Subjective vitality and patterns of acculturation: four cases

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The article presents a comparative analysis of the subjective vitalities (SVs) of the minority groups of Latvia (Russian-speakers), Lithuania (Russian-speakers and Poles) and Mari El (Maris) in the Russian Federation, with a particular focus on the Mari case. The same extended version of the SV questionnaire was used in quantitative surveys in all four cases. The analysis revealed that Russians in Latvia and Maris have relatively high SVs, while the Lithuanian minorities had considerably lower SV scores. An investigation of the interaction of some of the variables within the samples detected different acculturation patterns between the Baltic minorities and the Maris. While in the Baltic settings, higher level of acculturation to the culture of the dominant group was related to lower perception of interethnic distrust towards the dominant group, in the Mari sample higher level of acculturation was related to higher interethnic distrust. The difference is due to the nature of interethnic relations in Mari El, and is influenced by some social factors that determine the distinction of Maris in the context of acculturation.

Keywords: subjective vitality; acculturation patterns; interethnic discordance; language maintenance

Introduction

In their 1981 paper introducing the concept of subjective vitality (SV), Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal stressed the importance of this concept ‘in determining patterns of intergroup behaviours’ and for monitoring ‘the position of minorities as distinctive collective entities in intergroup settings’ (147). Subsequent research has proven the relevance of SV for intergroup behaviour, but has also revealed difficulties in its operationalisation (Abrams, Barker, and Giles 2009). The goal of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon by comparing four ethnic groups in three different settings in order to assess the extent to which these ethnicities can be seen as distinctive entities in their respective settings and how their SVs relate to their intergroup behaviour, particularly the patterns of acculturation to the culture of the dominant group. The four groups compared are the Maris in the Mari El Republic of the Russian Federation, the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia and the Polish- and Russian-speaking minorities in Lithuania.

In the first section of the paper, we outline the theoretical background of our study. Even though our study sets its agenda based on the insights of Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal (1981), our understanding of SV is more complex than simply ‘a group’s subjective assessment of its vitality’ (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981, 147). Besides an assessment of vitality, it also includes other factors which have been shown to influence a group’s ability to act collectively. This expanded theoretical model of SV (Ehala 2010a) was first

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operationalised for a large-scale vitality study amongst the main ethnicities in the Baltic countries (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2013a, 2013b). In the second section, we briefly discuss the operationalisation of the model, and the composition of the samples of the Latvian and Lithuanian minorities originally used in the vitality study in the Baltic countries. We also describe the composition and collection of the Mari sample, which is original for this study.

Section three provides a short description of all four ethnolinguistic groups, roughly along the lines of objective vitality factors. The descriptions are complemented by a comparative summary that outlines the most relevant similarities and differences between these groups that may be relevant in assessing their overall vitalities. In section four, the SVs of the groups are compared in terms of the parameters specified in the theoretical model. This comparative analysis is empirically valuable for assessing the SV of fairly little studied Mari ethnicity in comparison with the three other groups, whose vitalities have been studied more.

The final section provides an analysis of the interaction of the SV factors in all four samples. The analysis revealed significant differences in the interaction of some of the variables in different samples, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of different acculturation patterns in the structure of SV.

Theoretical framework

The current study is based on the theoretical model developed by Ehala (2010a, 2010b) that specifies four components of SV: perceived strength differential (PSD), perceived intergroup discordance (D), perceived intergroup distance (R) and the level of utilitarianism (U).

PSD is based on the standard conception of SV (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981). It expresses how strong the members of an ethnolinguistic group perceive their in-group ($S_{we}$) to be in respect to demography, economics and institutional support compared to the strength of the most prominent out-group ($S_{they}$). The importance of PSD for language maintenance is based on the observation that the members of ethnolinguistic minorities tend to shift their linguistic and ethnic affiliation towards the majority: the weaker the minority and the stronger the majority, the greater the shift.

However, research has shown that there is no direct correlation between PSD and the rate of language and identity loss, as in many cases PSD assessments underestimate the actual level of vitality (Yagmur 2011). This is due to other social-psychological factors that contribute to SV. For example, perceptions of distrust of the out-group (D) and the illegitimacy (Leg) of the existing interethnic relations strengthen interethnic boundaries and reduce the likelihood of a shift in ethnic affiliation. The perception of intergroup distrust and illegitimacy are theoretically formalised as interethnic discordance factor D (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2011a). While a high level of D increases language and identity maintenance, it has also been observed to reduce the perceived in-group strength, leading to a more pessimistic level of PSD (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2011b). Thus, without knowing the level of D, information about PSD alone may be misleading in the assessment of the vitality of a group.

Derived from the work on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner and Brown 1978), the SV model states that the combination of PSD and D expresses the stability of interethnic relations. Small PSD in combination with high D expresses an unstable interethnic situation, while large PSD and low D indicate stability. The rationale behind this generalisation is that the stronger the minority perceives itself in relation to the majority (small PSD), and the more it perceives the power relations to be illegitimate
and the out-group not to be trusted (high D), the more the minority perceives the need to demand justice, at the same time also realising that it might be strong enough to change the status quo (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2011a). On the other hand, if the minority members perceive the interethnic situation to be legitimate and express out-group favouritism (low or negative D value), and the PSD is large, the interethnic situation is perceived as stable. In a stable setting, minority members are more likely to shift group membership individually rather than attempting to change their low status collectively.

