

## ARTICLE

# Features of the Linguistic Identity of the Russian Population in Latvia

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the article and the materials of the qualitative sociological research included in it was to show and analyze the extent to which the Russian population, as the largest ethnic minority in Latvia, needs the actualization of ethnocultural identity in the form of linguistic identity in the context of the reduction of the sociolinguistic functions of the Russian language in the public space of this country at the institutional level. The article presents materials from a sociological study of the opinions of 12 well-known representatives of Russian public organizations, education, science, culture, and journalism in Latvia. Among the respondents were 8 doctors of science, 7 teachers and researchers from three universities and research institutes professionally engaged in the study of Russian language and literature, 2 journalists and writers, 2 organizers of university life, 2 heads of Russian non-governmental organizations, one theater actor, and one teacher from a secondary school. Thus, the choice of respondents was determined by their connection with the most important spheres of public life in the country, which are most responsible for the reproduction of people's linguistic identity. Their statements emphasized the indispensability of the Russian language and culture in understanding Latvian society and in strengthening internal social solidarity within the Russian minority, which actualizes the ethnocultural identity of this group precisely as a linguistic identity. At the same time, the linguistic identity of Russians is not an obstacle to openness to Latvian national values, to the Latvian language. The reason for the actualization of the linguistic identity of the Russian ethnic minority is that the representatives of this group see in their native language and the culture associated with it the most important intellectual, value and social resource that enriches their cultural and social capital. As a theoretical basis for the analysis, the author of the article resorts to theories of liberal multiculturalism, primarily to

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the sociology of Jurgen Habermas.

**Keywords:** Linguistic Identity; Russian Population of Latvia; Ethnic Minority; Liberal Multiculturalism

## 1. Introduction

The article shows the historical, ethno-demographic, political and legal features of the formation and reproduction of the linguistic identity of the Russian population of modern Latvia. The relevance of this topic is dictated by the specifics of the ethnic diversity of the population of Latvia, which is clearly dominated by two poles - ethnic Latvians and Russians as the largest ethnic minority of the country. At the same time, the Russian language is constantly losing its position in the public space of this country, it is recognized in the legislation as a foreign language, despite the fact that it is the native language of about a third of the population (for ethnic Russians and for a large proportion of other ethnic minorities - Belarusians, Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, etc.). However, sociological studies show that the change in the social status of the Russian language in comparison with Latvian, as the only state language in Latvia, has not led to the rejection of the Russian language as a means of internal communication among Russian-speaking residents of the country. Moreover, it is the Russian language that is the most important factor in constructing the ethnocultural identity of the Russian population of Latvia. This allows us to say that the ethnocultural identity of Russians has taken the form of linguistic identity. The article presents materials from a sociological study that indicate that very well-known figures in Russian education, science, journalism, culture, and public organizations view the Russian language as an extremely significant value, on the basis of which they build their professional activities, thereby influencing the reproduction of Russian linguistic identity in a significant part of Latvian civil society. The aim of the article and the materials of the qualitative sociological research included in it was to show and analyze the extent to which the Russian population, as the largest ethnic minority in Latvia, needs the actualization of ethnocultural identity in the form of linguistic identity in the context of the reduction of the sociolinguistic functions of the Russian language in the public space of this country at the institutional level. The reason for the actualization of the linguistic identity of the Russian

ethnic minority is that the representatives of this group see in their native language and the culture associated with it the most important intellectual, value and social resource that enriches their cultural and social capital.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Linguistic Identity as a Social Phenomenon

Linguistic identity can be defined as a type of social identity that a person associates with a certain language (or languages), which is considered by them as an important or even priority element in the system of social identity of this person. A person's native language is the most important element of their identity, connecting them with the culture and history of their people. Being a form of manifestation and development of the culture of a community that exists in interaction with other social formations, the linguistic identity of a social group acquires the role of socio-political capital, using which this group fights for resources and power in society<sup>[1, 2]</sup>. This concept of language was born in the era of modernization of traditional societies, which was accompanied by cultural unification of culturally, ethno-confessional and socially fragmented communities in the course of nation-building<sup>[3]</sup>. As a result, nationalism acquires a linguistic coloring, which considers societies as different linguistic communities competing with each other<sup>[4]</sup>. The most important role of the national language in this process was already understood in the philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who saw it not only as a means of communication, but also as a way of manifesting and developing an original culture<sup>[5]</sup>. In the 20th century, these ideas were developed by linguists Edward Sapir<sup>[6]</sup> and Benjamin Whorf<sup>[7]</sup>.

However, the social environment of a person by native speakers does not in itself determine his identity. To do this, it is necessary to develop a subjective attitude towards the language and to internalize it, including the culture associated with it. In this case, the connection between the individual and the language group into which he is included from birth<sup>[8]</sup> or in the process of imposed socialization and

attribution of social categorization will not be understood in an essentialist manner, but as a result of the social construction of one's linguistic identity. Moreover, such construction of one's linguistic identity takes place in conditions of interactive interaction with both representatives of "own group" and "outgroups"<sup>[9]</sup>. To a large extent, studies of linguistic identity have acquired importance in the context of a globalizing world, mass migrations, and the environment of multinational corporations, when people voluntarily or forcedly transform their inherited ethnocultural identities<sup>[10, 11]</sup>. In social psychology, the linguistic identity of an individual is considered as one of the social mechanisms of its identification with a reference social group, focusing on the typical patterns of narratives of this group<sup>[12–14]</sup>.

Linguistic identity as part of the ascribed identity can have various connotations – from positive and neutral to negative, imposing discriminatory ethnocultural stereotypes<sup>[15]</sup>. Some researchers even believe that linguistic identity is not a question of language, but a political problem, which is mainly perceived as a question of political loyalty<sup>[16]</sup>. The linguistic identity of an ethnic group different from the majority of the country's population is a kind of convex marker of its social status in the ethno-social stratification of society<sup>[17]</sup>. However, representatives of a linguistic community can still construct their identity based on their native language, even if the environment of this community attributes negative connotations to all their cultural markers, including the language used in their environment. Why does a discriminated group not always abandon its language? Obviously, the linguistic identity of such a group is the result of a complex rational and emotional construction, which is accompanied by a multifaceted assessment of the significance of the group's native

language in the development of personal social competence in understanding reality, in maintaining internal social solidarity, in the most acceptable provision of cultural capital to members of this group in the existing social environment and historical conditions. An important role in preserving the linguistic identity of an individual or a group is also played by the assessment of those socio-cultural, political and economic resources that the dominant ethnocultural group offers as "payment" for linguistic and cultural assimilation in its environment or in the created system of ethnosocial stratification.

