

ARTICLE

Linguistic Identity of Russians in the Latvian Lands in the Second Half of the 19th–Early 20th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present empirical material reflecting the processes of formation and reproduction of linguistic identity based on the Russian language and Russian culture among the Russian population of the Latvian lands that were part of the Russian Empire. The historical period chosen for scientific analysis in this article — the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries — is extremely important for the processes of bourgeois modernization in Eastern Europe, accompanied by processes of nation-building. At the same time, the article critically addresses narratives prevalent in contemporary public consciousness and even academic research that claim that the processes of modernization of the social life of the Russian population in this region of Russia were reduced exclusively to problems of nation-building and the actualization of ethnic identity. The author of the article demonstrates that the appeal of Russians to the values of linguistic identity was linked to the need to consolidate Russian communal life in the Baltics. To a lesser extent, representatives of Russian society saw the dissemination of their linguistic identity as a means of distancing themselves from other ethnic groups. The article uses an analysis of academic literature and an extensive array of materials published in Russian newspapers and magazines in Riga, the largest city in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire during the period under review.

Keywords: Linguistic Identity; Russian Population of Latvian Lands; Russian Community; Native Language

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1. Introduction

Historically, Russian was the native language of the overwhelming majority of people who identified themselves as Russians^[1]. In this sense, it was the core of the ethnocultural and national identity of Russians, at least since the period of their emergence as a nation, which began with the modernization of Russia in the second half of the 19th century. At the same time, from this stage of its development, the Russian state began to view the Russian language and the cultural tradition based on it as a crucial means of cultural integration for the empire's population, which was extremely ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse. According to the First General Census of the Russian Empire (1897), less than half of the country's population — 44.31% — considered Russian as their native language^[2].

But why is the linguistic identity of Latvia's Russian population being revived, given that the very process of modernization in the Russian Empire was accompanied by a significant increase in the role of the Russian language in the country's administrative, political, and cultural life, and the establishment of state status for this language? A preliminary, brief answer to this question can be formulated as follows: the mere fact of Russian ethnic origin among residents of the Russian Empire living in provinces with a significant non-Russian population did not automatically guarantee ethnic Russians a successful socio-economic existence or social and professional advancement. The modernization of the empire in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional regions presented a socio-cultural, moral, and psychological challenge for all ethnic groups, including Russians. Clearly, the relevance of this historical challenge was different for ethnic Latvians, the overwhelming majority of Latvia's population, Baltic Germans, Jews, and other ethnic groups, on the one hand, and ethnic Russians, on the other. But this challenge was also palpable for ethnic Russians. Moreover, the methods of realizing, presenting, and defending their linguistic identity developed by the Russian population of Latvia during this historical period were, to varying degrees, replicated later in the independent Republic of Latvia (1918–1940 and from 1991 to the present) and during Latvia's period as part of the USSR (1940–1991).

2. Materials and Methods

Linguistic identity is a type of social identity that an individual and others associate with a particular language (or languages) and view as an important or even priority element in the individual's social identity system^[3]. The nation-building process of the 19th and early 20th centuries gave rise to the concept of the crucial role of language in shaping national identity^[4,5]. Nationalist ideologists often linked the goals of nationalist movements to the acquisition of privileges for linguistic communities^[6]. An individual's linguistic identity is internally contradictory and dynamic. It is inextricably linked to national identity, and in the context of modernity and nationalism, it often serves as the most important element, and thus the most fundamental characteristic, of ethnic and even national identity. As such, its resource is the national culture of the people, supported and developed by educational institutions, official communication, and the ideological narratives of the nation-state and civil society. On the other hand, linguistic identity is a crucial component of an individual's holistic identity, which is based on the independence of one's thought and freedom of action and deed, resulting in the ability to morally regulate one's own actions and morally evaluate the actions of others^[7]. However, national identity cannot completely replace or subordinate an individual's linguistic identity, as it is historically older and has more sophisticated mechanisms for connecting with the people's culture, their mass behavior, and their everyday life. In this sense, linguistic identity, the individual's intellectual life and moral consciousness constituted on its basis, serve as the framework within which the values and norms of national identity, the ethnopolitics of the nation-state, and the communicative environment in which representatives of various ethnic groups are included are analyzed.

Most contemporary authors describing the spread of the Russian language and the cultural tradition based on it in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries view them in the context of nation-building, the intensification of nationalist practices and ideology at the level of state power and in the public consciousness^[8–10]. However, in the opinion of the author of this article, this approach is largely a product of a later historical reconstruc-

tion, formed within the large cluster of studies of nations and nationalism that emerged in the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries. This view strongly aligns and even identifies bourgeois modernization as a systemic socio-historical phenomenon of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries exclusively with processes of nation-building.

