of origin, individuals seek to find new sources of belonging, to forge new identities and to integrate into their new societies. One of the prerequisites for

successful integration is learning the language of the host country (or at least another foreign language spoken in that country). Thus, the use and maintenance of the mother tongue/ heritage language is an additional burden to the various psychological, social and economic challenges that most emigrants face. This is particularly true for children, who usually acquire the language of the home country more easily and more quickly than their parents and whose language proficiency increases very rapidly at this age, while the level of the language of the country of origin decreases proportionally. Longitudinal data from the emigrant survey show that in the five years between the two waves of the study (2014 and 2019), the use of Latvian in communication between emigrant families declined significantly. The use of Latvian in everyday communication in Latvian emigrant families has decreased from 40% to 28%, with a corresponding increase in the number of families (from 24% to 32%) in which both Latvian and another language are used in everyday communication. Among emigrants of all nationalities, including Latvians, the number of children with very poor or virtually no knowledge of Latvian has increased significantly over the last five years (Mieriņa et al. 2021). These are the challenges that diaspora families increasingly face if they want to maintain their mother tongue and pass on their Latvian identity to future generations.

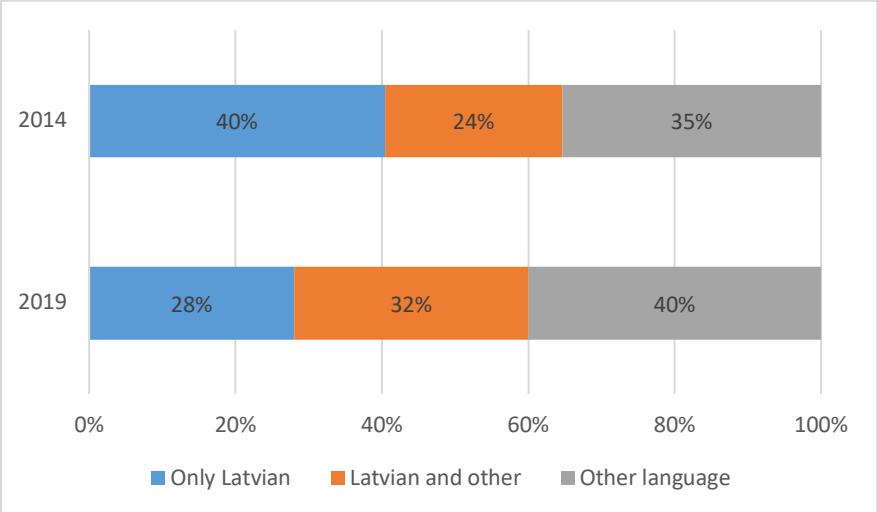


Fig. 1. Conversational languages: changes in using Latvian language within family, 2014-2019

Source: The authors, based on longitudinal data from emigrant surveys in 2014 and 2019.

Considering the crucial role of language in the transmission of ethnic culture and identity formation in emigration (Nesteruk 2010; Grosa 2020), one of the most important aspects is the use of Latvian language in the family, but especially – parents' attitudes towards teaching Latvian to their children. Quantitative surveys of emigrants show that the majority of parents living in emigration want their children to understand and speak Latvian. Moreover, parents' attitudes remain relatively unchanged over time. Similarly to 2014 (Mieriņa 2016), around 68% of parents living in emigration want their child/children to be fluent in Latvian (Figure 2). But the proportion of parents who would like their child to understand and be able to communicate at least at a conversational level in Latvian has even increased slightly over the five-year period (from 22% to 28%).

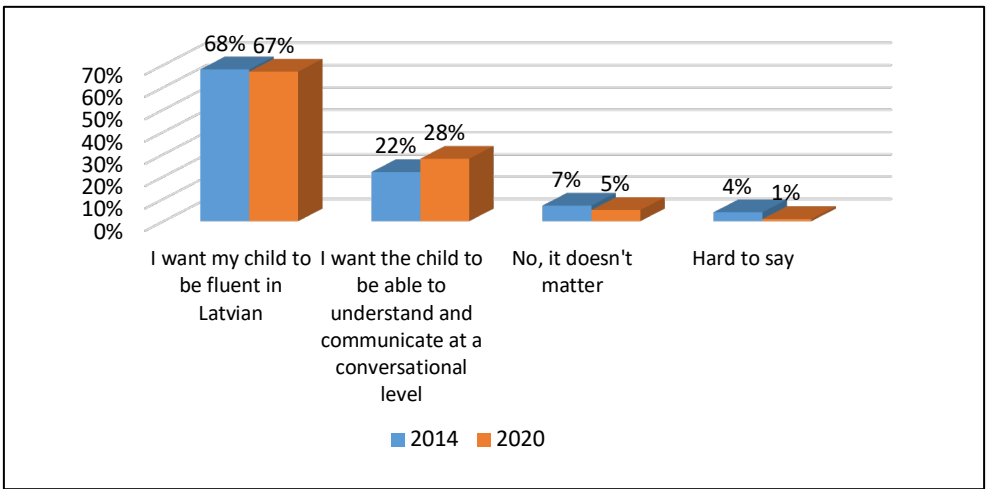


Fig. 2. Parents' attitude towards children's knowledge of Latvian

Source: The authors, based on an emigrant survey, 2014, and a longitudinal panel survey, 2020.