However, the possibility of shifting group membership in the high stability condition is also influenced by the interethnic distance R between the minority and majority. R has two aspects: R₁ – minority members’ integration into the dominant group’s linguistic networks (as conceptualised in Landry, Allard, and Henry 1996), and the perception of cultural similarity – R₂. The more the minority members use the majority language in their everyday communication and the more similar racially, culturally and religiously they perceive the majority to be to them (low R), the easier the minority members may find it to shift to majority group membership. We also suggest that the level of R can be taken as an indicator of the level of acculturation of a particular respondent to the dominant group’s values and way of living, including the language use as a cultural practice. Thus, R is both the measure of the current level of acculturation as well as predictor for the SV.

The fourth factor in the model is the index of utilitarianism (U). According to Scollon and Scollon (1995), utilitarianism (U) is a broad attitude in which people act in a way most economically useful for them. Utilitarian values are in opposition to what can be called the traditionalist discourse (Tr). The traditionalist discourse stresses the emotional attachment of people to their customs and heritage and a desire to pass them on to their offspring. Traditionalism is a conservative discourse, while the utilitarian discourse favours change and innovation. Utilitarianism and traditionalism are in modest conflict in every group, as some individuals incline more to traditionalism while others are utilitarian. It is hypothesised, and there is also some supporting empirical evidence, that high U reduces SV, while low U increases it (Ehala 2012).

Following Ehala (2010b), we assume that SV is related to the process of acculturation of minority members to the dominant culture. Acculturation is here understood as ‘the process by which individuals change, both by being influenced by contact with another culture and by being participants in the general acculturative changes under way in their own culture’ (Berry 1990, 235). Based on these two aspects of one’s cultural behaviour – contact with another culture and participation in one’s own culture – Berry (1974, 1997) proposed a bi-dimensional model of acculturation leading to a typology of four patterns: integration is the pattern in which the members of subordinate group adopt the dominant group culture and language while also maintaining their heritage culture and language; assimilation is when the dominant language and culture are adopted and the heritage ones are abandoned; separation is when the heritage culture is maintained without adopting the dominant language and culture; and marginalisation occurs when heritage culture is abandoned, but little acculturation to the dominant culture occurs. According to Berry (1990), the patterns of acculturation may be seen in cases of both immigrant as well as indigenous minorities.

As argued in Ehala (2010b), Berry’s (1997) acculturation strategies are directly related to the SV factors described above. For example, high level of intergroup discordance hinders acculturation, because the perception of illegitimacy of intergroup power relations and distrust towards the majority reduces the wish to interact with the dominant group members. On the other hand, high level of utilitarianism enhances
acculturation as highly utilitarian minority members are more likely to adapt to the mainstream than those who hold very traditionalist values. The PSD also affects acculturation: if PSD is large, the subordinate group perceives itself much weaker than the dominant group, and in this situation, assimilation is likely if the person is both utilitarian and the discordance level is low. If discordance is high and/or the person holds very traditional values, marginalisation is more probable. If PSD is small, separation and integration are typical acculturation patterns, depending of the values of D and U. The relationship between SV parameters and acculturation patterns is presented in Figure 1.

Method of the study

The research instrument

To measure the components of SV described above, a 60-item questionnaire was developed. To measure PSD, 20 items from the standard SV questionnaire (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981) were used. The linguistic distance part of the intergroup distance variable R was measured by the 10-item questionnaire of individual network of linguistic contacts developed by Landry, Allard, and Henry (1996). For the cultural distance part of R, and for D and U, original sets of questions were developed.

All 60 items used Likert scales for responses. For variables expressing U, six-step scales, and for the rest of the variables seven-point scales, were used. All original parts of the questionnaire were tested in a pilot study and refined thereafter. The questionnaires also contained items for obtaining information on the sociodemographic backgrounds of the respondents. The questionnaires were first used in a large-scale comparative study of the SV of the main ethnic groups in the Baltic countries and are published in full in the appendix of Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2014), downloadable at http://kodu.ut.ee/~ehalam/Appendices.pdf.

As the theoretical model requires single quantitative measures for all four key variables (PSD, D, R and U), summary indices were calculated as the mean values for all questionnaire items representing a particular variable. The exact procedures for calculating the summary indices for PSD and D are described in Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2011b), and for U in Ehala (2012). The exact mathematical formulae for calculating SV scores from the key variables, and the scale for the interpretation of the scores are described in detail in Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2014), and will not be further elaborated on here.

Cronbach (1971) alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the scales in each sample. Of the 32 scales (eight in each sample), 23 were internally consistent (alphas = 0.7 or higher), and nine had somewhat lower internal consistency scores (see Table 1). Based on the internal consistency test, it can be concluded that four scales had good

| D   | High      | Separation | Marginalization | Low | U   
|-----|-----------|------------|-----------------|-----|-----
| Low | Integration | Assimilation | High            |     |    

Figure 1. SV and patterns of acculturation.
internal consistency in all four settings; two scales had good internal consistency in three out of four settings. Legitimacy scale had lower scores in three settings and utilitarianism scale in all settings. Thus, utilitarianism scale might need improvement in the future, but as the scores are still fairly close to 0.7, we find it justified to use the scale in our analysis.

As about settings, the Mari sample had three scales with alphas somewhat less than 0.7 which may be due to the small size of the sample. The sample of Russian-speakers in Lithuania is deviating more seriously in two scales, the reason which is unknown. In general we assess the instrument as a whole as satisfactory for the comparative analysis.

