



# Language Attitudes and Ethnic Identity: Examining Listener Perceptions of Latvian-Russian Bilingual Speakers

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the attitudes of ethnic Latvian listeners towards Latvian–Russian bilinguals. Fifty-seven ethnic Latvians completed an identity questionnaire to obtain estimates of their ethnic beliefs and rated the speech of eight Latvian–Russian bilinguals for personal traits, judged how well social and ethnic labels apply to bilinguals, and expressed behavioral choices based on their experience with bilinguals’ speech. Listeners generally categorized speakers in linguistic terms, rather than by ethnicity, downgrading only ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian in ratings of honesty (solidarity) and education (status), but upgrading the same speakers in terms of listener preference for these speakers as potential entrepreneurs. Listeners’ own identity beliefs were moderately associated with their ratings, but only for the evaluations of ethnic Russians speaking Russian. These findings provide insights into Latvian–Russian bilingualism, implicating several processes underlying language attitudes, stemming from the current ethnolinguistic context of Latvia and also potentially from listeners’ difficulty processing low-proficiency speakers.

## KEYWORDS

Ethnic identity; language attitudes; Latvian–Russian bilinguals; pronunciation

## Introduction

It is common knowledge that language exerts a powerful influence on how people evaluate others. Research on language attitudes has shown that listeners ascribe evaluative judgments to speakers based on the way they speak, with such judgments linked to distinct linguistic features of speakers’ language production (Giles & Rakić, 2014). Not surprisingly, speakers of non-standard language varieties (e.g., users of regional dialects and non-native speakers), including language users in bilingual and multilingual settings, frequently become targets of evaluative judgments, often negative, because their speech patterns differ perceptibly from those of the majority groups (Dragojevic, Gasiorek, & Giles, 2016). In a broad sense, language attitudes reflect not just listeners’ assessments of individual speakers, they also seem to capture socially constructed biases at the level of groups and societies (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). This makes research into language attitudes particularly useful as a way of documenting social and linguistic dimensions of language use. The goal of the present study was therefore to extend research on language attitudes to the bilingual (Latvian–Russian) setting of Latvia—where the majority group of 1,216,443 ethnic Latvians coexists with a minority group of Russian speakers (615,008) largely composed of ethnic Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2016)—to generate a picture of current linguistic attitudes in a context of substantial sociopolitical change after the 1991 restoration of Latvia’s independence. The chief objective was to document ethnic Latvian listeners’ attitudes towards bilingual speakers of Russian and Latvian as a function of listeners’ own ethnic identity beliefs, 25 years after Latvian regained its official language status.

## Literature review

### *Linguistic attitudes towards L2 speakers*

To affirm their membership in particular social groups, people commonly compare themselves to others, with such comparisons based on linguistic factors. In fact, language—most notably, segmental and suprasegmental characteristics of speech contributing to listener perceptions of a speaker's accent—appear to be key criteria used by people to evaluate others (Giles & Watson, 2013). In other words, people exploit variations in speech to make inferences about other speakers' social groups and to attribute (often stereotypical) judgments to these speakers and their groups. For example, members of a majority language group often ascribe negative judgments to second language (L2) speakers, judging those with heavy accents to be less intelligent and competent or rating them as being less friendly and honest (Cargile & Giles, 1998; Lindemann, 2003). Faced with negative judgments from the majority language group, L2 speakers frequently feel stigmatized and express weaker affiliation to the host country, with stronger accents linked to the perception of being an outsider (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

Negative, stereotypical attitudes and biases towards L2 speakers can be conceptualized within multiple theoretical frameworks, including social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles & Johnson, 1981), communication accommodation theory (Dragojevic et al., 2016), and the intergroup communication and acculturation model (Bourhis, Sioufi, & Sachdev, 2012). While the focus of each framework varies—in terms of analyzing communication at the level of individuals, groups, and even societies—these views generally overlap in their predictions. When people regard each other in terms of social and group identities, as opposed to considering each other as individuals with person-specific characteristics, they tend to emphasize similarities within groups and enhance (perceived) differences across them.

Although this study was not designed as a test of any theoretical position, these interrelated frameworks provide a conceptual backdrop for this dataset. To illustrate, according to the communication accommodation theory (Dragojevic et al., 2016), members of a particular group (often defined in ethnic terms)—especially those who view language as a core aspect of their identity—might emphasize intergroup distinctions during communicative encounters with members of other ethnic groups through engaging in non-accommodative behaviors, for example, by switching to their ethnic language, sounding more accented (thus clearly marking their origins), or by using vernacular, dialect-specific phonetic or lexical features in their speech. More importantly, these non-accommodative behaviours would be accompanied by people making negative evaluations about their interlocutors or attributing stereotypical judgments to them (Soliz & Giles, 2014), with such evaluations and judgments often patterning along the dimensions of status, which includes such traits as intelligence and competence, and solidarity, which comprises such characteristics as generosity and friendliness.

Judgments of speaker status appear to be based on listener perception of the socioeconomic power attached to the majority group and their language, which is usually a standard language variety (Fuentes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert, & Giles, 2012). Because the majority group's language is often linked to the socioeconomic dominance of this group, speakers of non-standard varieties (including L2 speakers) are frequently perceived as having lower status, relative to the majority speakers of the target variety (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Judgments of speaker solidarity seem to represent the perceived loyalty of group members' towards the group (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). With some exceptions (Fuentes et al., 2012), L2 speakers are generally also downgraded on solidarity, compared to the majority speakers of the target variety, indicating that L2 speakers are perceived as outsiders (Dragojevic et al., 2016).

### *Ethnic identity and language attitudes*

Negative stereotyping is particularly important in theoretical frameworks which posit strong links between language and speakers' ethnic identity (Giles & Johnson, 1981). Ethnic identity can be broadly defined as the subjective experience of being part of an ethnic group (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004), which encompasses the feelings, experiences, and behaviors determining how people position themselves as

members of a group with shared culture and language. Ethnic identity—a key variable targeted here—is tied to attitudes because a speaker’s accent evinces not just evaluative judgments but also acts as a cue to a speaker’s ethnic identity (Hogg, 2006), such that perceived outsiders to an ethnic group (e.g., those speaking with distinct accents) are disliked, downgraded in ratings, or discriminated against.

