

## *Language on the Stage – Questions of Identity and Ideology*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Language used on the stage always bears certain connotations to the identity, ideology and morality of characters, theatre makers and audiences. In my article, I am going to analyse how minority languages have been used or represented in Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian theatre through the lens of theatre history. Following books are investigated using content analysis method: *The Dynamic World of Finnish Theatre* (2006) by S. E. Wilmer and Pirkko Koski, *Estonian Theatre* (2003) by Jaak Rähesoo, *Theatre in Latvia* (2012, ed. by Guna Zeltiņa) and *Lithuanian Theatre* (2009, ed. by Gintaras Aleknonis and Helmutas Šabasevičius).

Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are neighbouring countries that have faced different political history: from rather independent Finland to the post-Soviet Baltic countries. Taking this into the consideration, one can detect the disquisition between bi-lingual (Finland, Latvia) and monolingual approaches (Estonia, Lithuania) to theatre history.

**Keywords:** stage language, Finnish theatre, Estonian theatre, Latvian theatre, Lithuanian theatre, theatre history, representation of minorities

Language used on the stage always bears certain connotations to the identity, ideology and morality of characters, theatre makers and audiences. In my article, I am going to analyse to which extent different languages and especially minority languages are represented in Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian theatre histories taking four books, all written in English and published at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, under the observation.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of national theatre was almost a compulsory element in building up national consciousness and later on also the nation state in most of Eastern European countries, but also in Finland, Norway and Iceland. National theatre meant performances in national languages, presented and received by native-speakers. Nevertheless, theatre tradition in

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these countries was already developed in some other languages (mostly in Polish, German or Russian, in Scandinavia in Swedish or Danish), which did not fade after the establishment of local national theatres. What kind of position did these troupes and theatres acquire after the establishment of national theatres and how their work is represented in theatre histories, is the main core of my research. One has to keep in mind that a similar language and class struggle can be observed in all these countries: even Swedish, German, Polish and Russian inhabitants were in minority until the end of the eighteenth century,<sup>2</sup> they mostly belonged to the upper class and their language was used as the main tool of official communication and culture. At the same time, Finns, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians belonged to the ethnic majority group in their country but were predominantly peasants and had limited access to power and education.

There are four publications about Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian theatre under observation: *The Dynamic World of Finnish Theatre* (2006) by S. E. Wilmer and Pirkko Koski, *Estonian Theatre* (2003) by Jaak Rähesoo, *Theatre in Latvia* (2012, ed. by Guna Zeltiņa) and *Lithuanian Theatre* (2009, ed. by Gintaras Aleknonis and Helmutas Šabasevičius). All the authors of these works, except the American-Irish theatre researcher S. E. Wilmer, are writing about their own theatrical culture and introducing first of all an insider's point of view. It is also noteworthy that when all other titles have rather clear references to national theatre and culture, then *Theatre in Latvia* stresses a more geographical approach to the issue. The first book is written in collaboration by two authors, the second one by Rähesoo alone, overviews of Latvian and Lithuanian theatre both by seven authors. Lithuanian theatre history is presented in the form of one coherent story without paying a special attention to individual theatre institutions. The books about Estonian and Latvian theatres give at first a short historical overview about the general development of theatre in the country and afterwards introduce theatre institutions with their historical and present context. *The Dynamic World of Finnish Theatre* is based on quite a unique model: the first chapter introduces different types (based on language, genre, professionalism, etc.) of Finnish theatre, the second is investigating Finnish nationalism in theatre, the third is analysing important domestic and foreign plays and the fourth presents the theatre structure and some institutions. Even every chapter of the book has its own topic and goals, all the aspects are tackled

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<sup>2</sup> In 1897, the population of Estonia consisted of 91 percent of Estonians, 4 percent of Germans and 4 percent of Russians; the population of Latvia of 68 percent of Latvians, 12 percent of Russians or Belarusians, 7 percent of Jews and 6 percent of Germans; the population of Lithuania of 58 percent of Lithuanians, 15 percent of Russians and Belarusians, 13 percent of Jews and 10 percent of Poles. (Kasekamp 2010: 113)

from the historical perspective also. It is interesting that all books start their presentations of national theatre histories with a statement about strong folkloric roots that can be traced to theatre but also foreign influences are acknowledged.

