Russian–Estonian language contacts, linguistic creativity, and convergence: New rules in the making

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Abstract

The paper discusses several phenomena in contemporary Estonian–Russian language contacts with a focus on attitudes, code-switching, convergence and the emergence of new varieties. The contact situation is recent and provides a good opportunity for microsociolinguistic research. The article describes some instances of bilingual linguistic creativity (derivation of new words from Estonian stems with Russian derivational suffixes, use of bilingual homophones, jocular relexification), as well as code-switching as a means of in- and out-group communication. Code-switching may sometimes result in what is called here ‘paradoxical politeness’ when a dominant speaker of language A uses language B and vice versa. Possibly, a new variety (‘market discourse’) with limited use between salespersons and their customers is emerging. The variety is used in a Russian-to-Estonian communication when a Russian speaker has a limited command of Estonian. The main features of the ‘market discourse’ are as follows: Estonian nouns appear in the nominative singular, seldom in the plural, sometimes Estonian adjectives, numerals and discourse markers are inserted into the Russian matrix.

1. Introduction

Since the regaining of independence in 1991 Estonia has been a scene of numerous political, sociocultural and sociolinguistic changes. Previously it used to be a society with two completely separate language communities that can be described most adequately in the terms of voluntary segregation, asymmetric functional bilingualism on the part of Estonians, and conflicting language hierarchies: an official Soviet hierarchy (promoting Russian at the expense of other languages) and that of Estonians (resisting Russification). Now Estonia is gradually changing into a society where the Russian-speaking community is becoming more dif-
ferentiated with regard to the command of Estonian, and multilingual communication is frequent and visible (Verschik 2004a).

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of Russian—Estonian contacts for a general research with a focus on attitudes, code-switching, convergence and a possible emergence of new varieties. The data come from recorded Russian-language and bilingual TV broadcasts (30 hours, recorded between 2000 and 2004) as well as from participant observation of language behaviour in markets, shops and banks of the capital Tallinn (70 random encounters). This is a qualitative study that is aimed at mapping various contact phenomena.

2. The relevance of the case study

As the changes in attitudes, language proficiencies, patterns of communication, and sociolinguistic configuration of Estonian society are quite recent, it would be a fine opportunity to study a language contact setting emerging and developing here and now. There are several relevant additional issues:

(i) The contacts take place in two highly literate communities, between languages that are highly planned and adequately equipped for H functions.

(ii) To the best of my knowledge, there is no microsociolinguistic research on language contacts in the post-Soviet setting. I believe that the absence of such studies considerably hinders comparative sociolinguistic research, say, of code-switching in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

(iii) The languages in question have several typological differences (word order, argument structure, use of pre- and postpositions, etc.), and it is therefore a contact situation where bilingual speakers would most probably produce various compromise strategies.

(iv) Speakers of Estonian as an L2 are still perceived as a very new phenomenon. As their ability to speak Estonian and their needs and opportunities to use it vary, it is reasonable to look for the development of compromise strategies and language creativity.

3. The impact of changing attitudes on contact-induced change

It has been convincingly demonstrated by Thomason (1997, 2000, 2001) that speakers’ attitudes may be a decisive force that hinders or promotes changes. As Rampton (1998: 290) observes, code-switching research, for instance, has been focused on ‘finding coherence and systematicity’ rather than on contradiction and creativity. One may claim that this observation is applicable to language contact research in general.
The effects of deliberate decisions by language-planners on the Estonian lexicon and morphology are well known among language planning researchers (Raag 1998). There is more to it: the whole history of Russian–Estonian language contacts in the Soviet period illustrates the role of attitudes in contact induced change. The pre-1991 atmosphere was that of voluntary segregation and defensive linguistic behaviour on the part of Estonians (concealing proficiency in Russian during the census of 1979, relatively successful attempts at preserving H functions of Estonian, adherence to a fairly strict corpus planning, refusal to accept Russian as the only language of ‘high culture’, to name just a few examples). The changes that occurred in Estonian during the period of Soviet domination cannot be simply ascribed to ‘the Russian influence’ (Ehala 1994; Hasselblatt 2000). Practically, there is no considerable Russian impact on the structure of Estonian. Certain lexical borrowings from Russian belong to a casual, mostly informal register and are gradually becoming obsolete. As for the Russian speakers in the pre-1991 period, they seldom bothered to master even basic Estonian and had borrowed very few lexical items referring to local realities.