The strength of people’s in-group identification appears to moderate their negative attitudes towards speakers of non-standard varieties (including L2 speakers). For instance, Giles (1971) compared British schoolchildren’s ratings for six regional varieties of British English, including the Southern Standard variety assumed to hold the superior status. Children’s ratings of speech pleasantness, prestige, and their comfort of interacting with each speaker depended on the measure of ethnocentrism (preference for one’s own group). Compared to children with weaker ethnocentrism beliefs, those with stronger beliefs generally provided lower ratings but also judged the Southern Standard accent more favorably. More recently, Neuliep and Speten-Hansen (2013) reported that a video narrated by an L2 speaker, unlike the same video narrated by a native speaker, yielded negative judgments of the speaker’s physical and social attractiveness, his ability to accomplish the speaking task, his credibility, and character, with harsher judgments provided by participants with stronger ethnic beliefs. Similarly, Hansen and Dovidio (2016) showed that listeners’ ethnic biases were predictive of their judgments of L2 speakers’ employability, such that more biased listeners were less likely to provide hiring recommendations. Based on these findings, research into language attitudes needs to consider listeners’ ethnic identity as a moderating factor.

### ***Sociolinguistic context of Latvia***

The sociolinguistic context of Latvia appears to be particularly relevant to extending work on language attitudes as a function of listeners’ own ethnic beliefs, especially because (to our knowledge) there has been no research into language attitudes towards bilingual speakers in this setting (but see Austers, 2002, for research on value judgments). Latvia is a bilingual context where the majority group of 1,216,443 ethnic Latvians coexists with a group of minority Russian language speakers (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2016), largely composed of ethnic Russians (504,370 or 25.6% of the total population), Belarusians (65,999 or 3.4%), and Ukrainians (44,639 or 2.3%). Although the language proficiency of individual speakers varies, most ethnic Latvians (60–100%) have some knowledge of Russian, and many Russian speakers (60–80%, especially young persons) speak and understand Latvian (Djackova, 2011; Zepa, Žabko, & Vaivode, 2008). For instance, in a review of the education policies in Latvia between 1999 and 2008, Dilāns and Zepa (2015) concluded that 73% of minority school students reported intermediate or high levels of Latvian proficiency in 2008, a significant increase from 1999. In the 25 years after the 1991 restoration of Latvia’s independence, the country has witnessed considerable socio-political tensions surrounding language. Primarily, these relate to the status of minority Russian speakers, many of whom are among the 232,143 legal aliens, or 12% of the total population (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2016), with residency rights but no citizenship and no voting rights (Schmid, 2008), and to the ongoing minority education reform to transition all ethnically Russian schools to Latvian, which has sparked fierce debates (Hogan-Brun, 2006).

In essence, the linguistic landscape of Latvia has been shaped by state policies encouraging Russian speakers to assimilate to the majority language and culture (Hogan-Brun, Ozolins, Ramonienē, & Rannut, 2008), with at least some legislation being at odds with the European Union statutes on protection of minorities, such as the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Duina & Miani, 2015), and individual speakers’ rights to use their ethnic language (Pavlenko, 2011). Despite periodic linguistic tensions, however, post-1991 surveys have shown that Russian speakers, especially young adults, demonstrate an increased level of motivation to acquire Latvian, accompanied by improved actual competence (Priedīte, 2005; Zepa et al., 2008). For instance, in a 2002–2007 comparison of ethnic Russian adolescents, Cara (2010) showed that over time, adolescents reported higher Latvian proficiency and demonstrated positive attitudes towards linguistic integration (preserving Russian while acquiring Latvian), while also increasingly choosing “Latvian” as an ethnic label and “Latvian citizen” (rather than “non-citizen”) as their official status. While these findings of Russian speakers’ linguistic integration are encouraging, it is

unknown whether Russian–Latvian bilingualism attracts positive attitudes from members of the ethnic majority.

## The current study

Research into linguistic attitudes suggests that L2 speakers (who typically represent minority language groups) are often the targets of negative stereotyping by members of social and linguistic majority groups and that stereotyping likely reflects socially constructed biases, leading to potential alienation and stigmatization of L2 speakers. Moreover, negative attitudes are often moderated by listeners' own ethnic beliefs, in the sense that stronger ethnic beliefs correspond to more negative attitudes. Set against this backdrop, this study explored the attitudes that ethnic Latvians express towards Latvian–Russian bilingual speakers in Latvia, with the assumption that language attitudes create social landscapes that can help or hinder bilingual language learning and use (Giles, Katz, & Myers, 2006). In particular, the study elicited ethnic Latvian listeners' attitudinal judgments about bilingual speakers, in terms of status (e.g., capable, intelligent) and solidarity (e.g., honest, kind) traits, targeted ethnic Latvian listeners' reactions about how well social and ethnic labels apply to bilingual speakers (e.g., Latvian, immigrant, alien), and examined the listeners' behavioral preferences based on their experience with bilinguals' speech (e.g., I would choose this speaker as a politician). The listeners also completed an ethnic identity questionnaire to obtain estimates of their ethnic beliefs. It was expected that ethnic Latvians' language attitudes would generally reflect positive dispositions towards increased Latvian proficiency documented for ethnic Russian speakers, especially young persons. It was also anticipated that ethnic Latvians' attitudes towards bilinguals would depend on the strength of their ethnic beliefs. The study addressed the following questions:

- (1) How do ethnic Latvian listeners evaluate Latvian–Russian bilinguals using their two languages along status, solidarity, ethnic, social, and behavioral dimensions?
- (2) How do the listeners' own ethnic identity beliefs relate to their evaluations of the bilingual speakers?

