



The Characteristic Trends in Latvian Regional Press: Changes in the Traditional Functions of the Press, the Aspects of Identity and Cultural Diversity¹

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The competition “Quality of Latvian language in periodical press” held by the State Language Centre of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia served as a source of inspiration for an in-depth study of regional press (in this context, “regional” refers to non-national level editions) and this paper. The aim of the competition is to identify, evaluate and award the periodical press publications that maintain high language standards, as well as to provide well-reasoned recommendations for improving the quality of language. This competition, involving the cooperation of the State Language Centre with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Culture and Latvian Press Publishers Association, has been taking place since 2016; in 2020, 20 competitors applied. Although regional newspapers are by no means the only participants, as national newspapers, weekly magazines, magazines published less frequently than weekly, and specialised publications also take part, it is the regional newspapers that are the most active participants each year; in addition, they are also eager to find out how they performed and welcome the evaluators’ feedback.

However, language quality of the regional press is not the topic of this paper; in this context, it is a matter of secondary importance. Upon taking up the evaluation of regional press, it was the content of the newspapers, their wide and varied range of topics, as well as richness and variety of language that attracted attention, in comparison to the so-called major newspapers and internet portals. In addition, the material studied allowed to draw certain conclusions on the changes in the functions of the regional press: its former primary functions of being the main information media, propagandists and agitators have now been superseded by fulfilling the role of a trustworthy friend and ally of the residents of the various regions of Latvia.

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The regional newspapers that took part in the competition in 2019 and 2020 have been used in the paper.

In 2019, the following newspapers took part:

- *Zemgale* (for Dobeles county)
- *Zemgales Ziņas* (newspaper for Zemgale)
- *Ventas Balss* (Ventspils)
- *Auseklis* (newspaper for Aloja, Krimulda, Limbaži and Salacgrīva counties)
- *Kursas Laiks* (newspaper for Southern Kurzeme)
- *Dzirkstele* (the only newspaper for Gulbene county)
- *Alūksnes Ziņas* (newspaper for Alūksne and Ape counties).

In 2020, the following newspapers took part:

- *Kursas Laiks* (newspaper for Southern Kurzeme)
- *Kurzemes Vārds* (newspaper for Liepāja and the surrounding counties)
- *Bauskas Dzīve* (newspaper for Bauska, Iecava, Rundāle and Vecumnieki counties)
- *Rēzeknes Vēstis* (newspaper for Rēzekne and Latgale)
- *Kurzemnieks* (newspaper for Central Kurzeme)
- *Brīvā Daugava* (newspaper for Jēkabpils and the surrounding counties)
- *Latgales Laiks* (newspaper for Latgale).

Based on the newspapers analysed, the objective of this paper was chosen: namely, to study the varied content of regional press (while also paying attention to language use), assess its functions, as well as to clarify and gain an understanding of the viability of regional press under present day conditions of fierce competition with other (including digital) media.

Regional press: a general overview

Latvian regional press has been a staple of the state media environment for decades, and, despite the fact that the readership is declining with each year due to objective reasons, as a significant part of it in the rural regions consists of elderly people, while the younger generation moves to regional centres, the capital or even abroad in search for a better life, money is always put aside for the so-called “local paper”. For the most part, the elderly readers are not wealthy, their purchasing power is lower than the city residents’, they are mostly pensioners and often have limited or no access to the internet, so the local newspaper that comes out several times a week or weekly is like a close friend. The study “The Diversity of the Media Environment in Latvia” makes note of cases when people even form a reading chain: the neighbours make an arrangement as to who is going to subscribe to the regional paper for the particular month and, after reading the paper, hand it over to the neighbour to read; alternatively, the pensioners form a reading queue at the nearest library, as they cannot afford to subscribe (Š u l m a n e, U z u l e 2018, 130). The frequency of publication of the regional newspapers varies: it

might be weekly (in which case there are 52 issues per year), biweekly (102 issues per year), triweekly (152 issues per year) or even five times a week (249 issues per year). Local advertisements (buying, selling, swapping, renting) have a significant role in these editions, as they energise the local market of supply and demand. In the regions, the younger generation obtain information on Latvian, European and global events via other channels (TV, internet portals); the regional press, on the other hand, reports on local events and residents, thus promoting them and also boosting local patriotism.

The portal *lsm.lv* (“Latvijas sabiedriskie mediji” / “Public broadcasting of Latvia”) has reported on the stable and special role of the local newspapers: “In the time of crisis, regional press has attained a special role: in addition to providing information, it also performs a social function, admit the editors-in-chief of the regional newspapers. Although the dramatic decline of income has severely impacted both the advertising market and people’s ability to subscribe to their favourite publications, many people still try to set aside money specifically for the local newspaper” (*LSM*).

The readers have a high level of trust in the regional media. Aidis Tomsons, journalist of Latvia’s national public-service radio broadcasting network *Latvijas Radio*, pointed out this very important factor in a 2019 interview with the regional newspaper *Dzirkstele*: “In the past, 15–20 years ago, the media environment was dominated by the traditional media: radio, TV, and press. At the moment, press – most definitely national press – has lost its position, as it is subsidised to serve the interests of particular media owners, and the regional press, in fact, is all that remains. Nowadays, the internet, ruled by quick and superficial reading, dominates the information environment. The superficial actions make the availability of information more shallow, less verifiable, not to mention the possibility to create fake news. The information that we obtain has become less trustworthy” (Tomsons 2019).

