6 Challenges for the Estonian Language: A Poststructuralist Perspective

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Introduction

This chapter examines the specific challenges faced as part of the process of promoting Estonian as the language of wider societal, interethnic use in Estonia. These challenges are largely a result of the Soviet occupation and the ensuing ethnolinguistic divide and tensions that came about following independence. Although these social and historical contingencies have led to diverging perspectives on the status of Soviet-era Russian-speaking immigrants and their need to speak Estonian, as we will see, there is certainly evidence of a growing rapprochement between the two major ethnolinguistic groups, opening the way towards a more integrated and open society based on a new common language – Estonian. I assess the Estonian case from a poststructuralist perspective, arguing that there are sound ethical reasons to continue Estonian-based integration efforts but that more attention needs to be paid to the specific circumstances that have led to and maintain social inequalities among many of the country's non-ethnic Estonian inhabitants.

Estonia, Estonian, and the Present Sociolinguistic Situation from a Sociohistorical Perspective

Although this chapter deals with challenges for the future of the Estonian language, it is useful to begin with an overview from the sociohistorical

perspective (see also Skerrett, 2011c). Indeed, as will become clear, within the kind of poststructuralist framework that I employ, it is essential. Let us begin, however, with an introduction to Estonia and Estonian in order to contextualize this field of research and orientate the reader at this preliminary stage. Estonia is one of the three countries known as the Baltic states, located on the northeastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Latvia and Lithuania, the other two Baltic states, lie to the south of Estonia; to its north is Finland across the Gulf of Finland, to its west Sweden across the Baltic Sea, and directly bordering it to the east, Russia. Estonia is relatively small in terms of population and land area: the estimated number of inhabitants for July 2009 is just short of 1.3 million and the total land area is 43,211 square kilometres, which is slightly larger than either Denmark or the Netherlands (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Estonia has been an independent country since 1918; however, it was occupied in 1939, and annexed in 1940, by the Soviet Union. The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 allowed Estonia to return to sovereignty. The post-Soviet period has seen Estonia forge ever closer ties with the West, including joining both the EU and NATO in 2004 and the Eurozone in 2011.

Estonian, the national language of Estonia, has approximately 1.1 million native speakers, 950,000 of these living in Estonia itself and the remainder elsewhere (Sutrop, 2004). Outside Estonia, the language is spoken by significant populations of ethnic Estonians in Australia, the USA, Canada and Sweden (by exiles from the Soviet occupation and their descendents), as well as Russia (by descendents of economic immigrants from the end of the 19th century) (Viitso, 1998). Estonian is a member of the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic family of languages, closely related to Finnish and more distantly to Hungarian (Abondolo, 1998). Although several other Finno-Ugric languages are spoken in Europe, such as Saami in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, Võro in Estonia, and (the now moribund) Livonian in Latvia, Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian are the only members of the Finno-Ugric branch – indeed, the entire Uralic family – to constitute national languages. Estonian and its Uralic cousins are genetically unrelated to Russian, Latvian, Swedish, English or any of the other Indo-European languages, the largest linguistic grouping in Europe and the world.

The present sociolinguistic environment in Estonia – that is, attitudes towards and use of language across different social groups – has been comprehensively shaped by the events that occurred during the Soviet occupation (Skerrett, 2011c). The inequalities imposed through language in Soviet Estonia are well documented (for a review see Skerrett 2007a, 2007b, 2010b). A major factor influencing language use was the demographic change that occurred during World War II annexation and the ensuing years of occupation.

Misiunas and Taagepera (1993) estimate that in total Estonia lost 25% of its pre-War population through deportations, murder and exile. State-controlled in-migration (industrial workers, functionaries, Soviet military personnel as well as ex-convicts under the so-called 101 km rule, according to which released prisoners could not settle under 100 km from a major city, Leningrad being 101 km from Estonia), combined with (later) personal spontaneous migration to Estonia, resulted in a massive fall in the autochthonous proportion of the population: the native Estonian population fell from 88.2% in 1938 to 74.6% in 1959 and approximately 60% at independence in 1991 (Lieven, 1994). The city of Narva in northeast Estonia re-emerged after the War as exclusively Russian-speaking, due to a combination of migrant-staffed industrialization and other immigration, and the fact that pre-War Estonian inhabitants were prohibited from returning to the area (Kallas, 2004).

The population changes were compounded by the fact that Russian was allowed to co-exist in Estonia and the other non-Russian republics alongside local languages (Skerrett, 2011c). Thus, Russian speakers (or other Slavs such as Ukrainians or Belarusians whose language was not provided outside their home Republic and thus became 'Russian-speaking') had no imperative to learn Estonian. Russian was indeed the lingua franca (language of communication between speakers of different languages) of the Soviet Union. By the 1950s, Communist Party Secretary Khrushchev had already introduced the notion of 'iazyk mezhnatsional'nogo obshcheniia' (language of international communication), and Russian emerged as 'one of [the regime's] strongest hallmarks' (Clachar, 1998: 108). In fact, as Sussex and Cubberley (2006: 575) suggest, Russian was promoted as 'more of a second native language than a *lingua franca*'. Estonian lost many basic functions and a definite hierarchy emerged: 'in many everyday situations, the Balts [sic] were forced to speak Russian [....] The result was [...] the superior position of the Russian language' (Nørgaard *et al.*, 1996: 178). As Adrey (2005: 458) states,

> Russian was the exclusive dominant language in official spheres, i.e. state government, transport, industry, military, and in highly qualified employments and higher education, while Estonian [...] essentially channelled informal social communication.

There was a prevailing mindset in many Russian speakers, furthermore, that they had 'a human right to be monolingual no matter where they live[d] and work[ed] [in the Soviet Union]' (Karklins, 1994: 158). According to the census of 1989, only 14.9% of non-Estonians could speak Estonian fluently (Kolstø, 1996).

