6. Canadian Immersion, Baltic Transitional Bilingual Education and European Plurilingualism

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Abstract

The chapter presents a comparative story of bilingual education in Canada, Estonia and Latvia with a focus on French immersion and transitional bilingualism as adopted in Latvia and Estonia. With a view to global processes and concomitant sociolinguistic change, the intention is to look at the future of immersion in Canada and the Baltics.

Keywords

Plurilingualism, bilingualism, language immersion, sociolinguistics.

Introduction

What is bilingual education? The popular misconception about bilingual education as a purely 20th century phenomenon is widespread though it varies from country to country on different continents. Contrary to the received view, bilingual education did not start in a Canadian elementary school in 1965, and neither was it invented in the USA in the 1960s. It would also be a mistake to record its North American history from the first known bilingual schools of Virginia in the 17th century (Seidner, 1976). Mackey

argues that in Europe, 'bilingual schooling is at least four to five thousand years old' (Mackey, 1978, p. 2), but other scholars claim that it originated in the Near East and trace it back to the Old Babylonian scribal school encouraging its upper-level pupils to be 'radically bilingual, constantly switching back and forth, even within the same text, between Sumerian and Akkadian' (Griffith, 2015, p. 9), and evidently using pedagogical translanguaging[1] so passionately debated today.

Given the antiquity and wide spread of bilingual education, every instance of teaching academic content in two (or more) languages should be framed in its socio-historical context. For example, in universities, the initial practice of giving formal instruction in classical languages made education essentially bi- or multilingual. In general education, however, multilingualism or mother-tongue-based multilingual education started proliferating with colonisation, though, in truth, it rather helped to create language inequality, minorising indigenous languages and majorising those of colonisers (see, e.g., Milloy, 1999; Richardson, 1993; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, 2017). Whereas multilingualism is an early characteristic of human societies, monolingualism is a result of recent social, cultural, and ethnocentric developments (Lewis, 1977, p. 22; see also Pavlenko, nd), and as such is closely linked to the appearance of the nation state. At the time of rampant industrialisation, the spread of the 'one united nation – one language' ideology coincided with the growth of general formal education and had multiple lingering side effects, including the appearance of boarding schools for indigenous people (Milloy, 1999).

The tumultuous 20th century saw the end of colonialism in its classical form and the subsequent change in the system of territorial, political, cultural, and linguistic domination. Newly founded nation states aimed at cultural homogeneity and practiced systematic linguistic discrimination in favour of the titular language (Giordano, 2018). In turn, globalisation and increased migration problematised the monolingualism of the nation state, and

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[1] i.e., pedagogies encouraging '*multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*' (Garcia, 2009, p. 45, emphasis in original).

multilingualism legally resurfaced in the form of the fundamental right of every child 'to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language' (UN, 1989). It should be noted however that in granting linguistic minority children the right to education in their mother tongue, Article 30 left measures for its implementation undiscussed. In the 1990s, the need for language regulation in multilingual societies prompted the development of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), and later adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1994), the first legally binding multilateral instrument. Nevertheless, the ideal of a culturally homogeneous nation state seems to have been regaining its popularity, with European countries, the Baltic states including, often reprimanded by the EU for not enacting laws regulating the recognition of minorities (Giordano, 2018; Pavlenko, 2008, 2011).

Having the same Soviet legacy, the Baltic countries differ in other respects. In contrast to Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia are more than neighbouring states which joined the European Union in the same year. After regaining their independence, the two happened to be in a similar linguistic predicament: a quarter of their citizens were ethnically Russian and the number of those speaking Russian as their first (and often their only) language was even higher. Focusing on derussification and assimilation of their Russian-speaking minorities, Estonian and Latvian governments adopted *ius sanguinis* citizenship laws and became officially monolingual, the revised legislation imposing occupation restrictions and affecting education policies and practices (Lazdiņa & Marten, 2019; Pavlenko, 2008, 2011).

Concerning their language laws, both Estonia and Latvia adopted them at the end of the perestroika, i.e., in 1989. Without sufficient expertise, local legislators resorted to external sources, and their first choice was to draw on Quebec experience. Thus, *La Charte de la langue française* or *Loi 101* (1977) became one of the cornerstones of language legislation in the Baltic countries in general and Latvia in particular (Rannut, 2002; Druviete, 2002). Whereas the 1989 language policies were meant to modify the existing language hierarchy, the language laws amended after

Latvia and Estonia became sovereign in 1991 made Estonian and Latvian the sole languages of government and administration as well as the primary languages of education. Despite the Baltic Republics being autonomous countries and Quebec a province, both governments further drew upon its experience and created institutions responsible for the implementation of language policies, and just like those of Quebec, their language policies have been criticised for intervening in the social sphere and segregating linguistic minorities (Druviete, 2002).