Various authors (Li Wei 1998; Backus 1999; Muysken 2000) have warned against viewing languages as clearly definable discrete entities. For instance, it may prove impossible to ascribe every item of a code-switched utterance to a particular language even if languages are not closely related or not related at all (Clyne 1987; see also Verschik 2004a on some Russian–Estonian examples). Rigid analytical frameworks may fail to adequately address the emerging compromise strategies and creativity of speakers (Auer 1998a). Carter (2004) has recently addressed aspects of monolingual linguistic creativity. Although there is no systematic treatment of multilingual creativity (similar to Carter 2004), certain valuable case studies do exist. For instance, the effects of ‘playing with languages’ are discussed in detail in Hinnenkamp (2003: 27–31) and in Dirim and Hieronymus (2003: 51–53).

In the present situation of Russian–Estonian language contacts at least three patterns of linguistic creativity can be mentioned. (As the question has not been investigated, the list is not complete.) I believe that these patterns are not limited to this particular case but rather that they are common to multilingual linguistic creativity in general. The three patterns discussed here are: 1) the formation of new words using Estonian stems and Russian derivational suffixes; 2) the deliberate creation and use of bilingual homophones; 3) jocular relexification.

The formation of new words from Estonian stems with Russian derivational suffixes seems to be the most frequent device. Example (1) illustrates how a saleswoman with a limited command of Estonian creates a new word and a new meaning by using the Estonian noun *kaneel*
`cinnamon` and Russian derivational morphology. Instead of the Estonian compound noun \textit{kaneelisai} `cinnamon roll` or its rather long Russian equivalent \textit{buločka s korečj} she coins a new word \textit{kanel'ka} (< Estonian \textit{kaneel} `cinnamon` + Russian derivational suffix -\textit{k}- + ending -\textit{a}):

(1) \begin{align*}
A \textit{vot kanel'ka}, \quad & \text{berite} \\
\text{cinnamon roll NOM SG FEM take IMPERATIVE 2PL} \\
\textit{kanel'ki} & \text{cinnamon roll ACC PL} \\
\text{`here is a cinnamon roll, take some cinnamon rolls'} \\
\text{(Tallinn, Railway Station Market, 2003)}
\end{align*}

 Needless to say, the aforementioned noun exists neither in monolingual Russian nor in monolingual Estonian. It is clear that there is no lexical gap in Russian, and the speaker does not wish to introduce the Estonian lexical item, as it exists in the monolingual variety. There are several possible reasons for creating and introducing the new lexical item: 1) it is shorter than its Russian equivalent (this may be important in the case of frequent use) and 2) a new combination of elements from both languages attracts attention and makes the speech more expressive.

Another pattern of linguistic creativity is the deliberate use of bilingual homophones (see Clyne 2003: 164–165). These are items that sound alike or almost alike in more than one language (cf. \textit{in} in English, German, Yiddish, Dutch). According to Clyne (2003: 164–165), bilingual homophones play a significant role in transfer facilitation and in the creation of compromise forms in code-switching. In addition, bilingual homophones may be used consciously for creative and humorous purposes. Note that not only items with common etymology (as \textit{in}) but also coincidentally similar items may act as bilingual homophones. Example (2) illustrates the use of the derivational suffix -\textit{ik} that has a common shape but different origins and different range of meanings in Russian and in Estonian. The following lexical item is used in Russian youth slang (Külmoja 1999: 523):