Estonia was declared the official language of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1989, before independence in 1991 (Galbreath, 2005). This initial language law allowed for parallel use of Russian in public administration and made no reference to usage in private spheres (Adrey, 2005; Galbreath, 2005; Järve, 2002). Post-independence, the law was modified to require employees in both public and private sectors to speak Estonian, although pressure from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the EU saw that most requirements for Estonian proficiency in the private sector were dropped (Kelley, 2004; Ozolins, 2003). This resulted in Estonian language planners producing a list of occupations for which it was considered that knowledge of Estonian was of 'legitimate public interest' (Ozolins, 2003: 223) and there are public health and safety-related proficiency requirements for those dealing with the public, but there is no *general* requirement for private sector service staff (Kelley, 2004). Indeed, in majority Russian-speaking areas in parts of Tallinn and the Ida-Virumaa county in the northeast, it may be impossible to get by only in Estonian. There is also variation by employment sector; industry, for example, is often still heavily Russified, whereas agriculture tends to function solely in Estonian (Hogan-Brun *et al.*, 2007). Public servants are required to know Estonian, but those that were employed prior to the switchover were given a period to gain proficiency. Again, however, it is possible to come across public employees (tram drivers, for example) with very limited command of the language and certain public institutions, such as the corrections system, function primarily in Russian (Hogan-Brun *et al.*, 2007). Estonian is the only language of the parliament (Ozolins, 2003).

There were plans to transfer all Russia medium secondary schools to Estonian by 2003, which was later reduced to 60% of subjects taught and postponed initially to 2007 (Adrey, 2005; Asser *et al.*, 2002) and later to 2011 (Skerrett, 2011c). Estonia can be contrasted in this sense to Latvia, which implemented similar plans at the outset, amid much controversy. Nevertheless, the proportion of students studying in Estonian-medium schools has been increasing gradually (from 72% in 1999 to 78% in 2006, which compares with 28% and 20%, respectively, in Russia medium schools), driven by the overall decline in the number of Russian speakers (see below) and the increase in preference for Estonian-medium education among non-ethnic Estonians. Presently, approximately one-sixth of Russian-speaking students are studying in Estonian-medium schools (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). State-sponsored higher education degrees are available only in Estonian. However, students from Russia medium secondary schools are able to attend a transitional language course to prepare them for university studies (Hogan-Brun *et al.*, 2007). Without doubt, the most far-reaching change to language

policy in the post-Soviet period is the requirement for Soviet-era immigrants to naturalize in order to obtain citizenship, one of the requirements of the process being a basic knowledge of Estonian (Skerrett, 2011b, 2011c). According to the 2000 census (Statistics Estonia, n.d.), the proportion of Russian speakers that were able to speak Estonian was 38.9%. Although this represents a 159% increase since independence, so Estonianization had therefore been reasonably successful, language policy had not brought about a full switchover to an Estonian-speaking society (Skerrett, 2011b, 2011c).

Language Policy and Planning in the Poststructuralist Paradigm

Before beginning a discussion of the challenges facing the Estonian language, let us first turn to the theoretical framework and specific model that will inform the discussion: poststructuralism and the historical-structural approach (Tollefson, 1991) respectively. (For a more comprehensive account of critical language policy and the case of Estonia, see Skerrett, 2011c.) A poststructuralist perspective can be characterized by the need to question taken-for-granted categories in order to deconstruct naturalized discourses, or culturally contingent ways of seeing the world that have become regularized or normalized over time. As Mills (2004: 43,45) explains, 'discourses are highly regulated groupings of utterances or statements with internal rules which are specific to discourse itself'; that is, 'statements do not exist in isolation since there is a set of structures which makes those statements make sense and gives them force'. These structures or 'rules delimit the sayable' (Henriques as cited in Mills, 2004: 43), and the Cartesian notion of the fixed and unitary self, capable of fully independent thought or behaviour, is rejected (Francis, 1999; Mills, 2004). The self is, rather, positioned within and constituted by discourse: 'what we think we might want to express is constrained by systems and rules which are in some sense beyond human control', or at least immediate individual control, in that '[t]hese systems are ones which we are not always necessarily aware of' (Mills, 2004: 67,68). If we consider ourselves to be a 'woman', or 'gay' or 'Estonian', it is because discursive structures (in other words available cultural categories) allow us to, not because these are essential characteristics springing from within. As Nietzsche (1968: 17) argues, we need to cease looking 'for the origin [of social phenomena] *behind* the world'.

Foucault (1984: 72,73), a highly influential author in poststructuralist thought, explains 'Truth is a thing of this world: it is *produced* only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each

society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and *makes function as true'* (emphasis added). Elsewhere he notes, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (Foucault, 1991: 27). Specifically, then, in terms of applied linguistic research, a poststructuralist approach means resisting the temptation to 'decontextualize' linguistic contexts under analysis, that is, taking up the challenge to find 'ways of mapping micro and macro relations' (Pennycook, 2006: 5; Skerrett, 2010a): individual linguistic behaviour (the micro, cf. Tollefson's 'neoclassical approach', below) occurs within and is constituted by the sociohistorical environment (the macro, cf. Tollefson's 'historical-structural' approach, below).

Turning, then, to the specific model for analysing language planning and policy challenges in Estonia, the general analytical framework I employ is that of Tollefson (1991). Broadly poststructuralist (although as a neo-Marxist, not fully so), Tollefson (1991) makes the distinction between, on the one hand, the study of language and its use centred on the individual – in other words, an essentialist approach, in that it diverts attention away from the social, what he refers to as the 'neoclassical' approach – and on the other hand, the sort of analysis that sees the individual as always operating within a network of social and historical relations, what he terms the 'historical-structural' approach (see also Skerrett, 2010a). In the mid-1990s, Ricento and Hornberger (1996) noted that this had been the dominant general framework of analysis in language policy and planning for some 20 years already, having emerged with more socially critically aware trends of postmodernist thought of the period.