Pourquoi le Québec? The explanation is in linguistic similarity, i.e., French as well as Estonian and Latvian are minoritised majority languages with English and Russian being majorised minority languages respectively (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994). The second reason is the availability of legal documents and contacts with Canadian applied linguists, hence, the potential of further collaboration between Baltic and Quebec language policy makers and language education specialists (Druviete, 2002; Rannut, 2002). Given the political and ethno-demographic situation in the Baltic region, the application of a sound language policy, including in education, has been deemed paramount for the titular language survival (Druviete, 2002; Ozolins, 2018). In turn, the languages of schooling, their ratio, and the starting point of teaching the titular languages to the Russian-speaking minorities became highly politicised issues.

Apart from the geopolitical and socioeconomic transformation, the 20th century became marked by the systematic research of education, including bilingual practices. In the context of Canada, it was research on motivation in second language (L2) acquisition which flourished and helped the socio-psychological model to dominate in the field from 1959 through to 1990.[2] Thus, when in 1965 a group of Anglophone middle-class parents in St Lambert near Montreal decided to provide their children with the advantage of bilingualism and set up an experimental kindergarten class

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[2] More on the legacy of the model can be found in *Contemporary Language Motivation Theory: 60 Years Since Gardner and Lambert* (1959) edited by Al-Hoorie and MacIntyre.

for that purpose,[3] the initiative, later to be known as immersion, attracted the interest of university researchers (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). The education experiments of exposing students to full instruction through the target language, and making L2 both a subject to learn and a tool to communicate, demonstrated that not only do immersion children effectively learn French, their English proficiency may also benefit. Generally recognised as a resounding success, the model of immersion bilingual education was adapted and spread throughout Canada, across North America, and around the world.

Seeing the success of immersion education, it is appropriate to ponder on its potential in the two Baltic countries struggling 'to (re-)establish their national languages in de facto multilingual surroundings' (Vihalemm & Hogan-Brun, 2013, p. 55). The broadly popularised Estonian language immersion programme was conducted both on the basis of the French Canadian immersion approach and with the assistance of Canadian specialists (Mehisto, 2015a, 2015b). Although there is no similar programme in Latvia, the two Baltic states have many common features. Apart from the topicality of language and Russian minority integration issues, both countries have a *de jure* unified education system, but de facto refer to two types – with instruction in titular languages and in Russian (Khavenson, 2018). Additionally, their substantial education reforms as part of de-sovietisation were first implemented in the national language schools, whereas for Russian-medium schools the reform started later and coincided with the introduction of bilingual education policies. The latter factor undeniably aggravated the response of the Russian-speaking population to change (ibid.).

Finally, the promise of additive bilingualism[4] offered by Canadian immersion has never been fully realised, in addition to which Quebec can hardly be a paragon of language maintenance. The most recent instance is the debate expanded around Bill 96 (an act respecting French, the official and common language of

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[3] On the parents' role, read the blog of one of the founding parents of the St. Lambert experiment, Olga Melikoff at https://olgamelikoff.com/
[4] See it explained in *A note on terminology and methods*.

Quebec), which was tabled in May 2021 and introduced a serious overhaul of Bill 101. Being in line with attempts to establish a particular Quebec identity, Bill 96 is a response to the growing concern among the French-speaking population (Francophones) about the decline of French in Quebec. The draft immediately raised multiple concerns for English speakers (Anglophones) who harshly criticised the proposed upgrade of Quebec's language law for '[going] far beyond what is necessary or appropriate to protect the French language' and assaulting fundamental rights and freedoms (Eliadis, 2021, online).

In light of the above, the chapter presents a comparative cross-disciplinary study of bilingual education in Canada, Estonia and Latvia with a focus on French immersion and transitional bilingualism adopted in Latvia and Estonia. Seeing the success of immersion education as contingent on multiple political, social and cultural factors, this chapter delves into the success of Canadian immersion programmes, examines the implementation or non-implementation of such programmes in Estonia and Latvia and discusses the global prospects of the method in view of ever-increasing migration and European commitment to plurilingual education. Using Baker's taxonomy of bilingual education (Baker, 2001; Mwaniki et al., 2017; Wright & Baker, 2017), Cummins' insight on language development (2014; 2019; 2021) and Spolsky's (2004) conceptualisation of main forces or conditions co-occurring with language policies, the goal is to compare the immersion and transitional bilingual education in Canada, Estonia, and Latvia. The study raises the following questions:

- What factors may facilitate the implementation of immersion in the Baltics?
- Are there any similarities in the future of immersion in Canada and the Baltics?

A note on terminology and methods

Before discussing immersion, language policies and other factors affecting choice and implementation of bilingual education, the field of bilingual education should be mapped and the most important terms and concepts used in the chapter defined.