What follows, is my analysis of the books with my focus on language issues in the theatre. I used the content analysis method writing down all sentences that either stated directly the stage language in use or the reference became evident through the surrounding discourse but I marked also statements or paragraphs where the language issue was overlooked or theatres working in other, minority languages were not represented. Close reading of the works and of the collected statements led to the analysis of general ideological stands and particular decisions made in writing the national theatre histories. The author of the article is aware that because of limited research material, conclusions cannot be very far reaching but hopefully they are adequate about these particular versions of national theatre histories. The order of books and states under investigation arises first from their geographical location (moving from north to south) and political history of the countries (from rather independent Finland to the post-Soviet countries) but the article divides the disquisition also into bi-lingual and monolingual approaches.

## The Dynamic World of Finnish Theatre

Today Finland is a bilingual country with two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, the Swedish-speaking population consisting of 6% of inhabitants. But the language policy of today reflects the historical roots and cultural background of the country. Wilmer and Koski start their introduction of Finnish theatre with a chapter about touring companies and indigenous drama. With the word “indigenous” they have in mind drama written in or about Finland and without clear reference to language. For example, the first indigenous opera *Kung Carl jakt* (*King Charles’ Hunt*) was performed in Swedish. The next chapter, titled “Swedish Theatre / New Theatre” describes how the Swedish-speaking theatre was trying to represent also the Finnish-speaking population. For example, the first professional production of a play in Finnish, Aleksis Kivi’s *Lea*, was performed in 1869 with a Swedish-Norwegian actress who could not understand Finnish in the leading role. (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 23) The third short chapter is about the Russian theatre company that was performing in the Arkadia Theatre (1868–80) and later in the Alexander Theatre (1880–1918) together with Swedish and Finnish troupes but stopped its activity after the Finnish Civil War. Also possible local cultural influences are highlighted in the overview. For example in the chapter about Finnish opera it is mentioned that both the Swedish

and Russian Theatres in Helsinki performed operas. Implicitly also because of that Kaarlo Bergbom, director of the Finnish Theatre took great interest in the staging of foreign-language opera in the 1870s but gave up the idea in five years since it proved too expensive. (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 29) Nevertheless, later on in the book the authors comment on these founding years: “In bilingual Finland the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki [...] was a peripheral area of Swedish theatre professionalism, and the local Swedish dialect was not heard on that stage. The theatre was conquered by local actors as late as 1916. The Russian Theatre was a part of the Russian theatre system and did not influence local Finnish development or, indeed, represent local languages.” (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 127) This statement also explains why the prehistory of Finnish theatre is presented only in 10 pages and the history of national theatre in 130 pages.

It becomes clear from the book that as a reaction to the longstanding Swedish domination and the Russification policy in the 1890s, from the 1860s onward a fierce battle about dominant language sundered the Finnish society and the end of the century witnessed strong demonstrations of rising national feelings. In 1902 a massive granite building of the Finnish Theatre in the centre of Helsinki was opened and it obtained gradually the name of national theatre. The authors also give several examples of how ideas and attempts to establish bilingual theatre or produce bilingual productions have either failed or in case of success have met also clearly expressed dissatisfaction (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 30, 55, 59).