There are, however, weaknesses with the model, and Tollefson is not without his critics. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) note that much of the research that Tollefson criticizes for its neoclassical approach in his text, which specifically deals with language policy and planning, does not in fact deal with this field. Nevertheless, what matters is that Tollefson aims to remain immanent (non-positivistic) in his approach to the analysis of linguistic behaviour and, for the most part, succeeds in doing so. In other words, he explains social phenomena through analysis of what is occurring and has occurred *within* the realms of the social, rather than searching for extra-social or extra-cultural (transcendental) explanations. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) also note that the focus on the social in this approach can become 'deterministic, or even circular, leaving little room for human creativity, innovation, or choice' (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996: 407). That is, while it is important to recognize that individual choices cannot ever be seen as

completely 'free' (the micro can never occur *outside* the macro), there is never-theless room for creativity and macro structures do indeed change over time, not least because of individual movement within these structures to prolong, resist or restructure existing ways of interacting with the world. As Shohamy (2006) notes, '[l]anguage policy manifests itself not only through such items as policy documents and test materials but also through the language used [by individuals] in the public space' (p. 133). In this analysis of language practices and planning in Estonia, then, we need to remain mindful of the historical and structural contingencies constraining *and producing* individual behaviour (Foucault, 1978, 1980) as people circulate through the discursive framework, the network of compelling notions, about which language(s) to speak and when. To quote Pennycook (1994: 33), '[t]his is not, therefore, an attempt to find a relationship between the individual or language and soci-ety, but rather to suggest that they are inseparably intertwined'.

Challenges for the Estonian Language

Without doubt, the most significant challenging facing the Estonian lan-guage is its (non-) usage among the large Russian-speaking population: chiefly, as noted, the Russian, Ukrainians and Belarusians that settled in Estonia during the Soviet period, and their descendents. According to recent figures, ethnic Estonians now constitute 68% of the total population and Russian speakers make up 29% (ethnic Russians 26%) (Asari, 2009). The proportion of non-ethnic Estonians in the population, furthermore, contin-ues to decline, with ethnic Estonians now constituting over 77% of school-aged children (7–16 years of age) (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). The proportion of non-citizens in the population in 2007 was 16.3%, around half of these indi-viduals (8.5% of the total) being stateless and the majority of the remainder citizens of the Russian Federation having permanent resident status in Estonia (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Although non-citizens enjoy most of the social and legal rights enjoyed by citizens, they cannot vote or stand for elec-tion, and, as we will see, many suffer from social exclusion due to geographic and linguistic isolation from the rest of the country (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Also, despite the fact that procedures have been simplified since indepen-dence, approximately 4000 children born in independent Estonia are stateless (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008).

According to Statistics Estonia (Asari, 2009), the immigrant population (foreign-born individuals and Estonian-born individuals with at least one foreign-born parent) in the majority of the country's regions constitutes less than 15% of the total, with the exception of Harjumaa, where Tallinn is

located (33% immigrant population), and Ida-Virumaa, bordering Russia in the northeast (63% immigrant population). Taking a look at the regional specificities of Estonian language competence among immigrants, we can see an inverse relationship with the relative concentration of their population: 38% of immigrants in Ida-Virumaa and 69% in Harjumaa can speak Estonian, whereas elsewhere the proportion is 79% or more (Asari, 2009). We can therefore speak of the presence of minorities and related language concerns as regionally specific phenomena in Estonia.

There are identifiable patterns related to the linguistic repertoire of the Estonian population due to post-independence language policy. On the one hand, Russian proficiency among ethnic Estonians has remained reasonably stable. Overall, the proportion of those with at least passive knowledge has increased slightly from 88% in 1987 to 91% in 2007. However, the proportion that are fluent has dropped from 23% to 22%, and, in the youngest age groups, more than half (56%) are not even able to understand Russian (Lauristin et al., 2008). On the other hand, Russian speakers with at least a passive knowledge of Estonian have jumped from 42% in 1987 to 83% in 2007, with the highest level of proficiency among the youngest age cohorts (Lauristin et al., 2008). Proficiency in English has increased in both ethnolinguistic groups during the same period (1987–2007), from 39% to 73% and 20% to 53% for ethnic Estonians and Russian speakers, respectively (at least passive knowledge).

Given that the younger generation of ethnic Estonians cannot get by in Russian, does this mean that it is possible to live daily life with knowledge of Estonian alone? As we have already seen, in Ida-Virumaa, the answer is clearly no, although the relatively low proportion of ethnic Estonians living in the region and therefore also the lesser degree of interethnic contact reduces the potential for communicative difficulties in that particular case. For the country in general, however, we can see evidence at this point in time of pragmatic mixing strategies: 48% of ethnic Estonians and 63% of other ethnicities claim to switch between languages (Lauristin et al., 2008). However, more Russian speakers claim to use only Russian (40% overall and 54% for the oldest age group) compared to ethnic Estonians using only Estonian (30%); 49% of Russian speakers state that it is possible to get by with just Russian (Lauristin et al., 2008). That is, overall, Russian still functions more as a lingua franca than Estonian. The highest proportion of ethnic Estonians who report only using Russian with Russian speakers does not exceed 8% for any age group (it is a mere 1% for the youngest cohort) (Lauristin et al., 2008), however, indicating a definite if somewhat gradual shift to Estonian. Similarly, 45% of youths claim that they only ever use Estonian in interethnic communication (Lauristin et al., 2008).