As Guntars Līcis, Executive Director and Vice Chairman of the Board of the *Latvijas preses izdevēju asociācija* (“Latvian Press Publishers Association”) explained in a conversation (Līcis 2020), there are 37 regional newspapers in total in Latvia (not including the self-governments’ informative publications) with 53,230 subscribers (as of October 2020); however, this number is not final, as the newspapers (up to one third of the aforementioned publications) are also sold in retail. According to the data available to the Latvian Press Publishers Association, one-time print runs of newspapers range from 1000 to 4500 issues. The oldest Latvian regional newspaper is *Kurzemes Vārds*: in November 2020 it celebrated its 102nd anniversary. During the Soviet era its name was changed to *Komunisti*, but in 1990 its historical name was restored. *Kurzemes Vārds* is one of the symbols of the city, it is published five times a week, and by providing information on the news for Liepāja and the surrounding counties, it has become one of the most-read regional newspapers in Latvia.

Table 1

The most subscribed to regional newspapers in Latvia

No.	Name of newspaper	Headquarters
1.	<i>Kurzemes Vārds</i>	Liepāja
2.	<i>Druva</i>	Cēsis
3.	<i>Neatkarīgās Tukuma Ziņas</i>	Tukums
4.	<i>Auseklis</i>	Limbaži
5.	<i>Liesma</i>	Valmiera
6.	<i>Stars</i>	Madona
7.	<i>Bauskas Dzīve</i>	Bauska
8.	<i>Rēzeknes Vēstis</i> (the Latvian edition)	Rēzekne
9.	<i>Saldus Zeme</i>	Saldus
10.	<i>Kurzemnieks</i>	Kuldīga

Not all regional newspapers given in Table 1 are analysed in the paper: the focus is on the newspapers that took part in the language quality competition, listed in the introduction of the paper. However, there is a partial overlap between the two groups. Readers' trust in local newspapers is also built on the fact that the journalists that work there are familiar: well-known people that are their own. As researchers Ilze Šulmane and Laura Uzule point out (Šulmane, Uzule 2018, 121), "In regional media, the editorial staff tends to be more feminine. Notably, regional journalists are mostly long-time employees at the particular medium: several interviewees' career at their workplace spans even several decades. Most journalists are satisfied with their career choice and do not plan to change it." Moreover, "professionals employed at the regional media do not feel that their main professional objective is to act as a watchdog; rather, it is to fulfil the role of a supportive assistant and informer" (Uzule 2018, 183).

Thematic variety

The newspapers are highly thematically diverse. If the local general practitioner has only weekly appointments or is a long drive away, the "home doctor" is sure to help both humans and animals: the short articles explain how to use over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, as well as provide information on the possible side effects; the authors also advise not to be overzealous in their use of medicine, as caution should be taken even when using OTC products. Newspapers invite the readers to attend medical examinations, report on mobile mammography services, visiting consultations of phlebologists, allergologists and other specialists; at the same time, they also advise not to neglect folk medicine: to grow marigold, camomile, peppermint in their garden, to pick medicinal herbs at the right time and prepare them for winter by drying their leaves for tea, preparing tinctures, and recalling methods used by grandmothers. Readers can grow many of the recommended ingredients in their own garden. There is practical advice on how to

deal with moles, ants and water voles, flocks of thrushes and wild boars. In addition, neighbours help each other by sharing advice. This is consistent with ethicists' Deni Elliott's and David Ozar's stance: "A fourth central value of journalism is *community building*. In addition to providing the society with information and enabling individuals and groups to act autonomously, it is also part of journalism's appropriate work to build the bonds of the society in other ways. "Human interest" stories are an example of stories that help build community" (Meyers 2010, 15).

It can be concluded that pages and columns devoted to recipes and home cooks are very popular, as there is quite a lot of material and advice, as well as recipes, devoted to this topic. These columns offer wonderful and at the same time simple recipes with the motto: "Be economic!", meaning that there is no need for expensive or exotic ingredients that are so common in the recipes posted on the internet in an attempt to surprise the reader. Plenty of advice is offered by, for example, the jovial Edīte Ločmele who summed up the life of a pensioner in the newspaper *Alūksnes Ziņas* (AZ² 07.09.2018, 7) like this: "I live for today and have no fear of tomorrow; I accept the life as it is. Whether I'm criticised or praised, I treat it all the same and waste no time in arguing with fools". In addition, she offers delicate (not didactic or arrogant) advice on how to eat both healthy and delicious food by spending EUR 2 a day, keep a cheerful outlook on life and how to set some money aside from the pension that is below the subsistence level to go to a sanatorium each year. The topic of travelling is special: those who have less means travel around Latvia or visit the capital, as there is quite a lot to see in, for example, *Rīgas Motormuzejs* (the Riga Motor Museum). Those who have a bit more money visit the closest neighbouring countries – Lithuania and Estonia or a bit farther to Poland – not only to go on excursions, but also to purchase school supplies for their children. Wealthier people go to more distant European countries, and virtual trips to exotic and far-off places take place at tourism evenings held at regional community centres, when a trip to, for example, Guatemala, is made possible by listening to the traveller's story and impressions, as well as their video materials and photos.

