"We don't really have a preferred language": a case study of language practices in the Latvian–Estonian border area (Valka and Valga twin-towns)

„Mums patiešām nav tādas prioritāras valodas": valodas prakse Latvijas–Igaunijas pierobežā (dvīņu pilsētu Valkas un Valgas gadījuma izpēte)

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The article is based on research carried out in the border towns of Latvia and Estonia (Valka and Valga) in 2014–2015. The purpose of the research was to explore the use of languages in the public space (linguistic landscape) and language choice in oral communication, particularly between ethnic Estonians, Latvians and Russians, on both sides of the border, i.e. investigating which languages (Latvian, Estonian, Russian or English) are used as a lingua franca.

Based on a common history, Valka and Valka currently call themselves "twin towns" and use the slogan *1 city, 2 states* for shaping the external image of both cities. This background inspired the first question underlying the research: whether the two cities can also be called twin towns from a sociolinguistic perspective, i.e. whether there are similarities in both towns regarding the choice of languages in public space and in oral communication. The second research question was formulated with the aim to explore reasons for the presence of languages in Valka and Valga: which factors have contributed to the use of languages in specific situations, e.g. national or institutional regulations, different language management models at the local level, language beliefs.

Data were gathered through documenting and analyzing language signs in the linguistic landscape, by taking field study notes, and by conducting observations, experiments and interviews. Data analysis and interpretation was based on linguistic landscape theory and linguistic ethnography.

The article consists of four parts: an introductory part in which the theoretical and practical framework of the research is presented. The second part provides a brief insight into the history of both towns and their contemporary ethno-demographic situation. The third part is the main part of the article, analyzing the data collection process and discussing the main results of the research, while the final part presents conclusions and suggests further discussions.

Keywords: Valka and Valga; linguistic landscape; language management; lingua franca; Russian and English.

1. Introduction

This paper discusses issues of multilingualism in the Latvian–Estonian border area, in the so-called twin-towns of Valka (in Latvia) and Valga (in Estonia). Until 1920, the town was commonly known by its German name *Walk, Walken*; after independence of Latvia and Estonia in 1918, the town was split into two parts. Throughout the 20th century, border regimes between Latvia and Estonia have changed several times: whereas there was no border during Soviet times, people again needed a passport after the re-establishment of independence of the Baltic States until the inclusion of the region into the Schengen zone in 2007.

Two main questions guided research on which this paper is based. First, are Valga and Valka twin-towns also from a sociolinguistic perspective: which similarities and differences in language use exist in public space on both sides of the border? Subordinate to this first main interest are the questions whether public written signs reflect oral use of languages in public space in Valga/Valka and how individuals from both sides communicate with each other, i.e. whether a lingua franca is noticeable in public space. Second, how to explain reasons for the existing presence of languages in public space on both sides of the border, including perspectives of historical developments, of present language normalization processes, and of language ideologies.

In order to investigate multilingualism in Valka/Valga, data were collected during several periods of ethnographic field work in 2014 and 2015.[1] During research, I have used a combination of methodologies and theoretical approaches, in line with Angouri (2010, 41) who argues that a "wide range of tools for data collection can provide rich datasets and enhance our understanding of complexities in some field area". Data gathering methods used were Linguistic Landscapes (LL, including Web LL research), field notes, observations (e.g. in a fast food restaurant where young people from the border area meet and use different languages), interviews and experiments (e.g. addressing people in Latvian or Estonian on the opposite side of the border, and waiting for languages offered for communication).

In line with its research questions and methods, my paper thereby also addresses which advantages there are when combining diverse theoretical frameworks in linguistic research. Data interpretation has been based on methods of linguistic landscapes analysis (Gorter 2006, Shohamy, Gorter 2009; Marten, Van Mensel, Gorter 2012; Tufi, Blackwood 2015; Gorter, Marten, Van Mensel 2019) as well as on perspectives of linguistic ethnography (Creese 2010; Blackledge, Creese 2010), relating also to Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (Blommaert 2013). As Blommaert (2013, 50) points out, "by looking at public signs, we can perform *a reconstruction of the communication patterns for which such signs were manufactured.* Communication patterns are, in turn, social patterns, and an ethnographic study of situated signs can thus lead us towards insights into the social structure in which they fit. Signs lead us to practices, and practices lead us to

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people". He also stresses that ethnography "always historicizes", and that "we can only understand signs, in other words, by reading back into their genesis and their trajectories of becoming" (Blommaert 2013, 118). In this sense, the paper argues that versatile approaches can contribute to gaining a more holistic perspective of a linguistic situation.