In particular domains, from 1997 to 2003, we can see an increase in Estonian usage in more informal areas (the following figures indicate having used Estonian in the previous month): with friends and acquaintances 20% to 34% overall and 22% to 47% for Tallinn; with strangers in public places 23% to 38% overall and 29% to 53% for Tallinn; with colleagues or class-mates 15% to 22% overall and 13% to 31% for Tallinn; and in night clubs and bars 7% to 22% overall and 12% to 28% for Tallinn (Vihalemm *et al.*, 2004). Thus we can again see that a 'slow but steady' shift towards Estonian in interethnic communication is taking place.

Results from a qualitative study of Russian speakers living in Tallinn (Skerrett, 2011b) suggest a tendency to use Estonian as a default language in public places such as shops and restaurants, at least for bilinguals. However, one interviewee did assert the right to use Russian, even though she knew Estonian: 'sometimes I want to be served in Russian [. . . .] If I go to a place where I know it's a very... you know, high quality' (Skerrett, 2007a: 83). There is also evidence from the study that bilingual Russian speakers see knowledge of Estonian as having clear integrative value: 'I know what is happening around me. Others, they live like in their own small communities, like a small environment. They don't know the lan-guage, they don't care about the country [...] But they live poor lives, they have miserable lives' (p. 85). Furthermore, there is a belief in the national language paradigm – that is, that Estonian has a place as the language of Estonia. As one informant noted, '[i]f we go to live in another country we definitely learn the language [...] I think [Estonians] are right. I mean, if some Russian people in Estonia or wherever go to France [...] how would they live without French?' (p. 86). Another stated, '[b]ecause it's very funny, you try to go to Russia [and say] you know now I think that Arabic is better, let's [make] this the state language. What [would] Russians say? You know?' (p. 86).

Lauristin and colleagues (2008) have found that, overall, there is a grow-ing belief among both ethnolinguistic groups that the increasing competence in Estonian among Russian speakers will solve interethnic problems. In 2005, 77% of ethnic Estonians and 64% of Russian speakers agreed with the statement 'If a person knows the Estonian language, there is no difference whether they are ethnically Estonian or not (it is not important whether they belong to another ethnic group)' (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008: 66). Nevertheless, over half (53%) of Russian speakers believe it is possible to get a good job if the individual is 'a capable specialist or [has] good contacts [...] without knowing Estonian' (p. 66). Ethnic Estonians are also aware of this (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Thus knowledge of Estonian is useful in employment, but not essential.

Another crucial domain is the media. While one-fifth of Estonia's Russian speakers regularly follow Estonian language media, the lack of high-quality locally produced Russian-language media has constituted a major challenge for integration and thus also Estonian language promotion (Lauristin *et al.,* 2008). Local Russian-language press and radio are popular, but until very recently there have been hardly any Estonian television broadcasts in Russian. Apart from a Latvian-based Baltic version of a Russian national station that broadcasts 20 minutes of Estonian news per day, Estonia's Russian speakers have had to rely on programming from Russia, which comes with its own particular worldview, often contrasting sharply with that of both Estonians and Estonian Russian speakers: 60% of Estonian Russian speakers trust Estonian-produced media and but only 38% trust Moscow-produced media (Lauristin *et al.,* 2008). However, the propensity of Russian media to produce and maintain anti-integrative tendencies among local Russian speakers should not be discounted. A positive recent development has been the establishment of a second state-funded digital television channel (ETV2), which features a greater proportion of Russian-language programming.

The Russian language itself, as it is used in Estonia, is undergoing a set of changes indicative of integration. Specific lexical and morphosyntactic shifts in the direction of Estonian and unique to Estonia have been observed (Verschik, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2007). In the example *stavit' v golovu* from *pähe panema* (*put to the head,* i.e. *put on* [a hat]), Verschik (2007: 91) observes that the construction would be 'impossible in monolingual Russian' and '[f]or a monolingual speaker of Standard Russian [. . .] the meaning [. . .] remains opaque'.

Given the increased competence in English for both ethnolinguistic groups and the only partial knowledge of Estonian among Russian speakers (and vice versa), how large is the threat suggested by some theorists (see for example Laitin, 1998) that English will become an interethnic lingua franca? Russian speakers under the age of 30 generally speak both Estonian and English (in addition to Russian), whereas ethnic Estonians speak only English (as well as Estonian); the future lingua franca may thus indeed be either English or Estonian. Overall, 10% of ethnic Estonians and 5% of Russian speakers already claim to use a third language in interethnic communication and 43% of Russian speakers agree that it is 'normal' to use English with ethnic Estonians (Lauristin *et al.,* 2008). Nevertheless, Estonian retains a certain advantage over English, as we saw with the (growing) legitimacy it enjoys as the national language. In the 2000 census, even in Ida-Virumaa, there was not a single city in which competence in English was higher than competence in Estonian; the highest was in Sillamäe, but, even there, the number of people speaking Estonian outnumbered those speaking English by

almost two to one (Statistics Estonia, n.d.). An ethnic Estonian informant in an online study (Skerrett, 2011a) recently reported having had to resort to English when dealing by telephone with Narva Hospital, however, and it is clear that particular attention needs to be paid to the language situation in Ida-Virumaa, an issue I revisit below.

One domain in which English is particularly prominent is information technology. Although Estonian-language IT products are available, they are not necessarily used. Amongst ethnic Estonians, 69% report using an English-language operating system; this figure is 62% among Russian speakers (Vihalemm *et al.*, 2004). Ethnic Estonians are more bothered by having to use English-based products (because they are cheaper, for example) than Russian speakers, but the tendency is for younger members of both groups to be more accepting of English-language IT environments (Vihalemm *et al.*, 2004). Nevertheless, Estonian usage is high in the access of online services (75% for ethnic Estonians and 52% for Russian speakers) and in online communication (73% and 29%, respectively) (Vihalemm *et al.*, 2004). In the latter case, however, usage of Russian (64%) and English (35%) is higher among Russian speakers (Vihalemm *et al.*, 2004).