As evidenced by articles on dahlia, tomato, and berry growers, as well as juice producers, people featured in them encourage others to work and realise their potential, give practical advice, as well as advocate for learning from neighbours and promote healthy competition. In addition, there are ads that regularly feature fairs and plant nurseries, which often contain information that might be of state importance, yet is overlooked by the major press. For example, the industrious Iveta Jogure from "Lejiņas" farm in Anna rural territory (Vidzeme) invites visitors to a tomato show held at the regional community house, as she grows a hundred (!) tomato varieties (AZ 14.09.2018, 1), while Ārija Mičule in Litene (Vidzeme)

² AZ – *Alūksnes Ziņas*; a full list of abbreviated newspaper titles is given at the end of the paper.

grows 130 dahlia and 90 chrysanthemum varieties (*Dz* 11.09.2018, 6–7). Māris Šermuks from Auce (Zemgale) grows viburnum berries – unique berries with medicinal properties, which is the reason why he refers to them as berry queens; territory covering 7 ha near his house is used to grow 12 varieties of viburnum shrubs (*ZZ* 27.09.2018, 16–17). SIA “Latvijas pusdārgakmens” is a distinctive and unique company: its head Ainis Vorobjovs had already prepared to leave for work in Scandinavia; however, he managed to unearth (both figuratively and literally) semi-precious stones in Latvia. The story of this company is also one of the 26 Vidzeme success stories of 2018, which empowers the people featured in them, while also inspiring others (*Dz* 14.09.2018, 8). Notably, the columns feature dozens of such people – needlewomen, home producers, medicinal herb gatherers, flag and antique collectors, candied fruit and sweet producers: each of them is unique! And, if nothing else, there are always some delightful nature surprises in the garden, such as giant puffballs or triple cucumbers.

Newspapers are proud of the strong families: “It is the parents who must set a good example to their children, as everything starts in the family,” says Rolands Vendiņš, a great father from Alūksne (Vidzeme) (*AZ* 07.09.2018, 10–11). Kaspars Losevs from Ranka (Vidzeme) shares a similar sentiment: “A family should be full, with a father, a mother, and their children” (*Dz* 07.09.2018, 8). Several newspapers feature thematic articles on father’s role in the family to celebrate Father’s Day. A pedagogue at the “Sprīdītis” kindergarten in Alūksne says, “Each father is a super-dad to his children. The most important thing is that he is beside them, and if dad comes to pick up his child, the child is much happier!” (*AZ* 07.09.2018, 2). Personal experience stories are often emotional, but also empowering, for example, when people share their experience on how to raise children with developmental and mobility disabilities (*Dz* 07.09.2018, 10).

Each county has something to be proud of and something to learn from. It refers not only to the people themselves, but also to the work they do and how they do it: in one rural territory, a culture house is restored, in another, a new open air stage is built or the flooring of the existing stage is restored, while in Lielplatone manor territory (Zemgale) the restored laundry house is unveiled.

In a 2018 interview with the regional newspaper *Bauskas Dzīve*, media researcher Rolands Tjarve pointed out: “The strength of the local – or regional – media is that they are closer to the people: the journalists know every individual of the local society and thus can forecast and analyse the developments. Local journalists possess a much better historical memory, meaning that their work can be more analytical and of sufficient quality. Moreover, the locals know the regional media professionals, so they are much more open to sharing information with them as opposed to the major national media, whose journalists are mistrusted due to this very reason: the locals believe that they lack professionalism or accuracy when reporting what was said by the information provider. However, if regional journalists did this, they would have nowhere to hide: they all live in the

same town” (Tj arve 2018). Jock Lauterer, professor in journalism, shares a similar sentiment: “As community journalists, we are accessible and open to our readers, as they are to us; there should be very few barriers, physical or otherwise, between main street and the newsroom. In community journalism it’s useful to think like this: *A stranger is just one of your readers you haven’t met yet*. Further, as community journalists, we are pledged to be accountable to our sources, the community at large and to ourselves for what goes in the paper with our name on it” (L a u t e r e r 2005, 254). The linguist David Crystal also noted that “Another kind of language variation shows the relationships people have with each other. How do we talk to people when we meet them? It all depends on how well we know them, and what our relationship is to them. If they’re friends, we’ll talk to them in a familiar way. [...] And if we don’t know them at all, we’ll be more distant and formal” (C r y s t a l 2019, 141). Regional press addresses its audience as friends and old acquaintances.

At the same time, it is difficult to write about one’s own community. R. Tjarve admits that “self-censorship might get activated to a certain degree – “oh, why should we be so critical, they are our own, after all.” That is a problem, of course, yet I believe that in most regions the journalists are professional and serve society” (T j a r v e 2018).

It is the thematic diversity of a regional newspaper that makes it welcome in each home. Moreover, the newspapers try to cover everything, including not only the positive, but also the negative aspects of local life. Unfortunately, as the journalists themselves admit, an unpleasant trend in this regard has emerged lately. “As the financial opportunities of regional media declines, their potential dependence on advertisers is growing. “Our editorial office has encountered a situation when major advertisers decline to continue our cooperation, because journalists have prepared material that criticises them,” a journalist working at a regional medium disclosed. Although the economic situation of the regional media until now made it possible to stay neutral and not to give in to advertisers’ pressure, it might drastically change soon. Furthermore, regional media employees also see the impunity of self-governments’ staff as potentially threatening: self-government officials and employees increasingly ignore regional journalists by refusing to provide the requested information, interviews, and comments, thus demonstrating their displeasure with media work and criticism levelled against them, thereby intentionally interfering with the media’s ability to perform their main tasks, namely, to provide neutral and object information and to monitor those in power” (Š u l m a n e, U z u l e 2018, 125–126).

Porridge day at *Ventspils Piejūras brīvdabas muzejs* (Ventspils Seaside Open-Air Museum), cheese festival, milk festival, bread day, apple celebration, tomato days and harvest festivals – these are only a few of the many events that celebrate the locals, bringing joy to both the producers and those who buy and taste the productions, attend the events and discuss them.