## 2.2. Historical Background and Institutional Framework of Linguistic Identity of Russians in Latvia

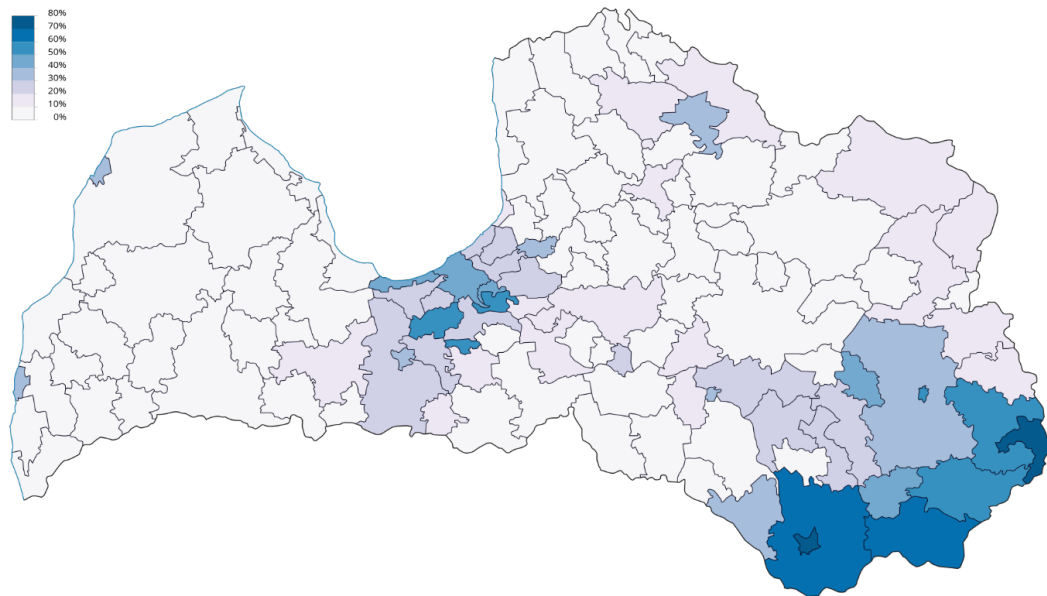
Latvia is a multicultural and multiethnic country, which it shares with many Eastern European countries (such as Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, etc.). According to its Constitution, Latvia is a national state of ethnic Latvians<sup>[18]</sup> with a large proportion of ethnic minorities. This ethnic diversity is dominated by two large ethnic groups – the Latvian ethnic nation and Russians. At the beginning of 2024, 1,871.9 thousand people lived in Latvia, of which 1,171.1 thousand were Latvians (62.6% of the total population), and Russians – 437.6 thousand (23.4%)<sup>[19]</sup>. **Table 1** presents data on the ethnic structure of the population of Latvia over the last quarter of a century. It shows that despite the numerical reduction of the Russian minority, its share in the total population of the country continues to remain significant.

**Table 1.** Ethnic composition of Latvia (2000–2024)<sup>[20]</sup>.

	2000 Thousand	%	2011 Thousand	%	2021 Thousand	%	2024 Thousand	%
Total	2 377.1	100	2 070.4	100	1 893.2	100	1 871.9	100
Latvians	1 370.6	58	1 285.1	62	1 187.9	63	1 171.1	63
Russians	703.1	30	557.1	27	463.6	24	437.6	23
Belarusians	97.1	4	68.2	3	58.6	3	54.6	3
Ukrainians	63.6	3	45.8	2	42.3	2	59.6	3
Poles	59.5	3	44.8	2	37.2	2	34.8	2
Lithuanians	33.4	1	24.5	1	21.5	1	20.2	1
Other	49.7	2	44.9	2	82.1	4	94.0	5

**Figure 1** gives a general idea of the high proportion of Russian population in the largest cities of Latvia (in the center - in Riga, Jelgava and Jurmala, in the west - in Liepaja and Ventspils), as well as in the east of the country (in the cities of Daugavpils and Rezekne, as well as in the Latgale region as a whole) based on the latest population census conducted in 2011. Moreover, such a composition has been formed

since the second half of the 19th century, when modernization began, accompanied by an influx of Russian population from other regions of the Russian Empire (then the USSR). In Latgale, a high proportion of Russian Old Believers began in the 17th century, when representatives of this group, who did not recognize Nikon's church reform, began to move to these lands.



**Figure 1.** The map of Latvia's territory in 2011 is colored in different shades of blue, where the darkest shade corresponds to the 80% of the population for whom Russian is their native language<sup>[21]</sup>.

**Table 2** provides information on the prevalence of different languages as the main means of communication in families in the regions of Latvia.

Latvia is also home to a large number of other ethnic groups, with the combined share of ethnic Latvians and Russians amounting to 86.0%. Ethnic Latvians and Russians, in comparison with other ethnic groups (with the exception of the Roma), are characterized by an ethnocultural identity based on the native language of these groups. This is ultimately manifested in the features of their social culture, including the features of the formation of networks of socio-cultural solidarity in entrepreneurship, organizational behavior and economic life in general. For ethnic Latvians, the mother tongue is Latvian in 95.7% of cases, for Russians, Russian - 94.5% of cases, for Ukrainians, Ukrainian - in 27.2%, for Poles, Polish - in 19.4%, for Belarusians, Belarusian - in 18.8%<sup>[23]</sup>. The share of Russians is especially high in the industrial and commercial centers of Latvia's economic life, in its largest cities. In Riga, the capital of the

country, the share of Russians exceeds 34.1%, and in Daugavpils, the second most populous city in the country, it is 48.6%<sup>[24]</sup>. Only Latvians and Russians, compared to other major ethnic groups in Latvia (and with the exception of a small group of Roma), are characterized by marrying mainly with partners of their own ethnicity<sup>[25]</sup>. At the same time, Russians do not consider their language as a self-sufficient means of communication in Latvia. The ability to communicate in Latvian is characteristic of the overwhelming majority of representatives of ethnic minorities. Young people and the middle generation know Latvian especially well: over 90%<sup>[26]</sup>. **Table 3** presents official data from the Ministry of Education and Science on the interest of Russian families from the largest cities in the country with a traditionally high proportion of Russian population to provide their children with preschool education in Russian. Despite the decrease in the number of children studying in preschool institutions in Russian (this is also affected by the general decrease in the number of Russians in Latvia), this share remains quite high.

**Table 2.** Grouping of permanent residents of Latvia by language used at home on March 1, 2011 (in thousands) <sup>[22]</sup>.

	Total	Latvian	Russian	Belarusian	Ukrainian	Polish	Lithuanian	Other
Total	1 876,8	1 164,9	698,8	0,637	1,7	1,8	2,2	6,9
Riga	585,1	254,2	326,5	0,2	0,7	0,5	0,6	2,5
Riga	339,2	249,5	87,8	0,1	0,3	0,1	0,2	1,3
Vidzeme	197,8	180,4	16,7	0,04	0,2	0,03	0,05	0,5
Kurzeme	245,0	195,3	47,2	0,05	0,3	0,05	1,0	1,2
Zemgale	234,8	178,5	54,8	0,08	0,2	0,07	0,3	0,9
Latgale	274,9	107,0	165,9	0,1	0,1	1,0	0,1	0,7

**Table 3.** Number of children in preschool educational institutions by language group in cities of the republic <sup>[27]</sup>.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	79 123	78 373	78 873	80 947	82 633	83 980	84 806	85 189
Latvian	58 980	58 998	59 817	61 969	63 812	65 947	67 700	69 456
Russian	20 010	19 249	18 891	18 816	18 677	17 864	16 943	15 581
English	0	0	24	19	17	36	40	28
Polish	133	126	141	143	127	133	123	124

**Table 4** provides data on the widespread use of the Russian language among the population of Latvia in various periods of its history (during the period of the Republic of Latvia from 1918 to 1940, as part of the USSR, and during the period of restored independence since 1991). **Table 5** gives a general idea of the prevalence of different languages in family communication in the regions of Latvia.