When defining bilingualism in a country, it is important to account for a possible difference between language situation and language policy governing language use. At the national level, Spolsky singles out four forces that co-exist or co-occur with language policies: 1) a sociolinguistic situation with 'the number and kinds of languages, the number and kinds of speakers of each, the communicative value of each language both inside and outside the community being studied'; 2) 'the working' of a national or ethnic identity; 3) globalisation, and 'the consequent tidal wave of English'; and, finally, 4) 'the gradually increasing recognition that language choice is an important component of human and civil rights' (Spolsky, 2004, pp. 219–220). All four factors are to be considered when comparing the state of bilingual education in the three countries.

The language policy orientation defines the language(s) of instruction and determines the type of education designed for language minority students. Generally speaking, bilingual education is the use of a native and second language for instruction, or, in other words, the delivery of content-based subjects through the medium of a second language, with the subsequent division of education programmes into those fostering bilingualism and others for language minority children. A detailed classification might be done by looking at certain features such as a typical type of student and language(s) of the classroom (minority/majority/mixed), societal and education aim, and language outcome (Baker, 2001, p. 194). A further distinction is into 'weak' and 'strong' forms of education for bilingualism, with 'weak' ones aiming at assimilation of language minority students by imposing the majority language or recognising the minority language but for a limited period of time (Mwaniki et al., 2017, p. 40). In the context of this chapter, a weak form of specific interest is transitional bilingual education, the form where students' use of their home language in the classroom is temporarily allowed but decreases with time, and the share of majority language use grows proportionately until the child is deemed to be ready for mainstream education in the school language (hence the 'early exit' and 'late exit' types). The regularly offered rationale for transitional bilingualism is the equality of opportunity in view of the child's future functioning in the majority language, whereas the criticism comes for the

semi-hidden agenda of majority language monolingualism, with 'the dominant aim [being] for the student to move to learning in the dominant language of the region and not for the development of the home language' (Wright & Baker, 2017, p. 69).

The relevant sociolinguistic and socio-political constructs are of additive and subtractive bilingualism, with the subtractive form considered to occur in the case of pressure to replace or demote the first language (Baker, 2001). In its turn, additive bilingualism is used 'in the discursive context of challenging monolingual submersion programmes that promote subtractive bilingualism among minoritized students' (Cummins, 2021, p. 299).

In the realm of minority rights, another important concept is asymmetrical bilingualism. For instance, in the Soviet Union, all languages were formally equal, but in the Baltic republics their bilingualism was asymmetrical, with the titular nations speaking fluent Russian and immigrant Russians hardly using any titular language. After the restoration of Baltic independence, the Soviet legacy of asymmetric bilingualism seriously obstructed the national plans to create integrated societies in Estonia and Latvia. In Canada, Francophones in the Anglophone provinces find themselves in the same linguistic predicament, and it is asymmetrical bilingualism that has been used to explain so-called positive discrimination, i.e., the application of the asymmetrical principle in giving more rights to minoritised language (French) speakers and fewer to the speakers of the majority language (English).

In turn, immersion education is categorised as a form promoting additive bilingualism and therefore representing a 'strong' form which aims at overcoming any bilingual asymmetry. The approach is usually praised for providing functional bilingualism and biculturality, and it is the genesis and development of this form that is to be discussed next.

Canadian French Immersion

A comparatively young nation, Canada was founded by European settlers on land originally populated by indigenous peoples (First Nations and Inuit). The fall of New France to the British catalysed the parallel development of French and British linguistic communities, with the language contact necessitating the appearance

of bilingual schools in the 19th century (Sissins, 1917). Since the majority of French speakers lived in the province of Quebec, it was the only province where both English and French languages received legal recognition when the confederation was formed in 1867. Having no official status outside of Quebec, French had a secondary role and comparatively low status. With limited interactions between English speaking and French speaking populations, bilingualism was more commonplace among the outnumbered Francophones, which brought the viability of French into question (Genesee, 2015). The situation changed with the Official Languages Act (1969) granting both languages official status, consequently raising the prestige of French and increasing the interest of Anglophone Canadians in learning the language (ibid.).

The enactment occurred during the so-called Quiet Revolution, a period of intense socio-political and socio-cultural transformation in Quebec. In the post WWII period, the low level of formal education and slower economic growth than in the rest of Canada led to the perceived necessity of reforms. The *Révolution tranquille* of the 1960s became a time of rapid change and dramatic development of government institutions. The increased role of the state in the province's economic, social, and cultural life had major consequences, such as the diminishing role of the Catholic Church, increasing prosperity for French-speaking Québécois, and, notably, an expanding nationalist consciousness (Durocher, 2015). Ensuing pressures led to an education reform, while research and the education experiments into the linguistic situation initiated by Professor Wallace E. Lambert and his graduate students Robert C. Gardner and G. Richard Tucker at McGill University became part of the general movement towards change. What is significant in the context of the present chapter is that all the developments led to the birth of what is widely known today as the Canadian French Immersion model.