But discussing the period after the independence in 1917, language issues seem not to be a source of potential conflict or resistance in the Finnish theatre field, even they are quite often mentioned in the book. For example, one can read that the Theatre School of Finland (1943, using Finnish as study language) and the Swedish Theatre School (1966) were united in 1979 to the Theatre Academy of Finland where Finnish and Swedish departments of acting were established. (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 133–134) The authors introduce Finnish theatre institutions and stage directors according to their artistic and social input, trying to convince the reader that language does not matter in bilingual Finland. Nevertheless, chapters concentrating only on two large (the National Theatre and the Helsinki City Theatre) and two small theatres (the Q Theatre and the mostly Swedish-speaking Viirus) leave it open why the Swedish Theatre and many other Finnish-speaking companies were left out of the focus of the book. The same holds true when some pages later it is stated that until 1996 the state’s support to theatres has been the stable 37% of their total income [municipal subsidy usually exceeds governmental one – A. S.], except for the Swedish Theatre and the Tampere Workers’ Theatre which receive 60%. (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 147) No explanation to this is given in the book.

Wilmer and Koski summarize the current situation as follows: “Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking theatres in Finland have no principal differences in repertoire or working methods.” (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 154) But nevertheless, Finnish theatre history in Finnish discusses the Finnish-speaking theatre and in Swedish the Swedish-speaking theatre (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 46). This and also some earlier citations lead the reader to question, how many common traits, structures and persons there really are between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking theatre worlds even when they look similar.

### Theatre in Latvia

From Guna Zeltiņa’s introductory chapter (pages 7–28) one can learn that after the era of touring companies, a permanent German theatre was established in Riga already in 1782 where only a few of the musicians were of Latvian descent. (Later, on page 89, it is also mentioned that the first professional German theatre in Liepāja was founded already in 1877.) The dominance of German theatre culture was initially shaken by the establishment of Russian theatres in Daugavpils (1854) and Riga (1883). And after the birth of Latvian (amateur) theatre in 1868, the activities of German theatres fade away in this chapter and Russian theatres are mentioned only then when the activities of Latvian theatre makers or the fate of other institutions intersect with them. For example, when Latvian artists became interested in Russian theatre and particularly in the Riga Russian Theatre at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century because several outstanding directors and actors worked there (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 12) or when the Children’s and Youth Theatre and the Riga Russian Theatre were shut down during the Nazi occupation (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, also productions of two directors, clearly indicated as Russians, have deserved some notice. The work of the Russian director Sergey Radlov at the Daugavpils and the Riga Russian Drama Theatre (1953–58) is mentioned as a re-enforcer of theatre culture in Latvia (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 22). And director Mikhail Gruzlov from St. Petersburg introduced dynamic changes with his psychologically and physically saturated productions in the second half of the 1990s (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 27). But more information is given about Russian-speaking theatres and the collaboration between Latvian theatres and Russian theatre makers in the chapters of particular institutions.

To understand fully the cultural and social context of German and Russian theatres in the Baltic countries, one has to take into the consideration the constitution of inhabitants of the countries. While Germans dominated the economic, political, and social life of the Baltic Provinces, they constituted

less than 10 percent of the population until the end of the eighteenth century. (O'Connor 2003: 38) At the same time, the number of Latvians living in Riga increased from 24 percent in 1867 to 45% percent in 1897 (O'Connor 2003: 65) and this had a positive effect also on Latvian theatrical life since professional theatres are mostly situated only in bigger cities that can provide a decent number of audiences. Before the Second World War most of the German population was repatriated to the German territories and consequently also German theatres were closed. After the war, several waves of immigration were arranged from Russia and other parts of the Soviet Union to the Baltics. For example, the number of Russians in Latvia increased approximately four times since the war, making up 34% of the whole population (905,500 inhabitants) in 1989. For now, it has fallen to 26.0% (520,126 inhabitants). Currently there are two Russian-speaking theatres in Latvia: the Riga Russian Theatre and the Daugavpils Theatre. Subsequently both of them deserve more attention because of their meaningful history.