In addition, it is important to stress that relatively few studies have been conducted from a comparative perspective. Among the few examples are Ruzaitė 2017 and Tufi, Blackwood 2015, but generally border areas remain under-researched. Therefore, this case study of the Estonian–Latvian border area contributes to closing this scientific gap.

2. Valga and Valka: short historical sketch and current ethno-demographic situation

Valka and Valga are two towns in the border area of Latvia and Estonia: Valka in northern Latvia, whereas Valga is a town in southern Estonia (see the map in Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Baltic States; the arrow indicates the location of the twin town Valka–Valga (Source: http://ian.macky.net/pat/map/balt/baltblu2.gif)

2.1. A short historical overview

Valga and Valka are twin towns, separated by the Estonian–Latvian border. They use the slogan "1 city, 2 states" (in Estonian: '1 linn, 2 riiki'; in Latvian: '1 pilsēta, 2 valstis'). The slogan reflects the history of being one town called *Walk, Walken* in German, which for the first time was mentioned in the 13th century. From this time until the 15th century it was the seat of the Landtag of the Livonian Confederation. City rights were granted by Polish king Stefan Batory in 1584 (Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka).

However, the town gained further importance in modern times only at the end of the 19th century when the Vidzeme Teachers' Seminary operated here (1849–1890), and when it developed as an important railway junction. The main aim of the Teachers' Seminary was to prepare teachers for parish or ministerial schools. At the end of the 19th century (1897) the ethno-demographic situation of the town was as follows: Latvians (40.7%), Estonians (32.9%), Russians (11.1%), Germans (10.4%), others (4.9%) (Data from Valka Local History Museum, recorded in October 2014).

On July 1, 1920 the town was divided between the newly established Latvian and Estonian states. It was a logical decision due to the ethno-demographic composition mentioned above. Similarly, to other European states, also Latvia and Estonia as national states started developing their national identities through a national language. In the case of the ethnically mixed town of *Walk*, instead of fighting over it, Latvians and Estonians simply decided to split it into two parts: the more Estonian-speaking part was incorporated into the state of Estonia (with the name *Valga*), the more Latvian-speaking part into the state of Latvia (*Valka*). After the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union (1940), at the beginning of World War II, the border became irrelevant, since the political border between Latvia and Estonia ceased to exist.

The border was again restored after the re-establishment of independence of the Baltic States (1991). Border control between Valka and Valga had an impact on the lives of local people in every-day situations (see further in the text). In 2007, Estonia and Latvia, who had since 2004 both been members of the European Union, acceded to the Schengen Zone and border control was again removed. The two towns now officially cooperate and enjoy not only the attention of local and international tourists but also shared public activities, cultural and sport events, participate together in cross-border projects and have developed economic cooperation.

2.2. Current ethno-demographic situation

The area of both towns is very similar: Valga's size is about 16.5 square kilometers, that of Valka about 14.2. The only major difference is that the old town remained on the Estonian side. Regarding their populations, they are quite different, though: There are 12,261 residents in Valga (Estonia: Valga 2011), but considerably fewer on the Latvian side (4,853; CSPD 2016).

The ethnic composition of both towns is relatively similar with a strong majority of the national ethnicity, a sizeable Russian minority, but only small

numbers of other ethnicities, including Latvians in Valga and Estonians in Valka (see Table 1).

Ethnicities	Valga (Estonia) (Census 2011)	Valka (Latvia) (CSPD 2016)
Estonians	64.3% (7886)	1.0% (49)
Latvians	2.1 (262)	76.0 (3690)
Russians	26.3 (3224)	16.3 (789)
Ukrainians	3.1 (386)	2.0 (92)
Belarusians	1.3 (156)	2.4 (115)

Table 1. Ethnic composition of Valga (Estonia) and Valka (Latvia)

The population of Valka is slightly more homogenous, though. 76% of the population identify themselves as Latvians, in turn in Valga only 64.3% consider themselves Estonians. The proportion of Russians in Valga (26.3%) is higher than in Valka (16.3%); also, there are more Latvians in Valga than Estonians in Valka (262 Latvians on the Estonian side vs. 49 Estonians on the Latvian side). Table 1 shows that Valga is ethnically more diverse than Valka, which could be one of the reasons why in the public space there are more bilingual and multilingual signs on the Estonian than on the Latvian side (see further in the chapter 3.1).