Local identity is also enforced by turning to history: *Zemgales Ziņas* (2019) tells of the centenary of Penkule Culture House at Penkule Manor and of a new exhibition in the former home of Jānis Čakste, the first President of Latvia, in Auči. Other places take pride in their history as well: *Rēzeknes Vēstis* (2019) feature “Mūsu ciema klubs: pagātnes lappuses” (“The Club of Our Village: Tales of the Past”) – tales of history told by local pensioners, while the 2019 “History Pages” column in Jēkabpils newspaper *Brīvā Daugava* features Jānis Ģībietis’, head of popular education section of Jēkabpils county municipality, memories of work in the post-war period. The locals celebrate restored monuments – in Aloja (Vidzeme), the monument to Aloja residents fallen in battles for freedom has been restored, using the 1939 design by Kārlis Zāle (*A* 14.12.2018, 1–2), and a monument to the veterinarian Kristaps Helmanis has been unveiled in Tērvete (Zemgale) to commemorate his 170th birthday (*Z* 07.06.2020).

The newspaper *Kursas Laiks* (*KL* 20.09.2018) starts the new school year by taking a tour round the Kurzeme schools: Vērgale Primary School (there are few schools that can celebrate an anniversary as grand as 190!), Bārta Primary School, Durbe School, Rucava Primary School, and Grobiņa Gymnasium, where a graduate student has returned as a teacher. Bauska Primary School, on the other hand, had its centenary, and to celebrate it, a whole spread was dedicated to the event, featuring graduates’ memories and life stories (*BDz* 24.09.2019).

Code (Zemgale) resident Dainuvīte Brūvere celebrated her 70th birthday; while someone celebrates a birthday every day, this one is special, as Brūvere tends the Rundāle Palace rose garden (*BDz* 13.09.2019, 9), and her motto is – life is a bed of roses! Both restored and new objects are celebrated: Jelgava Palace is renovated, while Valgunde Sports Hall (both in Zemgale) is declared to be one of the most valuable buildings in Latvia in 2018. Merchants at Kuldīga market (Kurzeme) say that Germans and Dutch marvel at our sorrels, as they do not have such plants, so the merchants have to tell the foreign visitors that sorrels are a kind of special spinach.

Newspapers of towns near the border tell of neighbourly connections: for example, *Bauskas Dzīve* (*BDz* 24.09.2019, 8–9) published a report from Skaistkalne (Zemgale), where both Latvian and Lithuanian flags flew proudly, celebrating the Baltic Unity Day, when the legendary Battle of Saulē (1236) is commemorated. The people gathered for the celebration were addressed by Viktoras Rinkevičius and Audrys Šimas, members of the Seimas of Lithuania who reside in the Biržai district. “Latvians and Lithuanians have always been united nations; therefore, the tradition of this celebration must continue.” In border areas, the nations have intermarried; many people have relatives on the other side of the border. The Baltic Unity Day is celebrated in Biržai as well (*BDz* 24.09.2019, 16), where Biržai and Pasvalys self-governments sign cooperation agreements with the self-government of Bauska municipality. However, there are also some drawbacks due to insufficient language knowledge (of either Lithuanian or Latvian, respectively). As there is

little interest in language courses, it is impossible to organise them, meaning that Latvians and Lithuanians get by with the help of interpreters.

Language of the regional press

Each style is characterised as a “language variation that has developed throughout history; the choice of a particular style depends on the content and environment of communication, as well as the communicator’s attitude towards them” (R o z e n b e r g s 1995, 80). In accordance with the traditional Latvian stylistics framework, media i.e. press [including regional press – auth. D. L, Z. L.] language is the language of mass media with all the characteristic functions and features of the publicist style. The features of publicist style are determined by its functions: to inform, to influence, to educate, to nurture, to promote, to organise, and to entertain (Ibid., 92). These functions, along with the extralinguistic factors, determine the choice of the required language features.

The linguist Daina Nītiņa admits that “the publicist or media language style is not uniform and it may have features of different styles. [...] [It] is largely a reflection of the public life of its time” (N ī t i ņ a, I ļ j i n s k a, P l a t o n o v a 2008, 125). Moreover, as the authors of the book underline, the development of this style is influenced by public view, moods, and trends; at the same time, it also has a strong impact on public opinion and people’s views. The dominant function of the publicist language style is the expressive and persuasive function. (Ibid., 128). Thus, the language style of the regional press is determined by the aims and objectives of the newspapers: they feature general information on national developments, as well as those regarding the capital of the state; however, greater emphasis is placed on local news and events, their own region and its people – individuals who do ordinary everyday work: teachers, postmen, gardeners, farmers, as well as people who are no longer employed, but do something unique and non-conventional, expressing love towards their region and country. The values of the nation do not change, as “the heart of Latvia is in its countryside”. This phrase has been used by the popular Latvian newspaper *Latvijas Avīze* journalists already since 1991 (B ū m a n e 2012).

The press language fulfils the functions of the publicist style: it is simple and easy to understand for all kinds of readers; the topics are simple and presented in a straightforward manner. Regional issues repeat from time to time; they are also well known to the journalists, yet the readers enjoy the stories, as they tell of their own people.

The language of the regional press sometimes deliberately makes use of obsolete words and barbarisms as expressive elements. Is it something to be worried about? As the linguist Regina Kvašytė explains, “These words are not subjected to actualisation; they usually have a different meaning in the modern language. This applies in particular to barbarisms that became such when the loanwords were replaced by new Latvian words” (K v a š y t ė 2012, 489). Therefore, these

elements can be considered individual markers of the particular text that act as specific elements of non-standard Latvian in general, not as words used in the particular region. Some examples of regional words include *iršoņi* (hornets), *gružkaste* (waste bin), *spindzeles* (wasps), *knauši* (mosquitoes) – in Liepāja (Kurzeme); as for barbarisms, such words as *vešūzis* (from German: *die Wäsche* – “1. laundry; 2. to wash” (VLV 1975, 728) and *šmucspainis* (from German: *der Schmutz* – “dirt, mud” (Ibid., 554)) have been used. As stated before, they are barbarisms in Latvian, not regional words of a particular location.