So, the above-mentioned parental initiative in St Lambert and ensuing set of bilingual interventions in grades 1–4 (Lambert & Tucker, 1972) demonstrated the effectiveness of early French immersion. The success of the experiment gave rise to similar grassroots movements, which, in their turn, induced the foundation of such organisations as Canadian Parents for French (CPF) and the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers,

both becoming important players in the field of education policy. Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments became equally eager to support the education trend as it helped to bridge the 'two solitudes',[5] two distinct founding cultures of French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians. Although bilingual education was not viewed positively by all,[6] it received recognition and became 'seen to increase social cohesion throughout Canada' (Ballinger et al., 2017, p. 31).

The immersion experience grew, and its forms variegated, but the essential core of a minimum 50% of instruction in the second language remained unchanged. Other characteristic features were a growing share of the first language in secondary school and permissive, at least initially, attitudes towards the use of students' home language (Baker, 2001). In terms of the variation, the difference might be in the age when a child begins the programme, that is, *early*, delayed or *middle* (at the age of 9–10), and *late* (at the secondary level) immersion, with the classical French immersion model starting in kindergarten and Grade 1 (Cummins, 2021). The last parameter is the amount of time spent in immersion, with *total* immersion starting with teaching fully in the second language and then a gradual reduction to 50% immersion at the end of junior school, and *partial* immersion maintaining 50% immersion throughout the whole period of pre- and junior schooling (Baker, 2001).

Overall, French immersion rapidly spread not only in North America but across Europe, too. To explain this phenomenon, Baker (2001) made a list of features conducive to such speedy education growth, with additive bilingualism and French and English as two majority languages of high prestige making the top. Whereas a sociolinguistic situation and working of a national/ethnic identity are factors co-occurring with and

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[5] The cultural divide between Canada's Francophone and Anglophone cultures was famously referred to as the 'Two Solitudes' by Canadian writer Hugh MacLennan in his eponymous novel written in 1945.
[6] For example, the Association of Catholic Principals of Montreal proclaimed 'that the average child cannot cope with two languages of instruction and to try to do so leads to insecurity, language interference, and academic retardation' (1969, cited in Lambert & Tucker, 1972, p. 5).

thus facilitating or contravening government language policy (Spolsky, 2004), the choice of languages with high communicative value and provision of sustenance for national/ethnic identity are bound to have a broad support at all social levels. The rest of Baker's list details important technicalities concerning how to succeed; they include optionality of the programme, bilingual teaching staff (preferably trained in bilingual education), and permissive attitude to the use of the first language outside of the classroom as well as inside the early immersion classroom, though for a short period of time only. A similar lack of experience and the same curriculum as in mainstream education are on the list of features leading to the success of an immersion programme (Baker, 2001).

Coming back to Canada, many of the points raised above indiscriminately relate to immersion as implemented not in the French-speaking province of Quebec but in the rest of Canada, where French is a minority language. The linguistic shift makes the two contexts highly different, the change in sociolinguistic situation affects the overall value of bilingualism. Thus, outside Quebec, immersion students do not frequently use the second language (i.e., French) in public and private spheres, and the dropout rate from immersion programmes before high school are high due to no apparent need for bilingualism to enter university. However, despite a certain dominance of neoliberal ideologies in majority-language Anglophone students' investment in French, which tends to '[limit] the full potential of their development of identity as legitimate bi/multilingual speakers' (Marshall & Bokhorst–Heng, 2020, p. 613), the latest available statistics for the pre-pandemic 2018–2019 school year shows unchanged student enrolment in French as a Second Language programmes with some growth in French immersion (CPF, 2021). The seeming status quo is a good result in view of the global significance of English and growing attention to the language rights of minorities other than French. Moreover, recent initiatives such as, for example, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy in French Immersion and French Second-Language Programs funded under the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023, or the pilot project French Second Language Learning from Early Childhood with funding

in Budget 2021, support and strengthen the position of French immersion programmes.[7]

Another interesting question is the non-existence of English immersion programmes in mainstream education. In Quebec, it is obviously due to *La Charte de la langue française* aka *Loi 101* restricting the use of other than French languages in education.[8] However, the search in New Brunswick, the only Canadian province with both French and English as its official languages, yields a similar result. There exist stately funded spring/summer intensive language immersion programmes both for Francophone and Anglophone students,[9] but these programmes are immersion in name only, exploiting the metaphor of success.

It has been over fifty years since the Official Languages Act came into force, and the vision of official bilingualism has undergone changes. One of the assumptions the immersion programmes for majority language students is based on is that '[l]earning through two languages and learning about the target-language culture … help resolve societal power imbalances and bridge divides between language speakers' (Ballinger et al., 2017, p. 40), and this postulate corresponds to the societal demands where the minority rights are concerned. With Canadian multiculturalism being both a sociological fact and a federal public policy, Canada may correspond to Spolsky's vision of a nation as necessarily interested in developing and implementing permissive language rights for its minorities.