3. Data collection and main results

For answering the research question *Do public written signs reflect the oral use of languages in public space (on both sides)* I have used the following data gathering methods: Linguistic Landscapes (LL) research including Web LL analysis, and observations and field notes within the context of linguistic ethnography.

In order to understand the question *what is the language of communication between both communities* two main methods of data collection were used: interviews, which were analyzed applying tools from narrative analysis, and experiments addressing people in Latvian or Estonian on the opposite side of the border and observing the languages which were offered for communication.

3.1. Linguistic landscapes (including Web LL)

The first overview about the LL of Valka and Valga was gained by investigating city web sites and comparing the presence of languages and their hierarchies on them. Language laws in both countries require public signs of any kind to be at least in the official language, i.e. Estonian or Latvian must be present, and no other language may be more dominant. In government signage, the rules are even stricter; with only few exceptions, information provided by government institutions may only be in the state language. The web site of Valka (www.valka.lv) is offered in four languages in the order: Latvian–English–Estonian–Russian. The order of the languages may reflect their prestige but does not indicate importance for every-day communication. Russian is in both towns the second-most widely

used language among the local population but serves also as an important means of communication between the communities of Valka and Valga (see further below). The web site of Valga also has information in four languages, only their sequence is different from Valka's web site: Estonian, Russian, English, Latvian (www.valga.ee). This layout of languages portrays the sociolinguistic situation in Valga: the importance of the titular language, the use of Russian with more than one-fourth of the population identifying themselves as Russians (see table 1), and English as an important language in more formal and official domains (see chapter 3.2). The presence of the titular languages of the neighboring state on both web sites (i.e. Latvian on Valga's web site and Estonian on Valka's) may be explained by their important role for gathering information about an abundance of sport and cultural events which take place in the area or are organized as common Latvian–Estonian activities.

LL is an area of study of multilingualism in public space that is developing exceedingly fast in diverse directions, for example, in recent years also as shown by Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA), which pays attention "to the need to understand language ethnographically, locally, historically, and in relation to mobility" (Blommaert 2013, xii). LL as it has developed in the past years is a more extensive concept than just a documentation of signs; "it contextualizes the public space within issues of identity and language policy of nations, political and social conflicts" (Shohamy and Gorter 2009, 4). LL data from Valka and Valga also reveal not just space with different languages. During the research, the space became, in Blommaert's understanding (Blommaert 2013), an important repository for investigating and trying understanding communication patterns, which, in turn, lead to social patterns, and social structure in which signs fit.

LL-data were collected in the centers of both towns. From the data collected, a corpus was extracted which consisted of various signs in the city centers of Valka and Valga. The aim was not to conduct a detailed quantitative analysis, but to identify typical patterns of different types of signs. For this purpose, a similar number of signs from both sides was chosen for deeper analysis: 31 signs from Valka and 32 from Valga. These do not show clear distinctions between the Latvian and Estonian sides of the divided town regarding the languages on the signs: generally, however, the corpus reflects that there are more monolingual signs in Valka, whereas bilingual signs are more common in Valga, and trilingual signs again in Valka (see Table 2).

Town/ Type of sign	Monolingual	Bilingual	Trilingual	More than 3 LG
Valga (EST)	8 (25%)	22 (68.8%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)
Valka (LV)	11 (35.5%)	7 (22.5%)	11 (35.5%)	2 (6.5%)

Table 2. Number of languages on each sign in Valga and Valka chosen for further analysis

3.1.1. Distribution of languages on the signs

On the Latvian side, monolingual signs are mostly official signs which indicate the directions to a museum, a bus or railway station, a municipality office, etc. On the Estonian side, on the other hand, such official signs (e.g. also the name of the tourist information center or signs pointing to the municipality) are bilingual (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2.   Bilingual sign in Valga

Figure 3.   Monolingual sign in Valka

In Valka, also private signs (names of hairdressing salons, shops and workshops) are mostly monolingual, whereas in Valga such signs are mainly bilingual. From 22 bilingual signs in Valga, 6 are Estonian–English (i.e. with