More examples of regional words can be found in the newspaper *Zemgale* (Z 08.06.2018, 5): it reports on the Alsunga Suiti women’s costumes, telling of *lindrūki*, *sviedru lupata*, *cūksudrabs* and *trakā drāna*; as it turns out, all these words denote parts of the costume. Such words serve as witnesses of regional language or the past, as well as reminders not to forget and also use them from time to time. It should be noted that “language is not characterised by a direct aspiration to perfection, but rather an aspiration to convenient and focused forms of expressions. In a way, the language finds these forms; therefore, it needs a choice, which is provided by language periphery situations and forms of possible variants” (Valgīna 2001, 10). At the same time, applying the concept of a language standard does not mean that the whole social group has to accept only one variant (Klinkenberg 1996, 268). A choice between several standard codes in the same society might exist, depending on the social situation of the user (economic, social, educational level), the context of the conversation, and the attitude towards the situation.

Historical places and ancient toponyms, as well as tourist trails and cycling routes that have been created in place of former railroads and roads, presented by regional historians, are celebrated. Naturally, when examining the neighbours’ and other European countries’ experiences, interesting words do pop up: for example, *plogings* (“plogging”) – “picking up litter while jogging” (MD), *glempings* (*glamping* – “a blend of camping with the adjective glamorous, i.e. the notion of glamorous camping” (MD)) when telling of the luxurious glamping “Bārtas krasts” in Rucava (Kurzeme), and pupils from Līvāni (Latgale) came up with the neologism *zip smēriņi* (sauces), and the sauces themselves won an award at the competition “My Business Idea 2019”.

When evaluating the language used in the regional press for the State Language Centre competition, it was pointed out that occasionally there is a sense of monotony in a number of newspaper articles and headlines, and the lack of a professional proofreader was also evident, as the newspapers are understaffed and overworked. Therefore, stylistic errors occur, as there is no time to polish the finer details of an article. For example, the smallest denomination of euros are called *centi* (cents) in Latvian, not *eirocenti*; however, some newspapers gave prices in *eirocenti* as late as 2018.

Usually, the press journalists’ language is not edited in the traditional sense, meaning that the publisher actively trusts them. However, not only the publisher, but

also the readers trust the journalists, which in the context of regional press is even more important. “Moreover, cultivating the style of language does not necessarily mean following grammar norms and observing the norms of literary language: in the professional environment, the skill to choose the most appropriate means of expression in terms of style and the situation in question in order to attract readers’ attention and persuade them, is also valued” (L i e p a 2011, 93). The seasoned journalist Aivars Ozoliņš highlights the same aspect in the interview conducted for the author’s study on the language of Latvia’s printed media: “It has to be something that the readers want to read. It has to be well written and captivating. But that depends on the individual’s own skills. The editorial staff can teach someone to write a news article; an opinion piece, on the other hand, is something a journalist has to learn to write on their own. One must know language and how to use it” (Ibid., 93). The author of a text may address the readers differently: both as a neutral reporter of facts and a personality providing independent analysis and description of a situation, stating their own position, and making use of linguistic individuality and stylistic freedom in order to avoid media language clichés.

“As evidenced by practical application [of the publicist style], sentence constructions more and more feature fixed and stable, semantically connected word combinations or word combinations that have become commonplace due to high usage” (R o z e n b e r g s 1995, 93). In addition, “language genres of the publicist style have a number of common features: in terms of content, this style is characterised by topicality and focus. [...] Media language covers large sections of society; therefore, this language is simple, apt, exact, clear, unequivocal. [...] In order to make sure that the information given is specific, facts, numbers, data, time, place, examples, quotes etc. are provided. [...] Publicist material has to be effective. It is achieved by making use of facts and means of expression” (Ibid., 93–94). The particularities of publicist style are also reflected in its lexis: it has its own specific terminology, it features terms from various fields, as well as professionalisms, numerous proper nouns (for example, names of institutions) and their abbreviations, phraseological units, non-complex sentence types (Ibid., 94). However, sometimes certain word combinations, locations, examples, names of institutions and their abbreviations, as well as certain phraseological units, are used too frequently in the language of printed press, creating a sense of monotony; since the same companies located in the particular region are discussed time and time again, a degree of repetition is unavoidable.

“Most journalists working at regional media treat their job as a mission and their life’s fulfillment and therefore keep on working, despite the pay; some journalists work very long hours and can earn decent money while regularly preparing many articles, while at the same time being aware that it has a negative impact on quality, increases the risk of errors, falling in a routine and encountering burnout” (Š u l m a n e, U z u l e 2018, 130).

The newspaper *Brīvā Daugava* (BD 25.10.2019, 1, 4) takes pride in Place Name Day in Viesīte, where (at Pauls Stradiņš’ School) 150 local dialectal words were collected.

Sometimes newspapers feature texts written in a dialect: for example, *Ventas Balss* publishes conversations overheard on a bus in Livonian dialect, and *Rēzeknes Vēstis* publishes its “Church News” in both – Latvian and Latgalian written language. Latgalian written language is periodically used in local newspapers; supplements, thematic pages and publications are prepared in major regional and municipal newspapers and magazines. “Mōras Zeme”, the supplement of the newspaper *Rēzeknes Vēstis*, is a long-existing publication. [...] “Latgališu Gazeta”, the monthly supplement of *Latgales Laiks*, is increasingly rarer published in Latgalian written language; the publications in the newspapers *Ludzas Zeme* and *Vaduguns* are also irregular (*VSL* 2016, 186). “These publications in Latgalian written language demonstrate to public text users that there are several varieties of Latvian, two traditions of Standard Latvian and various spoken forms of the language” (Ibid.).