To preserve the Latvian language and strengthen Latvian identity in the diaspora, parents' motivation and willingness to teach their children the language and facilitate language learning and use are important. One of the most important reasons why parents consider it important for their children to know Latvian is the need to communicate with family and friends (78% of respondents mention this reason) (Mieriņa et al. 2021). Almost the same proportion of parents (73%) believe that the Latvian language is important for the child's personal development and identity, with particular emphasis on the fact that Latvian language skills are an important part of being Latvian and that knowing it is necessary to understand the culture and history of one's country of origin.

Looking to the future from the perspective of the country of origin, 49% of parents are hopeful that their children may return to Latvia (Figure 3). There are no statistically significant differences between the motives given for the importance of language skills, depending on whether the child was born in Latvia or abroad. Parents of children born in Latvia are slightly more likely than others to consider language important for maintaining Latvian identity (76%) and to allow returning to Latvia (52%), while parents of children born outside Latvia are more likely (79%) to stress the need to communicate with grandparents, relatives and friends in Latvia. Other reasons include the fact that any language is important for a child's development and growth, as well as for the child to be aware of his/her roots and belonging to his/her or his/her parents' country of origin.

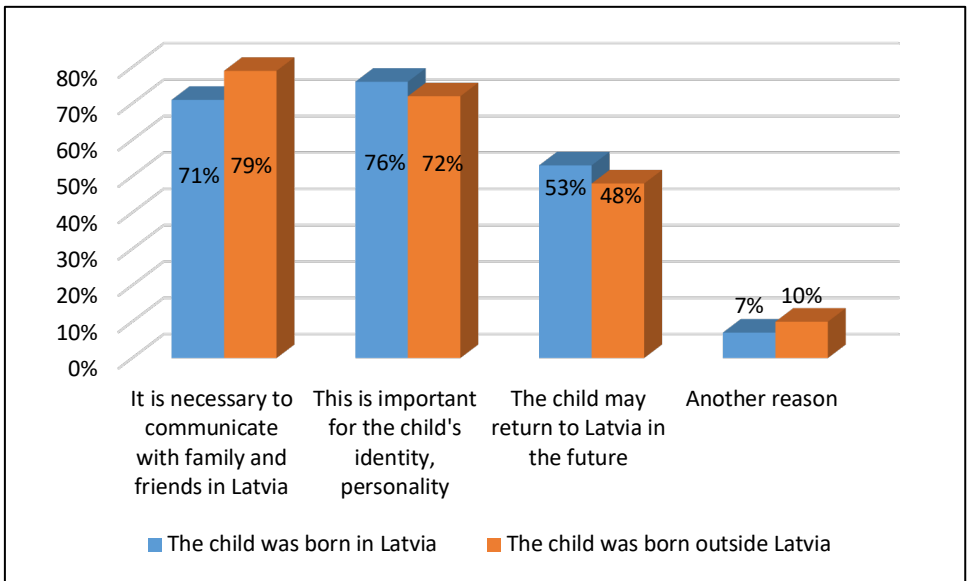


Fig. 3. Why is it important for Latvian parents that their child knows Latvian

Source: The authors, based on a longitudinal panel survey, 2020. Parents living together with their minor children (n=1452).

There are many ways to learn and maintain the Latvian language and strengthen children's Latvian identity, and the choice depends on both the motivation of the family and the availability of various resources. The activities most used to learn and maintain the Latvian language can be divided into several groups. The greatest contribution to language maintenance in the diaspora is made by the use of Latvian as an everyday spoken language in the family, at home. The second most popular activity to strengthen children's Latvian language and identity in the diaspora is reading books in Latvian, although the proportion of children in emigration who read books in Latvian has decreased (from 33% to 26%) over the past five years (Figure 4). The share of other activities – diaspora weekend schools (diaspora summer camps in Latvia) and participation in amateur groups – dance groups, choirs, etc. – has not changed significantly over the five-year period. Parents of children also mention communication with family members (mostly grandparents in the case of children) or friends in Latvia as an important resource for maintaining language and culture, as well as, where possible, children visiting their parents and relatives in Latvia during their holidays. Also, celebrating Latvian annual and national holidays, spending time with other Latvian families, watching films and playing games in Latvian and attending Latvian events also play an important role in maintaining language and identity (Mieriņa et al. 2021).