Estonian as the first or dominant language on display). Rather unexpected was that 6 English–Estonian (mainly non-official, see Figure 4, but also official, see Figure 5), 5 Estonian–Russian (mainly non-official) and 2 Russian–Estonian signs (a private announcement and an advertisement of a bank) were found. Only one sign was bilingual Estonian–Latvian (a private sign about services). The same number (one sign) of Latvian–Estonian bilingual signs was found also on the Latvian side; bilingual signs in Valka were mostly identified as graffiti at the bus stop (Latvian–Russian, Russian–English, and Russian–Latvian). It was also unexpected to observe that there were more trilingual signs in Valka than bilingual ones (see Table 2). Whereas bilingual signs were mainly non-official signs created by individuals, trilingual signs were signs with names of different institutions or provided information to tourists (e.g. the name of the museum, a description of a place of special importance), naming some cross-border institution or announcements. The combination Latvian–Estonian–English was observed only outside and inside the door of the Latvian–Estonian Institute (an organization aiming at enhancing cooperation between the two countries through common projects, language courses and other activities) and for naming the local museum (Valka Local History Museum). The combination Latvian–Estonian–Russian (in this or another hierarchy of those three languages, see Figure 4) could be identified in private announcements (for selling or buying something) and outside and inside the Valka Art School where Latvian pupils and teachers mix with Estonian tutors and children. The curriculum is provided in three languages (Latvian, Estonian and Russian) and languages of informal communication, as described on the town's website, are also Latvian, Estonian and Russian (Stabulniece, Valkas Mākslas skola). The presence of all three languages in public space or on school-signs mirrors the ethno-demographic composition of both towns (see above Table 1).
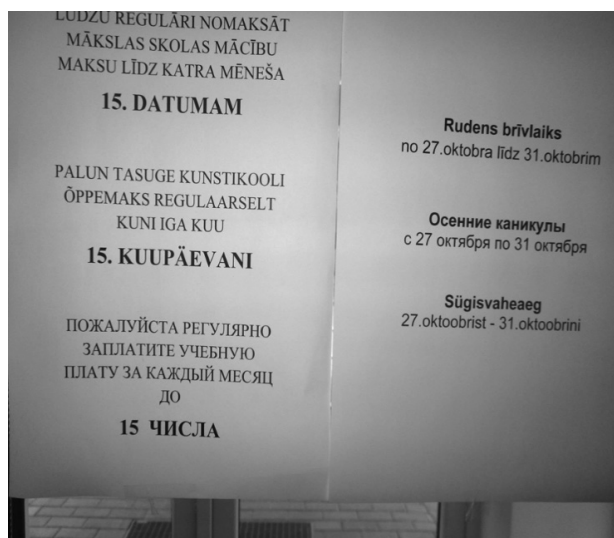

Figure 4. Latvian–Estonian–Russian and Latvian–Russian–Estonian indoor signs at Valka Art School (the left side tells students to pay the school fees by the 15th of every month; on the right side there is information about the autumn holidays)

To summarize the LL research, it is possible to conclude that linguistic diversity in the LL is higher on the Estonian than on the Latvian side. Exceptions are signs at institutions, which were officially established as cross-border organizations for the population from both towns, for example, the museum and the art school in Valka. Since Latvia and Estonia have similar language laws and regulations regarding language use in public space, which both favor the respective official language, the question, is: why does the situation differ in practice?

3.1.2. Interviews about the languages on signs

In order to understand such a difference as between the LL on the Latvian and Estonian sides, it is useful to collect additional data on the signs and the contexts in which they were created. In this, I followed the perspective of language management, according to which "public signs are the culmination of a process with several participants – the initiator or owner of the sign, the sign maker, and the reader" (Spolsky 2009, 70). In this context, Spolsky (Spolsky 2009, 70) emphasized that "there is also a significant fourth party, the implied "top" in the "top-down" model, and this is a language management authority, whether a national or local government or perhaps religious or ethnic authority, which sets a specific policy on language choice". My aim was, therefore, to get information on persons who intervened into the Linguistic Landscape by providing rules and took decisions on what types of signs to place at which locations. To this end, I conducted interviews, including with local government authorities. I hoped to get an answer to the question of whether there are initiatives from local authorities in Valka/Valga on managing language use in the public space of the twin-town. The following (1) is an extract from the answers given by a Consultant of the Valga Town Development Department (the transcripts of the interview are provided in the languages used by the respondents, i.e. in this case English):