**Table 4.** The share of residents of Latvia who knew Russian and for whom it was their native language, 1930–2011 (%) <sup>[28]</sup>.

Year	1930	1959	1970	1979	1989	2000	2011
Residents who know Russian language			67,1	76,8	81,6	81,2	No data
Residents for whom Russian language is native	13,3	31,4	35,9	40,2	42,1	37,5	37,2

**Table 5.** Grouping of permanent residents of Latvia by language used at home on March 1, 2011 (in thousands).

	Total	Latvian	Russian	Belarusian	Ukrainian	Polish	Lithuanian	Other
Total	1 876,8	1 164,9	698,8	0,637	1,7	1,8	2,2	6,9
Riga	585,1	254,2	326,5	0,2	0,7	0,5	0,6	2,5
Riga	339,2	249,5	87,8	0,1	0,3	0,1	0,2	1,3
Vidzeme	197,8	180,4	16,7	0,04	0,2	0,03	0,05	0,5
Kurzeme	245,0	195,3	47,2	0,05	0,3	0,05	1,0	1,2
Zemgale	234,8	178,5	54,8	0,08	0,2	0,07	0,3	0,9
Latgale	274,9	107,0	165,9	0,1	0,1	1,0	0,1	0,7

The very close connection between the ethnocultural and linguistic identity of the Russian population does not mean that this ethnic minority is in its own ethnic niche, distancing itself from the Latvian language. In fact, since the restoration of Latvia's independence, there has been a process of constant improvement in the knowledge of the Latvian language and its use in public life and professional activities. According to a sociological study (2023) in the age cohorts of 18–34 years, 53.9% of respondents for whom Latvian is not their native language assessed their knowledge of this language as “very good” and “good”. Among the age cohorts of 35–64 years, this share was 42.5%, which means a progressive process in the development of multilingualism in the Russian environment (**Table 6**).

**Table 6.** Respondents whose native language is not Latvian: self-assessment of Latvian language proficiency (%).

	In the Age Group 18–34 years	In the Age Group 35–64 years
Very good, good	53,9	42,5
Average	24,7	34,8
Poor	10,5	14,0
Very poor	10,5	4,2
Don't know	1,0	1,6
Hard to say	5,7	2,9

Thus, the historically formed multicultural environment is a very important factor in the implementation of multilingualism in Latvia. Therefore, it is extremely important for Latvia to disseminate information about positive practices in other countries about the fruitful balance in public life between the functions of the state language and the languages of ethnic minorities. This study demonstrated a more tolerant attitude of Latvian respondents to the presence of the Russian language in the public space than is articulated in the programs of the leading Latvian political parties and biased media. Thus, 42.2% of the surveyed Latvians believe that information in state and municipal institutions should be duplicated in Russian. And 64.1% of all respondents believe that residents of Latvia should know Russian. And among respondents from ethnic minorities, 79.2% believe that knowledge of the Latvian language is important for all residents of the country<sup>[29]</sup>.

The author of this article conducted a sociological study in Daugavpils, the second most populous city in Latvia, back in 2010. One of the objectives of the study was to identify the main structural elements of the ethnocultural identity of the city's three largest ethnic groups – Russians, ethnic Latvians and Poles (N = 578). For the city's Russian residents, the Russian language is the most important value, which “to a greater or lesser extent” determines their collective identity (93.3% of cases). Next in descending order of importance are “Russian culture” (74.1%), “resident of Latvia” (71.0%), “ethnic origin” (63.6%), “religion” (62.1%), “citizenship of Latvia” (50.4%), “citizenship of the European Union” (34.7%), and “Latvian language” (19.6%)<sup>[30]</sup>. The data of this study confirmed the hypothesis about the priority of linguistic components in the collective identity of the Russian population of Latvia. Moreover, as can be seen from the data provided, the linguistic component dominates not only in the ethnocultural identity of Russians, but linguistic identity turns out to be even more important for this ethnic group

than national-civic identity.

The priority role of the native language in the collective identity of the Russian population is largely associated with the peculiarities of Latvian national construction after the restoration of state independence in 1991. These peculiarities are associated with the change in the status of the Latvian language as the only state language and the languages of other ethnic groups in the country, which, according to Latvian legislation, are considered foreign<sup>[31]</sup>. Despite the fact that in 2005 the Parliament ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which contains the concepts of “linguistic identity of national minorities”, “languages of national minorities”<sup>[32]</sup>, Latvia still does not have any special legislative acts that would regulate the use of languages of ethnic minorities in the public sphere of society, as well as the development of these languages. The Russian population's emphasis on the problems of their linguistic identity is related to the need to develop mechanisms for the internal protection of their ethnocultural identity. However, these institutional measures for the dominance of the Latvian language in the public space and the radical weakening of the position of the Russian language in it were not accompanied by ensuring equal access for ethnic minorities to prestigious areas of employment in politics, public administration, big business, etc. There is not a single Russian minister in the government, and there is not a single Russian among the rectors of state universities. There are practically no Russians in the leadership of big business in Latvia either<sup>[33]</sup>. Therefore, the Russian population does not at all consider the rejection of their linguistic identity and the transition to intra-group communication in the Latvian language as an “equivalent exchange”.

The almost complete combination of ethnocultural and linguistic identity for ethnic Russians in Latvia is dictated by many factors. Firstly, these are the long historical periods when the territory of Latvia was part of Russia (the Russian

Empire (1721–1918) and the Soviet Union (1940–1991)), when the Russian language *de facto* or *de jure* served as the state language. The especially high role of linguistic factors in the ethnocultural identity of Russians began to manifest itself during the period of modernization from the second half of the 19th century, when Russia began to form both as an empire and as a national state, in which the Russian language and culture began to be considered the most important elements of nation-building<sup>[34]</sup>. Secondly, at all historical stages of the presence of Russians on the territory of Latvia, this population was unable to develop a special form of autonomous territorial collective identity that could even minimally compete with the volume and richness of cultural values of “mainland” Russia. True, if we are talking about the Russian Old Believer population and its distancing from the Russian Orthodox Church, some features of everyday culture are noted. At the same time, the highest degree of its immersion in common Russian cultural traditions is noted<sup>[35, 36]</sup>. Thirdly, linguistic identity, as a type of collective identity of Russians in Latvia, acts as the most important symbolic marker of the typified social status, social categorization and self-categorization of this ethnic group in the system of ethno-social stratification and in the system of distribution of resources, power and influence in Latvia<sup>[37]</sup>, which is constituted as a national state of ethnic Latvians. Thus, the preamble to the Constitution of Latvia, approved in 2014, subordinates collective ethnocultural and linguistic identities. The concept of the “Latvian nation” includes only ethnic Latvians, and ethnic minorities are associated with the concept of the “people of Latvia”.