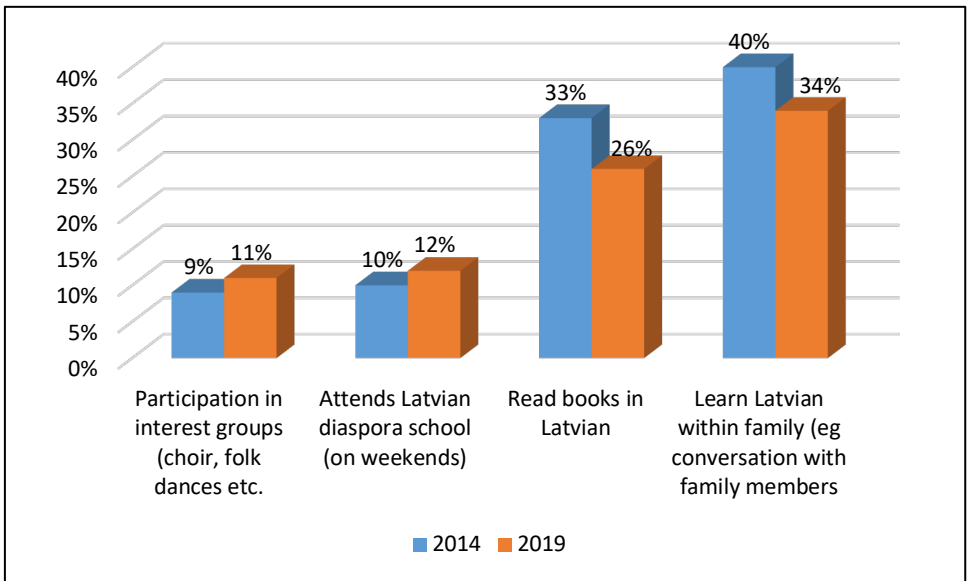


Fig. 4. Activities for maintaining the Latvian language in emigration

Source: The authors, based on longitudinal panel survey, 2020. Parents, who live together with minor children. (n=1452)

The main factor that determines how good or poor a child's Latvian language skills will be is the language used in the family. Only then do external factors come into play – the opportunity to live in a Latvian environment and the child's own contribution – reading books, etc. Therefore, the parents' motivation to teach their child the language plays an important role. The most negative impact on the Latvian language skills of young children is the time spent outside Latvia, whereas as the child grows older and the language skills become more established, the knowledge is not forgotten so quickly (Mieriņa 2016).

Both 2014 and 2020 survey data also confirm that keeping the Latvian language 'alive' and helping children develop a Latvian identity outside Latvia is a particular challenge for ethnically mixed families where one parent is a foreigner. Although in the majority of cases (74%) the spouse's attitude is supportive (with the exception of Russian respondents, of whom only 27% are supportive), it is not uncommon to encounter negative attitudes from the spouse or even serious objections to the use of a language in the family that the spouse does not understand. For example, some of the open-ended questions: *'The father of the child only wanted to hear [host country] language at home', 'we have always spoken English at home because he [my husband] does not like that he does not understand what I say to the children', 'I have no possibility to speak to the children in Latvian*'. Given that children learn the language much more quickly than their own parents when living in a different language environment, the latter must make a special effort to motivate the child to learn and use the heritage language inherited of his or her father or mother.

49% of parents communicate in Latvian at home, while children use Latvian in 54% of their communication (Fig. 5). Respondents' answers indicate that children speak Latvian with their mother almost twice as often as with their father. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in families where the parents have different countries of origin and ethnicity, in most cases, the woman has left Latvia and married or lives with a partner of a different nationality. Consequently, the child speaks Latvian with the mother and English with the father. Secondly, according to the data, the main language maintainer in diaspora families is the woman (mother), and it is with their mothers that children most often speak Latvian (83%). Thus, in ethnically mixed families where a woman is an emigrant from Latvia, children are more likely to learn, retain and maintain the Latvian language.