(1)   *Touristic signs they are in English but if they are like a name of street when we have the law that it should be in Estonian. If we are thinking about tourists, where to find or to see some kind of monuments or sightseeings, when we have of course also in English.*

        My personal opinion is that ... also Latvians understanding what is in English – county government, what is museum. So, that is very hard, when ... it is not so much space to put in one (???) or in the center... writing in ... so many different languages. The same name, but who knows [..]. *Who knows may be if they are starting (???) more and more the center of the town, then we are making this kind of the marketing and writing in Estonian and Latvian (..)*

(Interview 065M, Valga Town Government, 17 February 2015)

This interview confirms the linguistic landscape data: On the one hand, the choice of languages in public space is heavily influenced by official state language policies (i.e. normative documents), which is particularly noticeable on official signs, but also has its effect on private signs. This applies to the Latvian side where the rules are followed strictly, i.e. official signs are in Latvian only. In Estonia (Valga), however, there is also a pragmatic approach to this question, as mentioned in the interview. Marketing is seen as a reason to use more languages in the public

space of Valga. At the same time, the data from both towns show that the cultural and historical perspective of having been a single united town in the past almost do not play any role, with the exception of the Latvian–Estonian Institute and the Valka Local History Museum, where official signs are in both (Latvian and Estonian) languages.

3.2. Linguistic ethnography

In addition to investigating the Latvian–Estonian border area through a rather traditional LL study, the design of the research added ethnographic approaches to the research. The aim of this was to understand new perspectives, which are relevant to the interaction between language use and social life when language use can be observed as a social action, particularly as a communicative action.

Traditionally, ethnography looks for "real actors in real events, using real communicative codes with real effects in real lifeworlds" (Blommaert 2001, 2). During the last decade, among other research methods, linguistic ethnography (LE) (Creese 2010) also gained ground in linguistics. LE research gathers data based on locally or context-specific background knowledge which are recorded during observations in field notes, or diaries. These data gathering methods were used also for this research; the aim is to provide a frame for the interpretation and analysis of different types of data. Participation in observations and writing field notes (e.g. in cafés), organizing experiments (e.g. in places where public signs were bilingual Estonian–Latvian, see 3.2.2) provided insight into beliefs about languages and language practices in different domains, which complemented the LL data. In this way, my research started to emphasize the language users rather than the codes or languages.

3.2.1. Observations and field notes

The research question *How do individuals from both sides communicate with each other, i.e. is a lingua franca noticeable in the public space* (see also the first chapter) led to the question: where in every-day life do people from both sides of the border meet? Is there some café or some similar place on the Estonian side which is frequented by people from Valka or vice versa? After *testing* several places on both sides, the conclusion was that people most often meet at a branch of Hesburger (a Finnish fast food restaurant chain) located on the Estonian side (i.e. in Valga) but just a few meters away from the Latvian border (depending on which way you take, only one street, a parking place or a petrol station need to be crossed). It is in particular a popular place for teenagers and other young people. During my observations in the period between October 2014 and February 2015 I took field notes in which I marked the language of communication between customers from Valka (Latvia) and the employees of the restaurant, but I also noted the reactions of speakers and metalinguistic comments.

Most of the customers were about 12–30 years old. Shop-assistants were mostly speakers of Estonian, therefore, communication between them and customers from Valga took place in Estonian. Some customers from Valga spoke Russian among themselves, but they ordered food in Estonian. More diverse patterns of behavior were noticed among customers from the Latvian side. Regardless of age, they ordered mostly in Russian. My data show that customers from Valka who did

not come alone spoke Latvian with each other but addressed the shop-assistant in Russian. The reaction of the sellers to this choice was diverse, from explicit dislike to neutral and efficient service. In a few situations, it was possible to notice a correlation between the age of the customers and the code of communication of the seller: younger customers who did not speak Estonian were served with less respect, in some situations even in an openly unfriendly way, e.g.:

(2)　Two girls, ca. 11–13 years old, speaking with each other in Latvian, order food in Russian (in very short simple sentences). Seller answers (showing dislike) in Russian. Girls ask in Russian, how much do they have to pay. The seller answers in Estonian, girls:

Skol'ko?