Linguistic identity binds the private life of Russians in Latvia and ensures a significant part of their communication in the public sphere. However, in Latvia, the possibilities for reproducing Russian linguistic identity in the field of education are constantly shrinking. Since 1991, the legal status of the languages of instruction in Latvian schools, including ethnic minority schools, has been determined by various versions of the Education Law. The Education Law of the Republic of Latvia, adopted in June 1991, i.e., at a time when Latvia was still *de facto* part of the USSR, spoke of a “guaranteed right to education in the state language” (the Latvian language had acquired this status by that time), as well as “the right to education in the native language in

accordance with the Language Law”. The Education Law, adopted in 1998 and in force with some amendments and additions to this day, prescribes the state language as the language of “state, municipal educational institutions and state higher educational institutions”. The opportunity to receive education in other languages is available in “private educational institutions, in state and municipal educational institutions where educational programs for ethnic minorities are implemented”. The 1998 law stipulated that from 1 September 2004, in state and municipal secondary educational institutions in the tenth grade, and in vocational educational institutions in the first years, instruction would be conducted only in the state language. However, in 2003, the Cabinet of Ministers stated that it was impossible to implement this norm due to the unpreparedness of minority schools to provide instruction only in Latvian. Therefore, the adopted amendments to the Law gave ethnic minority schools the opportunity to conduct classes in the languages of ethnic minorities in 40% of subjects<sup>[38]</sup>. In 2022, the Saeima (parliament) adopted amendments to the Education Law, according to which all education in Latvia, including private education, can only be carried out in the state language<sup>[39]</sup>. Political parties, both government and opposition, that are focused on the Latvian voter, view Latvia as a national state focused on protecting the Latvian language and culture. Even if the programs of these parties talk about developing a “diversity of the media environment,” the point is that such “diversity” is associated exclusively with the Latvian language. In these programs, the existence of ethnic minorities and their constitutional rights to preserve their ethnocultural identity are not mentioned at all<sup>[40, 41]</sup>. The most radical parties (National Alliance, New Unity) particularly emphasize the need for a complete transition of all education to the Latvian language<sup>[42, 43]</sup>. The only parliamentary party, “For Stability!”, oriented toward the Russian voter, declared in its program the provision of “education in the native language”<sup>[44]</sup>.

The Russian population of Latvia has negatively perceived the education policy in schools for ethnic minorities. Since the mid-1990s, the Latvian Association for Support of Schools with Instruction in Russian (LASHOR) has existed. This public organization advocates for the “preservation of

bilingual education” for Russian youth, which involves ensuring a balance of lessons in Latvian and Russian<sup>[45]</sup>. LASHOR is one of the organizers of protests by Russian schoolchildren against plans to transfer all education of ethnic minorities to the Latvian language in 2003–2004, as well as one of the initiators of collecting signatures in protest against similar government plans in the fall-winter of 2017 (together with the Russian Union of Latvia, the Union of Citizens and Non-Citizens, the Latvian Anti-Fascist Committee, etc.<sup>[46–48]</sup>). In general, the largest parties claiming to protect the interests of the Russian population – the largest parliamentary faction of the Harmony party and the Russian Union of Latvia party (formerly Equality, For Human Rights in a United Latvia) – have expressed criticism of the government’s plans to transition all education of ethnic minorities to the Latvian language only<sup>[49, 50]</sup>.

Latvian political parties, which have been primarily focused on protecting the interests of ethnic minorities since 1991 (Equality, People’s Harmony Party, For Native Language!, Social Democratic Party “Harmony”, Russian Union of Latvia, Stability!), in one form or another, both in their political programs and in their activities, have defended the need to preserve the Russian language in the Latvian education system, in the public space in general. However, despite the fact that the Harmony Party was the leader in parliamentary elections for a long time from 2011 to 2022, receiving from 23 to 31% of seats, its representatives have never been invited to the government<sup>[51]</sup>. The desire of this party’s functionaries to remove the issues of preserving the Russian language from the election program and an active ideological struggle to find sympathy for this party from the Latvian establishment actually led to the fact that the Russian voter turned away from it, and in the last elections to the Saeima in 2022, this party was not even able to get into parliament<sup>[52]</sup>. As a result, the representation of the Russian population as a significant share of Latvian society has sharply decreased in the modern political space of Latvia, which has a negative impact on the Latvian model of democracy. International observers have expressed a critical attitude towards ignoring the requests of the Russian population to preserve the Russian language and culture in the public life of Latvia. For example, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in its 2021 resolution criticized the Latvian authorities for restricting the social and

economic opportunities of Russian speakers in Latvia<sup>[53]</sup>.

### **2.3. Latvian Russian Studies on the Linguistic Identity of the Russian Population in the Country**

The research of Latvian specialists in Russian language and literature (in Latvian Russian studies) contains the most important scientific generalizations about the place of the Russian language and the world of literature associated with it for the full cultural socialization of the Russian and generally Russian-speaking population of Latvia, in the formation of the linguistic identity of these ethnocultural groups. These studies put forward the idea that the Russian language in Latvia is the language of the diaspora. At the same time, the diaspora status of the Russian language in Latvia embodies both the universal and global features of linguistic diasporas, and those that are determined by the socio-political conditions of Latvia. Moreover, it is precisely on the latter that Latvian Russianists focus in their research. The most frequently noted is the lack of fundamental knowledge of Russian history and culture among students who learn Russian language and literature in schools, the low potential of the natural Russian speech environment in Latvia, and the crossing of Russian and Latvian language norms in the minds of many schoolchildren<sup>[54–56]</sup>, a decline in schoolchildren’s interest in reading Russian literature<sup>[57]</sup>, strong influence of English on Russian<sup>[58]</sup>, erosion of literary norms of the Russian language<sup>[59]</sup>, a low proportion of subjects related to the study of Russian language and literature, especially modern Russian literature, in the education system for ethnic minorities<sup>[60, 61]</sup>, the language policy of the Latvian state, which reduces the possibilities for the functioning of the Russian language in the public space<sup>[62]</sup>. In general, Latvian Russianists promote the idea of an organic connection between the Russian language and Russian literature, which need to function in a system of public infrastructure, including the education system, mass media, scientific research, theater and cinema, the possibility of public debates in Russian, legislation that supports the linguistic rights of ethnic minorities, and a tolerant attitude of other ethnic groups towards public forms of expression and reproduction of the Russian language<sup>[63, 64]</sup>.

