



Developing Latgalian literacy: Texts, skills, and practices

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What is **Latgalian literacy**, and how can it be developed?

To find answers to these questions, I will look at

- ❖ definitions of literacy and their applicability to lesser used languages,
- ❖ characteristics of Latgalian texts and practices in the past,
- ❖ characteristics of Latgalian texts and practices today,

Literacy

- ❖ has been studied from various approaches and defined in various ways;
- ❖ is most often defined either as a set of (individual) skills or as a set of (social) practices;
- ❖ skills/abilities are assessed and evaluated, while practices are observed and described without evaluation (but with attitudes and social values);
- ❖ some definitions combine these two perspectives.

Let us first take the perspective of individual skills.

Literacy as ability/skills

While in earlier times, the question of a person's literacy was understood as a simple yes/no question about a certain ability ("Can you read?", "Can you write?"), researchers now acknowledge that

- Literacy is **gradable**: a person can be more or less literate, may show a low or high degree of literacy.
- Reading and writing are **complex** skills, they involve the combination of various abilities, skills, knowledge.
- The measurement of literacy should take into account **functions** of literacy in a given society.

Literacy as skill

- ❖ 21st century international assessment of literacy:
PIAAC (**P**rogramme for the **I**nternational **A**ssessment of **A**dult **C**ompetencies), belonging to OECD
<https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>
- ❖ Assesses literacy, numeracy and problem solving in over 40 countries; Latvia in 2022 for the first time
- ❖ Tests are based on authentic material and reflect literacy practices in society, for example, finding information in a time table, registering online for a class, evaluating the point of view of an opinion essay

Literacy as skill

❖ Definition of literacy in PIAAC:

Literacy is accessing, understanding, evaluating and reflecting on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society.

BUT: The underlying concept of „society” seems to be that of a **monolingual** community and of monolingual individuals

- ❖ Assessment tests are carried out in one language; in some states, participants may choose one; example: Finland (Finnish or Swedish), Estonia (Estonian or Russian)
- ignores the fact that **many people achieve their goals and participate in society in more than one language!**