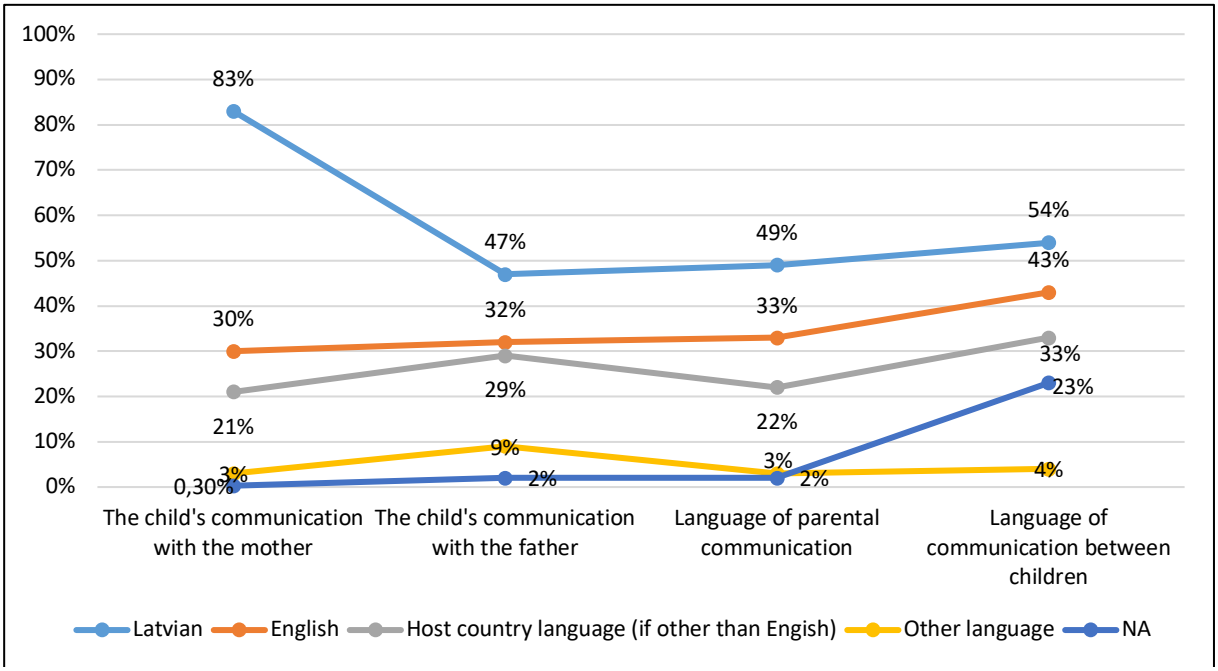


Fig. 5. Languages used in communication with family members

Source: The author, based on parents` survey (n = 1367), 2020. The `NA/ Not applicable` indicator reflects those respondents who do not live with a spouse and children/ who do not live with a mother or father

The latter conclusions, as well as the quantitative characteristics discussed above, are deepened and vividly illustrated by the excerpts from the emigrants' life stories discussed below.

3.2. Heritage language and identity from the perspective of the life story approach

The life-story approach offers opportunities to make an important contribution to migration research in at least two respects. First, contemporary international migration is rarely a one-off activity or event, but rather a developing process. Second, moving oneself and one's family to a new society is one of the most cardinal actions that people can take in their lifetime, and it brings significant changes to individuals' lives (Gu 2019). A life-story approach is therefore an appropriate way to explore issues related to migration and the consequences of this action. Oral histories reveal how people made sense of what they did and what they believed; they are less about the events themselves and more about the personal meaning of these events (Portelli 1998).

The Latvian National Oral History Collection mainly contains the life stories of the older generation, many of whom went into exile after the Second World War, and whose stories testify to the fracture caused by forced migration, the strategies of adaptation to a new environment, and the different ways of maintaining and preserving one's mother tongue and ethnic identity. In recent years, the Collection has been purposefully enriched with the life stories of representatives of the so-called new emigration (after Latvia regained independence in 1991) who left Latvia for various reasons, mostly in search of better-paid work that would ensure family welfare, necessary health care for children, educational opportunities, as well as for various personal factors. The Collection also includes interviews with relatives who have remained in Latvia and whose children or grandchildren have left for permanent residence outside Latvia.

Thus, Daina's story (she emigrated with her young children in 2016 for economic reasons and to reunite with her husband, who had difficulty finding a sufficiently well-paid job in Latvia), like the quantitative data analysed above, reveals important reasons why emigrants want to maintain the Latvian language for their children. These are a sense of identity and maintaining a link with family in Latvia, including

by maintaining the Latvian language: "*I will definitely have Latvian at home. I will teach them [the children] myself. – Why is this important to you? – It's my identity. It's important because of our grandmas. If he decides that he wants to go back, it shouldn't be that I have denied him. I think any expat should speak Latvian, whether it's in England or Ireland*." [NMV-4561]

Ieva (emigrated by marrying a foreigner in the late 1990s; first child born in Latvia, two more in emigration) also points to the need to preserve Latvian identity and sense of belonging in emigration. She points out that she has created the conditions for her son to be able to choose in the future whether to return to Latvia or to live elsewhere: "*It is a kind of belonging. Maybe it has to do with the feeling that when I was growing up, Latvia was something that had to be protected, cherished and kept, so that it wouldn't be destroyed. [...] That Latvian belonging, cultural heritage, it's just there, it's not even a matter of debate. My children are born here. My son still has Latvian citizenship. I think we never give up the idea that one day we might come back to live there. These are our roots, after all.*" [NMV-3703]