At the same time, Latvian Russianists integrate their high assessment of the role of the Russian language in the



process of socialization of Russians in Latvia into the general context of understanding Latvia as a country that is multicultural, where this ethnic group should play an important role in all spheres of its life<sup>[65]</sup>. Teachers of Russian language and literature are one of those professional groups in Latvia who actively understand the peculiarities of the linguistic and cultural identity of the Russian population of Latvia. Moreover, unlike sociologists, historians, political scientists, and legal experts, it is this professional community that is engaged in the linguistic socialization of the Russian youth of Latvia, and partly also representatives of those ethnic groups for whom Russian is their native language or those who have chosen this language as the most important resource of their cultural and social capital. Teachers of Russian consider their lessons to be the most important means of introducing students to Russian culture, including in the context of being in a diaspora, in which their life takes place in the context of multiculturalism and polylingualism<sup>[66]</sup>. This involves developing a culture of dialogue in teaching Russian. At the same time, the group community of students in the class acquires the quality of a cultural and linguistic community, in which each of its members, in the course of open discussions on the content of thematic images of Russian literature, offers his own interpretation of these images<sup>[67]</sup>. Latvian Russianists, based on their individual teaching experience, confirm the idea that high-quality mastery of the educational material on the Russian language and literature does not lead to the ethno-cultural self-isolation of students in the “Russian space”. On the contrary, there is an increase in interest in the Latvian language and culture. Latvian Russianists in the developed methods of teaching Russian literature demonstrate its semantic resource, which is also important for schoolchildren to master the material on the entire spectrum of the humanities and social sciences provided for by the Latvian programs of basic and secondary schools, including lessons on history, law, ethics, the basics of philosophy, psychology, etc.<sup>[68]</sup>.

In addition to the presence of Russian literature in schools for ethnic minorities, where there are relevant programs, it is also presented in performances of Russian artistic classics at the M. Chekhov Riga Russian Theatre. Theatrical productions of Russian classics and the discussions of these performances in public opinion, numerous articles in the Russian press, discussions on Russian radio repeatedly

multiply the phenomenon of the Russian language and the fiction associated with it<sup>[69]</sup>.

## 2.4. Research Methodology

The author’s sociological approach to the linguistic identity of ethnic groups in general and the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia in particular is determined by the cognitive turn in the social sciences, which shifts the emphasis in examining social phenomena from their objective characteristics to subjective ones, related to the peculiarities of social actors’ understanding of the picture of the world in which they operate, and their reflexive attitude towards this world and their actions<sup>[70, 71]</sup>. In this context, the interest in the linguistic identity of the Russian population of Latvia is not accidental. This form of social identity is the structuring basis of the most important features that determine both the objective position of this ethnic group in the socio-economic and class structure of Latvian society, its political system, and the reflexive attitude towards its place in society. Of all the types of collective identity constructed on the basis of spiritual features, such as the distinctive features of mass ethnic psychology, everyday culture, folklore, religion, mythology about common origin, features of political consciousness, etc., it is in the native language and the cultural tradition associated with it that the Russian population of Latvia sees the most important factor that constitutes it into a single ethnocultural community and distinguishes this community from ethnic Latvians and other ethnic groups in the country.

At the same time, in the substantiation of the research methodology and in the analysis of the obtained data, issues are raised that reflect modern discussions about ensuring the integrity of an individual’s identity, no matter what social, including ethnocultural, group he or she belongs to<sup>[72, 73]</sup>, guaranteeing conditions for a decent way of life for representatives of various ethnocultural groups in modern pluralistic societies, which in reality are constituted in the form of nation states<sup>[74, 75]</sup>. Within the liberal paradigm of organizing multicultural and multiethnic societies in nation states, many variations are emphasized - from libertarian ideas to liberal multiculturalism. The author of the article believes that it is the theories of liberal multiculturalism that are the most adequate for understanding the value of the linguistic identity of ethnic minorities, the actualization of which is a natural form determined by everyday life and ensuring the reproduc-

tion of the collective ethnocultural identity of these groups of society, strengthening their intra-group solidarity. At the same time, the actualization of the linguistic identity of ethnic minorities, if it does not claim to replace the values of national identity, does not in itself threaten the principles of constitutional order and the integration of the national state and the status positions of its state language<sup>[76, 77]</sup>.

Among all the sociological theories of liberal multiculturalism, the author of the article prefers the theory of Jurgen Habermas for the analysis of the features of the linguistic identity of Russians in Latvia. The advantage of this theory is the complex and at the same time detailed nature of the analysis of social identity, including linguistic identity, of ethnic groups of modern society. Habermas considers this identity as a holistic phenomenon, reproduced in the private and public life of people, in individual practices of everyday life, the life world of the main parameters<sup>[78]</sup>, characterizing the position of social actors in the existing hierarchical social system<sup>[79]</sup>, as an interactive formation, taking into account the social positions of counterparties and building its own line of behavior in open or emerging opportunities<sup>[80]</sup>. The presentation by ethnocultural actors in an open communicative discourse of the values of their collective identity, for example, linguistic identity, allows the whole society to take a realistic look at the already institutionalized or proposed project of national identity in an ethnically pluralistic society in order to avoid political utopianism in the rigid connection of a common national identity exclusively with the cultural identity of one of the ethnic groups of this society, including the dominant group, and to form constitutional patriotism<sup>[81]</sup>.

The author of this article examines the features of linguistic identity, focusing on the main provisions of Habermas's sociology. The objectives of the empirical part of the study were to show:

1. To what extent is it important for active figures of the Russian public that the Russian language and the literary tradition associated with it are in demand for a full understanding and assessment of contemporary processes in Latvia and the world as a whole;
2. To what extent is it important for active figures of the Russian public in Latvia to emphasize the values of Russian linguistic identity in their private and public life, which includes the idea of the Russian language as the most important structuring element of their consciousness, determining behavior in private and professional life;
3. To what extent is the status of the Russian language as an ethnic minority language in Latvia recognized and what is the attitude towards this status;
4. How are the resources provided by Latvian society assessed for the full functioning of the minority status of the Russian language?

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Parameters of Sociological Research

The author of this article conducted a survey of 12 well-known Russian representatives of the scientific community in Latvia, organizers and heads of educational programs of higher education institutions, university professors, researchers, writers, journalists, and cultural figures in November–December 2024. The purpose of this survey was to find out what role the Russian language and related Russian fiction play in their professional activities. The author of the study proceeded from the hypothesis, which can be found reflected in scientific thought, that Russian ethnocultural identity is predominantly linguistic in nature due to the literary-centricity of Russian culture as a whole<sup>[82–84]</sup>. Therefore, the value of Russian ethnocultural identity for a person directly depends on how much he considers the value of Russian literature in his private and professional life, and how irreplaceable these values are in understanding modern Latvian society and the world as a whole.

Among the respondents were 8 doctors of science, 7 teachers and researchers from three universities and research institutes professionally engaged in the study of Russian language and literature, 2 journalists and writers, 2 organizers of university life, 2 heads of Russian non-governmental organizations, one theater actor, and one teacher from a secondary school. Among the respondents were 2 who constantly emphasized their connection with the Old Believer Church, and 2 with Jewish origin. The interviews included the following questions:

- What role does Russian fiction play in your personal life?
- What role does Russian fiction play in your professional life?
- How do you assess the intellectual resources of the Rus-

sian language and fiction in understanding the social and political problems of modern Latvian society?