As we have seen, post-independence legislative changes have attempted to integrate Soviet-era immigrants and their descendants to a large extent by increasing their need to know Estonian and hopefully thus to improve their competence in this language. But how successful have integration attempts been, overall? Naturalization rates have slowed since the immediate post-independence period, with a moderate increase following EU accession in 2004, only to be tempered by Estonia's entry into the Schengen Zone, which offered all permanent residents the right to travel visa-free throughout most of Europe, regardless of citizenship status. Thus, the composition of the population according to citizenship is now quite stable, and although most stateless individuals report that they would like to naturalize, few (20%) feel they have the required language skills to take the exam (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Given this divide in the population, how do non-ethnic Estonians see themselves? Almost 90% consider themselves to be 'Russian', but the same proportion see themselves as members of the 'Russian-speaking population of Estonia' (Asser *et al.*, 2002: 26). That is, in Estonia, the term 'Russian' does not necessarily mean that the individual identifies with the Russian nationality or the country Russia; the identification may be with the language. Indeed, over one-half of the immigrant population in 2008 stated that their homeland is Estonia, with less than one-quarter naming both Estonia and Russia as their homelands and less than 20% stating Russia alone (Asser *et al.*, 2002). Among the second generation of immigrants, this phenomenon is even more pronounced with almost 80% fully agreeing that Estonia is their

homeland (Asser *et al.*, 2002). Asked whether they consider themselves to be part of the 'Estonian nation', 80% of those non-ethnic Estonians with citizenship agreed, as did more than half of stateless individuals (59%) as well as those with citizenship of another country (54%) (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Clearly, people can feel that they belong to the nation socially, even if legally they do not. Although the social and linguistic divisions in Estonian society are still quite pronounced, the potential for a more integrated future is high. Over half of the immigrant population 'feels proud of [the] achievements of Estonia' and three-quarters 'part of [...] Estonian society' (Asari, 2009: 28).

It should be recognized, nonetheless, that as integration also requires an effort from ethnic Estonians, negative attitudes towards immigrants hinder its progress, thereby, paradoxically, intensifying challenges for the language. According to a 2007 survey, more ethnic Estonians thought that 'the wider participation of non-Estonians in Estonian politics and economic life' would be negative (34%) than positive (28%) (Lauristin *et al.* 2008: 58). In 2000, less than half of ethnic Estonians thought that non-ethnic Estonians were loyal 'to the Estonian state', with the proportion even decreasing in 2008 (Asari, 2009); the (slight) decrease is probably due to negative reactions to the April 2007 Tallinn street riots by large numbers of Russian-speaking youths protesting the relocation of the Soviet 'unknown soldier' war memorial away from the city centre. Indeed, most integrative indexes have shown negative trends in the aftermath of the riots. Of course, we also need to take into account factors such as Russia's compatriot policy, according to which 'all people with a Russian ethnic background – even the ones who are citizens of other countries – still belong to the sphere of interest of the Russian Federation' (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008: 58). As Lauristin and colleagues (2008) rightly argue, this particular Russian foreign policy does 'Estonian Russians a disservice' (p. 58) by strengthening the divide with ethnic Estonians; it revives painful memories of the Soviet occupation and heighten fears of a recurrence on the part of the Soviet regime's successor. Nevertheless, over half of the immigrant population felt welcome in Estonia in 2008, with just over 20% feeling unwelcome (the remainder being neutral) (Asari, 2009). A 2007 poll found that 29.5% of non-ethnic Estonians regularly experience discrimination, although 25.2% rarely do and 19.9% never do (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Any discrimination against minorities is unacceptable but again, and I stress, the potential for a more harmonious and integrated Estonian society is high.

Voting trends in elections are also encouraging. One party in particular, Keskerakond (the Centre Party), has found strong support among those who feel disenfranchized by many of the post-independence (market economy) reforms in Estonia, among ethnic and non-ethnic Estonians alike (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). Although this party is not popular among many ethnic

Estonians, it has facilitated the greater representation of Russian speakers in local government, where, for example, in 2005, 24 of 63 elected members in Tallinn were Russian-speaking (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). What is perhaps most reassuring is that the party also helps to bridge the ethnolinguistic divide in the country. As Lauristin and colleagues (2008: 62) observe, the 'desire [of Russian speakers] to distance themselves from ethnic party politics gives us reason to believe that the potential for the development of multiethnic worldview-based parties and a corresponding electorate in Estonia is high [which] is clearly more beneficial to [...] separation along ethnic lines'.

One further and final challenge stemming from the inflexible attitudes of some ethnic Estonians is the purist discourse circulating in policy and planning and other linguistic elite groups. In an interview with the national broadsheet *Postimees* on the annual Estonian 'Mother Tongue Day' in 2008, Urmas Sutrop, Director of the Estonian Language Institute, had this to say in response to the question, 'is the Estonian language viable?':

> Meil räägivad siin näiteks venelased, ukrainlased *eesti keelt* nii, nagu nad räägivad. Vead hakkavad levima ja võimenduvad. Meie riigi integratsioonipoliitika tulemusena muutub keel tundmatuseni. Keelekaitse seisukohalt on kõige parem, kui integratsiooni ei toimuks—venelased räägiksid oma keelt ja eestlased omavahel eesti keelt, ilma et nad kokku saaks.
> *Translation*: Here we've got, for example, Russians, Ukrainians who speak Estonian their own way. The mistakes will spread and get stronger. As result of our country's integration policy, the language will become unrecognizable. From a language protection perspective, the best thing would be not to have integration – Russians would speak their own language and Estonians would speak Estonian amongst themselves, without dealing with each other. (Filippov, 2008: no page, para 3–4)