'How much?'

The seller replies in an unfriendly manner, pointing to the cash register:

Smotrite, tut napisano!!

'Look, it is written here!'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(October 21, 2014)

Communication was much more neutral when the same seller was addressed by 22–25-year-old customers, who also spoke Latvian with each other but ordered food in Russian.

Hesburger as a place in the border area was commented on by teenagers using their smartphones:

(3)　Two girls, ca. 10–12 years old, stand in the queue and communicate with each other in Russian:

Zdes' latyshskaja set'… Kak eto mozhet byt', my v Estonii! Chto-to tam pereskochilo… Nel'zja zvonit', dorogo budet.

'Here is Latvian network… How is it possible, we are in Estonia! Something has switched over… We must not be called; it will be expensive.'

(February 17, 2015)

There are more situations which reflect the low self-confidence of younger speakers in this cross-border area. Customers from the Latvian side often do not have skills in Estonian and are not certain which language would be appropriate in this situation (see situations 4 and 5).

(4)　Four girls, ca. 10–12 years old (speaking Latvian with each other), hesitate to order in Russian. One of them says:

Ko es viņai teikšu?

'What will I tell her?'

They help each other to translate into Russian but their expressions are very limited:

Odin kola, odin burger.

'One cola, one burger.'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(February 18, 2015)

(5)　Four youngsters (age 12–14) come into the room, look around and laugh out loud, saying (in Latvian) and move away:

Davai igauniski pasūtīsim.

'Let's order in Estonian.'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(February 18, 2015)

My observations show that Russian is still a lingua franca in the domain of public services in cross-border communication among individuals. In other domains, however, there can be different patterns. An interview with a representative of the local municipality of Valga (6) revealed that both Russian and English are of equal value in cultural or business cooperation between the municipalities. The language of the interview (English) was chosen by the representative of Valga Town Government (female, about 50 years old); the transcript of the interview again contains the language used by the respondent:

(6)   *We don't have so much towards Valka preferred language because it depends of audience. If we are going to meeting where people who are more speaking in English, we are speaking in English, where that it's people who are speaking in Russian, we are speaking in Russian.*

And, if there more like the project meetings and we have many projects together, we are holding. When mainly, usually we are speaking in English, because this is language, is easier to speak in English, because so many terms in English...

And ... if we have ... joint events in Valga Valka, when, when... eeee, it's in Estonian, Latvian, Russian, English. At least we have Estonian, Latvian, English. It depends... It's sometimes when we think there are more Russian speaking, like a Valka mayor can speak in Latvian, Russian... and ... Estonian mayor Estonian, English or Estonian mayor Estonian, Russian, Latvian mayor Latvian, English.

(Interview 065M, Valga Town Government, 17 February 2015)

This interview extract first of all indicates that there are events (communicative acts) when people from both towns meet, thereby creating a single speech community as it was before the national states of Latvia and Estonia were established and the town was not yet divided into two towns (see chapter 2.1). Second, it reflects a language ideology in place, which in this local context can be considered a heteroglossic ideology. It is at the same time quite complex, reflecting the language practices of this speech community. Linguists using the terms of linguistic homogeneity and heterogeneity often refer to Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin who "argued that the notion of linguistic homogeneity is tied to the development of the European states and efforts to establish a national identity through a national language… Such a notion may not be related to how people use language. In speech communities where there is multiple contact across social class, status and sometimes national origin, local ideologies of language often reflect heteroglossia, the shifting of styles or linguistic codes that exist within and often among communities" (Morgan 2014, 14). Even if official language ideologies in Latvia and Estonia, which are in line with ideologies of a national language, mostly point to linguistic homogeneity, as reflected in the language laws and the monolingual signs in government contexts, my research shows that linguistic practices also in the border area are, in fact, far more heterogeneous.

3.2.2. Experiments

The data on languages used orally among the populations of Valka and Valga, gathered during the interviews with people from various domains frequently revealed creative stories, legends, anecdotic situations, or other statements. These sometimes-reflected idealistic views on learning languages or so-called *native codes*, which people in the border area have from birth (i.e. people know both Latvian and Estonian because they have grown up in the border area). These stories were narratives which needed to be confirmed by other data taken from authentic situations of language use. For further data collection, an experiment was chosen with the following aims:

1) to check Estonian language skills among people living on the Latvian side and Latvian language skills of people from the Estonian side;
2) to observe which language of communication will be offered in cases where someone does not know a language.