The sample

The data for Lithuanian Russian-speakers, Lithuanian Poles and Latvian Russian-speakers were collected as a part of a large-scale comparative study of ethnolinguistic vitality in the Baltic states (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2013a, 2013b). In this study, a stratified sampling method was used so as to reflect the interethnic composition of the population in different regions. The country samples included all of the main ethnicities and were aimed at $N = 1000$; in the Lithuanian sample, there were 230 Russian-speakers, and 270 Poles, and in the Latvian sample 406 Russian-speakers. The Lithuanian data were collected in 2009 and the Latvian data in 2010; both sample sets were collected by professional polling companies.

For the Maris in Mari El, the convenience sampling method was applied, with the aim of achieving a sample that would adequately reflect the ethnic Mari population in Mari El in respect to four key demographic variables: age, sex, place of residence (city, town or rural) and education (higher, secondary or basic). The fieldwork was carried out by the second author in 2013 and 2014. The questionnaire was administered to 115 informants living in Mari El, of whom 95 self-identified as Mari and 20 as Russians. The respondents were able to choose between the Mari and Russian versions of the questionnaire. Only the ethnic Mari respondents were included in this sample, regardless of the language of the questionnaire chosen.

Despite the aim of representativeness, the initial Mari sample was over-represented by people with higher education, city residents, females and middle-aged people. Therefore, 31 respondents were excluded to make the sample composition closer to the real sociodemographic composition of the Mari ethnic group. This smaller sample ($N = 59$) was used in analyses of the SV scores of Mari people to be compared with the other three cases, while the initial larger sample ($N = 95$) was used for analyses exploring the relationships between the vitality factors. The sociodemographic composition of the Mari population in Mari El is plotted against the reduced sample in Table 2.
As the table shows, the sample is still over-represented by females and under-represented by people with basic education. As for gender, the SV scores turned out to be identical for males and females; therefore it is unlikely that the gender bias in the sample compromised the results. However, as will be shown in the final section, there is a weak positive correlation between education, income and SV in the Mari sample. This suggests that the underrepresentation of Maris with basic education might have increased the mean scores for SV in the sample to some extent. Therefore, statistically proven generalisations for the whole Mari population in Mari El cannot be made on the basis of our sample, and the results of the SV of the Mari in Mari El in comparison with other three groups must be interpreted with a caution. However, the theoretical interpretation of the interaction of different vitality factors does not require representative samples, therefore we believe that the inferences from the comparative study to the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality can be drawn based on the current samples, too.

### Description of the cases

**Maris in Mari El**

The Mari language is related to the Volgaic branch of the Uralic languages, and is spoken in the Russian Federation about 700 km east of Moscow. It is an officially recognised language in the autonomous Mari El Republic. According to the 2010 census (Natsionalnyi sostav 2012), the number of Maris in the Russian Federation is nearly 550,000, but only about half of them (291,000) live in Mari El. The rest are unevenly distributed in neighbouring areas and larger cities outside Mari El. The total population of Mari El is 696,000 people, of which 42% are ethnic Maris, 45% are Russians and the remaining 13% are representatives of various other ethnic groups. Amongst ethnic Maris, 76% know the Mari language, while Russian is spoken by 98% of Mari. Demographically, the ethnic Maris are a slowly decreasing community (a 3% decrease in the last 25 years). Most of the decrease is due to linguistic assimilation and/or self-identification as Russians in the population census, while the demographic structure indicates stability.

More than half of the Mari people (60%) live in rural settings, most of the urban Maris (23%) live in the capital and the other three major cities and the remaining 16% live in smaller urban settlements. Educationally, 15% of ethnic Maris have higher education or scientific degrees, 48% have secondary education and 37% have basic education (Natsionalnyi sostav 2012). The traditional religion of Mari, **Mariy jüla** (translated as ‘Mari tradition’), is paganism practiced by about 14% of native population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Population, N = 291,000 (%)</th>
<th>Sample, N = 59 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City residents</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township residents</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural residents</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic education</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, the sample is still over-represented by females and under-represented by people with basic education. As for gender, the SV scores turned out to be identical for males and females; therefore it is unlikely that the gender bias in the sample compromised the results. However, as will be shown in the final section, there is a weak positive correlation between education, income and SV in the Mari sample. This suggests that the underrepresentation of Maris with basic education might have increased the mean scores for SV in the sample to some extent. Therefore, statistically proven generalisations for the whole Mari population in Mari El cannot be made on the basis of our sample, and the results of the SV of the Mari in Mari El in comparison with other three groups must be interpreted with a caution. However, the theoretical interpretation of the interaction of different vitality factors does not require representative samples, therefore we believe that the inferences from the comparative study to the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality can be drawn based on the current samples, too.
The 67.3% of Mari are Russian Orthodox but large part of them participate also in Mariy jüla (Orlova 2010).

Historically, the first Mari national rise dates back to the 1920s, and aimed to unite separated dialect groups by creating one common literary language (Ivanov 2003). However, subsequent political events (repressions of the 1930s, the First World War and post-war period) gave little priority to this idea. State policy of creation of the united Russian-speaking Soviet people in the 1960s, followed by elimination of instruction in native language, and labour resettlement of indigenous peoples to different regions of the USSR (Sanukov 1992) almost reduced all the initiatives of Mari activists to nothing during the Soviet time. It activated again in the perestroika time public demonstrations, and peaked in the 1990s, when Mari El was officially recognised as a republic, with its own flag, anthem and emblem, and the Mari language became a state language along with Russian, in Mari El by the law ‘About Languages in Mari El’ (O yazykah 1995).