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[7] More information on the two official languages funding programmes is at https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/official -languages.html.

[8] Although the evolution of the language laws in Quebec exceeds the scope of the present chapter, the transition from the simple requirement of working knowledge of French to Bill 101 positioning French as the language of government, education, commerce and even workplace is noteworthy. Notwithstanding court challenges, the preservation of French peaked with even more astringent Bill 96, having entered into force on 1 June 2022 (Behiels & Hudon, 2022).

[9] See *Government of Canada Language Immersion Programmes* at https:// www.canada.ca/en/services/culture/cultural-youth-programs/language -immersion.html.

It was not until the second part of the 20ᵗʰ century that ethnic diversity became recognised and started being accommodated. In 1988, the gradual movement towards its acceptance resulted in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1998) setting out the legal framework. The shift to multiculturalism in the federal policy[10] affected the national language policy concerning indigenous languages and changed the language management. Due to the popularity of French immersion, unsurprisingly, its model was adapted for indigenous language bilingual programmes. The peculiarity is that in addition to typical immersion goals, such programmes seek to ensure the survival of indigenous languages and cultures (Dicks & Genesee, 2017, p. 457).

In Canada, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their ancestral land came hand in hand with immigration. Due to the vastness of the land, the need to accommodate ethnically and linguistically diverse immigrants has never been a burden, and the idea of multiculturalism, that all immigrant groups 'should retain their individuality and each make its contribution to the national character' (Government of Canada, 2011), appeared even before WWII. Enshrined in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1998), the provision to 'preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada' (Government of Canada, 2021) makes language policy provide for all languages spoken in Canada. Hence, languages other than official and indigenous ones received the name of 'heritage' languages with the first heritage language programmes opened in Ontario in the 1977 (Stern et al., 2016). Italian, Portuguese, Ukrainian, Polish, Arabic and Mandarin are only some of the languages in which the programmes are offered today, though, compared to immersion, heritage language bilingual education is quite a different 'strong' form of education for bilingualism.[11]

The context has been changing and the immersion method has been questioned repeatedly. For example, Cummins (2021) extolls

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[10] For example, the recognition of a large zone of the Northwest Territories as an autonomous, self-governing unit of native peoples.
[11] See, for example, Baker (2001) for detail.

the virtues of additive bilingualism but draws attention to the fact that a home-language switch may lead to a different outcome in minority and majority language situations. He warns that 'the lack of opportunity to develop L1 literacy skills results in a weak foundation upon which to build L2 literacy skills' (p. 24) and demonstrates that early-exit transitional bilingual programmes are logically incoherent and disadvantageous for learners.

There are new challenges to overcome, among them the linguistic heterogeneity of students coming to French immersion classes. Selective immigration policies brought a new flow of immigrants who are often more educated and skilled than average citizens in Canada (Kalan, 2021, p. 61). The most recent discussion is about the ways to eliminate the inherent monolingualism in language immersion pedagogy, that is, the essential separation of two languages (Cummins, 2014, 2019), and to apply a cross-linguistic methodology (Ballinger et al., 2017).

Even though the existing theories of language acquisition and methods of linguistic pedagogy have been constantly re-examined, the research in bilingual – and specifically immersion – education continues to be in high demand in Canada and around the world.[12] In Canada, the immersion approach still appears to be viable for it answers the demands of the forces affecting national language policy, but how it could serve Baltic language policies is the question to reflect on further.

The Baltic background

To give a better understanding of the language policies governing education in Estonia and Latvia today, it is appropriate to examine their language situation when they were part of the Russian empire and, later, the Soviet Union. This background is indispensable to understand 'a unique sociolinguistic experiment' (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 276) staged by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the ensuing language shift in the Baltics. Here and further in the chapter, the Baltics is used to address Latvia and Estonia, and exclude Lithuania due to the differences in the geopolitical

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[12] See, for example, *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education, International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

and ethno-demographic situation of the latter (also discussed in the introduction).

For quite some time in the Tsarist Empire, the Baltic territories were not affected by Russian language policy, and German – the language of the elite – remained the official language. Russification started in the mid-nineteenth century and aimed to reduce the influence of Germans as well as to prevent any nationalist upsurge. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, secular secondary and higher education could only be obtained in Russian; later, Russian replaced German as the language of primary education too. Starting in 1890, in Latvia, all subjects except for religion were taught in Russian starting from the first grade (Ābelnieks, 2012). However, after the 1905 revolution, minority language schools were granted more freedom and their number increased (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 279). The higher literacy rate aided the growth of nationalism and stood the Baltic peoples in good stead as a unifying factor. When at the end of WWI, Latvia and Estonia proclaimed their independence, for the first time in their history they started realising their one nation – one language dream.