The first step of the experiment was to select places from different domains for conducting research. First, places were chosen (services, shops or cafés) which used Latvian in their signs (when in Valga) and Estonian (when in Valka). There are just a few such places (see the chapter 3.1), mostly located in Valga where services were advertised also in Latvian (see the Figure 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Bilingual sign in Valga (with Estonian in large letters and Latvian translations in smaller letters). Offered services: shoe repair, key production, battery replacement

Figure 6. Trilingual sign in Valga (the name of the shop is the compound "Kummibox" with the first part in Estonian (Kummi) and the second part in English (box). Below is the name in Latvian („Riepu montāža" 'Fitting of tires') and in Russian ("Shinomontazh" 'Fitting of tires')

In the places in Valga where I started the dialogue in Latvian, I noticed considerable surprise in the eyes of owners – they could not understand Latvian. For communication I offered Russian and English, in all four cases Russian was the preferred language. The same situation occurred in the café "Riia" ('Riga' in Estonian) in Valga, close to the Latvian border. Here it was possible to hear Latvian radio, but the menu was only available in Estonian and the shop-assistant did not speak Latvian.

Similar experiments were conducted in other places in Valga and Valka, addressing service providers on the Latvian side in Estonian and on the Estonian side in Latvian. Only in one place in Estonia (Valga Tourism Information Centre) was it possible to speak Latvian (one of two employees was originally from Latvia). In other situations, and places mentioned earlier, but also at the bus and railway stations, the Information Centre of the Valga County Government, in the Valga–Tartu train (in Estonia), it was not possible to use Latvian. In the same way, it was not possible to use Estonian at the post office, in cafés or shops in Valka. Overall, this part of my research showed that it is only very infrequently possible to use the titular language of the neighboring state for communication.

The second part of my experiments, i.e. waiting (observing) which language will be offered as a means for communication, revealed the following patterns: Russian was used much more often as a lingua franca than English. At the same time, proficiency in Russian was quite varied and correlated with age. Service providers (women) who were ca. 40–55 years old had enough skills to communicate fluently. Younger individuals (ca. 20–30 years old) who chose Russian could understand Russian but had difficulties in producing answers. For instance, when buying a train ticket at the bus and railway station in Valga, I first tried to use Latvian, then English, but both did not work. My request was understood in Russian, but the answer included switching between Estonian and Russian:

(7)   Me:

Poezd, kotoryj idet s Valgi na Tartu, budet tot-zhe samyj dal'she v Tallin?
'Is the train which goes from Valga to Tartu the same which goes further to Tallinn?'

Saleswoman (ca. 30 years old):

Jah.

'*Yes* (in Estonian,) *the same* (in Russian).'   February 22, 2015

A similar situation occurred in the Valga–Tartu–Tallinn train where I wished to buy a ticket for continuing my journey to Tallinn. After my request in Latvian, the saleswoman smiled. Then I asked in English, and she looked at another passenger and wanted to ask for help. Finally, when I repeated my request in Russian, she understood me but had difficulties in keeping the conversation going.

English as a preferred language of communication was offered by younger service providers (25–30 years old women) at the Valga Museum and the Valga Town Government. All cases indicate that there are several factors which influence the choice between English and Russian as a lingua franca – with age and occupation being the most observable ones.

Conclusions and further discussion

Regarding the research questions formulated in the introduction, I can conclude that Valga and Valka are not twin towns from a sociolinguistic perspective. The signs chosen for further analysis in my corpus indicate that there are by far more bilingual or multilingual signs in the public space on the Estonian side than across the border in Latvia. In Estonia, there are private signs in Estonian, English, Russian and Latvian which have mostly informative functions. In general, the linguistic landscape of both towns indicates that the role of the titular language of the respective neighboring country is low. Similar conclusions can be drawn also from other research, e.g. regarding the absence of Latvian in Lithuanian resorts or a lack of Russian and Lithuanian in Polish resorts (Ruzaitė 2017).