The history of the latter provides a rather interesting case of the battle of languages and hegemonic powers. It goes back to 1854 when the chief engineer of Daugavpils fortress Nikolai Hagelstrom built and established a small private theatre, the first professional Russian theatre in Latvia. After several ups and downs the Russian Theatre became almost a persecuted, underground theatre during the years of Latvian independence (1918–40), thus also becoming an entirely amateur group. At the same time, Daugavpils Latvian Drama Theatre (founded in 1922 from a group of amateurs) was struggling for professionalism and for the better economic establishment. This development came to an end when the Latvian troupe broke up during the Second World War and finally the city and the theatre house were ruined also. Thus for the period 1944–58 the situation was changed completely since the theatre had only a Russian-speaking troupe. In line with the cultural policy of the time, in 1958 the Russian theatre was reorganized, Latvian and music troupes were also established and a new name was acquired – the Daugavpils Music and Drama Theatre. Unfortunately the activity of the theatre was not successful and it was disbanded. There was no professional theatre activity in Daugavpils 1963–88, after that a theatre with two troupes was re-established again. (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 106–113) The Daugavpils Theatre still struggles with inadequate subsidies, its hectic quality of productions and lack of audiences. This cannot be explained so much by the size of the city (approx. 100,000 inhabitants from whom 20% are Latvians) but also by the unfriendly cultural climate, especially when compared to the capital city Riga.

The Riga Russian Theatre has had more stable grounds for development and it is considered to be the oldest Russian theatre outside Russia. During the

“golden age” from 1902 to 1914 but also later on, the audience in Riga witnessed works of many famous Russian directors (Alexander Tairov, Mikhail Chekhov, etc.) and actors but also several admirable productions by local theatre makers. The theatre also initiated collaboration with Latvian actors from the 1930s onwards. After the artistic peaks achieved under the supervision of Sergey Radlov (1954–58) and Arkady Katz (1964–88), the Riga Russian Theatre has been experiencing a lack of clear artistic program and during the last fifteen years also a continuous change of artistic directors. (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 122–138) In the context of the article it is quite surprising that the author of the chapter, Baiba Kalna, openly admits that in the second half of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, the Riga Russian Theatre was one of the leading companies in Latvia, along with the Youth Theatre (led by Russian born Adolf Shapiro) and the Valmiera Theatre (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 132). Unfortunately the current situation is reminiscent of a Russian provincial theatre that is highly dependent on the influx of new artists from the motherland.

In addition to these two theatres, also the Youth Theatre in Riga (established in 1940) used to have both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking troupes (founded in 1946) but the theatre was closed because of complicated economical and artistic matters in 1992. Adolf Shapiro who was the artistic director from 1964 to the end, worked successfully with both troupes, earning a lot of fame to Latvian theatre. (*Theatre in Latvia* 2012: 139–155).

Even if the authors of the book admit that European and German theatre in particular from the one hand and Russian theatre from the other hand have been paragons of Latvian theatre, the relationship with local theatres and theatre makers remains a bit unclear. Since many Latvian actors and stage directors were trained and taught either by German colleagues either at home or abroad in the end of the nineteenth century (German director and actor Hermann Rhode-Ebeling was even leading the theatre troupe of the Riga Latvian Society 1886–93), one might wonder, how different this Latvian-speaking theatre was from its German counterpart. And other way around: was there significant differences between Russian- and Latvian-speaking theatres in Latvia after the Second World War when stage directors often studied in Moscow or St. Petersburg or just found their source of inspiration in Russian theatre? For example, how to interpret the work of Russian-speaking director Adolf Shapiro who himself has always stressed his European identity in the framework of national theatre history?

Despite these blanks that might arise from the format and the volume of the book, the authors of *Theatre in Latvia* approach at least local Russian theatre quite inclusively and stress the bilingual nature of Latvian theatre field.

## Estonian Theatre

Compared to the rather long and rich theatrical life in Lithuania but to a certain extent also in Latvia already before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Estonian theatrical life seems to be rather young. Jaak Rähesoo in his book *Estonian Theatre* gives an overview of the history of Estonian theatre in 70 pages and three pages (20–22) of it are dedicated to local German theatres. Here one learns the first professional theatre in Estonia, Revaler Theater was established only in 1809 with actors mostly recruited from Germany and this assured to the troupe a rather good quality of performing. The Revaler Theater gave also some performances in Russian and Estonian. Later on it is mentioned that German theatre was functioning half-heartedly (Rähesoo 2003: 46) in independent Estonia until Hitler called the Baltic Germans back to their homeland in 1939. But because of the tragic historical event, the German theatres in Estonia implicitly “bequeathed” their houses to Estonian theatres: the building of the Estonian Drama Theatre in Tallinn and the small house of the Vanemuine in Tartu.