Independent statehood did not last long, though during that time both countries managed to extend the use of their national languages across all public domains. Whereas Estonian immediately became the state language, Latvian, first, received the same status as German and Russian, and became the language of the state only in 1935, after the country turned into a dictatorship. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact led to short-term Soviet annexation and was followed by Nazi invasion. At the end of WWII, when the Soviet Army returned, it brought legions of linguistically and culturally different Russian-speaking Soviets for permanent residence in the previously independent Republics. Thus, the occupation regime dramatically changed the language situation in the Baltics (see Zamyatin, 2015). Although the Soviet government maintained national institutions and even introduced a form of bilingual education with the titular languages taught in Russian-medium schools and Russian in the titular school curricula, the number of Russian classes was bigger as well as the overall prestige of the titular languages diminishing. Newcomers were disincentivised to learn Estonian or Latvian, whereas the titulars 'engaged

in passive resistance, refusing to either learn Russian or to use it even when they knew it (Raun, 1985; Suny, 1994)' (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 281). Still, ethnic Latvians and Estonians were made to acquire the language, which in turn led to the situation of asymmetric bilingualism similar to the situation with the Francophones living in the Anglophone provinces of Canada. In the Baltics, the presence of the largely monolingual Russian-speaking population was doomed to create major challenges.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of the independence in 1991 turned the tide, and de-Russification, or a 'Reversal of Language Shift' (Pavlenko, 2008), became part of the de-Sovietisation process. While both Estonia and Latvia were successful in restoring the status of their titular languages, they were not equally successful in raising titular-language competence of their Russian speakers (Pavlenko, 2008). With politics and history permeating all public and academic debates on language policy, the discussion essentially comes down to the question of the degree to which 'nation-building based on a common language and culture is still adequate in the twenty-first century, [and] whether Soviet-time migrants to the Baltics should politically and morally be compared to autochthonous minorities in other parts of the world' (Lazdiņa & Martin, 2019, p. 9).

Since the restoration of independence, Baltic policy makers have been attracting aggressive criticism from Russia on one hand. On the other hand, they have been occasionally reprimanded by the EU authorities for 'restrictive policies … driven by a political agenda' with regard to the use of national minority languages, and for the way the policies found their place in the education system (Council of Europe, 2021; see also 2015). Notwithstanding the criticism, the aim of the national language policies has remained to fully re-establish the titular languages as the main languages in the respective countries, and this goal has shaped language management in education, caused reforms followed by mixed internal and external response but succeeded to considerably increase the knowledge of the titular languages among minorities. The way Estonian and Latvian education systems attempt to re-orient language practices and manage multilingualism is to be discussed in the following sections.

Estonian Language Immersion

The protection, promotion, and development of the Estonian language is stated as a goal in Estonia's Lifelong Learning Strategy, the document that guided the most important developments in the area of education in the 2014–2020 period and was concordant with the Estonia 2020 national reform programme (Government of Estonia). Referring to the insufficient Estonian language skills of graduates from Russian-medium schools, the document mentions special support to be given to those and other students speaking a native language other than Estonian. With a Russian-speaking minority comprising about 30 % of the population, Estonia has both Estonian-medium and Russian-medium kindergartens and basic (primary and lower-secondary) schools. In upper-secondary education, however, at least 60 % of instruction has to be conducted in the state language. Mainstream education has often been blamed for its inability to provide the necessary state language support to Russian-speaking students, and this became a stimulus for the 2000 launch of the language immersion programme, with the Canadian language immersion model as an example.

However, to prepare the Immersion Programme, 1.5 years was spent on teacher training and developing teaching and learning materials. Furthermore, the programme developers and coordinators managed to procure the support and involvement of the main stakeholders, which is believed to have contributed to the programme's success (Mehisto, 2015a). The opening of the Estonian Language Immersion Center in October 2000 became a widely covered event and was a sign of the systematic and systemic support that immersion education would enjoy from then on. Three years later, the first voluntary early immersion programme was joined by a late immersion programme, and due to the growing number of refugees and asylum seekers, the approach extended to Estonian-medium schools. Thus, within 20 years, the programme was used by 63 kindergartens and 37 schools, with about 10,000 students educated in different immersion models and through CLIL[13] at all stages of education (Golubeva, 2018).

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[13] In Europe, immersion very often goes under the name of CLIL or Content and Language Integrated Learning, although CLIL is an approach originally and still mainly meant for teaching foreign languages.