It is within the framework of this approach that the need of various ethnocultural groups to develop their linguistic identity is considered mainly in the context of ideas about the dominance/subordination of certain languages of a multicultural society in the affirmation of a single national identity. In this context, sociologists consider the inevitable stratification of ethnic groups, both majorities and minorities, due to the different statuses of their native languages^[11–13]; the spread of social stigmatization of ethnic minorities as speakers of minority languages^[14]; ideas about the inevitability of the dominance of the language and culture of the majority in the context of modernization in the lives of linguistic minorities^[15,16]; institutionalization of manipulative practices of political elites to support their interests on the part of the linguistic majority^[17–19], etc. Criticism of the idea of the inevitability of the total integration of the linguistic identity of ethnocultural groups into models of nation-building in the scientific literature after the Second World War is generally associated with ideas about the individual's right to their native language as one of the universal human rights^[20–24].

If we analyze the substantive aspect of the ethnocultural identity of the Russian population of the Latvian lands of the Baltics, we can see in it a dominant linguistic component based on the Russian language and Russian culture. As numerous articles in the Russian press published in Riga during this historical period demonstrate, Russian educators, public figures, politicians, scientists, and journalists viewed the Russian language as a universal social phenomenon, most appropriate to the times and fulfilling the greatest range of social functions for strengthening the position of the Russian community in Riga and throughout Latvia as a whole. The Russian language most fully accumulated the values of Russian history and culture, rationalizing them in the form of everyday folk and professional culture. At the level of individual consciousness, language was viewed as a way of existence and the development of thought, the primary means of communication within the community of language speakers. The Russian consciousness saw the Russian language

as a means of ensuring the unity of human socialization at all stages of development, as well as the unity of private, family, public, and governmental life. A common language leveled class and social distinctions within the ethnic group, which had been reinforced by dynamic modernization processes. A common language could unite the ethnic group in interactions, especially political ones, with other ethnic groups, which during that historical period were also actively competing for resources, influence, and power in Riga and the Baltics as a whole. Crucially, the Russian language and Russian culture were viewed as open systems for representatives of other ethnic groups, who could very well become native speakers of this language. Thus, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Russian linguistic community became the prototype of a liberally constructed national community. At the same time, as the core of national identity, linguistic identity was neither replaced nor obscured by linguistic identity. Russian public figures and journalists in Riga already recognized the potential and actual conflicts between them. While language, as the basis of linguistic identity, was viewed as a social and cultural phenomenon whose origins were lost in ancient times, when the Russian people were forming, national identity was clearly linked to modern times, to the processes of nation-building in European states, which were accompanied not only by obvious progress but also by a host of social, political, and interstate conflicts. In this situation, the Russian consciousness of that era largely favored their native Russian language and the cultural tradition based on it as the foundation of their ethnocultural identity. This allowed for a certain psychological and intellectual autonomy in relation to the constructs of national and state identity, which was undergoing a painful, highly contradictory, conflictual, and destructive process in its existence, particularly during the Revolution of 1905–1907 and right up until the final days of the Russian Empire in 1917.

The research material in this article is based on an analysis of the scientific literature on linguistic identity, its place in civil society structures, and the challenges faced in reproducing Russian linguistic identity in the Latvian lands of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The primary dataset used and analyzed in this article consists of numerous publications in Russian-language newspapers and magazines published in Riga, the largest city in the Latvian lands, including “Riga Herald,” “Riga

News,” “Riga Thought,” “Baltic region,” and “North-West Week.” The historical period chosen for analysis occupies a very important place in the history of Latvia, encompassing the processes of nation-building that took place under the autocracy and constitutional monarchy (since 1905). For the Russian population of the Latvian lands, this was a period of ethnic consolidation, when a liberal perception of civil society gradually matured, which should ensure the linguistic interests of all ethnic groups.

3. Results

3.1. The Russian Population in Latvia in the Second Half of the 19th – Early 20th Centuries

The history of Russians in Latvia is quite long — approximately a thousand years. According to Russian and Livonian chronicles, the first Russian traders arrived in Latvia as early as the 12th–13th centuries. However, before Latvia’s incorporation into Russia, which began with Russia’s victory in the Great Northern War (1721), when Livonia was incorporated, and culminated in the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1772 to 1795, which led to the incorporation of Latgale and Courland, there were very few Russians in Latvia. In the 19th century, the situation for Russians in Latvia changed radically. According to the First All-Russian Population Census (1897), 231,200 Russians, or 12% of the population, lived in the territory of present-day Latvia, while before the First World War, the figure was more than 300,000. Moreover, the Russian population of Riga, the largest city in the Baltics, during this period amounted to approximately 100,000 people, or 20% of all city residents. The high proportion of Russian and Russian-speaking population in Latvia, and especially in its largest cities, beginning with the era of bourgeois modernization in the second half of the 19th century, as well as the priority identification based on the Russian language and Russian culture, determined the reproduction of the most important structural elements of their collective ethnocultural identity^[25,26].