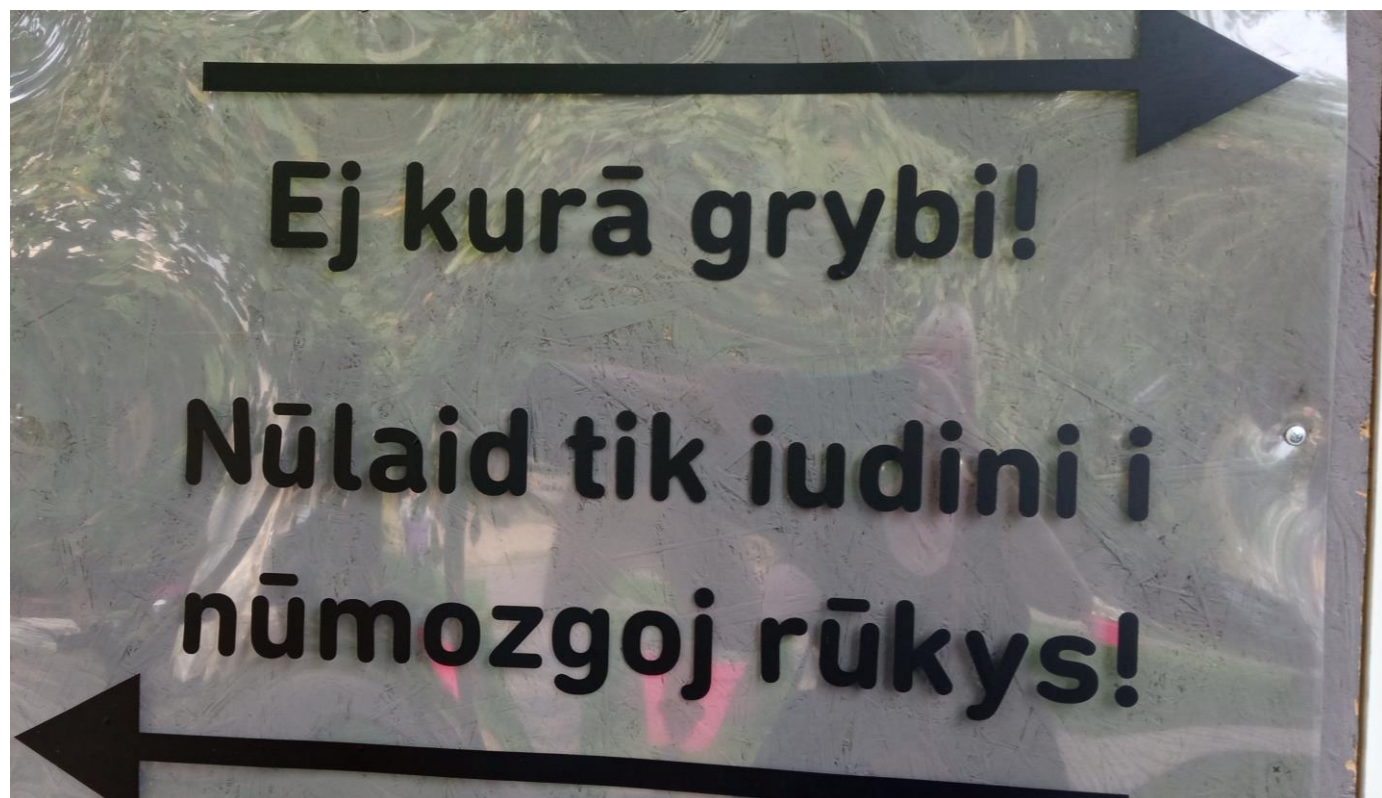
Literacy as skill

PIAAC and similar assessment can not be applied to Latgalian (and many other lesser used languages) because

- ❖ Speakers of Latgalian are literate and function in society in the dominant state language Standard Latvian,
- ❖ Reading and writing in Latgalian constitutes an **additional literacy**;
- ❖ Interesting question: are there any situations where a person **would need to read in Latgalian** *in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and participate in society?*

A not-too-serious literacy test in the spirit of PIAAC with authentic material in Latgalian

According to the sign, in which direction do you find the ladies' toilet?



In real life, you do not have to rely on written words alone!



Important for teaching Latgalian literacy

- ❖ Literacy in Latgalian is an **additional literacy** (not the primary one) in a **multilingual society** and for **multilingual individuals**.
- ❖ Latgalian literacy as a set of skills is part of an individual's **repertoire of literacies**, and
- ❖ **skills can be transferred** from one language (literacy) to another,
- ❖ especially when the languages and writing systems are similar.

Side remark

Some Latgalian intellectuals have used the term ***Latgalian illiteracy*** for Latvians from Riga and the western parts of Latvia who ignore Latgalian literature because they do not bother to read in Latgalian – although they could, with just a little effort.

This shows that they see literacy in Latgalian as related to literacy in Standard Latvian.

Literacy as practices

- ❖ Since the 1980s, various researchers have proposed to study literacy not as skills, but as practices = to look at **what people do** with literacy, as **regular activities that involve written words**.
- ❖ Different practices (different *literacies*) may be observed in different domains of life.
- ❖ For educators it is important to be aware of **differences between practices at school and at home**.
- ❖ Important question: How can different practices be integrated and skills be transferred from one domain to another?

Literacy as practices

views of what literacy is are often at odds with what people experience in their everyday life
(Barton 2007)

- ❖ Our idea of literacy is mostly that of school literacy.
- ❖ Our idea of literacy is still mainly based on practices and ideologies of the 20th century.
- ❖ Literacy as a set of social practices has changed dramatically in the 21st century,
- ❖ and it was different in the 18th and 19th centuries!