## Methodology

### Participants

Fifty-seven ethnic Latvians (23 females, 34 males) participated as listeners. The listeners, all born and raised in monolingual Latvian-speaking households, had resided in Latvia since birth and received primary and secondary education in Latvian. They were university students ( $M_{age} = 24.3$  years,  $SD = 5.9$ ) in various undergraduate (35) or graduate (22) programs at the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies: forestry (22), social sciences (12), economics (10), information technology (8), and engineering (5). They were recruited through announcements in their L2 English courses inviting them to participate in a language study. When asked to rate (in Latvian) how well-specific labels describe them on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *perfectly*), the listeners clearly preferred the “Latvian citizen” ( $M = 8.9$ ,  $SD = 0.1$ ), “Latvian resident” ( $M = 8.8$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ), and “Latvian” ( $M = 8.7$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ) labels to the “European” ( $M = 6.4$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ), “Russian from Latvia” ( $M = 1.5$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ), “Russian” ( $M = 1.4$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ), and “Immigrant” ( $M = 1.0$ ,  $SD = 0.3$ ) labels. Using a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *perfectly*), the listeners provided high ratings of their ability to speak ( $M = 8.7$ ,  $SD = 0.5$ ) and understand ( $M = 8.9$ ,  $SD = 0.3$ ) Latvian and estimated using Latvian frequently ( $M = 88.4\%$ ,  $SD = 16.0$ ). All listeners also reported knowledge of Russian, providing fairly high estimates of their ability to speak ( $M = 6.0$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ) and understand ( $M = 6.9$ ,  $SD = 1.9$ ) this language, and reported using some Russian daily ( $M = 25.1\%$ ,  $SD = 22.8$ ). The listeners also reported varying degrees of knowledge of additional languages, including English (53), French (4), German (9), Italian, Spanish, Swedish, and Latin (1 each).

## Speech materials

The target audio samples evaluated by the listeners included speech from eight Latvian–Russian bilingual speakers. Four speakers were ethnic Latvians (i.e., born and raised in ethnic Latvian families) while the remaining four were ethnic Russians (i.e., born and raised in ethnic Russian families). All speakers (19–24 years) were female (to control for gender effects) and were selected from the sample of 38 students drawn from the same university population, following the same recruitment procedures. All speakers recorded brief narratives in both Latvian and Russian (with the language of the first and second recording counter-balanced across speakers) in response to an eight-panel picture story describing two passers-by who ran into each other at a busy intersection and inadvertently took each other’s similar-looking suitcases (Derwing, Rossiter, Munro, & Thomson, 2004). The speech samples were recorded in individual sessions in a quiet classroom using digital recorders, and the speakers were given a few minutes to familiarize themselves with the picture story before providing their description.

To obtain listener-based estimates of the speakers’ Latvian and Russian-speaking ability, the recordings were first presented to 20 raters, separate from the group of 57 ethnic Latvian listeners. Ten ethnic Latvian raters heard the recordings in Latvian (8 female, 2 male;  $M_{age} = 39.5$  years,  $range = 22–58$ ), while the corresponding recordings in Russian were presented to 10 ethnic Russian raters (9 female, 1 male;  $M_{age} = 30.2$  years,  $range = 20–55$ ). The raters used 9-point Likert scales to evaluate the speakers for accentedness (1 = *strong accent*, 9 = *no accent*), comprehensibility (1 = *difficult to understand*, 9 = *easy to understand*), fluency (1 = *speaks slowly, with undue pausing and hesitations*, 9 = *speaks fluidly, without unnecessary pausing and hesitations*), and global ability (1 = *does not know the language*, 9 = *knows the language perfectly*). The eight target speakers were selected based on the obtained ratings, such that there were four native speakers of each ethnic language, with two speakers being high-level speakers of their respective L2 and two speakers being low-level speakers of their respective L2. As illustrated in Table 1, the eight speakers could be categorized into six groups (or speech guises): (a) ethnic Latvians speaking Latvian (four speakers), (b) ethnic Russians speaking high-level Latvian (two speakers), (c) ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian (two speakers), (d) ethnic Latvians speaking low-level Russian (two speakers), (e) ethnic Latvians speaking high-level Russian (two speakers), and (f) ethnic Russians speaking Russian (four speakers). Thus, the four speakers using their ethnic language (i.e., Latvian or Russian guises) had comparable high speech ratings (7.0–9.0), while the two sets of speakers using their L2 (i.e., high- or low-level Russian or Latvian guises) differed in their speech ratings depending on their skill level, with high-level speakers receiving high evaluations (around 7.0–8.0) and low-level speakers receiving low evaluations (around 4.0–6.0).

To further confirm that the selected speech samples exemplified varying levels of L2 performance perceptible to a listener, the samples were coded by a balanced Latvian–Russian bilingual with training in applied linguistics. The coder evaluated the narratives broadly for pronunciation errors, defined as vowel and consonant substitutions, insertions, or deletions, wrong vowel quantity (short vs. long vowels), and incorrect or missing lexical stress (Dilāns, 2016). There was a difference between the two ethnic Latvians speaking high-level Russian (errors = 0) and the two ethnic

**Table 1.** Mean listener-based ratings (1–9 scales) for the eight bilingual speakers in the Latvian and Russian guises.

Speaker	Latvian guise				Russian guise			
	Accent	Comp.	Fluency	Global	Accent	Comp.	Fluency	Global
Ethnic Latvians								
1. Low Russian	8.5	8.1	6.7	7.9	4.3	5.5	5.7	5.7
2. Low Russian	8.2	8.0	8.0	8.2	4.6	6.5	5.6	5.6
3. High Russian	7.1	7.9	7.5	7.9	7.0	7.5	7.4	7.1
4. High Russian	8.0	7.8	7.0	8.0	6.6	7.0	6.6	6.7
Ethnic Russians								
5. Low Latvian	5.0	6.1	5.0	6.1	8.9	8.7	7.6	8.0
6. Low Latvian	6.3	6.9	5.1	6.8	9.0	8.9	8.7	8.8
7. High Latvian	8.6	8.3	8.0	8.5	8.4	8.6	7.4	7.8
8. High Latvian	8.0	8.1	7.9	8.1	8.6	8.7	8.2	8.3

Comp. = comprehensibility.