Sanita's story (emigrated in the mid 2000s, driven by personal reasons; married in emigration, husband – immigrant to Sweden from a third country), alongside the need to communicate with relatives in Latvia and thoughts about the child's possible return sometime in the future, the importance of the mother tongue in communicating with the child, the opportunity to express the full range of emotions, to convey one's experiences more precisely to the other, is also revealed: "*Latvian is my mother tongue, in which I can say everything, in which I can sing, in which I can cry because we not only speak but also cry in our own language. [...] I can't imagine speaking to my children in English. To speak in a language in which I cannot speak properly, say the wrong thing, and be misunderstood. And Latvian is a very beautiful language. It is the language spoken in Latvia, and if we ever go to Latvia, I want them [the children] to speak Latvian, and I want them to speak and understand it*." [NMV-4568]

Anita left Latvia as a child in the early 2000s to join her mother, who went to Sweden in search of work and later started a new family with a resident. Anita's story shows that her mother's firm stance and close relationships with relatives and friends, including regular visits to Latvia, played an important role in preserving the Latvian language and maintaining a sense of belonging: "*When I moved here, it was difficult at first. I didn't know Swedish, I didn't know English. And everything was new. Mum was very strict. When we were little, we had to read books to keep the Latvian language. [..] Mum did everything to make me keep Latvian.*" [NMV-4564] It is also interesting to note that in another episode, Anita emphasises that she is determined to teach Latvian to her children when she has them, because she wants to preserve and pass on the connection with her native land: "*When my children are born, they will know that their mother comes from Latvia and that we have a small property there. It's important to keep the ties where we come from, [to feel] that it will continue in some way. I think when I have children, they will speak Latvian. Maybe not so perfectly, because I am also starting to forget, and I have to think in Swedish. But it's important to keep where we come from*." [NMV-4564]

The life stories in the Collection, told by representatives of the new emigration, reveal, similarly to the interviews with representatives of the exile, the parents' concerns about how and at what level, with what resources, and how deeply to maintain the language, culture and identity of children who were born in Latvia or abroad and for whom Latvian language and culture are no longer self-evident. The life stories reveal that the emigrant parents themselves often stress the need for a connection, especially for the sake of the family, to preserve the language, and to give the children cultural and linguistic capital. As Aivita says, this is not always easy: "*Is it important to you that your child speaks Latvian? – Yes, but it's quite difficult at the moment. You have to force yourself and him. Friends had brought children's books, then she [daughter] was sitting and reading [in Latvian]: a chick, a bear. [..] I didn't think I would have a child who would speak Swedish. I didn't even know three years ago that I would speak Swedish. Now, when she comes home from the kindergarten and has learned a new word, my husband and I sometimes don't even know that word. It's funny that the dad doesn't understand what the child is saying*." (NMV-4562)

A frequent theme in emigrants' life stories is a concern for those who remain in Latvia and the preservation of family ties. According to the quantitative survey, the majority of recent emigrants (93%) have at least one family member or relative living in Latvia. More than half (61%) of respondents have a parent or at least one parent living in Latvia (Pranka, Elksne & Koroleva 2022), and the most important

thing is to stay connected and maintain relationships. As Aivita points out: "*I don't want to cut the link with Latvia completely. We will always have family in Latvia, it is our home. It's still a bit scary that my parents are getting older and older. What then? What then? Because I'll have to think how to help my parents. It makes me think that we are so far apart*." (NMV-4562)

While most migration is selective, with younger adults leaving, it also affects those who have not moved and do not intend to. Large numbers of older people have stayed at home, usually migrants' parents and elderly relatives. Migration research tends to focus on emigrants, and less often explores in depth the impact of migration on communities 'left behind' (King et al. 2006).

Relatives who have stayed in Latvia usually accept their children's and grandchildren's choices, they are proud of their children and grandchildren and follow their lives closely. People who have stayed in Latvia often support their children's and grandchildren's choices, and it is said with understanding that children choose to leave Latvia after family breakdown and divorce, job loss as an opportunity to start a new life and gain economic independence. As Elza summarises in a 2018 interview, "*I have one granddaughter in Denmark, one in Austria and two in Ireland. Four grandchildren abroad, four grandchildren in Latvia. [..] All of them are studying and working* [with pride in her voice]." (NMV-4633) The stories of the emigrants themselves also show their parents' support for their choice to emigrate: "*How do your parents see the possibility for you as a family to stay and live in Latvia? – They are angry and furious with the country, not with us. They told us: 'You have the right to a better life. You have the right to choose where you will work. [..] I have a feeling of security in Sweden, that everything will be fine. I will have a job, I will have a salary and we will buy a ticket for our mothers so they can fly visit us and live here with their grandchildren*." (NMV-4561)

In transnational families, the way in which family members experience the absence of their loved ones depends much more on the quality of their relationships than on the actual distance that separates them (Baldassar et al. 2015). Moreover, migration has often been partly motivated by the desire to provide financial support for family members, both children and migrant parents (King et al. 2006). The use of new technologies makes communication between family members across generations more complex and multidimensional (Baldassar et al. 2015). Grandmothers have also mastered the new communication possibilities – "*..but now you can talk on Skype*", says 82 y.o. Elga (NMV-4676). In addition, visiting Latvia is an essential episode in the stories of both those living in Latvia and the new emigrants. This is especially important in terms of maintaining the Latvian language among the children, which is equally important both in terms of not losing their roots in emigration, and in practical terms – being able to communicate with their grandparents, many of whom do not speak English or any other language of emigrants' new country of residence.