- What is your assessment of the quality of representation of Russian culture in its institutionalized centers in Latvia (Russian theater and Russian journalism)?

The accepted coding of respondents: F—female, M—male; P—professors, lecturers and researchers from universities; S—secondary school teacher; W—journalists and writers; O—leader of a public organization; T—theater actor.

### 3.1.1. The Role of Russian Fiction in the Private Lives of Respondents

Respondents professionally connected with Russian public organizations, teaching and researching of Russian literature and culture in Latvia, journalism, thereby actively influencing the strengthening of Russian linguistic identity, also note the highest significance of this culture in their private lives:

“The multifaceted connection with Russian literature has not been interrupted, has never died down, to this day I buy new literary studies, biographical studies on authors close to me (for example, the book by Valery Shubinsky “The Architect. The Life of Nikolai Gumilyov”). For many years I lived under the deep influence of the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, often reread, but (!!!) to this day “Dead Souls” by Nikolai Gogol, “Onegin” by Alexander Pushkin and others remain with me. I read the underestimated, overlooked geniuses of Nicolas Leskov and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin in their time... And, of course, Anton Chekhov” (FP);

“In my opinion, fiction, in general, is the basis for the formation of a person’s worldview, his views and principles of life, and assessment of the surrounding reality. Analyzing the ethnic component in literature - Russian authors, and such books dominated my reading list, I admit that this also influenced the formation of my visual images, the feeling of the historical connection between generations and its continuity” (FOS);

“I constantly remember and read the poems of Robert Rozhdestvensky, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Rasul Gamzatov. /She then recites Gamzatov’s poem “Take Care of Your Friends”/. In my mind lives the image of Natasha Rostova dancing Russian folk dance (from Leo Tolstoy’s novel “War and Peace”)... / The respondent then recites Tolstoy’s description by heart/ Where, how, when did this little countess, raised by a French emigrant, suck in this spirit from the Russian air she breathed, where did she get these techniques that the pas de châte should have long ago supplanted?” (FP);

“/Russian fiction plays/ a very big role in my life. I always wanted to have a large home library, so since my student days I tried to subscribe to collected works of Russian, Soviet and foreign writers, fortunately in the USSR there was such an opportunity. As a result, my library included collected works of Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Alexei Tolstoy, Sergei Yesenin and many, many others” (head of a Russian public organization) (MO).

True, there were statements by one of the respondents who are very seriously oriented in his private life towards the canons of religious Orthodox culture, including the religious literary tradition of Orthodoxy. Following religious canons also results in inflated demands on works of modern journalism and fiction in Russian:

“I read a lot of the Church Fathers, Orthodox literature - the sermons of the righteous John of Kronstadt, the books of the monk Barnabas, the book by Alexei Solonitsyn “Earthly Angel. Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna” ... I read Russian philosophers Nikolai Lossky, Nikolai Berdyaev, Ivan Ilyin, of course the prose and poetry of Alexander Pushkin. But in modern literature there are no works that would be worthy of an intelligent person. I do not want to read the modern dissident quirks of modern writers” (MP).

### 3.1.2. The Role of Russian Fiction in Professional Life

The Russian language and literature are excellent canons for the formation of professional thinking, public expression of thought, and the formation of successful social communication:

“Russian fiction has always helped me in my professional life in understanding the people around me, quickly establishing contacts based on common or similar principles, understandable associations, including when using “Aesopian” language. And undoubtedly, the content and plots of Russian fiction gave me examples of the system of relationships between people in general, including in the professional sphere” (FOS).

“The main thing that reading fiction has taught me is how to work with words. I rewrite my texts many times, trying to achieve, as it seems to me, the clearest and most precise presentation of thoughts” (MO).

The Russian language and the works of Russian fiction created in it are the mediators of intellectual communication between the current and past generations of Russian intellectuals living in Latvia. In this way, the connection between different eras of Latvian history is reproduced in the context of continuous Russian theoretical linguistic narratives:

“Having professionally studied the history of Russian philosophy and the history of Russian culture in Latvia for thirty-five years, I returned again and again to Russian literature through the works of Russian emigrants – lawyers (Vasily Sinaisky, Peter Jacobi, etc.), philosophers (Fyodor Stepun, Ivan Ilyin, Mark Vaintrob, Alexander Veideman, etc.)” (FP).

Referring to the classics of Russian literature is an important element of the educational process:

“When communicating with students, I use images from Anton Chekhov’s stories – “The Man in the Case,” “The Death of a Civil Servant,” unforgettable lines from Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov’s “The Twelve Chairs”... I often use the

expression from Ilf and Petrov: “The ice has begun to move, gentlemen of the jury, the ice has begun to move!” (FP).

For one respondent who teaches a course on business communication at the university, knowledge of the Russian language and literature is an important element of linguistic and ethnocultural competence, as well as competence in business communication, including manipulative practices:

“Teaching such disciplines as Business Communication, Business Rhetoric or Business Communication involves the formation of speech etiquette skills. Taking into account the pragmatism of the business environment, it should be taken into account that, in order to achieve their goals, some of its representatives resort to manipulation, with the intention of winning over the right person, often in an informal setting. Recognizing and analyzing such tricks helps to remove the mask from the manipulator and reveal the position he occupies. Inimitably vivid images of manipulators created by Nikolai Gogol (the image of Chichikov in “Dead Souls”) and Alexander Griboyedov (the image of Molchalin in “Woe from Wit”) are still found in our time” (FP).

### 3.1.3. Evaluation of the Intellectual Resource of the Russian Language and Literature in Understanding the Social and Political Problems of Modern Latvian Society

The respondents, specialists in Russian studies, are convinced that the Russian language and literature contain cultural baggage, which, if mastered well, allows a person to understand contemporary socio-political processes in the world:

“For teaching literature in the context of the diaspora, it is fundamentally important to develop a system of topics that allows students, on the one hand, to understand the features of the worldview of the Russian people, and on the other, ensures fundamental correlation, the possibility of comparing Russian culture with the cultures of other peoples. Russian literature

allows us to understand the positions of various types of artistic thinking, which involve examining cultural facts through the prism of worldviews, ways of understanding the world, characteristic of a particular cultural era" (FP);

"My assessment of the role of Russian literature in understanding the processes in the socio-political life of Latvia is very high. Many active participants in these processes are "bearers" of Russian culture, which is laid down in the family; they received their education (including higher education) in the language of the family - in Russian and can operate and communicate perfectly in different languages, including Russian, which makes them more competitive" (MO);

"Russian classical literature is called classic because it contains deep ideas of the Russian character, Russian history, Russian moral norms and traditions... I, and my generation, were undoubtedly lucky that in the fifties of the last century, Russian classics prevailed in libraries - Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Gorky, Sholokhov" (MW).