Despite the very limited attention to the local German theatre, Rähesoo admits that when the Estonian national theatre was founded in 1870 in the wave of national awakening, it heavily borrowed from its German counterparts while the national movement was directed against the Baltic Germans (Rähesoo 2003: 22–23, 27).

When at the end of the nineteenth century approximately 5% of Estonian population were Germans (47,000 persons) and 3% Russians (28,000 persons), before the Second World War the first had decreased to 2% and the latter increased to 8% (O’Connor 2003: 99–100). The Russian population started to grow right after the war and reached its peak in 1989 when 30% of the Estonian population were Russians (470,000 inhabitants). Nowadays every fourth person in Estonia identifies him/herself as Russian.

Even if the number of the Russian-speaking population grew steadily already before the Second World War, the first professional Russian theatre was established in Estonia, Tallinn in 1948 as an initiative of the Soviet government. Also another Russian drama theatre was founded in the north-east mining region (first in Rakvere, afterwards in Kohtla-Järve) in 1951 but it was closed down a decade later. (Rähesoo 2003: 56) After presenting these facts, no mention is made about the Russian-speaking theatre by Rähesoo in his historical survey.

Later on, under the title “The Russian Drama Theatre”, also activities of Russian-speaking amateur or semi-amateur troupes from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are introduced. The existence of a Russian troupe in Tallinn before the Second World War is known among Estonian theatre scholars mostly because the troupe shared the building of the German Theatre with German



and Estonian troupes for a while. Professional contacts between the Russian Drama Theatre and Estonian-speaking theatres or theatre makers have been quite random but have existed at least since the 1930s. In conclusion, Rähesoo stresses that Tallinn was for the most of Russian actors and directors a launching pad for Moscow or Leningrad (Rähesoo 2003: 186) and looking at the history of the Russian Drama Theatre, it is difficult to disagree with the statement. Finally, under the title “Little theatres. Amateur activities” two semi amateur Russian-language troupes from the North-East of Estonia are shortly introduced: Tuuleveski from Jõhvi and Ilmarine from Narva (Rähesoo 2003: 234).

It is also noteworthy that considerably fewer Estonian stage directors and actors have been studying in Russia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century when compared to Latvian or Lithuanian theatre makers but it does not diminish the overall influence of the Russian theatre of the motherland, especially during the first two decades at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1950s. However, local Russian theatres have had almost no impact on the Estonian national theatre. Thus, being Estonian theatre researcher myself, I tend to support Rähesoo’s monolingual approach to Estonian theatre history.

## Lithuanian Theatre

*Lithuanian Theatre* (2009) differs from the theatre histories discussed before at least in two aspects. First, since Lithuanian theatre was flourishing already before the establishment of national theatre and had versatile connections with other European countries, it deserves a lot of attention also in this book where the first 30 pages are dedicated to theatrical activities in other languages and the rest, 140 pages to the development of national theatre. But the second aspect is the very concern of the present article: language issues are systematically overlooked. As follows, I as a model reader of the book will try to pinpoint the blanks related to stage languages.

The first problem is related to the inconsistent use of languages in the titles. The titles of Italian, German, English, later on also Lithuanian and other plays or texts are given in original languages but titles of works in Russian (and in the first chapter probably also in other local languages like Latin and Polish) are presented in English. Because of that it is difficult to perceive in what language these productions were performed and in the book the language issue is tackled only occasionally since the main aim of the argument seems to be building up the national theatre history and consciousness. Nevertheless, it leaves some space for critical reflection and connoisseurs of history can fill up the blanks by themselves.