Literacy as practices

- ❖ Studied by systematic observation of *what people do* with written words (= ethnographic method),
- ❖ considering a range of factors that characterize such a literacy event and regular literacy practices.
- ❖ Not everything can be observed – often we draw conclusions about a practice by studying the texts involved.

Next slide: some factors characterizing literacy practices and texts.

Technology

*on paper – on screen
handwriting, print, digital
computer, smart phone, online,
offline, ...*

Possibilities

*constrained – creative
imposed – self-generated
mono- or multimodal*

Domain

*public – private
home, school, church,
administration...*

Purpose

*inform, instruct,
entertain...*

Language

*dialect – standard
one or more languages*

Individual

*age, gender, ...
language repertoire
language competence
insider – outsider*

Society

*repertoire of languages
repertoire of practices
dominant – grassroot*

Latgalian texts from the past

- ❖ Writing in Latgalian starts in the 18th century.
- ❖ Oldest preserved book: *Evangelia toto anno 1753* (texts from the New Testament to be read during Church service; appendix with texts for Catholic rites)
- ❖ 18th century texts: various religious genres, primers
- ❖ 19th century: + non-religious manuals, calendars
- ❖ The period of Old Written Latgalian ends in the 1860s due to the ban of printing in Latin letters (1865-1904).

Exploration of two Old Latgalian books

- ❖ *Evangelia toto anno* 1753 (religious texts)
- ❖ *Eysa mociba ap audzieszonu biszu* 1832 (a book about beekeeping)

Using the criteria set out above, I will ask:

- ❖ What characterizes the books?
- ❖ What (presumably) characterizes literacy practices in which they were used?

EVANGELIA

Toto Anno singulis Dominicis &
Festis diebus juxta antiquam Ec-
clesiæ consuetudinem in Liyonia
Lothavis prælegi

SOLITA,

Cum precibus & precatiunculis non-
nullis, curâ quorundam ex Clero Li-
vonico recentissimè juxta usitatiorem
loquendi modum Lothavicum

VERSA & TRANSLATA,

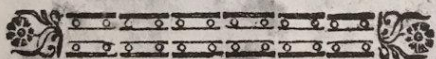
Ac in lucem

EDITA,

Anno,

Quo æternum Patris Verbum per
Angelos in terris evangelizatum est

1753.



V I L N Æ

Typis S.R.M. Academ: Societ: JESU.



1. EVANGELIA LOTHAVICA

In Dominicas & Festa per Annum.

Dominicâ imâ Adventûs.

5. Iksz worda Diwa Tâwa, ✱ und Dâla, ✱
und Swâta Gôra, ✱ Amen.

10. Uz gûda und reykszonas Diwa Kunga
wyssuwalditoja, iksz Swâtas Tryjadibas
winiga, mums uz pestiszonas Dweselu myu-
su, 10ssa mums Swâta Baznieyca Ewange-
liumu parakstitu nu Swâta Łukasza diwi-
dasmyta pyrmaja gobola.

15. **T**U layku sacyja JEZUS Moćieklim
sowim; byus zeymes uz saules un
nênêsza un zwygznu: un wiers
zemes apspiszona cilszu, del sa-

571222

56

Dozwala się drukować z warunkiem, aby po
wydrukowaniu złożone były trzy exemplarze
w Komitecie Cenzury. — Wilno 1852 dnia 12
września.

Cenzor, E. Borowski.

15472



T 74788

EYSA MOCIBA

A P

AUDZIEYSZONU BISZU

Wysim bitinikim un wysu wayrok

EATWEYSZYM

Nu wina ju drauga leyksnas baznieyc-
Kunga strupay un skaydri saraksteyta.

un da drukam paduta

ar czeterigim malawotim Awilim.



WILNA

pi Dworca 1832.