Latvians speaking low-level Russian (errors = 7). Similarly, there was a difference between the two ethnic Russians speaking high-level Latvian (errors = 0) and the two ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian (errors = 6). Typical errors in L2 Latvian included wrong vowel quantity (*tālāk* “forwards” and *pilsētā* “in the city” produced with short instead of long vowels), while typical errors in L2 Russian included lack of vowel reduction (*головами* “with their heads” spoken with insufficiently reduced vowels) and lack of word-final consonant devoicing (*город* “city” produced with a voiced stop). The narratives also differed in the information density and narrative structure (see the IRIS Repository at <https://www.iris-database.org>), with low-level speakers producing more truncated, uncoordinated, and simple verb phrases separated by pausing, compared to coordinated structures featuring various tense and aspect forms used by high-level speakers. Thus, although a small dataset ( $n = 2$  per cell) did not allow for statistical analyses to confirm speaker grouping, descriptive coding of the narratives largely supported the linguistic distinctions across the six speaker groups (guises) obtained through the ratings (Table 1).

The 16 target recordings from the eight speakers (where each speaker contributed a Latvian and a Russian narrative) were prepared for presentation to listeners by shortening each file to include approximately the first 20 seconds of each narrative, with initial disfluencies (a filled or unfilled pause) removed to increase the comparability of files in length and content and to prevent speakers from being penalized by listeners for hesitating (or thinking) before starting to speak. Apart from these small edits, the recordings remained unedited and represented extemporaneous speech. Focusing on the initial excerpts, which is consistent with the current practice (Derwing & Munro, 2013), also ensured that the narrative structure of the recordings was comparable (i.e., all speakers started by describing the first of eight ordered images), which may not have been possible if speech samples had been extracted from the middle of the narratives. In terms of length, the eight Latvian recordings ( $M_{length} = 20.2$  seconds,  $SD = 1.9$ ) and the eight Russian recordings ( $M_{length} = 20.4$  seconds,  $SD = 0.9$ ) were representative of 20–30-second audio clips typically evaluated by listeners in L2 speech research. For example, reliable ratings have been reported for samples as short as 4.5–10.5 seconds in duration, with a mean of 7.0 seconds (Derwing & Munro, 1997). Moreover, Nagle, Trofimovich, and Bergeron (2019) recently showed that listeners required about 20 seconds of experience to provide a rating, so the sample length in this study appeared adequate based on this estimate.

The 16 target recordings were then prepared for presentation to the listeners, with the recordings organized in two randomized lists and one filler narrative in Russian and one filler narrative in Latvian inserted at the beginning and end of the sequence, for a total of 18 recordings. From the perspective of the listener, then, each sequence sounded as though it included the speech of 18 different people instead of only 10 (eight speakers providing narratives in two languages, plus two distracter speakers).

### Rating procedure

The listeners were tested in small groups in university classrooms. They were asked to use several scales to listen to and rate different female speakers of Russian and Latvian narrating the same picture story and were shown the picture prompt. All written instruments were in Latvian. The rating instrument (available via IRIS) included 20 statements grouped into three categories: (a) seven statements targeting speakers’ social and ethnic belonging (i.e., This woman is ... Latvian, European, immigrant, Latvian citizen, Latvian resident, alien, Russian), (b) seven statements targeting the speakers’ status and solidarity traits (i.e., This woman is ... honest, educated, sophisticated, trustworthy, kind, capable, intelligent), and (c) six statements targeting listeners’ behavioural choices based on their experience with the speakers’ speech (i.e., I would choose this woman as a ... friend, colleague, politician, spouse for myself or my child, teacher, entrepreneur). Each statement was accompanied by a 9-point scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 9 = *completely agree*), and the listeners indicated their agreement with each statement based on their experience with each recording. After completing two practice files, the listeners proceeded to rate each speaker after listening to

each recording once. The timing of audio presentation was controlled by the researcher, to allow for sufficient time to complete the ratings. The listeners took an average 30–45 s per speaker, before the next file was played.

After completing the ratings, the listeners filled out a language background questionnaire eliciting their demographic information and their language background. They then proceeded to complete an ethnic identity questionnaire targeting the strength of their ethnic beliefs. The questionnaire (available via IRIS), which was adapted from a longer instrument developed by Gatbonton and Trofimovich (2008), contained 28 statements focusing on various aspects of ethnic identity, including people's knowledge, pride, loyalty, and support for their ethnic group. The listeners indicated the degree of their agreement to each statement using a 9-point scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 9 = *completely agree*). The entire testing session took 20–30 min.

### Data analysis

All listener ratings in response to the three sets of rated variables were first checked for internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), with reliability indexes exceeding the benchmark values of .70–.80 (Larson-Hall, 2009):  $\alpha = .98$  for the seven statements targeting speakers' social and ethnic belonging,  $\alpha = .79$  for the seven statements targeting the speakers' personal characteristics, and  $\alpha = .90$  for the six statements targeting listeners' behavioural choices in response to the speakers' speech. Therefore, individual scores were derived for each listener, separately per rated statement, by averaging across the ratings provided to all speakers contributing to each of the six guises: (a) ethnic Latvians speaking Latvian, (b) ethnic Russians speaking high-level Latvian, (c) ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian, (d) ethnic Latvians speaking low-level Russian, (e) ethnic Latvians speaking high-level Russian, and (f) ethnic Russians speaking Russian. The reliability for the listeners' responses to the ethnic identity questionnaire ranged between .65 and .88, as revealed through the Principal Component Analysis discussed below (see Table 2).

## Results

### Listener ratings of bilingual speakers

The first analysis targeted the first research question, which focused on the dimensions used by the ethnic Latvians to evaluate bilingual Latvian–Russian speakers using their two languages. Three separate discriminant analyses were carried out: (a) one for the seven rated variables targeting speakers' social and ethnic belonging, (b) one for the seven rated variables targeting speakers' status and solidarity traits, and (c) one for the six rated variables targeting listeners' behavioural choices. Discriminant analysis was deemed to be particularly useful for analyzing multiple rated dimensions because it uses combinations of several dependent variables (multiple ratings) to allow for separation or discrimination between groups (Field, 2009), which in this case corresponds to the six speech guises—bilingual speakers (ethnic Latvians or Russians) speaking Latvian or Russian. Thus, discriminant analysis was preferred over multiple univariate or multivariate analyses of variance because of its ability to examine whether the listeners could distinguish the speakers through three sets of dependent variables (ratings).