The Lithuanian dukes had surprisingly close connections with Western Europe during the period of the Renaissance and many Italian and English troupes visited their courts in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, performing obviously in their mother tongues. But what about school drama? In Jesuit colleges theatre was mostly produced in Latin and sporadically also in national or vernacular languages (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). To avoid further speculations, I just report that on page 21 of *Lithuanian Theatre* one suddenly learns that not only intermedes but also other forms of school drama had elements of the Lithuanian language and subject matter. This seems to hint that Lithuanian was not ordinarily used in school drama and obviously English neither, even if all the titles of plays are in English, thus probably the language on school stages was Latin.

In the same way on page 27 it is randomly stated that in the 1780s, in Oginskis' [the Grand Hetman of Lithuania – A. S.] theatre Italian operas were performed in Italian and Oginskis' own operas in Polish. The language issue is more thoroughly tackled in connection with the establishment of the first (and for more than a century the only) professional theatre in Vilnius in 1785. “Due to historical and political circumstances, performances in Vilnius City Theatre were held in Polish and Russian [since 1844 – A. S.]. Certain theatre seasons also featured dramas and operas in German, French and Italian. Yet the troupes were not only made up of foreign performers; many actors, musicians and choristers had a Lithuanian background. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when freedom of speech was restored in Lithuania, the Vilnius City Theatre allowed Lithuanians to perform as well...” (*Lithuanian Theatre* 2009: 30) One can only suppose that the Lithuanians performed obviously in Lithuanian. Other city theatres do not deserve any mention and the reader learns about them only occasionally when it is mentioned that Lithuanian amateur theatres borrowed costumes and props from Russian and Polish city theatres (*ibid.* 49) or the fate of the Polish theatres of Vilnius (Pohulanka, Lutnia) was complicated both before and during the Second World War (*ibid.* 96). It is worth mentioning that the Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Theatre was established in 1942 on the initiative of Segal. Putting bits and pieces together, the reader of the book finally understands that the dominant stage languages in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were Polish and Russian.

The first public performance in Lithuanian took place relatively late when compared to other countries under observation<sup>3</sup> – in 1899 in Palanga. Lithuanian evenings with theatrical performances had taken place actually earlier but they belonged to the underground movement of national culture because of strict Russian censorship that imposed severe restrictions on publications in Lithuanian and on the use of the language in public places. Russification was

<sup>3</sup> In Latvia 1868, in Finland 1869 and in Estonia 1870.

milder in other Baltic countries enjoying a bit bigger autonomy. In addition to that, urbanisation of Lithuanians was rather modest at the end of the nineteenth century: in 1897, Lithuanians comprised only 2.1 percent of the population in Vilnius (40 percent of Jews, 31 percent of Poles) and 6.6 percent of the population of Kaunas (O'Connor 2003: 66).

Gintaras Aleknonis states openly that the professional Lithuanian drama theatre was developing in the wake of Russian stage art on the one hand and the influence of the amateur theatre tradition on the other (*Lithuanian Theatre* 2009: 59). Later in the same chapter about the interwar period, it becomes clear that he did not have in mind the local Russian theatre tradition but rather the Lithuanian actors and directors who had studied and worked in Russia or artists from Russia who worked in Lithuanian theatre (especially Michael Chekhov). As a part of the Russification policy in Lithuania, the Russian government established scholarships for Lithuanian students in Moscow and Petersburg universities. The aim was to separate Lithuanian intellectuals from Polish education and culture. The tendency to obtain theatrical education in Russia is characteristic of many prominent Lithuanian stage directors during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, like for example Juozas Vaičkus, Konstantinas Glinskis, Borisas Dauguvietis, Antanas Sutkus, Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas, Algirdas Jakševičius, Romualdas Juknevičius, Henrikas Vancevičius, Vytautas Čibiras, Povilas Gaidys, Jonas Jurašas, Dalia Tamulevičiūtė, Saulius Varnas, Jonas Vaitkus, Rimas Tuminas, Eimuntas Nekrošius, etc.