Newspapers also provide their readers with a creative outlet; an example of this is the page “When soul’s song takes flight” in the newspaper *Rēzeknes Vēstis*. One such publication featured the Latgalian poet Ingrīda Tārauda, who resides in Ireland (*RV* 24.10.2019), but whose heart belongs to Latvia and Latgale. Readers send their sketches and poems to the “Pasta kaste” (“Mailbox”) column of *Rēzeknes Vēstis* as well. Other regional newspapers publish literary columns as well: *Zemgale* features the Jelgava poetry club “Pieskāriens” (“Touch”), while Dobeles – the literary society “Spārni” (“Wings”). Alfrēds Leja, Bearer of the Order of the Three Stars, published tales from his life (“A Mother’s Son” and “As I look back at the years gone by”) in several parts in the newspaper *Kursas Laiks* in 2019.

In search of a 21st century identity

Newspapers tell of people who have left and of those who come back. There are more articles on those who come back to Latvian countryside in order to preserve the Latvian language, their family roots, and their sense of home and belonging.

“Money won’t buy you everything,” (*KL* 04.07.2019, 11) states Lolita Vancere from Nīca (Kurzeme), who has spent 12 years in Ireland. “In “Auziņas” of Auzuciems I feel wonderful – like in a fairy tale. This is a place where I have to be. And it is important that children are with their grannies and other relatives.” She has 3 children, and in Ireland she spoke only Latvian with them. “With all the crap we ate in Ireland, it is fantastic to just go out in the garden and pick some berries or pluck some fruit! [...] I returned to my roots. There is a sense of community here.”

After 10 years, stewardess Kristīne Koļadina has ended her career at “Emirates”, the international airline of the United Arab Emirates, to return to her native Liepāja (Kurzeme) (*KV* 16.10.2020, 5). “Everything is so tasty here. The nature is so green, and Liepāja seems to be a right haven after all that whizzing around the world. I have been on many beaches around the world, both blue and not so blue, but you won’t find a more beautiful beach, softer sand, and delightful sunsets than in Liepāja anywhere in the world.”

A similar positive homecoming story has been published in the newspaper *Latgales Laiks* (LL 29.11.2019, 6) on Līga Pauļuka and Artūrs Miļicins, who have come back from Canada to Bebrene rural territory and are now busy with restoring the family home and tending to sheep. “You can feel the strength of family ties at “Strazdiņi”,” Līga admits. In Canada, she had been offered to advance her career; however, the family decided to return, as they missed home and the Latvian language. Many Līga’s and Artis’ friends have stayed in Canada and do not intend to come back. There are several reasons for that, the first being a high level of prosperity, the second – one of the parents is living abroad, so the children have also become cosmopolitan, and yet another – the person has married and a family home has been bought. Other young people from Ilūkste – Jānis Lāčplēsis and Lāsma Račkauskā, who have been living in the United Kingdom since 2005, also featured in the same issue – share such sentiments. “When I was a child, I had no money and nothing to eat. Thanks a lot for that, Latvia,” Jānis says with bitterness and irony. After being hardened by want and poverty, Jānis and Lāsma do not plan to come back. They also have no friends in their native country. The bread is not as tasty as in Latvia, but now there is plenty of it. In addition, both have made an arrangement not to speak Latvian to each other even at home in order to improve their English (LL 29.11.2019, 5). This is a different personal story; however, the newspaper has included it as well. “Migration to Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia and other places from Latvia is not motivated only by economic reasons: a wish to find a new identity, a different person, to become a true Englishman, Englishwoman or American is also a factor. [...] Latvian is intentionally spoken with an English accent, views on events reflect the position of the new host country, and the attitude towards Latvia is highly critical and dismissive” (K ū l e 2016, 88).

The newspaper *Auseklis* (for Aloja, Krimulda, Limbaži and Salacgrīva counties) has formed a column “Regions Await”, which reports that more and more children who had previously resided in another country now attend schools in Latvia: for example, in 2018, 60 families had returned to Kurzeme (A 21.12.2018, 11). In many cases, one of the main reasons for the return to Latvia was the parents’ wish for their children to learn Latvian, to speak and learn in their native language; however, it should be taken into account that only 9% of Latvian emigrant children and 12% children whose parents are Latvian nationals attend Latvian weekend schools (VSL 2016, 143–145).

The importance of regional press

When reading and evaluating regional newspapers, it can be concluded that each one of them holds something dear to one’s heart: somebody’s grandmother or grandfather comes from the particular region, an aunt, neighbour, class or schoolmate has worked in its hospital or school, library or gardening company – regional press runs through Latvia like a delicate thread, linking and connecting generations of its inhabitants. In addition, even if there is no closer connection,

we have at least visited someone in the town, gone mushrooming or for a swim there, participated in the traditional Cemetery Festival or stopped by while on the way somewhere else. And now it is all laid out for us to read in an article whose author has poured his/her heart and soul in it. Moreover, the regions are alive and everyone is addressed in a personal manner, as if it were a different world, not the 21st century, as names and surnames, as well as dates of birth and death are given; large families, gifted students, renovated schools and places are celebrated, as well as each rescue of a stork chick and cats who had climbed a 4m tall tree and could not get down – no one would be left to suffer their fate.

In the article “Current times call for qualitative media and knowledgeable readers” (*KL* 25.07.2019; 20–21), which features a discussion on the need for independent media in the regions, the lawyer Ieva Andersone says, “A regional newspaper should be like a good teacher. Balance is of particular importance for regional media, as they are often the only ones to cover the particular region. The main task is to report on current developments; at the same time, information on events and people should also be presented.”

Regional press teaches its readers not to complain and accept life as it is, to be empowered and not to give up. People ought to work and take pride in their place of birth, region, town, city, municipality; they should start with themselves. The times are hard, many people are overcome by depression, and in abandoned farmsteads “even Jesus is freezing” (*RV* 17.10.2020, 6).