It remains unclear how Sutrop envisages ethnic Estonians and Russian speakers avoiding all contact with each other in their daily lives. Propositions such as these only serve to create obstacles for integration and the maintenance and further promotion of Estonian as a language of wider usage; the alternative, as we have seen, is English. Recent proposals for amendments to the language law have also smacked of purism and anti-integrative tendencies. They have included fines for journalists for incorrect use of language in the media (Kruuse, 2009). This particular change is unlikely to come into effect, however, and the proposals have received a substantial amount of criticism (Sulbi, 2009). As Director of the Institute of Estonian Language and Culture at Tallinn University, Mart Rannut observes, '[k]õige nurgakivi on eesti keele staatus, sellega aga uues eelnõus rahul olla ei saa' ('[t]he cornerstone

of everything is the status of the Estonian language, that's why I can't be satis-
fied with the new draft policy') (as cited in Kruuse, 2009: no page, para 5).

Understanding and Confronting the Challenges

With these challenges in mind, how can we conceptualize the case of
Estonia within the poststructuralist and historical-structuralist approaches?
What, with this critical perspective in mind, can be done to bring about the
desired outcomes? And do 'desired outcomes' necessarily mean the contin-
ued promotion of the Estonian language? Let us begin with the challenges
for the Estonian language within a poststructuralist context.

Why would a proportion of Russian speakers 'choose' to remain uninte-
grated and not learn – or at least not speak – Estonian, when the language has
clear instrumental, economic value in post-Soviet Estonia? The answer lies in
how language fits into the sociohistorical structure of the country, and the
diverging ways of viewing life among different groups of the population that
have emerged from it (Skerrett, 2011c). While, on the whole, Estonians never
stopped seeing incorporation into the Soviet Union as an *occupation* and never
accepted *Soviet* as a term to denote their nationality (Kõresaar, 2004a, 2004b),
Russian speakers tended to see themselves as having (been) moved domesti-
cally within the same state and so did not consider themselves immigrants in
the traditional sense, and largely accepted the myth of a singular Soviet
nation (Fournier, 2002; Kymlicka, 2000). Many did not even know that an
independent Estonia had existed (Kõresaar, 2004a; Lauristin, 2004). And for
many – especially older– Russian speakers, this framework continues to
maintain a certain currency (Sztompka, 2004). The downfall of the Soviet
Union brought about a rewriting of history 'showing terror and extermina-
tion rather than a workers' paradise' (Sztompka, 2004: 164), a trauma that,
according to Sztompka, has had broad repercussions among Russian speakers
throughout the post-Soviet space. This is especially true for non-Russian
Russian speakers, who were more easily socialized into the Soviet national
mentality and whose homeland (the Soviet Union) has now ceased to exist.
Thus, for many, the shift to an officially Estonian-only society is discrimina-
tion, as it has taken away their right to use their mother tongue in what is to
them their home territory. Opportunities for social advancement, as they see
it, are denied to them as their language is no longer useful on its own in
higher-paying jobs or in the higher education system. This also explains why
the seemingly reasonable move by Estonian authorities to relocate a Soviet
war monument, mentioned above, resulted in the largest and most violent
demonstrations the country has seen since its renewed independence. Even

many young Russian speakers saw the move as an insult; despite the fact that they certainly do not have a Soviet identity, Soviet symbols remain part of the discursive environment that they inhabit. They are not Russian, but nor are they (yet) fully admitted into the Estonian national identity construct. They are Estonian-born descendants of Soviet-identified people, and their worldview, understandably, comprises symbols, values and beliefs from the repertoires of both Estonian and Soviet – and, to a lesser extent, present-day Russian – identity constructs. Rather than seeing non-users of Estonian as lazy or unmotivated, we therefore need to understand the particular social and historical contingencies that have brought about the current situation.

Before looking at specific recommendations to address the challenges faced by the Estonian language, let us turn to the question of whether the continued promotion and maintenance of Estonian constitute desired future outcomes. That is, what basis do we have for justifying Estonian language policy and planning activities? From the poststructuralist perspective, we need to be careful not to uncritically accept these efforts as being worthwhile in and of themselves. There are several interrelated reasons for this. First, as Tollefson (1991: 183) maintains, '[l]anguage itself leads neither to equality nor inequality, but instead is a tool to further them'. That is, we need to be alert to inequalities and ways of doing things in and through languages that lead to different forms of domination. From a critical stance, we need to remember that concern and compassion for others should be central in our work (Pennycook, 2006). Second, although as Pennycook (2001, 2006) suggests there is indeed a pronounced humanistic element in a great deal of work in contemporary applied linguistics, including that of Tollefson, from a poststructuralist perspective, we need a more nuanced approach. Much recent work in language policy, including Tollefson's and also, notably, that of Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998, 2000), takes a rights-based approach to solving social inequalities maintained through linguistic regimes. As Pennycook (2001: 64) contends, however, 'the dichotomizing between the haves and have-nots [of linguistic rights] can obscure social realities far more than they reveal them [. . .] [T]here is a related tendency to then suggest that those that have rights have full access to all aspects of language, while those without such rights do not.'