### Social and ethnic belonging

The first discriminant analysis examined the extent to which the listeners could differentiate the speakers through judgments of speakers' social and ethnic belonging (i.e., This woman is ... Latvian, European, immigrant, Latvian citizen, Latvian resident, alien, Russian). This analysis revealed two discriminant functions differentiating the speakers. The first function explained 74.1% of variance (canonical  $R^2 = .38$ ),  $\Lambda = .51$ ,  $\chi^2(20) = 303.43$ ,  $p < .0001$ , with judgments of speakers as Latvian ( $r = .88$ ) or Russian ( $r = -.83$ ) loading strongly on this function. The second function explained an additional 24.5% of unique variance (canonical  $R^2 = .17$ ),  $\Lambda = .82$ ,  $\chi^2(12) = 88.32$ ,  $p < .0001$ , with judgments of speakers as immigrant ( $r = .71$ ) and alien ( $r = .54$ ) loading on this function. In terms of the Latvian–Russian continuum, plotted along the x-axis

**Table 2.** PCA factor loadings (>.40) for listeners' responses to ethnic identity questionnaire.

Questions	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I proudly tell others that I belong to my ethnic group	.89			
I feel proud of my ethnic group	.87			
I feel proud of my ethnic group's accomplishments	.71			
Latvian is important for my personal identity	.64			
I feel proud when I see symbols of my ethnic group	.51			
I feel proud that I speak my ethnic language	.47			
Speaking Latvian defines Latvian ethnic identity		.87		
Speaking Russian defines Russian ethnic identity		.79		
Only immigrants speaking Latvian can be allowed in		.66		
Speaking ethnic language defines ethnic identity		.64		
I understand social status of my ethnic group			-.85	
I know history of my ethnic group			-.83	
I am ready to defend my ethnic group			-.78	
I use symbols showing my belonging to my ethnic group			-.74	
I am familiar with accomplishments of my ethnic group			-.63	
Latvian should be the only official language of Latvia				-.75
All children should be educated only in Latvian				-.73
Only Latvian should be used in all public spheres of life				-.45
Eigenvalue	7.55	2.24	1.53	1.06
Variance explained (%)	41.96	12.47	8.49	5.90
Reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha$ )	.88	.79	.87	.65

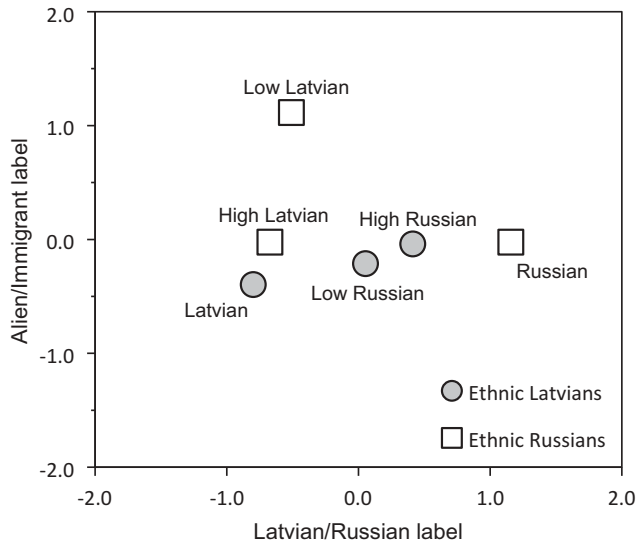
in the discriminant function plot (Figure 1), the listeners categorized the speakers based on the language they spoke (regardless of speakers' ethnicity)—from ethnic Latvians and Russians speaking Latvian (on the left) to ethnic Latvians and Russians speaking Russian (on the right). And in terms of the immigrant/alien dimension, plotted along the y-axis, the listeners singled out only the ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian as belonging to the immigrant/alien status, compared to the rest of the speakers.

**Personal characteristics.** The second discriminant analysis examined the extent to which the listeners differentiated the speakers through judgments of speakers' status and solidarity traits (i.e., This woman is ... honest, educated, sophisticated, trustworthy, kind, capable, intelligent). This analysis revealed a single discriminant function differentiating the speakers. This function, which explained 91.2% of variance (canonical  $R^2 = .10$ ),  $\Lambda = .89$ ,  $\chi^2(10) = 51.10$ ,  $p < .0001$ , was composed of two traits loading on this function—the ratings of speakers as honest ( $r = .76$ ) and educated ( $r = .99$ ). This single function is plotted along the x-axis in Figure 2, showing that the listeners distinguished only the ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian as being less honest and educated than the other speakers.

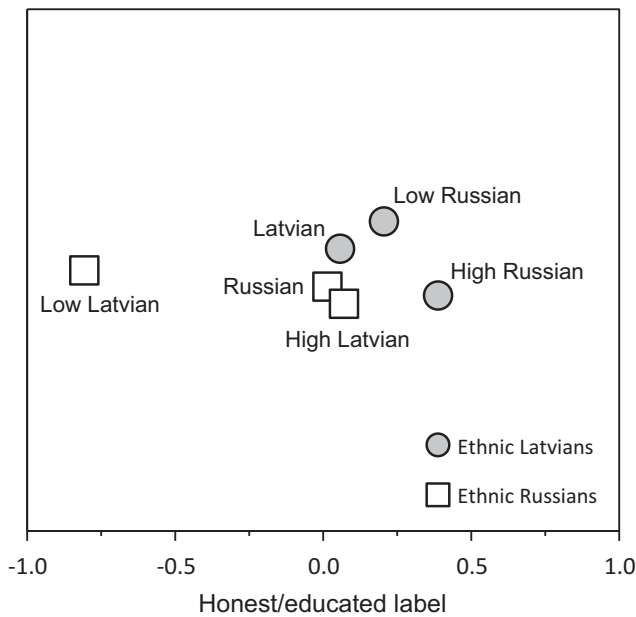
**Behavior choices.** The final discriminant analysis examined the extent to which the listeners could differentiate the bilingual speakers through listener behavioural choices (i.e., I would choose this woman as a ... friend, colleague, politician, spouse for myself or my child, teacher, entrepreneur). This analysis revealed a single discriminant function differentiating the speakers. This function explained 77.0% of variance (canonical  $R^2 = .08$ ),  $\Lambda = .51$ ,  $\chi^2(30) = 50.81$ ,  $p = .01$ , where only the choice of a speaker as an entrepreneur loaded strongly on this function ( $r = .92$ ). The function is plotted on the x-axis in Figure 3, illustrating that the listeners again singled out only the ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian, in this case as being more preferable as entrepreneurs, compared to the rest of the speakers.