As one can expect, almost no reference to different languages used on the Lithuanian stage at the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be indicated. The notion “Lithuanian theatre” is used repeatedly without clear indication does it include all theatre institutions and artists situated in Lithuania or only the ones who belong to national canon, i.e. carrying or representing some kind of national qualities. As an exception, it is stated on page 168 that among other actors also Vytautas Šapranauskas from the Russian Drama Theatre joined the Vilnius Small Theatre after 1990. Here the reader is informed about the existence of such a theatre.

On the homepage of the Lithuanian Russian Drama Theatre (*Lietuvos Rusų Dramos Teatras*) it is stated that the first permanent Russian theatre in Vilnius was established in 1864. Since it was the only theatre in the city for a long time, it had an immense influence on the local cultural life. During the First World War the troupe dispersed. The Russian Drama Theatre, the only Russian language professional theatre in Lithuania until today, was re-established only in 1946. According to the information, productions of the theatre were highly valued in Lithuania after 1955 (*Lietuvos Rusų Dramos Teatras*). In 2008, the well-known Lithuanian director Rimas Tuminas became artistic director of the institution,

thus the Russian Drama Theatre has a greater potential in future, being also mentioned in overviews of the Lithuanian theatre.

There are also two Polish theatres: the Polish Theatre in Vilnius (Polski Teatr w Wilnie) and the Polish Theatre Studio. The first was established already in 1963 by actress and director Irena Rymowicz. But they both are actually amateur groups that have attracted attention mostly in the circles of amateur and community theatres.

## Discussion and conclusions

Internationalization of theatre scene has brought language issues to the fore again, especially in contemporary dance and music theatre, but to a certain extent also in drama. Mostly internationalization results in a wider use of English or combinations of different languages. But not only! For example, in Soviet Estonia all music productions were performed in Estonian but after re-independence in their original language. Nowadays directors-designers and leading singers of opera productions are often from abroad. Contemporary dancers and choreographers who tour quite widely in Europe and elsewhere are prepared to speak on stage either in English or in a local language. These are just some examples that point out that in the twenty-first century monolingual approach to theatre history is either exclusive or even impossible. Also, theatre researchers should not ignore the language on stage because it has certain aesthetic and social characteristics that shape both performances and audiences.

Another issue often ignored in the monolingual or nationalistic approach to language is how different sublanguages (especially dialects and low style) are represented in drama and theatre. In general, sublanguages tend to be rather displaced from the stage. Dialects have been used in literature and theatre mostly in the context of standard language as a specific characteristic of speech of a certain character, which often serves as a comic effect. But performances in dialect signal the rise in the importance of local identity and language.

For example, until the nineteenth century there were two local languages (used also in publishing) in Estonia: Northern Estonian and Southern Estonian. The latter was slowly abandoned in the second half of the nineteenth century to strengthen the national movement that benefited from the monolingual approach. Just one of the signs that national and monolingual ideology has weakened after the independence is that from the 1990s several professional (not to mention amateur) productions have been staged in Southern Estonian dialects, especially the Võru and Setu language.

In Finland, professional theatres do not use the Saami language of the minority population but the Norwegian minority theatre is known for the Finns speaking the Saami language (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 149–150). Also the Finnish National Theatre has started performing in Saami recently.

The article did not aim to judge the authors or approaches of the books discussed because, as the material shows, the historical and cultural backgrounds of these four countries are quite different and so is also the impact of the minority languages on professional theatre culture. First of all, it was a comparative study of different theatre cultures and historiographic practices that might give also some valuable information about neighbouring countries. But the article had also a more disguised aim to sharpen one's eye toward minority languages and cultures inside a national culture and to foster creative collaboration between different domestic language groups because this is a part of inner internationalisation. Also Marvin Carlson in his book *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre* states: "The tradition of a theatre closely tied to a particular nation and a particular language still may dominate a generally held idea of how theatre operates, but the new theatre that is most oriented toward the contemporary world no longer is restricted to this model, and one of the most important challenges it faces is the presentation of a newly interdependent world that speaks with many different voices." (Carlson 2006: 19)

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