However, still today, Mari is not used as a language of instruction in schools or kindergartens, but only studied as a subject in around 98% of the schools in Mari El (Kuklina 2013). Culturally, the position of the Mari language is somewhat stronger. Currently, there are 16 Mari language periodicals (Chuksin 2008; Alekseyeva 2012), and around 30–45 books (a total of over 45,000 copies) are published yearly in Mari (Vasiutina 2009, 27). Mari language is also actively used in web pages (MariUver, translated as ‘Mari news’, on https://mariuver.wordpress.com/; Uver Jolva, translated as ‘News flow’, on http://volva.ru, Arslan [Mari name] on http://mari-arslan.ru/mari, etc.) and social network communities (Chylase mariy-vlak ushnyza! [translated as ‘Mari all over the world! Let’s come together!’]; Mariy ulam – marla item! [translated as ‘I am Mari! I live in the Mari way!’]; Mariy kaliy filosofiy da shonkalymash [translated as ‘Philosophy and mindset of Mari’], etc. on http://vkontakte.ru; Tyi mariy ulat mo? [translated as ‘Are you Mari too?’] on http://odnoklassniki.ru, etc.). There is Mari TV and radio broadcasting but, except for one full-time ethnic radio channel Mari El Radio, the broadcasting time in the Mari language is limited (approximately 6.2 hours per week of news and programmes). Cultural events in Mari (literature, theatre and folk music) are rather frequent and vibrant (according to annual reports of the Ministry of Culture, yearly total average number reaches 300).

Mari political activity peaked in the 1990s, when Mari El was officially recognised as a republic, with its own flag, anthem and emblem, and Mari became a state language. In cooperation with local authorities, Mari activists elaborated an extensive agenda aimed at involving native people in the political, economic and social life of Mari El to raise its status (Ivanov 2000, 9). In recent years, Mari political activity has decreased significantly, mainly due to the changed political approach of the local authorities, who became reluctant to support a Mari emancipation movement. Therefore several of the Mari political organisations have weakened, altered their courses of action or disintegrated.

Russian-speakers in Latvia

According to the 2011 census (Latvia 2011), the Russian-speaking community (699,000 people) comprises 34% of the population of Latvia. The vast majority of Russian-speakers are ethnic Russians, but this category includes Ukrainians, Belarusians and representatives of dozens of other ethnicities who speak Russian as their home language, but may still value their heritage in the form of ‘symbolic ethnicity’. Most of the Russian-speakers are urban. They are in the majority in two largest cities in Latvia, the capital Riga (55%) and Daugavpils (85%). The current community of Russian-speakers settled in
Latvia after the Second World War, when the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union. However, Latvia had a small Russian population before the First World War: the rural Russian Orthodox Old Believers community in the Latgale and Vidzeme districts, and an urban middle-class community in Riga, established in tsarist times. Currently, the Russian-speaking community is largely urban, economically well off and culturally and politically active. The Russian language is used as an instructional language up to the secondary school level; the three highest grades are Russian–Latvian bilingual. Several specialities in higher education use Russian as the language of instruction. Local Russian-language cultural life is active. There are a number of Russian dailies, radio stations and TV channels and TV broadcasts from Russia are also widely followed. All this means that the Russian-speaking community in Latvia is self-aware, prominent and active. Their influence on Latvian politics, economics and culture is larger than that of Russian-speakers in Estonia or Lithuania.

Russian-speakers in Lithuania
According to the 2011 census (Lithuania 2011), the Lithuanian population was 3.05 million people. The estimated number of Russian-speakers is roughly 240,000, which is nearly 8% of the population. As in Latvia, the Lithuanian Russian-speakers have diverse ethnic backgrounds. Nearly 40% of the Russian-speakers live in Vilnius, where they make up 20% of the population. Russian-speakers are in the majority in only one town in Lithuania, Visaginas, where they make up 75% of the population. About 20% (23,000) of the whole Lithuanian Russian-speaking community live in Visaginas. The overwhelming majority of Lithuania’s Russian-speakers moved to Lithuania during the Soviet times. For example, the mainly Russian population of Visaginas includes the personnel of the Ignalina nuclear power plant and their relatives. As the number of Russian-speakers is rather small in the country’s overall population, the community has not emerged as culturally active, nor are they politically organised. Although there are Russian-language schools, parents prefer to send their children to Lithuanian-language schools. The local Russian-language cultural life is poor, but TV broadcasts from Russia are followed widely. Previous research has indicated that the Lithuanian Russian-speakers have chosen a voluntary path of assimilation (Brazauskiene and Likhachiova 2011).