In cross-border communication, Russian continues to play a mediating role between Estonians and Latvians in informal communication, regardless of age. However, age is an important factor when looking at competence in Russian: younger speakers, as expected, have much lower skills than speakers over 40. English is used in oral communication in more formal situations (between the municipalities, at museums, tourism information centers, etc.). The choice between English or Russian is often also socially determined, less by age – individuals who have functions which have more responsibility, such as employees of the local municipality, are more likely to know English than persons in simpler jobs, even if the latter are related to serving customers such as at the train station or in cafés. In addition, the choice of language in the Linguistic Landscape on the Latvian side (Valka) is also determined by normative state language policies, whereas in Estonia (Valga), despite similar official rules, pragmatic and economic reasons dominate. Cultural and historical perspectives, on the other hand, do not play almost any role at all.

Methodologically, my research shows in which way a multimodal data collection, including a complexity perspective, can provide a deeper understanding of the social realities of language use, even though it is by far more time-consuming. Quantitative LL data reflect language use on the social level, but not necessarily language skills and use on individual levels. Ethnographic research (observations, field notes, experiments) is helpful for understanding, for example, the correlation among language use, age and social stratification. In Valga–Valka, this applies, for instance, to Russian and English as the languages mostly used in cross-border communication. As mentioned above, ethnographic research also embraces the historical dimension: "We can only understand the present in terms of its arrow of time – its past and its future" (Blommaert 2013, 118). To summarize, research into the current linguistic landscape of a place allows one to gain insight into speech communities and their history, while, on the other hand, the linguistic landscape itself becomes a historical document through its "layered-simultaneous outcomes of different histories of people, communities and activities" (Blommaert 2013, 120).

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Kopsavilkums

Raksta pamatā ir pētījums, kurš Latvijas un Igaunijas pierobežas pilsētās Valkā un Valgā tika veikts 2014.–2015. gadā, lai izzinātu valodu lietojumu gan publiskajā telpā (lingvistiskā ainava), gan iedzīvotāju mutvārdu saziņā, īpaši – starp Valgas un Valkas pusē dzīvojošajiem igauņiem, latviešiem un krieviem, proti, pētot, kura no valodām (abu titulnāciju valodas, krievu vai angļu) kalpo kā *lingua franca*.

Balstoties uz vēsturisko pieredzi, Valka un Valga tiek dēvētas par dvīņu pilsētām un abu pilsētu ārējā tēla veidošanā tiek izmantots sauklis: viena pilsēta, divas valstis. Tas rosināja kā vienu no pētījuma jautājumiem izvirzīt jautājumu: vai, iegūstot lingvistiskos datus, abas pilsētas var dēvēt par dvīņu pilsētām arī no sociolingvistiskās perspektīvas, proti, vai publiskajā telpā un mutvārdu saziņā lietoto valodu izvēlē ir vērojamas kādas līdzības. Savukārt otrs pētījuma jautājums tika formulēts, lai izzinātu iemeslus, kas noteikuši esošo valodu klātbūtni Valkā un Valgā: kuri faktori ir veicinājuši noteiktu valodu lietojumu kā lingvistiskajā ainavā, tā mutvārdu saziņā (piem., normatīvie dokumenti, atšķirīgi valodas pārvaldības modeļi lokālajā vidē, lingvistiskā pārliecība u. tml.).

Datu ieguvē tika izmantotas tādas metodes kā lingvistiskā ainava (valodas zīmes publiskajā telpā), lauka pētījuma piezīmes, vērojumi, eksperimenti un intervijas. Dati analizēti un interpretēti, pamatā balstoties uz šādu sociolingvistisko teoriju atziņām: lingvistiskās ainavas analīze, lingvistiskā etnogrāfija, etnogrāfiskā lingvistiskās ainavas analīze.

Raksta pamatā ir četras daļas: ievaddaļa, kurā ir formulēts pētījuma teorētiskais un praktiskais ietvars; otrā daļa – īss ieskats abu pilsētu vēsturē un mūsdienu etnodemogrāfiskajā situācijā; trešā daļa – galvenā raksta daļa, kurā analizēti iegūtie dati un pētījuma rezultāti, un noslēdzošā daļa – kopsavilkums un būtiskākie secinājumi.

Atslēgvārdi: Valka–Valga; lingvistiskā ainava; valodas pārvaldība; *lingua franca*; krievu un angļu valoda.