### Listeners' identity beliefs and ratings of bilingual speakers

The next analyses targeted the second research question, namely, whether there were relationships between the listeners' own ethnic identity beliefs and their ratings of the bilinguals. The assumption here was that the listeners' ratings might reflect the strength of their identity beliefs. An exploratory principal component

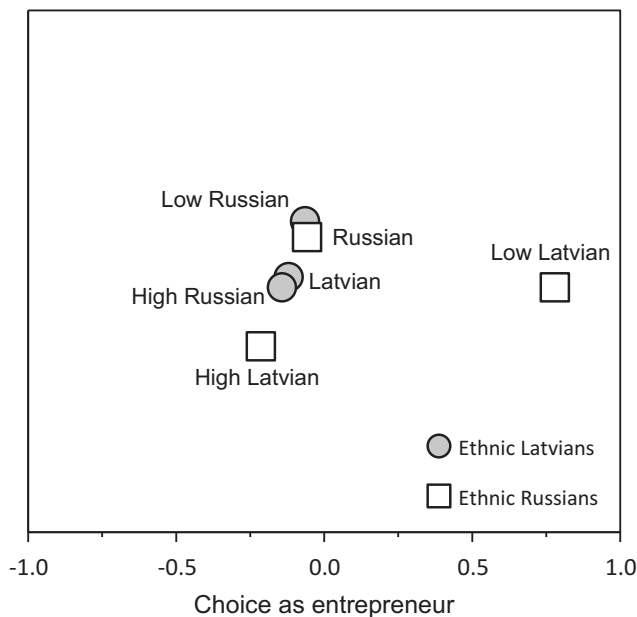


**Figure 1.** Discriminant functions for bilingual speakers rated by 57 Latvian listeners. The two dimensions most discriminating the speakers across seven labels were the target language (Latvian–Russian), plotted on the x-axis, and alien/immigrant status, plotted on the y-axis.



**Figure 2.** Discriminant functions for bilingual speakers rated by 57 Latvian listeners. The single dimension most discriminating the speakers across seven traits is the combined honest and educated ratings, plotted on the x-axis.

analysis (PCA) was conducted first as a data reduction technique to determine if the listeners’ responses to the ethnic identity questionnaire showed any underlying patterns based on their clustering. Initial data screening revealed that the listeners’ responses to 10 statements from the questionnaire revealed no correlations larger than .30 with their responses to any other statements, so the data for these 10 statements were eliminated from PCA (Field, 2009). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (.78), which exceeded the required



**Figure 3.** Discriminant functions for bilingual speakers rated by 57 Latvian listeners. The only dimension discriminating the speakers across six behaviour choices is the choice of the speaker as an entrepreneur, plotted on the x-axis.

.60 benchmark for sampling adequacy, and the significant Bartlett's test of sphericity,  $\chi^2(153) = 676.27$ ,  $p < .0001$ , suggested that remaining item correlations were sufficiently large and the correlation matrix was factorable (Field, 2009). The initial analysis revealed four factors with eigenvalues over Keiser's criterion of 1, accounting for a total of 68.82% of variance in the listeners' responses to 18 ethnic identity statements. The scree plot showed a clear discontinuity after the first four components, implying that all four factors should be retained. The factor loadings for the four retained dimensions, along with the reliability indexes (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for each component, are shown in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, Component 1, with questions targeting the listeners' pride in their ethnic group and its language, likely represented the ETHNIC PRIDE dimension of their ethnic identity. Component 2, which dealt with importance of language to ethnic identity, likely captured the LANGUAGE dimension of the listeners' ethnic identity. Component 3 appeared to deal specifically with the listeners' awareness of their ethnic group's SOCIAL STATUS, reflecting their familiarity with the group's history, symbols, and accomplishments. Finally, Component 4, with questions focusing on the official status of Latvian, likely reflected the POLITICAL STATUS dimension of the listeners' ethnic language.

The next analysis examined the relationships between the listeners' four ethnic identity components, as identified through the PCA, and their ratings of the bilingual speakers. For this analysis, the four identity components, derived as four separate factor scores (one per component) using the Anderson-Rubin method for obtaining non-correlated scores, were correlated with the four significant discriminant function scores, which included alien/immigrant and Latvian/Russian labels (Figure 1), honest/educated label (Figure 2), and choice as entrepreneur label (Figure 3), for a total of 16 correlations. These Pearson correlations (Bonferroni adjusted  $\alpha = .003$ , two-tailed) were computed separately for each set of bilingual speakers (i.e., speech guises). Only two significant relationships either exceeded or narrowly approached the benchmark for significance, and both associations obtained only for the ethnic Russians speaking Russian. The Latvian listeners with higher ETHNIC PRIDE scores tended to place ethnic Russians speaking Russian towards the Russian end of the Latvian–Russian continuum,  $r(55) = .37$ ,  $p = .005$ . Similarly, the Latvian listeners who scored higher on the POLITICAL STATUS dimension of their ethnic identity tended to give lower ratings to

ethnic Russians speaking Russian on the honest/educated dimension,  $r(55) = -.39$ ,  $p = .003$ . Correlation strength was close to the benchmark ( $r = .40$ ) for a medium-size relationship (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). Similar analyses exploring the relationships between listeners' language background variables (e.g., self-rated Russian proficiency and use) yielded no meaningful associations with listener-based discriminant scores.