To sum up, driven by interested stakeholders, the Estonian programme has proven to be a well-functioning, research-based mechanism that has paid off all the investments in textbooks and in-service training (Mehisto, 2015b). In a situation with decreasing numbers of students and merging schools,[14] immersion can be a good pedagogical solution for teaching minority students the official language as well as a means of ensuring their social and cultural integration. The voluntary nature of the programme and the possibility to return to 40 % of subjects in Russian in upper secondary school create additional appeal. Importantly, the project also presupposes the support of Estonian-language schools in those geographic areas where the titulars are in the minority (Mehisto, 2015a). Evidently, the sustainable Estonian variant of immersion fulfils the criteria posed by Spolsky's conceptualisation, with the demand for linguistic competence satisfied without threat to ethnic identity.

Latvian Transitional Bilingualism

Despite the similarity of the Estonian and Latvian situations, there is a significant difference in the voiced concerns. Thus, whereas in Estonia, the establishment of the immersion programme as well as the overall transition to Estonian-medium education and the integration of Russian-speakers into Estonian society have been conceptualised as central security topics (Mehisto, 2015a; Siiner & L'nyavskiy-Ekelund, 2016, p. 26), Latvia's emphasis has always been on protecting national identity. Although the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021–2027 views the strength of the nation as lying in 'the richness of the Latvian language and people's knowledge of other languages' (p. 5), with the Latvian state ensuring 'the right to self-determination of the Latvian people' (p. 8), nevertheless nearly all measures directed at language learning at school have been meant to strengthen the national identity.

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[14] See one such example given by the media portal Re:Baltica (Mihelson, 2019).

In Latvia, bilingual education for the minority population started in the 1990s (Lazdiņa, 2015, p. 8). With the Latvian language defined as fundamental for an integrated society (NDP, 2020, p. 77), transitional bilingual education can never have the additive character of French immersion. In view of the global linguistic competition, strengthening the Latvian language and raising its prestige are paramount and definitory for language management. The 2004 education reform for minority schools to transit to the 60 to 40 model, i.e., to teach up to 60 % of the subjects in Latvian and up to 40 % in Russian, was subject to protest and debate but was implemented notwithstanding. The amendment to the General Education Law adopted on 2 April 2018 made primary schools provide 50 % of subjects in the mother tongue and made lower secondary school transition to an 80/20 model. From the 2021–2022 academic year, in forms 10–12 (i.e., in upper-secondary education), all subjects except minority language, culture and history, were to be taught in Latvian, thus, concluding the transition (Laganovskis, 2019).

To sum up, the Latvian version of transitional bilingualism seems to have nearly grown into submersion, and its slow acceptance could easily be explained by the lack of 'reciprocal co-evolution'[15] at societal as well as systemic and institutional levels. Highly unpopular among minorities, in fact, both Latvian and Estonian bilingual models for mainstream education have neither been sufficiently promoted nor supported by continuous education research, thus, undermining the systematicity of the reform. Whereas in French immersion programmes the role of pedagogical support has always been perceived as important, recognised as crucial for further success, and generally present (Dicks & Genesee, 2017), the lack of pedagogical skills for teaching in Russian minority schools is an often-heard complaint, although it is a topic for different research.

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[15] 'Reciprocal co-evolution is a process where stakeholders, their understandings, actions, and the forces they are subject to and influence, and the mechanisms stakeholders produce, all evolve in response to one another and in response to other external stimuli' (Mehisto, 2015b, p. xxi).

Plurilingual Education and English as a Threat

Whereas the intricacies of sociolinguistic situation and identity working have received lavish attention, globalisation and 'the consequent tidal wave of English' (Spolsky, 2004, p. 220) have not been examined. This section will briefly discuss the response of the Baltic states to the growing role of English and concerns in respect of the EU policy of multilingualism.

With a view to the ambitious linguistic agenda of the European Union, which is 'that, by 2025, all young Europeans finishing upper secondary education [should] have a good knowledge of two languages, in addition to their mother tongue(s)' (European Commission, 2017, p. 13), it is appropriate to look at the applicability of immersion programmes for promoting foreign language learning in the Baltics. Despite the potential of choosing any European language, in reality, it is mainly English which is taken as the first foreign language.[16] Although in the public consciousness the notion of bilingual education is still generally linked to learning Latvian, CLIL started playing a prominent role in foreign language teaching at Latvian schools (Lapinska, 2015). Introduced in 2011, the advanced methodology of content and language integrated learning is occasionally paralleled with immersion, particularly for its attractiveness in view of the European policy of multilingualism. In Estonia, the parallel between CLIL and immersion is evident in the involvement of immersion specialists in the development and promotion of CLIL programmes.[17] Furthermore, it is CLIL methodology that is used to teach migrants the Latvian language. Here, the openness and readiness to experiment with language education only points at the composite, layered nature of minorities as in Latvia so in other Baltic states.

CLIL can also be found in higher education, where due to rampant internationalisation and general population decline, universities in the Baltics turned to English instruction. However,

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[16] Due to accelerating internationalisation, English becomes the only foreign language in the tertiary education.