(2) Russian \textit{isik} `father` (Estonian \textit{isa} `father` + -\textit{ik}),
\begin{align*}
\text{cf. Estonian} \quad & \text{\textit{isik} `individual, person` (Estonian \textit{ise} `self` + -\textit{ik})}
\end{align*}

In Russian the suffix -\textit{ik} is used for diminutive formation, while Estonian nouns with -\textit{ik} designate things and items that are linked to the meaning expressed by the stem (\textit{kand-ik} `tray` is something linked to carrying, cf. \textit{kand-ma} `to carry`). The reanalysis of Estonian \textit{isa} `father` as a Russian noun of the first declension class (\textit{is-a}, cf. Russian \textit{pap-a} `father`, \textit{djadj-a} `uncle`) and the use of the ambiguous derivational suffix result in a creation that is not intelligible in monolingual Russian and, simulta-
neously, coincides with an Estonian word *isik* ‘person’ (*ise* ‘self’ + *-ik*) with a completely different meaning. Both monolingual and multilingual creativity may pursue the same goal, that of deliberate ambiguity, but a multilingual speaker has greater resources at his/her disposal. The suffix *-ik* appears to be frequently used in derivation for the aforementioned purposes; in addition to *isik*, other instances have been registered in the speech of Russian students: *kaks-ik* 1) ‘two’ (the lowest mark at school) < Estonian *kaks* ‘two’ + *-ik* and 2) Estonian ‘twin’; *laps-ik* 2) ‘little child’ < Estonian *laps* ‘child’ + *-ik* and 2) Estonian ‘childish’.

The third pattern is jocular relexification that appears to be a frequent device in various contact situations, but, to the best of my knowledge, it has not been systematically investigated. It requires a certain degree of proficiency in both languages. In example (3) the Estonian stem *läh(e)*-‘to go’ is phonetically adapted into Russian (*ljax-*) and incorporated into Russian grammatical matrix. Estonian is in bold, Russian in italics.

(3) My *po-ljax-a-l-i*.
we PREFIX-go-VERBAL SUFFIX-PAST-PL
‘We are leaving’, ‘Let’s go’
heard from students of Narva College in 2002)
Compare with monolingual Russian in (4):

(4) My *po-š-l-i*.
we PREFIX-go-PAST-PL

Jocular relexification is a device characteristic of young Russians with a relatively good proficiency in Estonian and high language awareness. The following example (5) is very much like (3), except that it has more than one Estonian stem (*kuula*– ‘to hear’ and *loeng* ‘lecture’) inserted into the Russian matrix:

(5) *Ja pro-kul-a-l-a* vsj-u
I PREFIX-hear-VERBAL SUFFIX-PAST-FEM all-ACC
*loeng*-u
lecture-ACC
‘I have heard the entire lecture’
(conversation between two Russian students at the Tallinn Pedagogical University)

Compare (5) to monolingual Russian in (6) with the same meaning:

(6) *Ja pro-sluš-a-l-a*
I PREFIX-hear-VERBAL SUFFIX-PAST-FEM all-ACC
*vsj*-u lekečij-u
all-ACC lecture-ACC
It is important that instances of linguistic creativity should not be simply dismissed as anecdotal or irregular. At this point, it is not the frequency of the given phenomena that is relevant but rather the fact that these phenomena do occur. As Thomason (1997: 183) emphasises, any feature in an individual speech event may become a permanent feature of a group or of an entire speech community. Cases like (1), (2), (3) and (5) call for an interpretative, flexible approach rather than for strict claims in the style ‘either or’ (see methodological questions discussed in Auer 1995, 1998a; Li Wei 1998).

4. Code-switching as a strategy for in- and out-group communication

A comprehensive analysis of Russian–Estonian code-switching is beyond the scope of the current article. It is not even possible to list here all aspects that are relevant for the given case. Therefore, I will briefly discuss one point that makes the Russian–Estonian contact situation different from most of the cases described in code-switching literature, namely code-switching as a device for out-group communication purposes.