The Russian population was unevenly distributed across Latvia. The largest number of Russians — approxi-

mately 77,000 — lived in Latgale. 68,000 lived in the Latvian part of Livonia (Vidzeme), and 26,000 in Courland and Zemgale. By the end of the 19th century, Russians had become the second largest ethnic group after Latvians. There were twice as many Russians in cities as in rural areas. The only exception was Latgale, where, conversely, there were twice as many Russians in the villages as in the cities. Half of the Russian population of Vidzeme, Courland, and Zemgale originated from adjacent Russian provinces. For example, in Latgale, in the area around the city of Rēzekne, 10% of Russians originated from neighboring provinces. The largest number of Russians came from the Kaunas, Vitebsk, and Vilnius provinces. Russians living in Latvia had a high birth rate, and accordingly, their numbers grew rapidly. Compared to other ethnic groups in Latvia, the Russian population stood out for its diverse social composition. Fifty-four percent of Russians were peasants, living primarily in Latgale. Thirty-five percent were members of the middle class, and 8% were landowners and nobles. As for Latvians, most were peasants, while Baltic Germans, the most politically, economically, and culturally influential ethnic group since the 13th century, belonged primarily to the middle class^[27].

The most dynamic growth of the Russian population occurred in Riga, the largest city in the Baltics, the center of the Livonian Governorate, and simultaneously one of the largest cities in the Russian Empire. Riga was a vital commercial, industrial, and educational center for Russia, which experienced rapid growth driven by modernization from the second half of the 19th century until the outbreak of World War II in 1914. Riga’s attractiveness as a major center was constantly enhanced to attract Russians from Russia’s interior provinces during the period of modernization. Riga’s population increased 17 — fold from the early 19th to the early 20th centuries. Moreover, Riga’s importance also increased relative to other cities in the empire. While in 1811 the city’s population ranked eighth among Russian cities, by 1897 it had risen to fourth. The growth of Riga’s population, including its Russian population, occurred during this historical period primarily due to migration from both rural areas of Latvia and other provinces^[28]. Statistics provide a fairly complete picture of the size and proportion of the Russian population in Riga and other cities from the early 19th century to the early 20th century (**Table 1**).

Table 1. The number and proportion of the Russian population of Riga from 1806 to 1913^[29].

	1806	1867	1881	1897	1913
Russian population of Riga (thousands)	5.0	25.8	31.9	43.3	107.9
Share of Russian population among all Riga residents (%)	15.0	25.0	18.9	16.9	22.4

Table 2 presents data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the Russian population in the largest cities of the Latvian lands at the time of the First General Census of the Russian Empire (1897). As can be seen from the table, the share of Russians among the residents of Riga, Dvinsk (now Daugavpils), Libava (now Liepāja), Mitava (now Jelgava), and Rezhitsa (now Rēzekne) was significant — from

11.4% (Libava) to 27.0% (Dvinsk). Moreover, in the gender structure of the Russian population, the proportion of men was generally predominant (up to 77.9% in Mitava), indicating a significant layer of Russian military personnel among Russian city dwellers. The proportion of city residents born in other provinces of Russia is also significant (up to 46.2% in Dvinsk)^[30–32].

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the population, including the Russian population, in the largest cities of Latvian lands (1897).

	Dvinsk	Rezhitsa	Mitava	Libava	Riga
Share of city residents born in other provinces (%)	46.2	11.9	23.0	31.8	38.4
Russian population (in thousands)	19.1	2.4	4.0	7.3	44.4
Share of Russian population among city residents (%)	27.0	22.0	11.4	11.4	15.7
Share of Russian civilian population among city residents (%)	19.7	23.9	5.3	7.4	13.8