Aina, interviewed in a small town in Latvia, also reveals the experiences of relatives of emigrants who have stayed in Latvia. One of her sons emigrated to Ireland with his wife and children after the 2008 financial crisis in Latvia, when he was unable to cover his credit commitments. Aina recalls that she herself encouraged her son to emigrate with his whole family – wife and 3 children – because she believes that distance can be a threat to family unity. At the same time, Aina recalls that it was difficult for her to come to terms with the absence of her son's family for a long time, even though they tried to maintain close ties: "*Of course, when he left, I was desperate. I was the one who agreed them to leave [..] but it was still painful... And it was still painful some two or three years after they left. I was sitting in bed and I heard a particular song, and then I was crying again and again, and so.. Not anymore. It's not like that anymore. Now it's like.. Once my sister and I went to visit them, and then I saw that you can do it that way – you can go away and come back. [..] They haven't disappeared anywhere, they're fine with their own family, and that's the main thing for me. If the children are hurting, then I am hurting too. If the children are fine, then I'm fine.*" (NMV-4692)

Aina does not want to move to live with her son's family in Ireland. First of all, the foreign language would be a problem, and it would be difficult to get along with the local people. But she also feels personally closer to her home in Latvia. When asked about communicating with her grandchildren, Aina says that they prefer to speak in English, but she insists on using Latvian. The grandchildren's language skills are also linked to the age at which they left Latvia: "*My eldest grandson speaks [Latvian] very well. Only sometimes does he miss a word. The girl also tries to speak Latvian. But the middle child*

speaks English better. This year he started to tell me something in English, but I said – I don't understand. Do you understand that I don't understand you? But somehow in the end he and I could understand each other. He doesn't want to speak Latvian. He understands me [when I speak Latvian], but he doesn't want to speak. It's easier for him to speak English and he doesn't bother." (NMV-4692)

The eldest grandson has learned English very well at school and in everyday life, and sometimes acts as an interpreter when Aina's son's English is not good enough. Aina communicates with her son's family daily via Skype and WhatsApp. The other Aina's children (and grandchildren) live in Latvia and the family sees each other regularly. All four children own equal shares of their father's family home and regularly contribute equally to its management and renovation. Aina believes that the fact that her son owns a share in a house in Latvia is also a way of attaching him to his place and encouraging him that it is possible to return. Although this is not expected in the near future, while the grandchildren are still at school in Ireland.

Migration raises the need to reconsider (and even question) the relationships between identity, belonging and home. It encourages reflection on leaving Latvia (the deeper reasons and practicalities), on life outside Latvia, on maintaining the Latvian language and culture, on home and the respondents' own future. The individual interviews reveal different approaches and strategies in dealing with the relationship (both practical and emotional) between parents in Latvia and their descendants outside, different generational perspectives on contemporary migration – from the point of view of the emigrants and their parents. A frequent theme in the emigrants' life stories is the concern for those left behind in Latvia and the preservation of ties, including efforts to maintain the Latvian language for children in emigration, both as a cultural and Latvian identity resource and as an important means of communication with those left behind in Latvia.

4. DISCUSSION

Often, it is children who become a kind of cultural brokers for their families, as they often learn the language of the host country and integrate into their new society more quickly after receiving compulsory schooling (Sime & Fox 2015). On the other hand, emphasizing the value of language as cultural capital, the acquisition of the dominant language ensures that the younger generation performs better in education and is more competitive in the labour market, since language is not only a means of communication but serves as a tool of symbolic power, created in certain contexts or linguistic markets, where the characteristics of the market determine the value of the linguistic product, valuing some products more highly than others (Bourdieu 1992). And the dominant language of the home country tends to have a higher `market` value.

The desire of emigrants to maintain their ethnic identity and their mother tongue as a value can conflict, especially among young people, with the desire to adapt to the dominant linguistic environment, i.e., the culture of the home country. Emigrant parents with children often feel double pressure: both to integrate into their new home country and not to lose touch with their country of origin. Especially for children of emigrants, personal and emotional crises can arise as they grow up, when they have to choose between two 'competing' cultures (Mannitz 2005). The different dimensions of identity formation can affect the psychological well-being of the younger generation of emigrants. Fractured or shifting identities, a divided sense of belonging, and a contradictory sense of home are often attributed to migrant children in the literature (Kasinitz 2008).