Typically, many classical studies consider code-switching in bilingual speech communities where the status of the languages is clearly defined and where the local majority is not expected to know the language of the minority. The sociocultural setting in Estonia is different as far as the linguistic repertoire of the speakers is concerned: many Estonians in Tallinn have at least a passive knowledge of Russian, and elderly Estonians have a habit of using it. This circumstance enables communication between Russians and Estonians according to pattern II as described by Auer (1995), that is, A1 B2 A1 B2 (letters stand for speakers and digits for languages). It means that both participants respect the language choices of their partners and one’s ‘secure’ language may be used. Note that a choice to adhere to one’s ‘own’ language may be, but not necessarily is, dictated by language proficiency. In such instances a background knowledge, or, as Auer (1998 b: 154) has it, an extra-conversational element of knowledge is crucial for an adequate interpretation.

Example (7) is taken from a bilingual TV broadcast Bessonitsa-Une-tus (‘Insomnia’) where two hosts (a Russian-speaker and an Estonian-speaker), discuss a previously chosen topic with the studio audience. Everybody is entitled to use the language of his or her choice, as the broadcast is subtitled. An Estonian-speaking man A and one of the hosts, B, who is Russian-dominant, speak about the interference of the media into private life. B is a fluent speaker of Estonian as an L2, and he does code-switch during the show, but in some cases he prefers to stick to his role as the Russian-language host.
(7) A: *Tundub, et eesti poliitilises kultuuris täna tegelikult inimeste intime
elu, personaalne elu ei huvita, nii et kui me räägime luukerest
kapis, siis mulle tundub eelkõige, et ...*

'It seems that in the Estonian political culture people's private
life, personal life is not interesting, so as long as we speak about
skeletons in a cupboard, it seems to me, first of all ...'

B: [interrupting, swiftly] *To est', za ėto posadit' mogut?*

'That is, what one can be put in jail for'

A: *Just.*

'Exactly'

Based purely on this fragment, one might think that B has a passive
command of Estonian, just enough to understand and to adequately
react. However, systematic recordings of this bilingual broadcast prove
that, in fact, he is a highly proficient speaker of Estonian and his use of
Russian is not dictated by limited language skills.

Yet another phenomenon to be mentioned here is a paradoxical use
of languages when a Russian-dominant speaker would use Estonian and
an Estonian-dominant speaker Russian. This phenomenon can be la-
belled ‘paradoxical politeness’ as a shorthand term. It is still very much
the case, in the bilingual capital Tallinn at least, that the speakers have
a clear understanding about which language ‘belongs’ to which speaker.
(I believe that it is precisely the speakers’ general idea of how languages
are assigned to speakers that makes the concept of language crossing
meaningful, no matter how idiosyncratic this idea may be.) Therefore, a
symbolic exchange of languages (‘I speak yours and you speak mine’) is
a perfect means for showing respect, politeness and willingness to coop-
erate. Burt (1992: 173) stresses that when a native speaker of A is pro-
cficient in B and for the first time meets a native speaker of B who is
proficient in A and they do not yet have a shared norm of communica-
tion, any choice of language remains pragmatically ambiguous. Example
(8) is different from the cases investigated by Burt, since the speakers
are familiar with each other and already seem to have established the
norms of communication.

The following example (8) is an interaction in a cafeteria. A is a young
Russian-speaking female who speaks Estonian quite fluently and with a
very slight accent. B is her Estonian-speaking friend, also a young female
fluent in Russian. B enters the cafeteria where A is standing behind the
counter. Both are glad to see each other. The Estonian greeting word
*tere* is already an established borrowing even in the local monolingual
variety of Russian.
(8) B: \textit{Tere, devočka!}  
‘Hello, girl!’