3.2. The Symbolic Function of the Russian Language in the Ethnocultural Identity of Russians

The modernization of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century stimulated the nation-building processes of a unified Russian nation, as well as the rise of national consciousness among the peoples and national groups living in the country. As one of the most developed parts of the Empire, the Baltic region was distinguished by the dynamism of ethnic processes, which gradually involved the Russian population. Articles in the “Riga Herald” (Rizhsky Vestnik) in the 1870s indicate that Russian linguistic identity, for its individual bearers, served as a basic cultural resource, previously acquired in the familiar Russian cultural environment, for perceiving and evaluating the material and spiritual environment of the Baltic region and, above all, Riga, the largest city in this region of the Russian Empire. In fact, from the early 18th century, when this region was gradually incorporated into Russia, and right up until the end of the 19th century, Russians perceived the region’s cultural dissimilarity from Russia’s internal provinces, viewing it as “foreign land.” Russian linguistic identity established rigid cultural boundaries between its individual speakers and the cultural milieu of Riga. One Russian merchant, whose impressions were published in the newspaper “Riga Herald” in

1871, described his encounter with the Baltic-German environment within Russia as follows: “Every Russian traveler, arriving at the Riga-Dinaburg railway station in Riga, must inevitably be greatly surprised, finding the atmosphere of this station completely foreign”^[33]. Initially, Riga is perceived as a monolithic German city, with the exception of the Moscow suburb, where the Russian population has long settled. The Moscow suburb opposed Riga as a special cultural and economic space^[34]. The Moscow suburb for a long time remained the antithesis of the rest of Riga, where “there are almost no monuments, covenants, legends, traditions dear to the Russian people; there is definitely nothing for the Russian soul to immediately become attached to in Riga”^[35].

However, the entrenchment of Russians in Riga and the continued growth of this ethnic group’s population are leading to an expansion of the space in which the Russian language is beginning to occupy as a crucial element of Riga’s urban cultural diversity. A significant part of Riga’s material, social, and spiritual life is embodied in its Russian linguistic identity. This was reflected in the emergence of a large number of products of economic activity created by Russian craftsmen and artisans: “There are quite a few Russian artisans and craftsmen in Riga; take the trouble to look closely at any large building in this city: you will certainly be convinced that the majority of those working are native

Russians; the carpenters are mostly Russian, the masons are Russian, the sawyers are entirely Russian. Take the trouble to look into furniture stores - a lot of different furniture has been made, and well made, by Russian carpenters; take a look into shoe stores — you will find a lot of Russian work. One old manufacturer ... not at all jokingly assured that if Russian women and girls did not come to work in Riga cigar and tobacco factories, the tobacco manufacturers would have to close their establishments”^[36]. The penetration of Russian space into Riga’s urban development was primarily associated with church construction. In the second half of the 19th century, numerous Orthodox churches were built in Riga. A surge in religious construction was noted throughout Russia at this time^[37]. The Orthodox church, aesthetically and spatially distinct and towering above the civil development, had not only a religious but also an important cultural dimension. And with the construction of the monumental Orthodox cathedral on the Field of Mars in 1884, surrounded by Riga’s boulevards, a new Russian architectural and cultural dominant was created throughout the city center.

The need to establish the social status of the Russian language in Riga was also dictated by political considerations arising from the incorporation of the Baltics into the Russian Empire in the 18th century. Even by the mid-19th century, the socioeconomic status of Latvia’s Russian residents was not exceptional; they did not enjoy the privileges that characterized the Baltic German aristocracy and burghers. In cities, Russians settled primarily in their poor outskirts. The prominent Russian thinker and one of the ideologists of Slavophilism, Yuri Samarin (1819–1876), well acquainted with the history and socio-political situation in the Baltic region, wrote that “The situation of Russian people in the Baltic provinces is striking to foreigners and arouses surprise”^[38]. Similar ideas were expressed by another Slavophile theorist, Ivan Aksakov (1823–1886), who believed that Russian culture should dominate in the Russian Empire, since it was the Russian nation that unified all the peoples in this state and acted as “an arbiter of relations between conflicting nationalities”^[39]. In the late 1860s, the historian Mikhail Pogodin (1800–1875) actively advocated teaching all subjects in Latvian schools and gymnasiums only in Russian, believing that “Russification is a political necessity”^[40]. The views of the Slavophiles were readily and frequently circulated in the “Riga Herald.”