As we have seen, in the case of Estonia, the social reality is by no means a simple projection of policy producing a set of haves and have-nots (Pennycook, 2001). There is no clear division between 'A-team, the élites [. . .] and the B-team, the dominated, ordinary people' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998: 16; see also Pennycook, 2001: 64), not only because of the complexities of the power dynamics at play in the country, but also because it is not entirely

clear who speaks what 'language' (Verschik, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2007; Zabrodskaja, 2006) (see the discussion, above, of changes to the use of Russian in Estonia and the mixing strategies used in interethnic communication). The concept of an inalienable right belonging to particular groups in perpetuity (generally, what is meant by 'human rights'), furthermore, cannot stand up to critical, poststructuralist analysis. It is speculative to claim that a form of social organization that reduces inequalities under current (social) conditions will also do so under the unpredictable conditions of the future. Furthermore, language rights are based on the premise that there is some underlying, essential characteristic that 'belongs' to a particular internally homogeneous group. The notion of a group, moreover, relies on the existence of shared identities:

> [an] *imagined sameness* [...] *at all times and in all circumstances*; [through the illusion of the group] being, and being able to continue to be, itself and not [...] something else. [Group] identity may be regarded as a fiction, intended to put an orderly pattern and narrative on the actual complexity and multitudinous nature of both psychological and social worlds. (Robbins, 2005: 172)

This is problematic for any study of language in its social context. As Coulmas (2005) contends, traditionally:

> social factors to which linguistic variation was tied—social class, sex, age and ethnicity—were seen as fixed categories that remained stable [...] Variation in language was interpreted as being conditioned by these factors, understood as permanent properties of speakers, and varieties were seen as encoding speaker identities based on social membership. (Coulmas, 2005:178)

What is more, the native speaker – the proof, as it were, of the existence of languages – does not exist as something stable, clear or well defined (Coulmas, 2005). The native speaker, in other words, 'has no real-world referent' (Coulmas, 2005: 172). Language (use) is in a continual state of flux and cannot be claimed to reflect anything constant or essential about its speakers: it is 'a multifunctional variable instrument whose identity is perpetually reconstructed by its users rather than being categorically given' (Coulmas, 2005: 178).

Language, too, just like identity groups, relies on an imagined homogeneity where there is in fact great diversity. It is believed that members of a group speak the same discrete language. Yet, discrete languages are, like

groups, problematic simplifications, and thus positivistic constructs. The way language has come to be perceived needs to be understood within a particular social and historical context: that is, there is not necessarily anything inevitable or natural about the way we perceive language. As Williams (1999: 169) suggests, the many presently defined Indo-European languages in Europe have no linguistic basis, suggesting that 'they could well have been limited to three' (presumably, Slavic, Germanic and Romance, with varieties or 'dialects' between and within). The current linguistic divide emerged with the present political map, where '[t]he naming performatively [of nations] called the languages into being' (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007: 10). This discourse of 'national language', where each nation has its own language (usually just one although in some cases more) that 'belongs' to it, has become a dogma of the contemporary world.

The official designation of the separate national languages of Serbian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Bosnian out of what was formerly considered – with some ethnic and cultural qualifications – to be a single language (Serbo-Croatian) in the respective independent states that have emerged from the breakup of Yugoslavia (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006; Wardhaugh, 2006), is a good example of the discursive mechanism of the national language at work. Governments in these states have made deliberate attempts to intensify differences between the varieties (Wardhaugh, 2006). The relationship between Hindi and Urdu in India and Pakistan, respectively, is a similar case (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006). A further example is that of Soviet Moldova. The Cyrillic script was introduced in Moldova after the Soviet takeover in order to affiliate the Romanian (a Romance language) spoken there with Russian and thereby distinguishing the region from Romania itself, which, although communist, was not part of the Soviet Union (Munteanu, 2002; Skvortsova, 2002). In all these cases, language has been *constructed*, through intentional reification and manipulation, to support a nationalistic framework.

Fortunately, all this does not leave us, as linguists, without a field of study, even if we accept 'the conclusion that modern linguistics has been based upon a myth' (Harris, 1990: 45; see also Makoni & Pennycook, 2007: 19) (the myth being the reification of individually definable objects called languages). We still have *language* to research; it is the epistemology that requires refocus, as does that of any discipline reorienting itself towards a poststructuralist awareness. But can there be an argument for maintaining linguistic diversity for its own sake, as many contemporary policy theorists (Harrison, 2007; Martí et al., 2005; Mühlhäusler, 2001; Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998, 2000) contend? While there may well be, it should now be clear that I am not advocating a rights-based approach, given

that it relies on notions (such as ethnic groups, nations, languages) that can be shown to be fictitious, and is thus, ultimately, inadequate. The same is often true with the ecological approach (Pennycook, 2004; Skerrett, 2010a). I agree with Pennycook (2004: 229) that those that advocate an ecological approach do so with an aim to maintain diversity and the parallel they draw between diminishing biological diversity on the one hand and linguistic diversity on the other, and the threat this trend poses to our existence, is 'seductive'. Nevertheless, as he reminds us, languages are cultural artefacts, not living creatures; if we talk about 'natural' language we exclude the social (and therefore the political) – to pretend that language use exists or could exist in an extra-discursive environment (Bourne, 1988; Pennycook, 2004). Pennycook (2004) locates this danger within the general and continuing positivist tendency in the sciences, hard and soft alike, for modernist essentializing:

> At the same time that a particular social, economic, cultural and political world order is emerging, so too are attempts to biologize the world to match that order, to find biological explanations (either in hard science through DNA modelling or the softer sciences such as evolutionary psychology) for gender relations, sexual orientation, states of mind, ways of being. Language ecology, whether seen as a metaphor or as a relationship between languages and the natural environment, is inevitably tied to this cultural climate to negate the social, cultural and political. (Pennycook, 2004: 220)

As with all grand narratives, the danger is that attention is diverted away from what is actually going on, socially speaking: '[T]he sad irony for language ecology is that while singing the song of diversity and the environment, it unwittingly reproduces the discourses of the natural that have long served dominant articulations of the world'; the approach, thus, 'is ultimately anathema to critical theory' (Pennycook, 2004: 222) and therefore also to poststructuralism.