A: \textit{Tere, kallis!}  
‘Hello, dear!’

B: \textit{Ty so mnoj kurit’ budeš’?}  
you with me INSTR smoke will 2 SG  
‘Will you smoke with me?’

A: \textit{Jah.}  
‘Yes’

The symbolic exchange of languages may take place at the initial stage of a conversation before the speakers settle for a language or languages of their further communication, but it may also be chosen for a longer period than just a couple of sequences. It remains to be seen whether such examples can be analysed in terms of the language crossing framework (Rampton 1995, 1998). One should also expect that in the present sociolinguistic setting the concept of what constitutes an in- and out-group might be changing. In the pre-independence period when the two language communities were clearly defined and used to lead separate lives, interactions across the (ethno)linguistic border were automatically considered as out-group communication. However, example (8) shows that at least in some sector of the population micro-communities may be formed among more or less fluent bilinguals across the ethnic borders.

As a whole, a microsociolinguistic approach developed by Auer and associates (Auer 1998a) is extremely useful for describing interactions of this kind, because it considers sequences both preceding and following a given sequence. It is most likely that other analytical frameworks that concentrate on a particular utterance rather than on a conversation will simply disregard examples such as (7) and (8) if there is no code-switching within a particular sequence.

5. Some areas of convergence

Convergence in the direction of Estonian has not been studied, apart from one paper dedicated to the equivalents of Estonian compound nouns in local Russian (Verschik 2004b). As is well known empirically, contact-induced change in general and convergence in particular never occur in just one subsystem of a language. Therefore, it is reasonable to look for convergence in other subsystems as well. According to Clyne (1997), it is the multilingual individual’s speech where convergence usually occurs.

Clyne (2003: 76–79) has proposed a typology of transference leading to convergence. Certain types, such as phonic, lexical, multiple, seman-
tic, lexicosyntactic, semanticosyntactic, and, to a lesser extent, pragmatic convergence, are rather visible in the Russian–Estonian contact setting. As a detailed description of convergence remains beyond the limit of the present study, I would briefly point out one aspect that may prove to be methodologically relevant for other contact-situations as well.

Although the direction of convergence is clear (towards Estonian), the shape of convergent forms, constructions, etc., varies, depending on language proficiency, pragmatic goals, type of interaction, and various factors that facilitate convergence. This means that a bilingual speaker has at his/her disposal not just two items belonging to two monolingual varieties of the languages involved, but rather a continuum that may be called a convergence continuum. It is a degree of compromise that constitutes the continuum. It is a well-known phenomenon in closely related languages but not limited to these. Such a continuum exists at least in some types of convergence.

Let us analyse an Estonian lexical item that frequently appears in the speech of Russian–Estonian bilinguals and of Russian monolinguals as well, such as kääbemaks ‘value-added tax’. As a compound noun (kääbe-‘(money) circulation’ GEN + maks ‘tax’), it has two stresses in Estonian: the main stress is on the first component and the secondary one on the second. Further, it contains a front vowel [ä] that Russian does not have. The character of the obstructed [b] differs considerably in the two languages. A speaker may wish to pronounce this lexical item totally in accordance with the rules of Russian phonetics as [k’æjbmáks], that is, with the reduction of vowels preceding the stressed syllable, voiced [b] and with only one stress. However, the same speaker may choose a shape that is closer to Estonian, for instance, he or she may apply two stresses. The character of the first vowel may vary from [ə] to [ä] with a whole range of intermediate options.

Different choices along the continuum convey different information about the speaker’s intentions. For instance, if an interaction takes place between a Russian monolingual and a Russian–Estonian bilingual and the latter chooses a rendition that maximally approximates the Estonian version, then the choice could be interpreted at least in four ways as: (1) a wish to emphasise a good command of Estonian, (2) a wish to emphasise the otherness of this lexical item within the Russian-language conversation, (3) a wish to demonstrate the distance between the speakers, and (4) irony.