The challenge for parents and society is how to help children adapt to life in a multilingual and multicultural environment without creating conflicts and problems in the process of identity formation, and how to make language and culture learning appropriate and exciting for Latvian children who were born or raised outside Latvia. The solution lies in combining the individual efforts of families, the support of society, and the implementation of diaspora policies. Grosa, while acknowledging that English as an international language of communication has and will continue to play an important role in the diaspora, stresses that "global mobility and transnational lifestyles should not be seen as a doom to lose the languages of the countries of origin, but rather as an opportunity to be valued and passed on to those living in the diaspora" (Grosa 2020, p. 54).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Both the life stories and the quantitative data analysis discussed above reveal that the themes of identity and belonging are also prominent in the stories of Latvian emigrants. The situation of emigration can add additional dimensions to reflection on a person's own sense of identity, attitudes towards native language, belonging to a place, etc. Respondents reveal that these issues are often reflected upon in more depth just after the birth of children in emigration or at the time when a Latvian-born child starts school abroad. Migration is usually not the child's choice (in some cases, the choice to emigrate is made because of the child's health problems or because of better educational opportunities for the children), so parents feel responsible to ensure that the choice they make – to leave Latvia – is also beneficial for their children.

The results of the study show that parents play the most important role both in the child's language acquisition and maintenance in emigration, and in the process of realising and transferring ethnic identity as a value. Parents of Latvian origin in emigration themselves are aware of and emphasise the special importance of Latvian language learning for the maintenance of their children's Latvian identity. Parents feel obliged to compensate for the feeling of insecurity in emigration by providing other forms of security – material well-being, – as well as by trying to ensure that children retain their mother tongue, culture, sense of belonging to their ethnic homeland and also learn the culture of their home country. The sense of belonging of children of emigrants to both the new country of origin with its language and traditions and the ethnic homeland and its culture also plays an important role in preserving ethnic identity and the heritage language, stressing that there are risks of conflict between these two senses of belonging and identities. A sense of belonging, as one of the basic necessities of life, is recognised as a condition of psychological and physical well-being.

A range of attitudes provide insights into both the impact that expatriates have on their country of origin and their role in their new home country. In addition, the relatively small Latvian population continues to exacerbate the decline in national culture and the Latvian language associated with new emigrants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article was written in the framework of the project “Critical Thinking, Innovation, Competitiveness and Globalisation” of the University of Latvia.

REFERENCES

Adsera, A & Pytlikova, M 2015, ‘The role of language in shaping international migration’, *The Economic Journal*, vol. 125, pp. F49–F81, viewed 10 June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12231>.

Bourdieu, P 1991, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Baldassar, L & Merla, L 2015, ‘Locating Transnational Care Circulation in Migration and Family Studies, in L Baldassar & L Merla (eds.), *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P 1991, *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P 1992, *Language and symbolic power*, Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P & Passeron, JC 1990, *Reproduction in education, society and culture*, 2nd edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Brown, CL 2011, ‘Maintaining heritage language: Perspectives of Korean parents’, *Multicultural Education*, vol. 19 no. 1, pp. 31–37, viewed 3 June 2022, < https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ986889>.

Cho, G 2000, 'The role of heritage language in social interactions and relationships: Reflections from a language minority group', *Bilingual Research Journal : The Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 369–384, viewed 8 May 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2000.10162773>.

Diskin, C 2020, 'New Speakers in the Irish Context: Heritage Language Maintenance Among Multilingual Migrants in Dublin, Ireland', *Frontiers in Education*, 4: 163, viewed 13 June, <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00163>.

Goulbourne, H, Reynolds, T, Solomos, J & Zontini, E 2011, *Transnational Families: Ethnicities, identities and social capital*, Routledge, London.

Grosa, D 2020, 'Kādā valodā runā diaspora? Valodas situācijas dinamika', *Akadēmiskā Dzīve*, no. 56, pp. 46–54.

Grzymala-Kazlowska, A 2018, 'From connecting to social anchoring: adaptation and 'settlement' of Polish migrants in the UK', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 252-269, viewed 15 March 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341713>.

Gu, C 2019, 'Interviewing Immigrants and Refugees: Reflexive Engagement with Research Subjects', in S Gold & SJ Nawyn (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Migration Studies*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, pp. 565–581.

Kamerāde, D & Skubiņa, I 2019, 'Growing Up to Belong Transnationally: Parent Perceptions on Identity Formation Among Latvian Emigrant Children in England' in R. Kaša & I. Mieriņa (eds.), *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia: National Identity, Transnational Belonging, and Diaspora Politics* SpringerOpen, pp. 145–162.

