Latvian, English and Russian: Code-switching and metalinguistic discussions in Latvia

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Our paper investigates the role of English in contemporary Latvia from three perspectives. First, we look at patterns and functions of code-switching and code-mixing phenomena in online fora. Code-switching between Latvian and Russian is by far more frequent and is sometimes triggered by interaction between users of Latvian and Russian where people accuse each other of not knowing each other’s language. English, on the other hand, is used in more decontextualised occurrences, e.g. for expressing emotions or a frequent use of text message abbreviations. Second, we look at Latvian, English and other languages in the Linguistic Landscape. Whereas English was traditionally used mostly for symbolic purposes, in recent times more situations were found in which it carries more content. In addition, English also appears in playful situations, in particular with regard to ergonyms. Third, we analyze metalinguistic statements regarding Russian and English in the internet. Statements by users of Latvian are largely negative on Russian, but mostly neutral or even positive on English. Statements by users of Russian, on the other hand, frequently stress the importance of Russian as an international language.

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