Therefore, it is crucial that it can be the same bilingual speaker that moves across the continuum choosing the degree of compromise in accordance with his/her conversational goals. The choice may also be conscious, for we now know that compromise and change by deliberate decision (Thomason 1997, 2001) are important mechanisms in contact-
induced change in general and in multilingual interactions in particular. This example illustrates how difficult and even impossible it may be to assign language labels (‘Russian’, ‘English’) in the case of multilingual communication (see also Clyne 1987; Romaine 1995: 180 on so-called blurred sites of code-switching; Clyne 2003: 169–179 on facilitation in transfer).

The following phenomenon that involves orthography may be considered a manifestation of convergence in a somewhat broader sense. The two standard languages use different alphabets; nevertheless, in an informal setting, Russian-language items may be sometimes simply transliterated into Estonian. Clyne (2004, p. c.) suggests a shorthand term ‘graphemically integrated lexical transference’ for this phenomenon. In a marketplace where salespersons are seldom concerned about language legislation, accepted norms and spelling rules, one can frequently observe Russian-language names of various merchandise transliterated with Latin characters: *lossos* ‘lax’, cf. Russian *losos* and Estonian *lõhe*, *tomatõ*, cf. Russian *tomaty* ‘tomatoes’ (NOM PL) and Estonian *tomatid* (registered in Railway Station Market in Tallinn, 2003–2004). To the best of my knowledge, this phenomenon (graphemically integrated lexical transference) has not yet been described in the language contact literature.

Another question that has to be addressed in this section is: what is the source of convergent forms? Is it just an impact of L2 (Estonian) on L1 (Russian) that, indeed, can be expected in the situation of L2 acquisition by a substantial number of speakers and even in the case of a merely passive knowledge (Thomason 1997)? The answer to this question is ‘no’. Impact L2 > L1 is not the single source of convergent forms to appear. Let us not forget that a certain number of Estonians as users of Russian as a second language are still very much present in Tallinn and in the north-eastern part of the country with the Russian majority. This means that varieties of Russian as L2 (often heavily influenced by Estonian phonology and morphosyntax, and with a relatively limited lexicon) are present on the linguistic market. I have observed the same forms and items used both by Estonians in their Russian speech as well as by Russians in their varieties of Russian (see Verschik 2004 for the case of compound nouns). Other convergent forms that might have been copied from Russian as an L2 include the use of local cases or local adverbs after certain verbs.

In Estonian the verbs *jätma* ‘to leave’, *matma* ‘to bury’ govern a noun or a local adverb in one of the directional local cases, i.e. the Illative or the Allative case (question *where to?*) and *käima* ‘to go, to walk’ require the Inessive case (i.e. static local case, question *where?). On the contrary, in Russian the respective verbs *ostavit* ‘to leave’, *poxoronit* ‘to bury’
require the Prepositional case (where?) and the verb xodit’ ‘to go, to walk’ require the Accusative (where to?). Both dominant Russian-speakers and dominant Estonian-speakers produce sentences in Russian where the government pattern has been copied from Estonian. Example (9) is taken from a bilingual TV-broadcast called Tallinn—St. Petersburg (09.06.2004). The speaker is an Estonian-dominant bilingual:

(9)  I on by poxoronen sjuda.
    And he was buried to here (directional)
    ‘And he was buried here.’
    Compare with monolingual Russian in (10):

(10) I on byl poxoroneno zdes’
    And he was buried here (static)
    ‘And he was buried here.’

At the same time, Russian-dominant bilinguals may produce sentences like (11) where the government is copied from Estonian:

(11) Ja ostavila konspekt domoj.
    I left notes to home (directional)
    ‘I left my notes at home.’

Compare this to monolingual Russian (12) and to monolingual Estonian (13):

(12) Ja ostavila konspekt doma.
    I left notes at home (static)
    ‘I left my notes at home.’