3.3. The Socially Integrative Function of the Russian Language

The rapid growth of the Russian population in Latvia during the period of industrialization and urbanization in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, its regional dispersion in both major cities and rural areas, socio-demographic and professional differentiation, and representation across all social and class strata suggest that during this period, in one way or another, it began to resemble a miniature, modernizing community, characterized by the internal solidarity inherent in such a social organization, as well as the development of typical forms of attitudes toward other ethnic groups with which Russians constantly interacted, primarily Baltic Germans, Latvians, and Jews. Community life also led to the formation of a regional identity for Russians in Latvia and more broadly, throughout the Baltic provinces. The renowned Russian educator Semyon Shafranov (1820–1888), who worked in Riga in the mid-century as a teacher of Russian language and literature, asserted that the foundations of the Russian national spirit are laid, above all, in the Russian language. Language is the bearer of a people’s cultural identity, being the end result of the development of their spiritual culture. In one of his public lectures, Shafranov objected to assertions that the Russian language was merely a natural characteristic of a people: “What is a natural language? We share the same nature as all other peoples, but language is its own, unique, consciousness of its own spirit. A person is born a person, but he becomes Russian first and foremost in the family... in school”^[41].

The perception of the Russian language as a key factor in shaping Russian collective identity was fostered by celebrations in Riga and other Baltic cities dedicated to the memory of the brothers Saints Cyril (826–869) and Methodius (815–885), the creators of the Slavic alphabet. These celebrations arose as early as the early 1870s. Liturgies were celebrated in Orthodox churches, and solemn ceremonies dedicated to these Slavic educators were held at the Riga Theological Seminary and Russian secular educational institutions. In 1885, the 1000th anniversary of Methodius’s death was celebrated in Russia, including Riga, in an extremely solemn atmosphere^[41,42].

Russian residents of Riga began to solemnly commemorate events associated with the lives of Russian writers. In 1883, when the world-famous Russian writer Ivan Turgenev

(1818–1883) died, a service was held in Riga’s St. Peter and St. Paul Cathedral, and a public meeting was held in the Beehive building (“Uley”). In 1891, at the initiative of the Literary Circle, a service was held in Riga’s Nativity of Christ Cathedral for the late renowned novelist Ivan Goncharov (1812–1891). And in 1899, the centenary of the great writer and founder of the modern Russian language, Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), was celebrated with particular solemnity. The names of A. Pushkin, N. Gogol, and I. Turgenev appeared in the names of Riga streets. Close attention to issues of national consciousness coincided with the national liberation struggles of the Slavic peoples of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, who emphasized the value of Slavic languages and cultures. Among some Slavic intelligentsia, the ideals of Pan-Slavism, ranging from cultural to political, gained popularity. From the 1870s to the 1900s, the “Riga Herald” published extensively on the figures of the Slavic Renaissance, particularly frequently and enthusiastically on the Czechs, their centuries-long struggle for a worthy place for the Czech language in public life, and for national dignity and independence^[43–45]. Among the most authoritative scholars who published extensively in Riga Russian journals on the linguistic basis of Russian identity and its relationship with the identities of other Slavic peoples, the articles of Anton Budilovich (1846–1908), rector of the University of Dorpat (now Tartu), Russian philologist, and popularizer of Slavophile ideas, stand out. He also believed that Russians, together with Slavs, form an “independent cultural-historical type,” thereby emphasizing the ideas of Nikolai Danilevsky (1822–1885), one of the founders of the civilizational approach to history and the ideologist of Pan-Slavism^[46–48].

3.4. The Role of Riga’s Russian Community in the Reproduction of Linguistic Identity

Life in Riga, with its rich traditions of entrepreneurship, trade, and culture, placed high demands on the local Russian society, which owed its formation largely to the Russian merchant class and intelligentsia. The liberal reforms of the reign of Emperor Alexander II, initiated in the 1860s, encouraged Russian merchants, industrialists, and artisans to embrace previously uncommon forms of social life. It was precisely in this environment that Russian national-cultural societies emerged, in which the Russian language became a means

of communication for the ethnic consolidation of Russian society, as well as a foundation for creative expression in the cultural sphere. Moreover, most of them — the Russian Club, the Riga Third Mutual Credit Society, the Russian Crafts Artel, the Auxiliary Society of Russian Merchant Clerks, the Nikolaev Auxiliary Merchant Society, the musical societies “Bayan” and “Lado” and many others — proved to be viable for many decades and existed until Latvia gained independence, and some even during the time of the Republic of Latvia (1918–1940)^[49,50].

The Russian language, as a means of consolidating the Russian population, to some extent overcame the religious schism that arose in the Russian Orthodox Church as a result of the church reforms of Patriarch Nikon (1605–1681) in the second half of the 17th century^[51]. Both Orthodox and Riga Old Believers often formed the foundations of Russian societies. Russian societies were often founded by both Orthodox Christians and Riga Old Believers. Merchant capital returned to Russian society in the form of numerous donations, including financial support for the newspaper “Riga Herald,” the establishment of numerous scholarships for students at Russian gymnasiums and colleges in Riga, and scholarships for students at Moscow, Dorpat, and other universities. Auxiliary classes and boards of trustees were created, and literary and musical evenings were organized, the proceeds of which went to the needs of young people preparing for university entrance^[52–54].