[17] A recent example is sharing best practices of remote learning in CLIL within the Estonian initiative Education Nation at https://www.hm.ee/en /news/estonia-shares-its-best-practices-remote-learning-clil

the more programmes are taught through English, the less attention is paid to furthering students' language skills, and presently the CLIL approach has been practically ousted by English Medium Instruction. In any case, university programmes have a strong focus on content and pay close to no attention to language, thus, they are not to be discussed in the given framework of bilingual education.

Overall, globalisation and global migration problematise the nation state paradigm and native speakerism. In view of naturally proliferating multilingualism, mainstream education should respond and introduce corrections to the existing bilingual models. In the context of the 21st century, more voices are discussing the need for a new, translanguaging pedagogy, a pedagogy that moves away from one-language-at-a-time monolingual focus and treats the learning environment as an open multilingual space (Cummins, 2021; Kalan, 2021; Wei, 2018), thus achieving the leap from bi-/multilingualism to effective plurilingualism. Plurilingual and pluricultural competence, that is, the expression of multilingualism at the individual level, is actively researched in Quebec, advocated by the European Council and integrated in the Common European Framework of Reference. One thing is clear, however, and it is that in the existing system of language policies, the *de juro* move towards integrating plurilingualism into mainstream education seems to be equally problematic in both Quebec and the Baltic states.

Concerning immersion, being a form of additive bilingualism and for many decades used to challenge submersion programmes, the approach will stay though significantly enriched by translanguaging theory. Whether the term will remain or fall victim to criticism and modernisation and become bilingual education history is to be seen in the next decade.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding the demonstrated effectiveness of immersion programmes as an approach to learning L2, they are complex to implement in second-language education, as language management, part of language policy, is much affected by the sociolinguistic

situation, the definition of national identity, globalisation, and the understanding of human rights (Spolsky, 2004).

Whereas Canada's federal language policy is multilingual, at the provincial level, provision may differ, something that is reflected in language education, immersion included. Whereas French immersion in Quebec has a credible record of raising bilinguals, for English Canada, the same approach is less effective. At the same time, there are no English immersion programmes, which points to the unequal status and current position of English and French in Canada.

In the Baltics, language issues rise from the collective memory, and diversity is often seen as a threat rather than an opportunity, most immediately when it concerns Russian-language minorities. In view of the declining populations, Baltic policies as well as academic discourse frequently position their national languages as international minorities requiring protection. Additionally, the Russian threat, always lurking close by, motivates much of Latvian and Estonian language management. The focus of national-level documents on explicit ideologies is translated into ethno-centric approaches to language in education, with Estonian policies to protect, promote and develop Estonian, and Latvian polices to strengthen and maintain the position of Latvian both at home and abroad. In view of their large minority populations, language management occasionally clashes with the EU orientation towards multilingualism. Despite apparent similarities, there are significant differences in the types of bilingual education model employed, the way they are implemented and how change is administered.

The success of any programme, bilingualism included, depends on the support of its stakeholders. Thus, in the case of bilingual education, the teacher should be both bilingual (speaking at least two languages) and qualified to teach bilingually. The latter might be one of the reasons for the negative response to the transitional bilingual programmes for the minority schools in Latvia and Estonia, the failure becoming especially apparent when compared with the positive experience of immersion in the latter country. As '[t]he quality and the depth of education reform implementation strongly depend on whether all actors

accept this new wave' (Khavenson, 2018, p. 99), another negative aspect arising from the Baltic experience is insufficient communication with minority parents, who feel threatened by 'early exit' in the Latvian bilingual model, incompetence of teachers and assimilation rhetoric. Their apprehensions are not dissimilar to those experienced by Anglophones in Quebec in view of the newly proposed Bill 96.

Quebec French, Estonian, and Latvians are facing the challenge of withstanding the tidal wave of English, although the degree and immediacy of danger are different. With more than half a century of immersion education and research, the experience of calling into question monolingual instructional approaches could be enriched and adapted into dynamic models of multilingualism. At this new stage, not only an appropriation of the Canadian experience, but also collaborative research with the participation of the Baltic countries, seem to be promising.

Post scriptum

The study of language immersion and success of its application is linked to the discussion of language policy. While the development of a workable policy is proverbially difficult, its further implementation is commonly affected by various non-linguistic forces. 2022 became a year when both Estonia and Latvia took the last legal steps towards state-language education. Whereas the seemingly gradual transition to Estonian as a language of instruction will start in 2024 and will be completed by the beginning of the 2029/2030 academic year, the amendments to Latvian education laws are part of a wider de-Russification effort after the Russian invasion to Ukraine, with Latvian becoming the only language of schooling by September 2025. The change seems to put closure on the history of Russian bilingual education in the Baltics.

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