KRÓTKA NAUKA

O HODOWANIU PSZCZOŁ

Wszystkim Pszczelnikom nadewszystko

EOTYSZOM

Od iednego ich przyjaciela Lixnieńskiego
Xiedza krótko i iasno napisana.



w WILNIE

w Drukarni Dworca 1832 r.

Society and sociolinguistic landscape

Latgale up to 1772 part of Poland, then part of the Russian Empire; changes in society did not follow immediately

Colonial situation with Polish nobility and Latgalian dependents (serfdom abolished 1861)

Latgalian – spoken language of majority of population; also used in Church services and rites

Polish – spoken and written language of landowners, of Catholic church, of education

Other languages: German, Lithuanian, Russian, Belorussian, Latin

Literacy mainly among elite, little importance in farmers' everyday life

Some key features of the texts

	Evangelia 1753	Eysa mociba 1832
Technology	Printed book	Printed book
Purpose	Teach, instruct	Teach, instruct
Domain	Public; Church	Public-privat; agriculture
Possibilities: creativity, modalities, intertextuality	Translation (from Latin?) official use in Church needed by Church = “from above”, limited creativity only writing, no pictures	Free translation from Low Latvian some creativity (content altered, sentence structure) mostly writing, some images

Who is the author?

(A typical 20th century question)

	Evangelia 1753	Eysa mociba 1832
Authors	<p>The evangelists?</p> <p>Numerous people working on the texts translators</p>	<p>D. G. Settegast (German original 1798) → Ch. F. Launitz (Latvian translation 1803) → J. Akielewicz (Latgalian translation); only Akielewicz's name given</p>
Writer	<p>Unnamed Catholic priest (or team); outsider?</p> <p>Main language – Polish?</p> <p>good competence in Latgalian</p>	<p>J. Akielewicz, Catholic priest; outsider?</p> <p>Large language repertoire, main language Polish, very good Latgalian skills</p>

	Evangelia 1753	Eysa mociba 1832
Audience	<p>Readers: Catholic priests; others?</p> <p>Listeners: Latgalian farmers</p>	Latgalian farmers (readers)
Practice	Reading aloud, citing during Church services	Reading for learning practical knowledge and skills

Language

Reflects multilingualism of society and writers

- ❖ In addition to Latgalian, Latin and Polish are used in metatexts (title pages, approbation, dedication, headings, short explanations)
- ❖ Writing system reflects Polish model and incomplete standardization
- ❖ Vocabulary and grammar show some influence from Low Latvian, from Polish, and maybe other languages
- ❖ Sentence constructions show the convergence of oral patterns (e.g. discontinuous phrases) and typical written patterns taken over from other languages (e.g. passive).

Examples from *Eysa mociba*

Polish loanwords in a passage of *Eysa mociba*

*Łupi, Zweri, un satas Putni naistostieytu paleygu, **wygadu**,
un **roskożu** dora laudim, bet un winius taypat wajag barot,
dzyrdeyt, ganieyt, kławus idzieyt, un slymus ar szaydom
taydom zolom **joleczey**, kas gryb pi dzieywes winius
aysturet, un wayrok wel pidaudzynot, a cik tia **pracas** un
kłopota?*

The cattle, the animals, and the farm birds give people much help, **comfort** and **delight**, but they also must be fed, watered, pastured, driven to the shed, and sick ones have to be **medicated** if one wants to keep them alive and to breed them, and how much **labor** and **bother** is that?

Examples from *Eysa mociba*

Passive construction with an auxiliary inspired by Low Latvian (*top* ‘becomes’) or Polish (*palik* ‘remains, ‘becomes’, cf. Polish *zostać*)

<i>Topec</i>	<i>bites</i>	<i>stypras</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>top</i>	<i>plestas,</i>
therefore	bee.NOM.PL	strong.NOM.PL.F	NEG	become.PRS.3	tear.PST.PP.PL.F
<i>bet tik</i>	<i>wojas</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>styproku</i>		
but only	weak.NOM.PL.F	from	stronger.GEN.PL		
<i>palik</i>	<i>kryudeytas</i>				
become.PRS.3	kill.PST.PP.PL.F				

‘For strong bees **are not slain**, only weak [bees] **are killed** by stronger ones.’