The period of modernization was also associated with the establishment of a special professional group within Russian society—the intelligentsia—responsible for the formation of Russian linguistic culture. Here is how the renowned Russian historian Mikhail Karpovich described the social changes in Russian society initiated by the reforms of the 1860s: “For the first time in Russian history, doctors, lawyers, university professors, and engineers came to the forefront as important and influential members of society. One could say that a new class of professionals had emerged in Russia”^[55]. The diversity of activities of the Russian intelligentsia in the Baltics, aimed at strengthening the position of the Russian language and increasing the literacy rate of the Russian population, is striking. This task was extremely pressing, as even at the end of the 19th century, the highest literacy rate among the Russian ethnic group in Latvia was among Russian Orthodox men—70%, while among Russian Old

Believer men it was 25%, and among Old Believer women 8%^[30–32].

An important characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia was their individual dedication to developing the Russian language in the Baltics. Such was the founder and longtime editor of the newspaper “Riga Herald,” Yevgraf Cheshikhin (1824–1888), author of a multi-volume scholarly work on the history of the Baltics, “History of Livonia from Ancient Times,” and others^[56]. These individuals were forced to use their personal savings to develop Russian-language newspapers and schools. This was typical of Mikhail Kapustin (1828–1899), trustee of the Riga educational district, professor at Moscow University, author of many fundamental studies on legal theory, and teacher of international law to the children of Alexander III, including the future Emperor Nicholas II. Kapustin was, among other duties, responsible for the maintenance and expansion of educational buildings. Kapustin demonstrated entrepreneurial acumen, finding individuals willing to build schools at their own expense. In critical situations, he unhesitatingly took out the necessary loans from his own funds, purchased land and financed the construction of a Russian elementary school in Riga, and assisted the Orthodox Peter and Paul Brotherhood in carrying out construction work for the opening of a city school^[57]. The memory of Ivan Nikolich (1820–1879), assistant to the trustee of the Dorpat educational district, has long been remembered among Russian residents of Riga. His entire life was connected with teaching. After graduating from the history and philology department of the St. Petersburg Pedagogical Institute, he taught Russian in Dorpat (now Tartu), Mitau, and Riga. Nikolich published a Russian grammar for Germans, contributed to the “Riga Herald” and “Philological Notes,” and belonged to virtually every Russian public organization. Riga’s Russian intelligentsia was extremely diverse and initially did not distinguish itself from either the merchant class or the bureaucrats. Entrepreneurs and bureaucrats often played a prominent role in this milieu. This is evidenced by the biographies of several Russian public figures in Riga. Take, for example, Ivan Zheltov (1822–1900), a Russian philologist, translator, teacher, specialist in comparative linguistics, and a contributor to *Philological Notes*. He authored numerous essays and notes on the everyday life of the Russian population, published in the “Riga Herald”. From 1877 to 1888, he served as assistant editor of this news-

paper and as a correspondent for the national newspapers “Modern News” (*Sovremennye Izvestia*), “Russia” (*Rus*), and “Citizen” (*Grazhdanin*). He was born in the Yaroslavl province into a prominent merchant family, which later settled in Riga. However, Russian publicists in Riga looked to the cities of historical Russia as a model, where the role of the Russian intelligentsia in public life was significantly higher than in Riga: “The environment... that gives birth to a young intelligentsia in the depths of Russia does not yet exist here”^[58].

Among the obvious achievements of the Riga Russian intelligentsia, it is worth noting the founding and activities of the Russian Literary Circle, established in 1874. The circle’s charter stated: “The circle aims to provide educated Russian residents of Riga with a greater opportunity to follow advances in the sciences and arts and to communicate their observations and research in various fields of knowledge through essays or articles read and discussed at circle meetings.” In the 1890s, the circle was led by prominent Russian liberal figures — S. Mansyrev, V. Cheshikhin, F. Ern, M. Zolotarev, S. Zolotarev, N. Vtorykh, and others. By 1899, of the circle’s 160 members, 145 were civil servants, lawyers, doctors, and writers. During its existence, hundreds of papers were read at its meetings on various topics: Russian and European literature, social thought, philosophy, law, medicine, and history^[59]. Professors from the Riga Polytechnic Institute, the Universities of Dorpat and St. Petersburg, and representatives of other nationalities from Riga were invited to speak at the Circle (among the latter, Rabbi A. Pumpyansky, who delivered papers on Jews in the Baltic region, was the most frequent speaker)^[60].