“Latvians’ self-esteem is too low for the 21st century – inadequate for a country that is developed and a member of the European Union,” says professor Maija Kūle (*K ū l e* 2016, 89); however, despite all that, one must work and take pride in their country, nation, and state. Jānis Miķelsons, who works at “Mikaitas”, the largest sheep farm in Latvia, says, “People are complaining that all is bad. I cannot agree – life has never been better. People just have to learn a lot and be smarter about their actions” (*A* 19.12,2020, 2).

In the study on the diversity of the media environment in Latvia, heads and journalists of different media were interviewed. “When asked to predict the future of regional media, interviewed heads and journalists of the media were highly sceptical, painting a bleak picture. Representatives of regional newspapers were the most pessimistic, as they are aware of the changing pace of life, as well as the fact that their core audience consists of elderly people, conceding that the printed press might come to an end. However, local information is of great importance to people in the regions, meaning that this function will be fulfilled by something else, journalists note. “If regional newspapers die out, we will be replaced by public relations specialists – people will be fed soundbites regurgitated by oligarchs, businessmen, and political parties” – such is the grim forecast by regional media professionals” (*Š u l m a n e, U z u l e* 2018, 130–131).

Therefore, the current work by regional media should be duly appreciated. As media researcher R. Tjarve stated, “The current work is good enough. Journalists

know what their audience wants, as they follow the developments in everyday situations – in shops, on public transportation, in private conversations. This is the strength of regional media: they know and correctly assess what the society needs and provide it. I doubt that any important topics or directions have been ignored. Regional press is very good at fulfilling its function, which is why its audience wants it: its needs are fulfilled. And regional media should definitely be supported. It is one of the tasks of the Media Policy department of the Ministry of Culture” (Tj arve 2018).

And it is the highly specific content of regional media that strengthens 21st century Latvians’ identity. “In the era of cultural migration when national values are declining due to globalisation, [it is important – auth. D. L., Z. L.] that people stay loyal to the Latvian language (by knowing, using and developing the language), keep alive their sense of belonging (by living in Latvia and standing together with Latvia), keep alive the traditions (by maintaining them, as well as modernising) and not to give up the will to have their own state” (K ū l e 2016, 257). Media researcher L. Uzule points out: “Content provided by the regional media is a unique and very important source of information not only for the local audience, but also for the nation as a whole – Latvia does not end on the outskirts of Riga” (U z u l e 2018, 185).

Conclusions

The survival of regional press under conditions of fierce competition (including with electronic media) in Latvia is possible owing to its devoted readership.

Although the readership is declining each year due to objective reasons, the regional newspaper or “the local paper” is seen as a valuable source of information, tried and tested throughout the years. It also indicates a change in the functions of regional press: its former primary functions of being the main information media, propagandists and agitators have now been replaced by fulfilling the role of a trustworthy friend and ally of the residents of the various regions of Latvia.

Moreover, being acutely aware of the limited cultural event and socialisation options, the newspapers also perform social, welfare, and healthcare functions; thus, the postman often becomes the most welcome weekly guest in the lonely homes that are cut off from the problems of urban life.

The value of the newspapers is seen in their content, their wide and varied range of topics, as well as richness and variety of language in comparison to the so-called major newspapers and internet portals. Newspaper articles tell of familiar people, current regional events, provide advice on how to economise, adapting to the local situation and economic circumstances. Moreover, the journalists themselves are known to their audience: they live in the same region and have been working there for a long period of time.

Articles featured in regional newspapers also highlight the toughness of Latvian identity: there are numerous articles on both those who have emigrated and those

who have returned. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the content of regional newspapers is of great importance to the nation as a whole.

List of abbreviated newspaper titles

- A* – *Auseklis* (newspaper for Aloja, Krimulda, Limbaži and Salacgrīva municipalities). Publisher – SIA “Izdevniecība Auseklis”, Limbaži.
- AZ* – *Alūksnes Ziņas* (newspaper of Alūksne and Ape municipalities). Publisher – SIA “Reģionu mediji”.
- BD* – *Brīvā Daugava* (newspaper of Jēkabpils and the surrounding municipalities). Publisher – SIA “Brīvā Daugava”.
- BDz* – *Bauskas Dzīve* (newspaper of Bauska, Iecava, Rundāle and Vecumnieki municipalities). Publisher – SIA “Bauskas Dzīve”.
- Dz* – *Dzirkstele* (the only Gulbene municipality newspaper). Publisher – SIA “Reģionu mediji”.
- K* – *Kurzemnieks* (newspaper of mid Kurzeme). Publisher – SIA “Jaunais Kurzemnieks”.
- KL* – *Kursas Laiks* (newspaper of lower Kurzeme). Publisher – SIA “Reģionu mediji”.
- KV* – *Kurzemes Vārds* (newspaper of the town of Liepāja and the surrounding municipalities). Publisher – izdevējsabiedrība “Kurzemes Vārds”.
- LL* – *Latgales Laiks* (newspaper of Latgale). Publisher – SIA “Latgales Laiks”.
- RV* – *Rēzeknes Vēstis*. Publisher – SIA “Rēzeknes Vēstis”.
- VB* – *Ventas Balss*. Publisher – SIA “Ventas Balss”.
- Z* – *Zemgale*. Publisher – SIA “Firma Zemgale”.
- ZZ* – *Zemgales Ziņas* (newspaper of Zemgale). Publisher – SIA “Reģionu mediji”.

