

**”But how can you explain a language?”  
Laypersons’ Perceptions of and Attitudes to  
the Latgalian Language in Latvia**

This paper deals with my experience in gathering and interpreting data using techniques that are associated with folk linguistics, a currently emerging field within applied linguistics. The main aim of my paper is to summarize the design, the process of data collection and interpretation, and the main results of the research.

Whereas such ‘folk beliefs’ have traditionally been viewed as being in strict opposition to academic approaches (Wilton & Stegu, 2011), the border between ‘academic’ and ‘lay’ has declined in recent years. Results of scientific research are today frequently also based on the analysis of public discourse. Folk perceptions of one’s own or others’ language variation in this way mirror the social (political) status and prestige of these varieties, therefore it is highly beneficial to measure folk perceptions of language diversity in order to understand the status and functions of varieties.

In the case of the regional language of Latgalian in Eastern Latvia, assumptions on attitudes towards languages among non-linguists have often been proposed without consulting these linguistic laypersons themselves. In my paper, I investigate perceptions and attitudes of average language users towards Latgalian and their metalinguistic knowledge of what Latgalian is. Fieldwork for this research has been carried out in Baltinava district in the region of Latgale in Eastern Latvia in June 2013. 45 interviews have been analyzed using approaches from discourse analysis, in particular with regard to metalinguistic topics (Preston, 2011). Extracting from the interviews units of structure and relevance (e.g. lexical choice, grammar, paralinguistic elements) and analyzing specific linguistic and pragmatic features (Blommaert & Jie, 2010) provides tools to look beyond what is *said* and to uncover what is *presupposed*, i.e. deeply-held folk beliefs.

#### References

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