## Discussion

To provide a picture of the current attitudinal landscape of Latvia, this study examined ethnic Latvians' attitudes towards Latvian–Russian bilingual speech as a function of listeners' ethnic beliefs. Latvian listeners, who represent the linguistic majority (with knowledge of the minority language), generally set apart only one group of bilingual speakers through ratings—the speech of ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian. Listeners downgraded these speakers, relative to the other bilinguals, labeling them as more likely to represent legal aliens (persons without citizenship) and immigrants (Figure 1) and providing lower ratings for the honesty (solidarity) and education (status) traits (Figure 2). However, the same ethnic Russians were evaluated more positively, compared to the other bilinguals, in terms of listener preference for these speakers as potential entrepreneurs (Figure 3). Listeners generally categorized speakers in linguistic terms, than by ethnicity, in reference to the language they spoke (from native Latvian to native Russian). And listeners' own identity beliefs were moderately associated with their ratings, but only for ethnic Russians speaking Russian, such that listeners with stronger ethnic pride were more likely to place these speakers towards the Russian end of the Latvian–Russian linguistic continuum, and listeners with stronger political views gave these speakers lower honesty and education ratings.

### *Attitudes towards Latvian–Russian bilinguals*

In line with prior research into language attitudes towards minority language speakers (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), the current findings revealed that listeners representing the Latvian majority group expressed negative attitudes towards ethnic Russians whose Latvian speech departed considerably (e.g., in accent, comprehensibility, and fluency) from that of the majority standard variety. These negative evaluations questioned the speakers' belonging to Latvia as legal residents, with these bilinguals (all born and raised in Latvia) being more likely to be labeled as non-citizens and immigrants. These negative evaluations also concerned the two key dimensions of status (educated) and solidarity (honest), suggesting that, in the context of Latvian–Russian bilingualism, the perception of accent by majority speakers is associated with attributions of lack of competence and lack of social attractiveness (Fiske et al., 2007).

The determinants of these negative evaluations may depend on multiple factors, including the extent to which the majority language is standardized, the degree of its vitality in society and the competitiveness between the relevant linguistic groups (Cargile & Giles, 1998). For instance, there has been strong support for the purity of the Latvian language from the general population (Strelēvica-Ošiņa, 2016) and through state policy, with the State Language Centre (Valsts valodas centrs, <http://vvc.gov.lv>), a structure of Latvia's Ministry of Justice, tasked with enforcing language laws and policing Latvian language use in the public domain. Ethnic Latvians might also believe that the vitality of their language might be threatened by a large ethnic minority (Ehala & Zabrodskaja, 2013) or might experience socioeconomic competitiveness from ethnic Russians (Dilāns, 2009), especially young persons who increasingly speak better Latvian (Cara, 2010). It may also be that members of the majority group may attribute a set of values to minority language speakers that may depart drastically from the values expressed by minority speakers themselves (Austers, 2002), leading to a skewed, imprecise attitudinal perspective of the majority group towards a minority group. Finally, as suggested by a reviewer, ethnic Latvians' attitudes toward bilingual speakers may have been colored by the outcomes of 2012 (failed) referendum to establish Russian as the second official language. The referendum may have cast minority groups as unwilling to assimilate to the majority

society and may have acted as a trigger event, which has led to “militant democracy measures” implemented in Latvia post-2012 (Ijabs, 2015). All these factors might have encouraged ethnic Latvians to express negative judgments towards bilinguals whose Latvian speech departed from the expected standard variety and who were clearly marked as members of the linguistic minority.

### ***Role of ethnic beliefs in language attitudes***

Based on prior research showing associations between people’s own ethnic beliefs and their (often negative) judgments towards L2 speakers (Hansen & Dovidio, 2016), it was expected that Latvian listeners’ own ethnic beliefs would influence the strength of their attitudes towards bilinguals. In terms of the composition of ethnic identity for the current listener sample, a relatively coherent four-component structure emerged, encompassing the ethnic pride, language, social, and political status dimensions of listeners’ ethnic identity (see Table 2). This structure is compatible with the identity dimensions reported in contexts with similar interethnic linguistic tensions. For instance, the identity structure for ethnic French speakers from Quebec, where the French-speaking majority coexists with English-speaking minority, also included four components: strength of identification with one’s ethnic group, feelings of pride and loyalty toward one’s group, importance of language in expressing group identity, and support for the group’s sociopolitical aspirations (Gatbonton & Trofimovich, 2008).

However, with respect to the relationship between listeners’ identity beliefs and their attitudes towards bilinguals, only two associations emerged, concerning the speech of ethnic Russians speaking Russian. These identity beliefs appeared to focus on the Russian ethnicity generally, rather than on the linguistic skills of individual speakers, implying that (for this listener sample) strong ethnic beliefs were associated with some negativity towards ethnic Russians. These results, though, departed dramatically from the general response patterns shown by the listeners in rating the speakers. For instance, when asked to judge the relevance of several ethnic labels to the speech of bilinguals, listeners seemed to interpret the two labels—Russian and Latvian—not in terms of ethnicity but rather as language descriptors. As shown in Figure 1, listener ratings reflected the bilinguals’ target language proficiency (not ethnicity), with native Latvian and native Russian emerging as the end-points of this continuum. It appears, then, that the linguistic attitudes (assessed through speaker ratings) and biases moderated by ethnic identity beliefs (evaluated through the ethnic identity questionnaire) might reflect somewhat separate judgments (see Dragojevic & Giles, 2016). That is, listeners holding strong identity beliefs might generally stereotype an ethnic group, but the same listeners (as a group) might also ascribe evaluative judgments based solely on individual speakers’ linguistic abilities. The interplay between general ethnic biases and attitudes towards particular speakers must be explored further.