(13) Jätsin konspekti koju.
    I left PAST ISG notes to home (directional)
    ‘I left my notes at home.’

On the surface it is impossible to tell what is the direct source of copying. This is an interesting methodological question that deserves more research.

6. Possible new varieties

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, the regained Estonian independence, changes in the political climate, and the democratisation of text-production since 1991 have resulted in the less focused character of the speech communities (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Numerous
young Russian-speakers master Estonian (with a variable degree of success) and associate themselves with Estonia. Such speakers often emphasise that they are not simply Russians but ‘Estonia’s Russians’. Although there are no studies of attitudes and perception at the moment, there is empirical evidence that Russian-speakers in Russia often describe Russian as spoken in Estonia as different or even ‘odd’.

It does not immediately follow that there is one, clearly definable and fully crystallised variety of Russian. At present, there exists a mode of communication with a limited use between salespersons and customers in shops and markets (for that reason labelled as ‘market discourse’). Speakers who are not confident enough and do not attempt to speak Estonian have, nevertheless, developed a compromise strategy that facilitates understanding and expresses politeness. These speakers would not try to produce anything approximating a full version of Estonian, but rather would use Estonian nouns, discourse markers, numerals and sometimes adjectives, while the rest is completely Russian. Note that nouns bear neither Russian nor Estonian inflections. A possible exception to this is a sporadic use of the Estonian Nominative plural and the Partitive singular after cardinal numerals. According to the rules, cardinal numerals except üks ‘one’ govern a noun in the Partitive singular (üks kotti ‘one bag’ but kaks kotti ‘two bags’). Phrases with numerals are frequent in market communication and, therefore, it is possible that this type of construction may be memorized as a whole by the users of ‘market discourse’.

It is too early to say anything about a possible connection between ‘market discourse’ and various contact languages (trade pidgins in particular). So far it seems that ‘market discourse’ is used only unilaterally, i.e. salespersons addressing their Estonian customers in this manner, while the customers reply in Estonian or in Russian.

A typical example of ‘market discourse’ is (14) where a Russian-speaking saleswoman praises her cranberries in the market:

(14) Očen’ xoroši-je, värške i väga magus.
very good-NOM PL fresh NOM SG and very sweet NOM SG
‘Very good ones, fresh and very sweet’

Note that Estonian-language items are in their basic form, the Nominative singular, although the Russian adjective is in the plural, referring to omitted jagody ‘berries’. The contrast is visible through the juxtaposition with the monolingual Estonian version (15):

(15) Väga hea-d, värške-d ja väga magusa-d.
Very good-NOM PL fresh-NOM PL and very sweet-NOM PL
‘Very good ones, fresh and very sweet’
In (16) a saleswoman offers a dress to a customer. Here, Estonian lexical items do not receive any inflectional morphology (although in a negative sentence the Partitive case is obligatory):

(16) A ne hotite kleit vot pidulik?
And not want PL 2 dress NOM SGh here festive NOM SG
‘Would you like this party-gown?’
(heard in Railway Station Market, 2003)

There are various reasons why this communication strategy is being developed and used. Some Russian-speakers claim that Estonian is extremely unavailable. However, the unavailability should not be understood as withholding the language from ‘others’ and using foreigner talk instead (compare with the situation of Turks in Germany and a range of foreigner talk strategies as described in Hinnenkamp 1984). The situation of Russian in Estonia is completely different from that of immigrant minorities in Western Europe (see Rannut 1994; Ozolins 1999 on the language policy problems and objectives in the Baltic states). The ‘unavailability’ of Estonian is partly due to the polarisation of the two speech communities in the Soviet period (i.e. no friends from and virtually no need to communicate with the other speech community), partly to a self-sufficient character of the Russian-speaking population (one third of the population, concentrated in certain urban areas). All this makes any systematic study of Estonian unnecessary in the eyes of many Russian-speakers. Although the number of Russians who have at least some proficiency in Estonian has increased from 15 percent in 1989 to 44 percent in 2000, a simple calculation nevertheless shows that about 56 percent of Russians have no knowledge of Estonian at all (see data of the recent census on http://www.stat.ee).