For Russian journalism in Latvia, the Russian language and Russian fiction act as a means to vividly show the collisions in the modern socio-political life of Latvia. Thus, in the reader's mind, a whole system of analogies, logical connections, and emotional responses is built, which have long been proposed by Russian writers in their works:

"The genius of works that have become world classics is not only in the way they are written, not only in the images and plots, but also in the fact that they remain relevant 50, 100, 150, 200 years after they were written! You become convinced of this when quotes from these classic works of Russian literature amazingly clearly "fit" into an article about contemporary problems of society, into the headlines of today's publications, into the characteristics of the current situation and the current "heroes" of articles. "You are not taking according to your rank", "Sometimes a lot of

intelligence is worse than if it were not there at all", "Who am I - a trembling creature or do I have the right", "Woe from Wit", "The Inspector General is Coming to See Us", "Bar-gaining is not appropriate here...", "Gieben zi mir bitte". The immortal works of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Griboyedov, and the sparkling works of Ilf and Petrov allow us, journalists writing in Russian, to convey this or that problem much more vividly, more vividly, to outline the situation and characters. We often use famous phrases from Russian classics for headings and subheadings and often put quotes from famous novels, stories, and plays by Russian authors at the beginning of articles, as if anticipating the narrative. Maybe this sounds immodest, but in this way, we also make our contribution to the popularization and "extending the life" of Russian classics in the diaspora" (MW).

Even if some respondents admitted that this question was difficult, during the interview it became clear that their reference to Russian literature from a hundred to a hundred and fifty years ago helps them in their modern life. One of these respondents admitted that in his personal life and professional activity he is completely immersed in reading Russian fiction, the content of which obviously gives him the resources to understand modern life:

"I cannot answer this question... I am completely absorbed in reading literature, especially from the Silver Age /VV: Russian literature of the late 19th – early 20th century/. I have many recordings of Marina Tsvetaeva's poetry readings on YouTube" (MT).

Respondents note the diminishing opportunities for using the Russian language in the public space of Latvia, which leads to the fact that the linguistic socialization of young people in Russian takes place mainly in families and informal communication:

"In schools implementing programs for national minorities, Russian language and literature are studied. At the same time, students master a number of subjects bilingually or in Latvian, and such subjects as, for example, his-

tory, geography, and the history of Russian culture are not studied at all. In addition, the socio-cultural environment in which the child's personality is formed does not always open up opportunities for him to develop the "mental constants" formed by family upbringing. It often turns out that the child speaks Russian only in the family and at school" (FP).

However, despite the limited opportunities for the Russian language and literature in the education system, it is important for teachers of these subjects that their acquisition by students develops their ethnocultural identity and at the same time serves as a means of the integration into world culture, promotes openness to the Latvian language and literature:

"It is important for a teenager, whose formation takes place in a multicultural environment, to preserve and maintain a balance between positive cultural identity and cultural tolerance during such periods of life... Conversations held with students, as well as the creative works of schoolchildren convince us that in the process of learning, children develop an emotionally positive attitude towards their own cultural affiliation, as well as a positive perception of other cultures. Students show interest in expanding and enriching their knowledge of the cultural traditions of the Russian, Latvian and other peoples, in classical and modern works of art that reflect universal spiritual problems" (FP).

However, several respondents regretfully note the decreasing presence of the Russian language in the public space of Latvia:

"The intellectual resource of the Russian language in understanding the current problems of Latvian society has a tendency to constant and inexorable reduction" (FP);

"As for the intellectual resource of the Russian language in studying the social and political problems of modern Latvian society, I will refer to my personal experience. Over the past

few years, I have published several books on the history of Latvia in Russian ... But recently my books on the history of Latvia have been removed from the National Library out of sight" (MO).

### **3.1.4. Evaluation of the Quality of Representation of Russian Culture in Russian Theatre and Russian Journalism in Latvia**

Respondents believe that the Russian theatre in Riga has historically, for a very long period since its foundation in 1883, claimed the role of the most important means of preserving and developing the Russian language and culture in Latvia, and of conveying Russian cultural values to viewers, including young people:

"For Russian-speaking citizens of Latvia, the opportunity to preserve a sense of belonging to their cultural and historical roots is important. No less important is the opportunity to actively participate in the diverse cultural life of Latvia as part of Europe. Both opportunities are provided to us, in particular, by the Russian theatre. Each season, performances based on Russian classics are staged on the stage of the Riga Russian Theatre. Over the past 10 years, viewers have been able to get acquainted with the works of both Russian classics of the 19th century and with the works of writers from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries... Some of these productions are performed in a traditional style, while others are performed in a modern innovative manner, which often becomes the subject of lively discussions in society. But it is precisely this ambiguity of interpretations of classical works that turns theatrical performances into truly significant cultural events, to which each of us expresses our own attitude... There is another side to the problem – education and upbringing of the younger generation. In the context of the complete transition of education to the Latvian language, it is the theatre that gives schoolchildren the opportunity to develop cultural identity" (FP).

Respondents, as a rule, are very critical of the communi-

cation and educational possibilities of the Russian language, which are determined by the language legislation and policy of the Latvian state, as well as the statements of those politicians and public figures who are determined to de-Russify the public space of Latvia. Considering the complexity of the ethno-political situation in the country, most respondents were extremely cautious in their statements:

“Russian culture in the theater and in journalism is still preserved, but I cannot always agree with its interpretation” (FP);

“In areas of compact residence of Russians ... centers of Russian culture qualitatively fulfill the mission of preserving and developing Russian culture. And today’s political trend - a negative attitude towards everything Russian additionally slows down and complicates this process. Therefore, in my opinion, all “creators” and participants of Russian culture in Latvia take into account such a political factor in their activities: in choosing the repertoire of performances, the content of exhibitions and concerts. And Russian journalism in this situation has found itself in a more difficult position - the opportunity to freely express opinions, debate, and seek social solutions (especially in ethnopolitical issues) informally and formally is strictly limited. Journalists talk about a constant state of self-censorship, and the threat of closing Russian-language media and possible other sanctions also affects the ability and quality of the work of many journalists!” (FOS).

One of the respondents, a well-known actor of the Riga Russian Theatre in Latvia, even admitted that he does not read newspapers or watch television at all. A significant limitation for the implementation of journalism and theatre in Latvia in Russia is the decline in people’s interest in reading fiction:

“Unfortunately, the number of readers is becoming fewer and fewer. For obvious reasons, the number of articles about Russian literature is also decreasing. People of the “silver” age predominate among the readers” (MW).

Respondents involved not only in the cultural life of the Russian population of Latvia, but also in its socio-political activities, attach primary importance not so much to the artistic features of the performances of the Russian Theatre or the style of journalists’ publications as to the political context:

“I met the director of the Riga Russian Drama Theatre... And this meeting, alas, left me with the impression of him as a person who, while promoting Russian culture, is at the same time extremely unfriendly towards the Russian-speaking community of Latvia... /As for journalism in Russian/, which to one degree or another reflects the problems of Latvia’s national minorities, is rapidly shrinking and approaching its end due to the consistent implementation by the state of a policy aimed at their destruction” (MO).