### ***Various sources of language attitudes***

In terms of broader implications of these findings, it is important to understand the possible origins of language attitudes. At least one source of attitudes towards L2 speakers might stem from listeners’ expectations associated with particular speech patterns rather than the actual speech they experience (Lindemann & Subtirelu, 2013). In other words, listeners often judge speakers based on imagined or preconceived ideas rather than on actual speech. As an example, Ford (1984) showed that teachers preferred the writing samples produced by children when those samples were paired with the speech of native English speakers than when those were paired with the speech of Spanish-accented speakers, regardless of which learners actually produced written work. In this sense, at least some attitudes revealed here might have been triggered by socially constructed biases, which may or may not have basis in reality—for example, that Russian-accented speakers must be less educated (presumably because ethnic Russians are incapable of learning Latvian despite years of residing in Latvia) and less honest (on the assumption that members of other ethnic groups should not be trusted). The former idea appears to be

more grounded in reality than the latter, as the Latvian proficiency of many Russian speakers, for various reasons, has been less than advanced (Vihalemm & Hogan-Brun, 2013).

A likely candidate for expectations, not reality, driving language attitudes in this study pertains to the finding that female Russians speaking low-level Latvian were preferred over other speakers, including ethnic Latvians, as potential entrepreneurs. While ethnic Latvians have been reported to perceive Russian-speaking businesspeople as being more attractive, more willing to take risks, and more successful, compared to ethnic Latvians (Zepa et al., 2004), to our knowledge, there is no clear evidence that this is indeed the case. For example, the 2016 top 10 list of the richest Latvian business owners includes six ethnic Latvians and four ethnic Russian speakers (Atlāce-Bistere, 2016). And while it is intriguing that female speakers attracted positive ratings as potential entrepreneurs, against a popular belief that the Baltic states represent male-dominated societies, these countries are ranked low on the masculinity index in surveys of cultural dimensions of business life (Huettinger, 2008), meaning that (at least in business culture) gender roles appear to be balanced.

While language attitudes might stem from people's (often unfounded) beliefs about their interlocutors, cued by specific speech patterns, another source of attitudes might be linked to people having the subjective experience of processing difficulty when exposed to speech (Dovidio & Gluszek, 2012). In essence, people might have trouble understanding speech by certain speakers, struggling to process the message, and might therefore ascribe negative judgments to these speakers through ratings. Dragojevic and Giles (2016) recently tested the possibility that increased processing effort might be linked to listeners' attitudinal judgments. In their study, listeners evaluated the speech of American English and Punjabi-accented English in various degrees of background noise, designed to manipulate processing difficulty. Compared to stories presented in the clear, noisier speech was associated with enhanced processing effort, which in turn was tied to lower speaker evaluations (less intelligent, educated, competent, successful). Listeners might thus show negative attitudes towards speakers not only through reference to socially constructed beliefs but also, in a separate process, because they experience difficulty in understanding speech.

The negative ratings provided for ethnic Russians speaking low-level Latvian might have reflected listeners' increased processing difficulty, as these speakers were more accented and also less comprehensible and fluent than bilinguals speaking high-level Latvian (see Table 1). The processing difficulty account of language attitudes might also explain why Latvian listeners appeared to be sensitive, in their ratings, to the Latvian proficiency of bilingual speakers, such that they downgraded only the speakers of low proficiency but not those of high proficiency. In fact, Dragojevic and Giles (2016) proposed that the expectation-driven and processing-driven processes underlying language attitudes might run in parallel, sometimes amplifying each other and sometimes cancelling each other out. For instance, for ethnic Latvians, processing ease associated with the speech of ethnic Russians speaking high-level Latvian might have neutralized expectation-driven negative attitudes towards these speakers, while the increased processing burden associated with the speech of low-level speakers exacerbated their expectation-driven judgments targeting ethnic Russians. The interaction of various processes underlying language attitudes appears to be a key avenue for future research.

## Limitations

The findings of this study are accompanied by several limitations. First, with respect to the listener and speaker groups, it would be important to extend this research to male or mixed gender bilinguals (to ascertain if speakers' gender might matter) and also to bilinguals of different ages (on the assumption that attitudes might vary by generation). It would also be important to focus on ethnic Russians as listeners, to provide a comprehensive picture of attitudes towards Latvian–Russian bilingualism from the perspective of listeners from majority and minority groups, and to include listeners from various generations of minority and majority speakers with different degrees of knowledge of the other language. Second, in terms of research materials, it would be beneficial to manipulate speaking tasks, asking listeners to rate bilinguals in neutral tasks (such as a picture description) and in response to socially significant issues (such as

accommodation of recent immigrants or EU policies towards Eastern European member states). Third, with respect to listeners' linguistic profiles, it would be worthwhile to obtain more precise measures of listeners' background and language learning histories, as more sensitive instruments might reveal associations, for example, between listeners' knowledge of a minority language and their ratings of minority speakers.

This research also needs to be extended to capture broader contextual variables surrounding Latvian–Russian bilingualism. For example, people's attitudes might vary as a function of the reference group against which speakers are being evaluated (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014). For example, ethnic Latvians' attitudes might change when ethnic Russians' speech is presented for ratings in some cases along L2 Latvian speech by American or British speakers and in other cases along L2 Latvian speech by Arabic speakers. Against the backdrop of the ongoing migrant crisis in Europe, accented Russians might be perceived as members of the in-group as opposed to outsiders. Similarly, language attitudes might differ between large urban centres, where Latvian–Russian bilingualism is common, and rural areas, where local residents might not speak Russian, and attitudes might crucially depend on socioeconomic variables, such that language attitudes might clash with the monetary benefits associated with being able to accommodate Russian-speaking customers and tourists (Pavlenko, 2017).

## Conclusion

Focusing on ethnic Latvians' attitudes towards Latvian–Russian bilingual speech, this study showed that, for listeners representing the majority group, responses to bilingual speakers from a minority group evoke both positive and negative judgments but that these judgments generally patterned with the bilinguals' proficiency in the language of the majority group rather than the bilinguals' ethnicity. If these findings are in any way reflective of the current sociopolitical tensions surrounding language in Latvia, then the outlook demonstrated by these results is encouraging. It suggests that language attitudes towards minority speakers should improve as more and more speakers gain proficiency in the majority language. By considering rich contextual variables in their work, future researchers should target this and other hypotheses to reveal a nuanced picture of language attitudes towards bilingualism and multilingualism in Latvia.

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