As early as the early 20th century, members of the Russian Literary Circle had already outlined important paths for democratizing the education system. Even before the revolutionary crisis of the early 20th century, the Literary Circle sometimes opposed the official direction in education. In 1899, several issues of the *Riga Herald* published a report by the Chief Prosecutor of the Synod, K. Pobedonostsev, titled “The New School.” He advocated the need for state attention primarily in relation to elite education. The circle’s members saw Pobedonostsev’s ideas as a desire by the state to weaken the role of society in the development of schools^[61]. In November 1904, on the eve of the revolution, the board of the Literary Circle petitioned for greater independence,

primarily in the area of public lectures. The Circle intended to establish contacts with similar societies in other Russian cities and declared the need to hold an all-Russian congress of representatives of scientific, literary, and educational societies^[62]. With the onset of the revolution, the Literary Circle's activities intensified politically: in February 1905, the circle joined the resolution of the Moscow Pedagogical Society on the need for internal reforms in Russia and supported its demand for an all-Russian teachers' congress^[63]. The Charter was democratized: persons of non-Christian faiths and women were granted the right to be elected to the Council of the Literary Circle, and students were admitted to membership^[64]. For a time, from March to October 1905, the activities of the Literary Circle were banned, but after its resumption, the circle continued to promote the ideas of civil liberty and progress. The establishment of the Russian Education Society (1907) owed its existence to public initiative. The society united high-ranking officials of the provincial administration, church leaders, military personnel, merchants, journalists, teachers, and doctors—over a thousand people in total. Various political forces were represented within the Society: Ivan Vysotsky, the leader of the Russian right-wing Octobrists and editor of the “Riga Herald,” and Prince Seraphim Mansyrev, a liberal member of the Constitutional Democratic Party and deputy of the Fourth State Duma of Russia^[65]. The Society was even able to subsidize some government-run primary schools^[66].

3.5. Politicization of Linguistic Identity in 1905–1917

The Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 led to the transformation of the tsarist autocracy into a constitutional monarchy, which resulted in the establishment of political freedoms, albeit limited compared to Western countries. In the Baltics, ethnic differences became politicized, and political parties were established, either based on ethnicity or actively incorporating ethnic issues into their political agendas. This politicization also affected the Russian population of the Baltic provinces, whose sympathies ranged across a broad ideological spectrum, from social democratic to national conservative parties. For the Russian population, the question of the status of the Russian language and their linguistic identity in Latvian lands is becoming especially acute in a situation where the overwhelming majority of the ethnic

Latvian population began to declare their rights to national and cultural development, where Latvian began to be used more in Latvian schools, and where the struggle between Russian, Latvian, Baltic-German and Jewish parties became evident^[67,68].

The liberal understanding of the connection between linguistic and ethnocultural identity became the most influential factor in Russian socio-political consciousness in the region. This understanding was replicated within the Constitutional Democratic Party, which succeeded in electing the Russian deputy Prince Seraphim Mansyrev (1866–1928) to the Fourth State Duma (1912–1917). The newspapers “Riga Thought” (*Rizhsкая Mysl*) and “Riga Statements” (*Riga Vedomosti*) became the intellectual forum for Russian liberal consciousness. Russian liberalism opposed the state policy of Russification of the Latvian region and advocated for the cultural self-determination of the peoples of the empire. Thus, Russian linguistic identity was conceived as an ethnocultural form of collective identity for one ethnic group — ethnic Russians — as well as for those representatives of other ethnic groups who voluntarily adopted the Russian language and culture as their native languages. In this sense, as a form of ethnocultural identity, Russian linguistic identity is no different from Latvian linguistic identity, Baltic-German, and so on, since all ethnic groups have equal rights to cultural self-determination. Russian liberals saw the best way to unite all these nationalities on the path of political reform in rejecting the fetishization of the national factor and its rigid connection with ethnocultural and linguistic identity^[69].

The opportunity to openly express their interests, afforded by the era of Russian political pluralism, was also exploited by Russian conservatives in Riga, who openly proclaimed themselves “Russian nationalists.” As Ivan Vysotsky, editor of the “Riga Herald,” put it, the concept of “nationalism” is linked not only to party interests, but above all to the natural essence of every people, which can be neither reactionary nor progressive. Nationalism was interpreted as a purely ethnic phenomenon. The place of the Russian language in identity was interpreted contradictorily. A privileged connection between Russian linguistic identity and Russian statehood was recognized only if the bearers of this identity were ethnically Russian^[70]. Among a certain part of the Russian intelligentsia at the beginning of the 20th century we find an attempt to find a middle way between Russian

conservative nationalism and liberalism. As early as 1900, the ideas of national liberalism began to be promoted by the newspaper “Baltic region” (*Pribaltiyskiy Kray*). The views of Russian national liberalism were most fully expressed by the critic and publicist Vsevolod Cheshikhin, who believed that it was necessary to dissociate oneself from their extreme manifestations. He believed that in relations between the nationalities in the Baltic provinces it was necessary to create the basis for “mutual sympathy, mutual understanding”, to achieve respect for the manifestation of freedom in the cultural and linguistic life of each nationality^[71].