Kārkliņa, I & Kamerāde, D 2015, *'Nenāc manā istabā, es nesaprotu latviski: Latvijas emigrantu bērnu valodas un identitātes veidošanās',* LU Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, Rīga, viewed 15 April 2020, http://fsi.lu.lv/userfiles/file/ESF_Latvijas_emigrantu_kopienas/Exante/FSI_Karklina_Kamerade_Emigrantu_bernu_valoda.pdf.

Kasinitz, P 2008, 'Becoming American, becoming minority, getting ahead: The role of racial and ethnic status in the upward mobility of the children of immigrants', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 620, pp. 253–269, viewed 20 April 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375819>.

King, R, Vullnetari, J 2006, 'Orphan Pensioners and Migrating Grandparents: The Impact of Mass Migration on Older People in Rural Albania', *Ageing & Society*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 783–816.

Kipp, S, Clyne, M & Pauwels, A 1995, *Immigration and Australia's language resources*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Lee, R 2018, 'Spousal Characteristics and Language Use at Home: Immigrants and their Descendants in Canada', *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 61, no. 6, pp. 874-893, viewed 15 May 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121417753371>.

LR Diasporas likums (Diaspora Law). (14.11.2018.), Latvijas Vēstnesis, no. 225, viewed 20 January 2022, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/302998 (03.01.2021.)>.

Lulle, A & Kļave, E (eds.) 2015, *Radot iespējas attīstībai: diasporas bērnu un jauniešu izglītība*, LU Diasporas un migrācijas pētījumu centrs, Rīga.

Mannitz, S 2005, 'Coming of Age as 'The Third Generation': Children of Immigrants in Berlin' in J. Knörr (ed.), *Childhood and Migration: From Experience to Agency*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, pp. 23–50.

Montrul, S 2020, 'How learning context shapes heritage and second language acquisition', in M Dressman & RW Sadler (eds.), *The handbook of informal language learning,* Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 57–74.

Mieriņa, I 2016, 'Bērnu valodu prasme un latviešu valodas zudums/zuduma intensitāte jaunajās mītnes zemēs', LU Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, Rīga, viewed 20 April 2022, < https://migracija.lv/publikacijas/b%C4%93rnu-valodu-prasme-un-latvie%C5%A1u-valodas-zudums-zuduma-intensit%C4%81te-jaunaj%C4%81s-m%C4%ABtnes-zem%C4%93s/>.

Mieriņa, I, Koroļeva, I, Grosa, D & Jansone, R 2021, *Latviešu valoda diasporā: situācijas izpēte*. Latviešu valodas aģentūra, Rīga, viewed 20 May 2022, *<https://valoda.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/LatviesuValodaDiaspora_Petijums_145x210_WEB.pdf>*.

Nesteruk, O 2010, 'Heritage language maintenance and loss among the children of Eastern European immigrants in the USA', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 271–286, viewed 20 May 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630903582722>.

Polinsky, M 2006, 'Incomplete acquisition: American Russian', Journal of Slavic Linguistics, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 191–262, viewed 3 May 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24599616>.

Polinsky, M & Kagan, O 2007, 'Heritage languages: In the 'wild' and in the classroom', *Language and Linguistic Companion*, vol. 1, no. 5, pp. 368–395, viewed 20 March 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2007.00022.x>.

Portelli, A 1998, 'What Makes Oral History Different?, in R Perks & A Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 63–75.

Pranka, M, Elksne, G & Koroleva, I 2022, 'Social factors as the catalyst of emigration', *SHS Web of Conferences* ***131*** *01001 (2022),* viewed 3 March 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202213101001>.

Riessman, CK 2008, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Rothman, J 2009, 'Understanding the nature and outcomes of early bilin-gualism: Romance languages as heritage languages', *International Journal of Bilingualism*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 155–163, viewed 3 June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006909339814>.

Sayad, A 2004, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sime, D & Fox, R 2015, 'Home abroad: Eastern European children`s family and peer relationships after migration', *Childhood,* vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 377–393, viewed 1 June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568214543199>.

Sime, D 2018, 'Belonging and Ontological Security Among Eastern European Migrant Parents and Their Children', *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 35–53, viewed 10 April 2022, <http://ceemr.uw.edu.pl/vol-7-no-1-2018/articles/belonging-and-ontological-security-among-eastern-european-migrant-parents>.

Thomas, W & Collier, V 1997, *School effectiveness for language minority students*, Washington, DC: US House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor.

Van Deusen-Scholl, N 2003, 'Toward a definition of heritage language: sociopolitical and pedagogical considerations', *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 211–230, viewed 1 March 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0203_4>.

Zschomler, S 2019, Language Is Your Dignity: Migration, Linguistic Capital, and the Experience of Re/De-Valuation, *Languages,* vol. 4, no. 3:64, viewed 1 June 2022 <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages4030064>.