Returning to the issue of maintaining linguistic diversity, then, if we can only know what our discourses allow us to know, is there an argument that we, with our western (European) knowledge – bound up in western (European) languages – can do without the collected knowledge of other languages and other discourses from around the world? I would contend that we cannot, given the inequality and environmental destruction taking place in the western industrialized world. As Nettle and Romaine (2000), Harrison (2007) and Mühlhäusler (2001) all maintain, many non-western societies were much more adept at living harmoniously with their respective

environments, and the knowledge required to maintain such an existence has been transmitted through local varieties of language. Thus, it can be argued that, as linguists, we have a moral imperative to help maintain and promote global linguistic diversity (Skerrett, 2010a, 2011c). That is why I treat linguistics as a social discipline (Hudson, 2001). To try to divorce linguistics from its social milieu is counter-productive and even potentially dangerous (Skerrett, 2010a).

What are some of the specific things that can be done in order to address the challenges facing the Estonian language? And what, importantly, are the alternatives for a more equitable and ethical future in Estonia? Above all, the construct of Estonianness needs to be more flexible and admit more diversity (Skerrett, 2011c). Even the tiny autochthonous Võro language, spoken in the country's southeast, is presently excluded from notions of a genuinely Estonian identity, as this identity is not perceived to be robust enough to support more than one language of its own (K.D. Brown, 2005; Siiner, 2006). As Brown (2005: 84) states, 'the vitality of the nation is expressed through the vitality of the national language. In this ideology there is little room for the study of regional languages'. In this sense, we could say that we need to *queer* what it means to be Estonian (Skerrett, 2011c): although queer theory has its origins in the deconstruction of genders and sexualities, it has useful applications in its ability to deconstruct any identity category (Jagose, 1996). Indeed queer is quintessentially poststructuralist: the queer project denaturalizes the naturalized by locating the discourses that frame human social behaviour. It questions, analyses and critiques the taken-for-granted. Estonianness, like any identity category, and specifically, any nationality or ethnicity, is a social construction. The Estonian identity needs to be inclusive of people of all backgrounds living in the country. More attention (by way of government campaigns, for example) needs to be given to the *reconstruction* of Estonianness through the promotion of solidarity between all residents of Estonia, regardless of ethnicity, by emphasizing the commonalities they share in inhabiting the same physical and, in many ways, social space. At the same time, respect for diversity, promoted through continued minority language maintenance in the case of 'Estonian Russian' and by strengthening revivals efforts of Võro, would, it is hoped, see a queerer, more equitable sense of what it means to be Estonian.

Maintaining global linguistic diversity, in order to maintain a diversity of knowledge systems, does entail some form of language policy in favour of Estonian in Estonia (Skerrett, 2011c). The playing field between Russian and local languages in the constituent republics at the end of the Soviet Union was not equal (N.A. Brown, 2005; Druviete, 1997). Had the occupation not ended when it did, given the prestige and usefulness of Russian under the

Soviet system, linguistic Russification in Estonia might well have prevailed (Lieven, 1994). As has been the case in other postcolonial environments (for a discussion of Estonia as postcolonial, see Račevskis, 2002), promoting the local language has been seen as a tool for preserving local interests in a way that the colonial language cannot (Tollefson, 1991). This promotes Estonia's equality on an international level. Nevertheless, integration and a greater willingness on the part of Russian speakers to speak Estonian can only occur when societal conditions are conducive to these efforts. What is still needed is a more carefully targeted approach to access to public and private services for Russian speakers. In Ida-Virumaa, for example, quality Estonian language education needs to be intensified if the people are to enjoy mobility throughout the whole country. The Estonian Language Development Plan 2011–2017, currently being formulated, will be addressing this issue, but it remains to be seen whether the initiatives will be bold enough. While many services are still widely available in both languages, they may generally be available only in Estonian in the near future, given the eventual mortality of the bilingual ethnic Estonians schooled in the Soviet period. Furthermore, in order to prevent a shift to English as lingua franca, language planners need to create and maintain a discursive environment in which Estonian operates *and is available* as the language of access to social resources throughout the country.

As well as more language learning opportunities for adults in Russian-speaking areas, other ways of strengthening social cohesion include the integration of Estonian- and Russia medium schools; if current trends continue, this may well take place gradually. Additionally, if language acquisition strategies prove unsuccessful, further opportunities to naturalize should be provided for those who can no longer be reasonably expected to learn the language. And finally, greater localized recognition of Russian in some official capacity in Ida-Virumaa would almost certainly improve the sense of belonging and societal trust of Russian speakers living in that region. Although it could be argued that it would be counterproductive, in that it would discourage those people from learning Estonian, I am not advocating any lessening of efforts to increase their competence in Estonian, but rather a decided attempt to strengthen it.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that I am optimistic about the potential for greater societal integration on the basis of the Estonian language. First, the growing relative proportion of ethnic Estonians in the population

will, it is hoped, offset the postcolonial fears and defensive attitudes that many hold (Lauristin *et al.*, 2008). This should also increase the usefulness of the language in the wider Estonian society, further strengthening its status. Improved efforts to teach the language and a growing tendency among younger Russian speakers to see Estonian as the legitimate language of the nation also help to increase the significance of the language.

Second, as we have seen, the foundations for creating a more inclusive Estonia are solid: the majority of Russian speakers feel at home in Estonia and there is great potential for political integration. Nevertheless, further removal of barriers to social and economic advancement, especially in Ida-Virumaa, would help foster a discourse of greater mutual trust and respect. Realistically, however, given the high concentration of Russian speakers, especially in Narva, much of the region will remain functionally monolingual for some time to come; closer attention needs to be paid to the specific needs of the area in order to promote Estonian acquisition, while showing compassion and understanding towards the people involved. The potential for positive outcomes for all residents of Estonia through the Estonian language is high, but we simply cannot ignore the problems of social exclusion and isolation that many people face. That, after all, would do nothing to help overcome the challenges faced by the Estonian people or the language.

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