

Rearranging the Puzzle of Linguistic Diversity: Cases of Poland and Latvia

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The long 19th century in Eastern Europe saw intense nation-building efforts clashing with colonization policies of powers like Russia and Prussia, with their languages playing critical roles (Kamusella 2009). The year 1918 marked a significant shift as Central and North-Eastern Europe gained independence, transforming their landscapes and new polities. Poland and Latvia are key examples, reconstructing their national frameworks based on historical multilingualism, including regional and ethnic dimensions (Kamusella, Nomachi & Gibson 2017).

In the 1920s, managing linguistic diversity led to 'internal colonialism.' Standard Polish and Latvian became central in maintaining control within these new nation-states. Over two decades, these countries moved from democratic pluralism to authoritarian unitarism, altering their approach to multilingualism. Post-World War II, Latvia faced over 40 years of Sovietization and Russification (Krauze 2014, Druviete 2023, Fran 2023), while Poland continued internal colonization and cultural unification despite relative autonomy.

Traditional multilingual structures eroded, marginalizing minority languages and communities. Since the 1990s, political independence has often reinforced ethno-linguistic assimilation policies, responding to both real and perceived colonization threats against Polish- and Latvian-speaking majorities (Marten, Šuplinska & Lazdiņa 2009, Wicherkiewicz 2023/2024, Nau[a] 2023). A narrative promoting a monocultural ideal centered around national capitals emerged, using national languages to forcibly construct unity. Over time, these narratives became authoritative tools for addressing linguistic matters, historical narratives, and group identities.

This proposed paper aims to critically analyze how Poland's and Latvia's language policies have shaped dominant ethno-linguistic cores within their nation-states (Petit & Le Feuvre 2007). It will focus on recent efforts to revive past multilingualism (Walkowiak & Wicherkiewicz 2019, Gibson 2016). To illustrate the evolving socio-political discourse on multilingualism and diversity in Poland and Latvia, the paper will scrutinize recent revitalization movements of "regional," "minority" languages, and "dialects" (Olko, Borges & Wicherkiewicz 2016).

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