4. Discussion

The empirical data presented in this article on the development of the linguistic identity of the Russian population of the Latvian lands in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which were then part of the Russian Empire, demonstrates that this identity, in the vast majority of cases, ensured the natural adaptation of the Russian population to the demands of societal modernization. Current literature on the leading role of nation-building in the modernization of this region, which was accompanied by linguistic, socio-psychological, and political divisions between the largest ethnic groups—ethnic Latvians, Russians, Baltic Germans, and others—requires revision.

In Latvian historiography, government measures to introduce the Russian language into official administration, the education system, and public communication in general, beginning in the second half of the 19th century, are viewed as a process of Russification. However, the nature of the language policy pursued in the Baltic provinces by the governments of Emperors Alexander II (1818–1881), Alexander III (1845–1894), and Nicholas II (1868–1918) has received an ambiguous assessment in Latvian historiography. Much of Latvian historiography views the period of multicultural and multiethnic diversity in Latvia in the 19th and early 20th centuries solely as an era of “Germanization” and “Russification” of ethnic Latvians. And nothing is said about the natural rights of the Russian and Baltic-German population, who constituted a significant part of the population of the Latvian lands and especially the urban population, to develop their own linguistic and cultural identity^[72–74].

Other researchers speak of many positive aspects of

the language policy of the Russian government^[75], a policy in the cultural sphere that led to the development of scientific and artistic creativity of the ethnic groups inhabiting Latvia during that historical period^[76]. While not denying the assessment of the language policy in the Baltic provinces (Livland, Courland, and Estonia) by the governments of the Russian Empire as Russification, the author of this article believes that the Russian population of this region of the Empire had a vital interest in the dissemination of the Russian language, as this language fulfilled crucial functions in the socio-cultural modernization of this ethnic group. The author proceeds from the idea that the multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic composition of the population of many regions of Eastern Europe in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the Latvian lands, did not hinder their modernization or conflict with the interests of those ethnic groups that, during this historical period and after World War I, formed their national states on territories that were part of the European continental empires — the Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman. Moreover, the development of scientific thought in the 20th century showed that the most acceptable option for nation-building is to take into account the interests and protect the rights to collective linguistic identity of ethnic minorities. And as the subsequent historical development of Latvia as an independent state (1918–1940, since 1991) has shown, the Russian ethnic minority has reproduced many practices in the realization of its collective linguistic identity that were formed during the period of the incorporation of Latvian lands into the Russian Empire, which speaks to the importance of scientific interest in this topic.

5. Conclusions

As an analysis of the scholarly literature produced in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the vast Russian Baltic press of the same period, shows, the Russian language served the Russian population primarily as a means of internal group consolidation for the fullest individual self-realization in the context of intensifying processes of social mobility. The actualization of cultural boundaries with other ethnic groups was secondary. The primary goal in the formation and reproduction of Russian linguistic identity was the creation of

an adequate external environment for normal social life and socialization. Classical sociology of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries emphasized precisely this need for people to create a dense social fabric, moral and social solidarity, and the search for ways for the individual to interact with established social institutions. For example, the sociology of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, which reflected the most important features of the social consciousness of this historical period, does not at all absolutize the processes of nation-building and the associated problems of interethnic division and the strengthening of the linguistic identity of ethnic groups as a result of ethnic conflicts^[77,78]. This perception of linguistic identity becomes the content of later historical reconstruction in nationalist narratives. Only when the creation of such a social life was disrupted by the intervention of other ethnic groups did linguistic identity acquire markers of ethnic and national identity. What social milieu did Russian publicists and journalists portray as a model? It was precisely the one akin to the intelligentsia. This was a society of literate people immersed in literature and social and academic debate. These were theatergoers, who staged plays depicting the lives of this same intelligentsia. But this was also an active intelligentsia, connected to the provincial administration and Riga's trading and industrial groups. The Russian intelligentsia perceived itself as a social community — a prototype of the entire multi-class Russian society. And Russian linguistic identity began to be perceived as the most important cultural and social capital of a multi-ethnic civil society.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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