Poles in Lithuania
The Lithuanian Polish community consists of about 200,000 people who constitute nearly 7% of the population in Lithuania (Lithuania 2011). Unlike the Russian-speaking community, the Polish one is ethnically homogeneous but, as a typical border community, it has been characterised by identity and language drifts as the political borders have changed (Geben and Ramonienė 2015). The Lithuanian Polish community lives in the southern part of Lithuania, in the territory (including the capital Vilnius) that between the world wars belonged to Poland. More than half of Lithuanian Poles live in rural areas, where they comprise a significant majority (more than 60% of the population in some southern districts). In Vilnius, Poles make up about 29% of the population (around 100,000 people). While the economic level of Lithuanian Poles is below that of the country’s average, their community is politically well organised and focused on securing their cultural development. Secondary education in Polish is available, and there are a few opportunities for Polish language higher education in Lithuania. There are print media and radio stations in Polish; TV channels from Poland are available. A local cultural life in Polish exists, but it is limited in scope.
Comparative summary

The four cases have both similarities and differences. All four are minority communities in their societies. While the two Russian-speaking communities have a fairly recent immigrant origin, Poles and Maris are autochthonous in their territories. Using the geographical classification (White 1987; Edwards 2010), only Maris amongst the four are a unique minority, i.e. they are a minority everywhere, while the other three are local-only minorities (as Russian and Polish are majority communities in their respective states). Of the three local-only minorities, Poles can be considered to be an adjoining community, i.e. a cross-border minority contiguous with the Polish majority in Poland. The Russian communities, while located in neighbouring countries of the Russian Federation, do not form a cross-border territorial continuum with Russia. This is due to their mainly urban nature, while the Polish community in Lithuania is largely rural, as is the Mari community in Mari El.

Comparing the sizes, the Russian-speaking community in Latvia is about twice as large in absolute numbers as any of the other three. However, looking at proportional sizes of the minorities, both Latvian Russian-speakers and Mari form significant shares in Latvia and Mari El, respectively (of course the Maris in the Russian Federation are a tiny 0.4% minority). Both Lithuanian minorities are considerably smaller minorities in their country.

In terms of educational support, the two Russian-speaking minorities have Russian as the language of instruction in secondary education, and there are some Russian-language specialities in universities. Polish is also used as a language of instruction in secondary schools, with limited options for Polish higher education. Mari, on the other hand, is only taught as a subject in secondary schools. Culturally, Russian-speaking communities and the Polish minority enjoy the heritage of the strong national cultures of their motherlands, while Mari is a lesser used language with limited cultural resources. Still, ongoing Mari cultural activities are as strong as, or perhaps stronger than, the cultural life of any of the other three minority communities.

Economically, the Russian-speakers in Latvia are the strongest, while the Maris and Polish, as largely rural ethnicities, are the weakest. Politically, Latvian Russians, Maris and Polish are mobilised, while Lithuanian Russians are not.

Clearly, all four cases have different strengths and weaknesses in regard to their long term sustainability as ethnolinguistic communities. In terms of demographic strength, educational and economic support and political mobilisation, the Latvian Russian community seems to be the strongest and the Lithuanian Russian community perhaps the weakest, while it is hard to rank the Maris and Polish. The comparison of SVs in the following sections supplements this description from a social-psychological perspective. Note that the objective and subjective vitalities need not always match: there is evidence for ‘perceptual distortion’ in favour of both in-group or out-group vitalities (Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis 1994). The actual sustainability potential of these communities is a combination of both their strength described above as well as their ability to act as distinctive collective entities.

SVs of the groups compared

In this section, we present the results of the statistical analysis of the questionnaire, first by the structural variables of the model (PSD, D, R and U) and then we present the scores of SV calculated from these variables. As the data on the Baltic minorities have already
been presented in Ehala and Zabrodskaja (2013a, 2013b), we will mainly focus on the Mari results, providing the Baltic data as a framing reference.

**Perceived strength differential**

The PSD variable was calculated as the difference between the strength of the out-group (S\_they) and in-group (S\_we): PSD = S\_they − S\_we. The variables S\_they and S\_we were each measured by 10 items from the standard SV questionnaire developed by Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal (1981). The questions pertained to the status of the two groups’ language and culture, the number of prominent writers, thinkers and businesspeople, and the wealth and political activity of the group members. The responses were recorded on a seven-point scale, ranging from very much/many to very little/few. The results for all three summary variables are presented in Table 3.

It is interesting that all four minority groups assessed their own strength in exactly the middle of the scale, even though their actual demographic, economic and cultural strengths differ considerably. As for the strength of the out-group, Lithuanian minorities assessed it somewhat higher than Maris and Latvian Russian-speakers assessed the strength of their out-groups. So, on the basis of PSD, the latter two assessed the situation somewhat more positively than did Lithuanian Russian-speakers and Poles.

**Intergroup discordance (D)**

Intergroup discordance was measured by 10 items addressing the legitimacy of the interethnic power relations, as well as trust in the out-group members. The items addressing legitimacy focused on the official status of the minority language and on the level of political and cultural autonomy (e.g. X should be one of the official/regional languages in Y country). Intergroup trust was measured by statements indicating attitudes towards the out-group (Y), such as Ys wish to cooperate with Xs; and Ys behave under the influence of their lowest instincts. To calculate the level of distrust, the legitimacy and trust scales were reversed and D was expressed as the mean of the two variables. Differently from the other scales, which range from 0 to 1, the D scale ranges from –0.25 to 0.75 (see the justification and the exact procedure in Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2011b). In this scale, the negative values indicate negative discordance, i.e. a very positive attitude towards the dominant out-group, often called out-group favouritism (Sachdev and Bourhis 1991; Jost, Mahzarin, and Nosek 2004; Batalha, Akrami, and Ekehammar 2007). Zero indicates neutral feelings, and positive values indicate discordance. As the D scores in Table 3 show, both Lithuanian minorities expressed a degree of out-group favouritism, while both Mari and Latvian Russian-speakers’ mean levels of D indicate a moderate level of interethnic discordance.