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Dītē Liepa, Zenta Liepa

Laikmečio akcentai Latvijas regioninēje spaudoje – spaudos tradicinių funkcijų kaita, kultūros ir tapatumo įvairovės aspektai

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindinēs sąvokos: *regioninē spauda, teminē įvairovė, funkcijų kaita, giminės šaknys, valstybinė kalba, jaunosios kartos nacionalinė tapatybė.*

Regioninė spauda yra nuolatinė Latvijos žiniasklaidos sudedamoji dalis, nors jos skaitytųjų skaičius Latvijoje kasmet dėl objektyvių priežasčių mažėja: jaunosios kartos gyventojai pagal išsilavinimo ir darbo galimybes, ieškodami geresnio gyvenimo, renkasi kitą gyvenamąją vietovę, vyresnioji karta sensta, be to, Latvijos kaime daugumos gyventojų pajamos yra nedidelės ir jų perkamoji galia ribota, palyginus su miestiečiais, ypač – su rygiečiais. Vis dėlto, nepaisant šių aplinkybių, daugelis latvių vis dar stengiasi skirti pinigų būtent „mūsų vietiniam laikraščiui“, taip užtikrindami regioninių laikraščių, kaip dešimtmečiais stiprintų tradicinių vertybių, gyvavimą.

Čia skaitytojas gauna patarimų, kaip prižiūrėti savo ir naminių gyvūnų sveikatą, kaip užsiauginti savo darže tai, ko neturi kaimynas, kaip taupiai šeiminkauti ir, pasinaudojus

menkomis pajamomis, nuvykti į kelionę po Lietuvą ir Estiją, o pasvajoti apie tolimus kraštus galima turizmo vakaronėje, kai į Gvatemalą vykstama klausantis keliautojo pasakojimų ir stebint filmuotą medžiagą. Svarbu ir tai, kad pasakojant krašto naujienas vartojami savos aplinkos vietovardžiai – taip mokoma jų nepamiršti ir vartoti. Regioninė spauda moko gyvenimą priimti tokį, koks jis yra. Čia galima pasimokyti, kaip iš pensijos, žemesnės už pragyvenimo minimumą, kasmet nuvykti į sanatoriją, kaip pavalgyti už 2 eurus per dieną ir nesiskųsti dėl to. Nelaukti stebuklų, džiaugtis smulkmenomis, nes jėga slypi vavyje! Gebėti šeiminkauti, nedejuoti, būti pavyzdžiu aplinkiniams!

Kaip pripažįsta regionų laikraščių vadovai, regioninė spauda mūsų dienomis yra įgijusi ypatingą reikšmę – ji informuoja apie viską, kas svarbu Latvijos kaime, tokiu būdu tapdama šiuolaikinės kultūrinės aplinkos, kalbos ir bendruomenės susitikimo šaltiniu. Suvokdami ribotas kultūros renginių ir socializacijos galimybes, laikraščiai vykdo ir socialines, gerovės ir sveikatinimo funkcijas, nes dažnai laiškanešys tampa pačiu laukiamiausiu savaitės svečiu vienišuose ir nuo miesto gyvenimo problemų atskirtuose namuose.

Į ekonominę emigraciją iš Latvijos kaimų išvyko nemažai gyventojų, todėl beveik kiekviename laikraštyje esama pasakojimų apie tuos kraštiečius, kurie laimę ir sėkmę rado svetur, apie tuos, kurie sugrįžo į Latviją ir įgyta patirtimi stengiasi sutvirtinti gimtąjį kraštą ir valstybę. Tai įvairūs pasakojimai iš patirties, leidžiantys tarsi ant svarstyklių pasverti jaunosios kartos tapatumą ir priklausymo Latvijai ir latvių kalbai jausmą.

Dite Liepa, Zenta Liepa

The Characteristic Trends in Latvian Regional Press: Changes in the Traditional Functions of the Press, the Aspects of Identity and Cultural Diversity

S u m m a r y

Keywords: *regional press, thematic diversity, changes in functions, family roots, state, language, national identity of the new generation.*

Latvian regional press has been a staple of the state media environment for decades despite the fact that its readership is shrinking with each year due to objective reasons: young people move away in search for a better life in accordance with their education and professional capabilities, the already aging population is growing older; moreover, in rural Latvia, most residents have a lower income and purchasing power in comparison to the urban population, especially Rīgas. However, in spite of these factors, many Latvians still try to save money especially for “their local paper”, thus ensuring the viability of regional press that has been enjoying the readers’ support for decades as a traditional value. In these pages readers find advice on how to take care of both their own and their animals’ health, how to grow in their garden something that the neighbour does not have, how to economise and save enough from one’s small income to visit Lithuania and Estonia, and, if one wants to dream of far-off lands, it is made possible at a tourism evening, when a traveller’s tale and videos transport the audience to Guatemala. Moreover, when reporting

on regional news, local dialectal words are used, reminding the readers both not to forget and use them. Regional press teaches to accept life as it is. In it the readers can learn how to make an annual visit to a sanatorium and prepare meals for 2 euros a day – and not to complain about it; they are advised not to wait for miracles and find joy in the little things, as true strength can be found within, and one can learn to manage, not to complain, and set an example to the neighbours.

Heads of regional newspapers admit that nowadays regional press has attained a special status: it informs its audience on everything of importance in the rural areas of Latvia, thus acting as a modern source of cultural environment, language and community togetherness. Moreover, being acutely aware of the limited cultural event and socialisation options, the newspapers also fulfil social, welfare, and healthcare functions; thus, the postman often becomes the most welcome weekly guest in the lonely homes that are cut off from the problems of urban life. Many people have left the rural areas and gone into economic exile; therefore, nearly every newspaper prints a story both on those locals who have found happiness and success elsewhere and those who have come back to Latvia and try to use their experience to strengthen their region and Latvia as a whole. These different personal stories make it possible to examine the identity of the new generation and its sense of belonging to Latvia and the Latvian language.

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