Examples from *Eysa mociba*

Use of word order for emphasis, typical for spoken language

<i>Motie</i>	<i>naaugliga</i>	<i>lela</i>	<i>ir</i>
mother.NOM.SG	infertilbe.NOM.SG.F	great.NOM.SG.F	be.prs.3
<i>nalayme</i>	<i>del Biszu;</i>		
misfortune.NOM.SG	for bee.GEN.PL		

‘An infertile queen is a great misfortune for bees’

literal translation: «A mother infertile great is a misfortune for bees»

Literacy practices during the ban of printing

- ❖ Printing in Latin letters was prohibited 1865-1904.
- ❖ Using cyrillic letters for „Catholic” languages was unthinkable.
- ❖ A clandestine book production arose, where old printed books were copied manually; new manually produced books contained compilations of old texts, rarely new texts.
- ❖ This literacy practice opens many interesting questions about authorship, creativity, and the relations between dominant and grassroots literacy.

Latvian creative texts in the 21st century

I will look at some creative texts that were part of public discussions in 2021 and the beginning of 2022 (not least in connection to the annual award *Boņuks* for Latgalian cultural achievements)

- ❖ Ilze Sperga, short stories: written between 2004 and 2014, often first publication on the author's homepage; printed book 2014 (*Dzeīveiba*); audio versions by professional actors for the Latvian radio in 2021.
- ❖ Valentins Lukaševičs, essays: written since 2004, first appeared in print and online editions of journals and in blogs, published as book in 2021 (*Casnāga maizeitis*).

- ❖ Oskars Seiksts, short poems: sent as text messages to friends 1996-2021 (allegedly from his mother's cell phone, as he doesn't own one), published as a book in 2021 (*Vokora vuordi draugim*)
- ❖ Annele Slišāne, project #100dečiLatvijai: between 2016 and 2018, the artist each week wove a carpet from different materials and posted pictures and short texts in Latgalian or Latvian on Facebook. In 2018 a book was published, there have been exhibitions and public readings. In 2021 the artist produced a website with pictures, texts, audio and video recordings, including texts in sign language. <http://www.100decilatvijai.lv/>

- ❖ «Marija Dzeisla», poetry and public discussions; since 2016, poems have been published online (in LaKuGa and on Facebook) with the pseudonym Marija Dzeisla. In late 2021, a collection of poems was published in print.
- ❖ In 2021 and 2022, interviews with «Marija Dzeisla» appeared in print and online media, there have been reviews and radio shows.
- ❖ Part of this project is the public discussion it started, especially about authorship, but also about Latgale as a place and about writing in the digital world.

Some characteristics of the literacy practices in the studied examples

- ❖ Combination of «old» and «new» technologies;
- ❖ Different versions and different uses of a text, published several times online and in print, public readings are important; this way, making the most of the small amount of artistic texts in Latgalian and giving readers the possibility to return to known texts in a new form.
- ❖ Collaboration of authors, readers, critics, editors, proof-readers, translators, all being part of a community. The single author becomes less important.

Linguistic features include the persistent dialogue with Standard Latvian (in various forms) and the balance between creative freedom and norm, dialects and (Latgalian) standard, orality and literacy.

Conclusions: what characterizes Latgalian literacy?

- ❖ A multilingual context (in real and virtual worlds)
- ❖ The vicinity to Latvian (in several respects)
- ❖ Collaboration, «collective creativity» (term used by Apinis talking about the manually created books during the ban of printing)
- ❖ Regional diversity (dialects) and ongoing standardization
- ❖ A creative use of various technologies

All this may (should) be considered in the further development of Latgalian literacy, in schools and beyond.



Paldies par uzmanību!

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