The intergroup stability indicator presented in the last column of Table 3 was calculated as the sum of PSD and D. To interpret the stability results, it is necessary to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>S_they</th>
<th>S_we</th>
<th>PSD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>PSD + D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvian Russian-speakers</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>−0.20</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>−0.21</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian Poles</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>−0.29</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>−0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian Russian-speakers</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>−0.29</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
<td>−0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
take into account that the scores around zero and above indicate a lack of stability, i.e. a situation where the minority group may feel both the strength and motivation to change the intergroup situation collectively. Scores below \(-0.2\) indicate a level of stability where collective action seems unrealistic, even though there is some perception of interethnic discordance amongst some subgroups of the minority. As Table 3 indicates, both Maris’ and Latvian Russian-speakers’ perceived stability scores were fairly close to zero, which may indicate that both groups see opportunities and the need to improve their positions collectively. Both Lithuanian minorities seemed to perceive the interethnic situation as rather stable. This may be fairly accurate in terms of Lithuanian Russian-speakers, who are very well integrated into Lithuanian society and lack political organisation. The score indicating high stability for the Lithuanian Polish requires further explanation, as Poles are politically fairly well organised in Lithuania. A possible explanation for this apparent contradiction in the Polish case may lie in attitude differences between the small group of political activists and the politically disengaged general population.

**Intergroup distance (R)**

The intergroup distance variable \(R\) is calculated as a mean value of two scales: linguistic distance \((R_1)\) and cultural distance \((R_2)\). Linguistic distance was measured by 10 items from Landry, Allard, and Henry (1996). The items pertained to self-reported language choice in various communication settings, ranging from family to colleagues, occasional encounters and media language use. The summary scale was calculated as a mean of the individual items and transposed to a 0–1 scale, so that zero indicates no linguistic distance whatsoever from the dominant ethnicity (using the majority language in all communication situations) and 1 indicates absolute distance, with no use of the majority language at all. The value 0.5 indicates a balanced use of both languages as a mean of the use in all 10 communication situations.

The cultural distance \(R_2\) was measured by 10 items showing the differences between the respondent and the out-group. The questions were of the type *In terms of life values, how different are the Ys and you?*, with the possibility of indicating the difference on a seven-point scale numerically and verbally from *1 – very different* to *7 – very similar*, with the neutral midpoint *4 – hard to tell*. As with \(R_1\), the summary scale was calculated as a mean of the items and transposed to a 0–1 scale, so that 0 indicated strong similarity and 1 large difference. The overall intergroup distance \(R\) for each respondent was calculated as the mean of his/her score for \(R_1\) and \(R_2\). The results are presented in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language X → language Y</th>
<th>(R_1)</th>
<th>(R_2)</th>
<th>(R)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian → Latvian</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian → Lithuanian</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari → Russian</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish → Lithuanian</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the large $R_1$ value indicates (see Table 4), Russian-speakers in Latvia mostly used Russian across communication settings, but there was some Latvian use, too. Lithuanian Russian-speakers were considerably closer to the dominant group in their country, but still used more Russian than Lithuanian. Both the Maris and Polish used their heritage language less than the dominant language ($R_1$ values less than 0.5). The Mari data are in accordance with the 2010 census data showing that only about 76% of ethnic Maris reported the knowledge of the Mari language, while Russian was spoken by 98% of Maris (Natsionalnyi sostav 2012). All together, the data suggest the dominant position of the majority languages in Mari El and Lithuania, while in Latvia, Russian as a minority language has a much stronger position than the other three minority languages in their settings. The cultural distance scores ($R_2$) between the four minority groups and their respective majorities were reported as considerably smaller than the linguistic distances: all results fell on the more similar than different side of the scale. The overall scores for intercultural distance indicate that the autochthonous Mari and Polish communities perceived themselves to be closer to their majorities than the more recent Russian-speaking minorities did to their Baltic majority nations. Taking the $R$ scores as indicators of acculturation, it could be concluded that the Polish and Mari ethnicities are more acculturated to their dominant societies than the Russian-speaking minorities.

Utilitarianism ($U$)
The U-index was measured by 10 statements that described alternative value orientations towards utilitarianism and traditionalism. For example, utilitarianism was measured by such statements as: *He does not want to waste time on unimportant people and things that do not take him forward in life. It is important for him to concentrate on achieving his goals.* Traditionalism was measured by such statements as: *He/she considers it important to follow the practices of his/her culture.* The structure of the questionnaire was inspired by the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz et al. 2001), in which study participants were asked to mark on a six-point Likert scale to what extent they were similar to the described person (1 – very much similar to me … 6 – completely distinct from me).

The summary variable $U$ was calculated by subtracting the traditionalism score from the utilitarianism score (see Ehala 2012 for the procedure and its theoretical justification). As a result, a scale from 0 to 2 was formed, with zero indicating an absolute level of traditionalism without any approval of utilitarianism, 1 = a balanced value system, where both value sets are appreciated equally, and 2 = an absolute utilitarianism, with extreme distancing from the traditional value orientation.