In his insightful study on the refusal of L2 learning Hinnenkamp (1980) describes a different sociocultural setting where Turks in Germany, as a means of protest against hostile attitudes on the part of the German mainstream, try to avoid learning the full version of German. Although the refusal to learn Estonian appears in a rather different situation where the representatives of the former ‘metropolis’ are those who do not wish to learn the language of the ‘aborigines’, certain issues elaborated in the aforementioned study may prove methodologically useful.

However, since a total refusal to speak any Estonian today on the part of a person working with customers has unpleasant implications (starting from clients walking away to another salesperson and ending with legal complaints), the strategy described above enables speakers with a very low proficiency in Estonian to take a step in the direction of their potential clients.
In addition to this, there is some empirical evidence that ‘market discourse’ is available to relatively proficient speakers of Estonian as L2 as a register. I have encountered a young male speaker of Estonian as an L2 who was able to speak Estonian, although he was not very confident. He tried both monolingual versions, i.e. his native Russian and his L2 (Estonian). As the interaction went on, he decided to use ‘market discourse’ as a most effective means of communication that, in his view, would be a compromise between Russian and Estonian: since this is not a completely monolingual version of Russian and some Estonian-language elements are present, a necessary degree of politeness towards the second interlocutor is being demonstrated. At the same time, the prevalence of Russian grammar and Russian lexical items allows the speaker to feel more confident:

(17) Da ja smotreI korteri-d, kakI tuba takie
    yes I watched flat-NOM PL two room PART SG such NOM PL
    vaikse-d.
    small-NOM PL
    ‘Yes, I have seen flats, two rooms, such small ones’

According to complicated rules of the partial and total object in Estonian, the verb meaning ‘to see’ requires an object in the Partitive (korteri-<i>eid</i>) and not in the Nominative (korteri), as it is in our example. As for the noun <i>tuba</i> ‘room’, in this declension type the Nominative and the Partitive are identical, so there is no way to identify which case the speaker implies here (the Partitive case is required after a cardinal numeral). It is also possible that the phrase <i>kakI tuba</i> ‘two rooms’ is perceived by the speaker as a fixed expression (see the discussion above), for the topic of conversation was selling and buying property. As we already know, the speaker has some proficiency in Estonian and may have acquired the rule of using the Partitive singular after cardinal numerals.

7. Conclusions

As was demonstrated above, a study of language contacts in the post-Soviet setting where two languages have high prestige within respective speech communities provides methodologically relevant points for general language contact research. I agree with scholars who claim that the speakers’ attitudes determine the outcome of language contacts to a large extent.

A closer look at Russian–Estonian code-switching shows that it is successfully used as an out-group communication strategy and, in some
cases, may develop in a so-called paradoxical politeness when a dominant speaker of language A and a dominant speaker of language B exchange their languages (A-dominant speaks B and B-dominant speaks A).

The data suggest that linguistic creativity and playing with a language are an integral part of bilingual communication and have to be studied more closely. Convergence in the direction of Estonian is already happening in various areas. Convergence is not to be viewed solely as global copying of Estonian lexical items and grammatical properties into Russian, but rather as a continuum (for instance, starting with a complete phonological integration of Estonian lexical items into Russian and ending with the complete preservation of Estonian pronunciation, with a set of options in between). As some Estonians speak Russian as an L2, usually with a limited competence, their Russian speech is also likely to be a source of impact on the Russian of the Russians. New varieties, such as mixed speech that I call here ‘market discourse’, and other varieties of local Russian might not necessarily be clearly definable. It has to be emphasised that the same speaker is very likely to use several varieties, as the borders between the varieties are fuzzy.

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