## 4. Discussion

As the materials of the sociological study show, the preservation of the ethnocultural collective identity of the Russian population of Latvia as a predominantly linguistic identity is dictated by many factors. Among them, first of all, it is necessary to highlight the cognitive capabilities of the Russian language and the literary tradition associated with it for rationalization and understanding of the main problems of Latvian society in general, and the individual life world of a person in particular. Linguistic identity is the most important resource for strengthening social solidarity within the Russian ethnic group. At the same time, the linguistic identity of the Russian ethnic minority is not an obstacle to openness towards the Latvian language as the state language and to the rooting in the consciousness of this ethnic group of national values characteristic of all citizens of Latvia.

To briefly summarize the respondents’ statements, they contain deep regret about the sharp reduction in opportunities for public use of the Russian language in the public space of Latvia, at all levels of the education system - from preschool to university, and the almost complete exclusion of the Russian language from scientific research and publications in Latvia. For all respondents, it is an axiom that the status of the Russian language and the public cultural life associated with it since the restoration of Latvia’s independence in 1991

has been one of the most important factors that has led to ethnic division in Latvia, as well as to geopolitical tensions in interstate relations between Latvia and Russia. Respondents are not at all pleased with the change in the repertoire policy of the Mikhail Chekhov Riga Russian Theatre, which has resulted in the almost complete exclusion of performances based on world-famous classical examples of Russian literature. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of respondents consider the Russian language, fiction and culture in general to be their most important cultural and social capital, which cannot be replaced by either Latvian as the state language or English (or other foreign languages).

The Russian language and its literary basis for Russian respondents turn out to be self-sufficient for understanding not only private life, but also social processes, both in the past and present, not requiring explanations drawn from Latvian or English. Being the language of the Russian diaspora in Latvia, the Russian language fully reproduces the basic structures characteristic of the Russian language in Russia. Respondents confirmed the hypothesis that the author of this article put forward in his numerous previous studies of the identity of the Russian population of Latvia about the consolidation of markers of this population as a group social category in markers of linguistic self-identity. The Russian language is thus not only a sign by which its speakers are excluded from the national community of Latvians. The Russian language acts as the most important means of consolidating the ethno-cultural identity of Russians in Latvia, a marker of their self-categorization. Being in the space of the narrative about the Russian language, the respondents practically did not reflect on its relationship with the Latvian language. This indicates that identification with Latvia is not as relevant in the consciousness of these respondents as compared to the priority self-identification as representatives of the Russian linguistic community. The consolidation of the native language in one's consciousness as the most important structure-forming factor of identity is the result of a complex process of socialization of people, in which the native language provided far from unambiguous access to the social, cultural, informational, and economic resources of Latvian society that are of priority for the individual. In addition, in order to become a structuring center for the ethnocultural identity of a Russian person in Latvia, the Russian language and the literary and cultural tradition associated with it re-

quire a high level of linguistic and socio-cultural competence from its speakers. And in the conditions of intense competition between the Latvian and Russian languages for the right to become the only means of communication for the Russian-speaking population of Latvia - also a developed political and civic culture. Understanding this, some respondents were quite critical in their assessment of the results of the activities of those social actors whose professional responsibilities include the reproduction of Russian culture and language in Latvia (teaching these subjects in schools, the quality of journalism in Russian, staging classic works of Russian literature in the Riga Russian Theatre). Our study confirmed the correctness of the respondents' choice: their answers included all those narratives in relation to Russian linguistic identity in modern Latvia that can be traced both in public consciousness and in the scientific literature on this topic.

## 5. Conclusions

Latvia is a shining example of a multicultural country, where ethnic diversity is an important feature. Among the ethnic Latvians and many other ethnic groups, the Russian population stands out, with a significant presence dating back to the era of modernization in the second half of the 19th century. Currently, its share is approximately a quarter of the country's total population. Despite the fact that Latvia is a multiethnic country, its constitution and the main laws regulating ethnopolitics characterize this state as a national state of ethnic Latvians, where other groups are ethnic minorities, but their languages are recognized as foreign. Latvia has joined international norms for the protection of the ethnocultural identity of ethnic minorities. However, such protection mainly concerns the private lives of people who belong to these population groups.

This collision is perceived quite painfully by the Russian population, since nation-building in Latvia is accompanied by political and administrative measures to reduce the presence of the Russian language in the sphere of official communication, in the education system, and in the media. However, despite this, the Russian minority in Latvia emphasizes its ethnocultural identity precisely as a linguistic identity. The materials of a sociological study of the opinions of well-known representatives of Russian public organizations,



scientists, cultural figures, and journalists in Latvia show a very high degree of demand for the Russian language and the Russian literary tradition associated with it as the most important elements structuring the ethnocultural identity of Russians and Russian-speaking residents of the country. At the same time, the respondents' answers do not at all indicate that the linguistic identity of the Russian population is a form of distancing from the pan-Latvian identity. The position of these Russian intellectuals does not at all contradict the modern ideas of liberal multiculturalism (J. Habermas, W. Kymlicka, S. Benhabib, I. M. Young, etc.)<sup>[85, 86]</sup>, who see in the combination of national values and the values of ethnocultural, linguistic identity a reasonable way to harmonize relations between the national majority and ethnic minorities.

Of particular importance among these theories is the sociology of Jurgen Habermas, in which being a social metatheory in understanding the collective identities of social groups and ethnic minorities included in the hierarchical social, political and cultural systems of national states. This theory emphasizes the possibilities of successful interactions of ethnocultural, including linguistic identities, ethnic minorities and the identity of the majority, national-civil identities, if their bearers at the individual and collective level implement discourses of mutual understanding, based on the sharing of common values by actors. In such a situation, emphasizing the linguistic identities of ethnic minorities is not at all a threat to the integration of national states. Despite the criticism and doubts in some parts of the sociological literature, which considers Habermas's views to be utopian due to the preserved hierarchies in national states, in which the linguistic and, in general, ethnocultural identities of minorities are largely marginalized<sup>[87]</sup>, one should still acknowledge the correctness of those sociologists who consider the right to preserve the identity of ethnocultural minorities as one of the human rights, the institution of which in one form or another is considered in all existing modern ideological doctrines as an attributive characteristic of modernity as a whole<sup>[88]</sup>. The analysis of the perception of linguistic identity by prominent public and scientific representatives of the Russian community in Latvia carried out in the article, confirms Habermas's ideas about the practices of reproducing this identity as, first of all, a way of ensuring the integrity of the social identity of an individual who associates himself with the Russian language and its literary tradition and does not at all claim

to be an alternative to the general state identity in Latvia.

## Author Contributions

The author of the article V.V. is the only one who developed and provided its Conceptualization, methodology, software, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, visualization, supervision, project administration, funding acquisition.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The survey research materials are the property of the author of the research and this article. By agreement with the respondents, well-known scientists, journalists, public figures and cultural figures in Latvia, who took part in the research, their names and surnames are not disclosed. This is due to the fact that the content of the respondents' statements touches upon the sensitive topic of Russian linguistic identity in Latvia, which is not only of a scientific nature, but has been one of the most politically vulnerable in public debates for many decades. At the same time, the author of the article provides information about the data of his previous research, which can be found in the public domain and the sources of this data are reflected in the cited scientific literature.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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