All of the compared groups indicated a small inclination towards traditionalism (values below 1.0; see Table 5). The Maris indicated the strongest inclination towards traditionalism and rejection of utilitarian values; the Russian-speakers in Latvia were the most utilitarian minded, with Lithuanian minorities in between. The low mean values of the U-index show that the value systems of all groups generally favour language and identity maintenance.

Subjective vitality
The SV score was calculated using the formula: \( SV = U \cdot (PSD + D)/R \). According to this model, SV is the level of perceived stability of the interethnic situation (PSD + D), modified by the impact of the value system (U) and intergroup distance (R). As explained earlier, the higher the perceived intergroup stability, the lower the SV. However, large
interethnic distance can increase SV even in stable interethnic settings, since large R makes it very costly to move to the dominant group. Also, if the group members are extremely conservative (very low U), they are also less likely to shift language and ethnic identities.

For clarity of presentation, Table 5 repeats the values for the SV components presented in Tables 3 and 4, and adds the mean scores for SV. The SV scores are the means of all individual SV scores in each sample, not the calculation from the mean values of the components presented in Table 5. The SV scores should be interpreted as follows: values near zero and above indicate relatively high SV for minority groups, while negative scores between –0.1 and –0.2 indicate slightly low SV, –0.2 to –0.3 medium low and scores below –0.3 could be considered signs of seriously low SV (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2014, 83 for a full explanation of the assessment scale).

As Table 5 shows, the Latvian Russian-speakers and Maris had the highest SV scores of the four groups studied. The mean was above zero, which means that both groups could be considered to have enough SV to be active as collective entities. Remind that the underrepresentation of the less educated Maris in the sample may have caused the mean score SV to be somewhat higher than actual. Both Lithuanian minorities had considerably lower SV scores, indicating that the members of both communities may incline to a social mobility strategy rather than collective action. The lack of political activity amongst the Russian-speakers of Lithuania supports this, while the low score of Poles needs further explanation as the community has been politically and culturally more active than the Russian-speakers.

This section presented a comparative analysis of the social-psychological factors that are relevant for SV. The results grouped together (1) Latvian Russian-speakers and Maris and (2) Lithuanian Russian-speakers and Poles. In the next section, we will look at some interrelationships between SV variables and the sociodemographic profiles of the respondents. The analysis will show that, despite the similarities in Maris’ and Latvian Russian-speakers’ scores, the patterns of acculturation were quite different.

Patterns of acculturation

Amongst the Latvian and Lithuanian minorities, a number of important correlations were apparent in the analysis of the data. For all three minorities, there was a positive correlation between R1 and R2. For Latvian Russian-speakers, Spearman’s $\rho = .36$, $p < 0.01$, for Lithuanian Russian-speakers, $\rho = .25$, $p < .01$ and for Poles, $\rho = .18$, $p < 0.01$. The correlation indicates that the more respondents were integrated into the dominant group’s linguistic networks, the more similar they perceived the dominant group to be to them culturally. Furthermore, amongst these three minorities, there was also a positive correlation between R1 and D. For Latvian Russian-speakers, $\rho = .32$, $p < 0.01$, for Lithuanian Russians, $\rho = .25$, $p < 0.01$ and for Poles, $\rho = .34$, $p < 0.01$. This means that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>PSD + D</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvian Russians</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian Russians</td>
<td>–0.22</td>
<td>–0.38</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian Poles</td>
<td>–0.24</td>
<td>–0.35</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the more a respondent was integrated into the dominant group’s linguistic networks, the more legitimate he/she considered the intergroup power relations to be and the less distrust he/she felt towards the majority members.

Theoretically, this pattern of correlations seems to indicate the intuitively known dynamic relationship between language usage, cultural acculturation and intergroup relations: the more linguistic minority members become integrated into the mainstream linguistic networks, and the more they became acculturated, the more intergroup trust and social cohesion grow. Most of the integration programmes in Western societies are designed with precisely this underlying assumption between majority language usage and acculturation in mind.

To our surprise, no such relationship was evident in the Mari sample. First, there was no correlation between $R_1$ and $R_2$: the perception of cultural similarity was not related to the intensity of the out-group language usage in the Mari case. Second, both $R_1$ and $R_2$ were negatively correlated to the distrust part of $D$ (for $R_1 \rho = -0.20, p = 0.058$, and for $R_2 \rho = -0.36, p < 0.01$), and also to the legitimacy part of $D$, although in this case the correlation was weak and not statistically significant. This pattern between $R$ and $D$ was opposite to that found amongst the three minorities in the Baltic context. For Mari, it appears that the more one is integrated into the linguistic networks of the dominant Russian group and the more similar one perceives oneself to Russians, the less one trusts them. This latter and statistically stronger correlation is particularly counter-intuitive and needs explanation, as psychologically one would expect more trust when people feel similar than when they feel different.

To find an explanation, we hypothesised that perhaps the correlations were mediated by the intensity of interpersonal contact with Russians. In Mari El, Russians live mostly in urban environments, where they make up 58% of the population, while Maris make up just 27%. In rural settings, the distribution is the opposite: Maris are 68% and Russians only 23%. If the intensity of interpersonal contact with Russians explained the correlation between linguistic and cultural distance and distrust, we would expect to see that urban Maris used more Russian and saw themselves as being more similar to Russians than rural Maris do. This assumption appears to be true. Taking place of residence (city, township or village) to be an ordinal scale of urbanity, we found it to be statistically significantly correlated to all three variables: to $R_1 \rho = 0.23, p < 0.05$, to $R_2 \rho = 0.27, p < 0.01$ and to distrust $\rho = -0.21, p < 0.05$.

This means that Maris in urban environments use more Russian and perceive themselves to be culturally more like Russian, but trust Russians less than Maris in the countryside. This pattern indicates a different acculturation pattern than in the Baltic countries. While in the Baltic countries people who integrate well into the majority start to feel more a part of the majority, in Mari El the Maris who integrate linguistically and culturally into the Russian mainstream grow more distrustful of Russians. A possible explanation for this pattern is the majority attitude in Mari El: the level of distrust grows as a result of not being accepted by the majority, despite the high level of linguistic and cultural integration. In terms of the Interactive Acculturation Model (Bourhis et al. 1997), the Baltic settings studied exemplify consensual acculturation orientations between the majority and minority, where both the majority and minority prefer integration. The situation in Mari El seems to be that of conflicting acculturation orientations, as Maris want to integrate but the dominant majority is not ready to accept them.

This explanation is further supported by the correlations between respondents’ family economic status and several vitality components. For example, amongst all three Baltic minority groups there was a weak but statistically significant negative correlation between
linguistic distance R₁ and income (ρ for Latvian Russian-speakers was –0.13, Lithuanian Russian-speakers –0.18 and Poles –0.13, p < 0.05). There was also a negative correlation between R₂ and income for the Russian-speaking minorities (ρ for Latvian Russian-speakers was –0.12 and for Lithuanian Russian-speakers –0.21, p < 0.01). Amongst Lithuanian Russian-speakers and Poles there was also a small statistically significant positive correlation between income and perception of legitimacy (ρ = 0.18 and 0.16, respectively, p < 0.01). There was the same tendency amongst Latvian Russian-speakers, but it was small and not statistically significant. This set of correlations point to the elite social mobility scenario: people who are more integrated into the majority linguistic networks are better off economically. They also perceive the interethnic situation to be more legitimate. This indicates that in the two Baltic countries, successful integration is rewarded by higher economic security.

In the Mari sample, income was not correlated with either R₁ or R₂, but there was a positive weak correlation with the perception of interethnic discordance (ρ = 0.16). There was also a weak but statistically significant correlation between educational level and perception of discordance (for D, ρ = 0.23, p < 0.05). No correlation between educational level and level of discordance was detectable in the data of the other three minorities. This means that, unlike in the two Baltic societies, in Mari EL better educated and economically better off people tended to perceive the dominant Russian group as less trustworthy and the situation as less legitimate than did the less educated and less economically well off respondents. Furthermore, in the Mari sample there was a statistically significant positive correlation between income and PSD (ρ = 0.28 p < 0.01) and income and interethnic instability (PSD + D): ρ = 0.39, p < 0.01. These correlations can be interpreted as pointing to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling for ethnic Maris. The perception of difficulties with social mobility, together with the higher collective self-esteem (higher PSD values) stemming from relative economic and educational success, seems to be the reason why the more economically well off Maris perceived the intergroup situation to be less stable than did the less successful Maris.

**Conclusion**

This comparative case study enables us to draw two types of conclusions, empirical and theoretical-methodological. Empirically, it provides the first systematic subjective ethnolinguistic vitality assessment of the Mari ethnic group in the Mari El Republic of the Russian Federation. The most important finding was that, despite the fact that the Mari language is not used as the language of instruction at all in Mari El, and that many Maris use the Russian language extensively in their daily lives, the observed linguistic assimilation is not accompanied by collective identity shift. The SV of the Mari people is relatively high, considering its size, and the economically and educationally stronger members of the community value Mari identity highly. All this suggests that Mari ethnicity is likely to continue to act as an active collective entity in the society of Mari El.

The comparison with three different cases in Lithuania and Latvia makes it possible to view the Mari setting in a wider perspective. It shows that the use of a minority language as an instructional language in general education is not itself a decisive factor in language and identity maintenance if the community members prefer the mainstream schools, as do the Poles and Russian-speakers in Lithuania. In Lithuania, the low SV scores are accompanied by observed linguistic and identity shift. This, however, is not to underestimate the strong and widely observed positive effect that being an instructional language provides for minority language maintenance. And there is little doubt that were
the Mari language the language of instruction, it would improve the Mari language maintenance considerably, provided that there is a demand amongst the parents for Mari language education.

The comparison also showed the importance of the acculturation attitudes of the majority groups. The correlational patterns between the SV variables revealed that in Lithuania and Latvia it is easier for the minority members to acculturate to the mainstream, which leads to higher levels of trust in the majority and a sense of the legitimacy of the existing interethnic situation amongst those who are economically and educationally successful. The negative attitude amongst the majority seems to be the main reason why the more successful Maris feel more distrust towards the majority and see the interethnic situation as less legitimate than less successful Maris.

Theoretically, the discovery of two opposite patterns of acculturation in the analysis of comparative data provides strong empirical support for the hypothesised link between the SV factors and patterns of acculturation outlined in Figure 1 in the theoretical background section. The discovery of two opposite correlational patterns between the key variables of the SV in different ethnolinguistic settings indicates the heuristic potential of the multivariate quantitative model of SV. Its standardised methodology makes it possible to use it in rather different social settings and still be able to have meaningful comparative analyses of data that may lead to the discovery of underlying patterns between important social-psychological factors that might not be detectable using less standardised methodologies.

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References


