

## LIVONIAN – THE MOST ENDANGERED LANGUAGE IN EUROPE?

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**Abstract.** Drawing on my experience as General Editor of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, as well as my own research interest in the Livonian language, the situation of Livonian is here compared with that of some other threatened languages of Europe, most notably Manx Gaelic, spoken on the Isle of Man in the British Isles, which presents some interesting parallels with the situation of Livonian.

**Keywords:** Livonian, Manx Gaelic, endangered languages, language revival, orthographic norms

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### 1. Introduction

In my work as editor of the third edition of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, I have encountered several controversies about the status of languages in danger, and even caused some. This third edition, in its on-line version, invites participation from its users and because language, as an emblem of ethnic identity, is such an emotive issue, some heated debates have arisen about whether certain languages are extinct – and by implication whether the nations that bear their names are extinct too.

The UNESCO Atlas grew out of the concept of the 'Red Book', which originally was meant to provide a world-wide alert to the loss of biological diversity. By the early nineteen-nineties, linguists and anthropologists were beginning to notice a parallel between the losses sustained by nature and the losses sustained by human culture. Being an organisation concerned with both science and culture, it naturally fell to UNESCO to take up the call to safeguard cultural as well as biological diversity. The first two editions of this Atlas, in 1996 and 2001, were issued in book form, with an accompanying set of maps, but they did not cover the whole world. They only aimed to provide data about some representative areas of the world where the threat to

the smaller indigenous languages was most acute. Thanks to some generous funding from the Government of Norway, it was possible to expand the project in several ways for this edition. Firstly, it's appearing for the first time in two forms: a digital, on-line edition that is accessible through the UNESCO web-site, and a printed edition. The digital version was launched in Paris in February 2009, to coincide with International Mother Tongue Day. The print version appeared a year later, as well as the printed Spanish and French versions.

The scope of the Atlas is now greatly extended, to include 2,500 languages – which is probably more than a third of all the languages in the world. Since languages are constantly dying, naturally we had to decide to include some recently extinct ones among these, so approximately 230 of the languages included have been extinct since 1950.

Each map and section of accompanying text in all three editions was the work of an acknowledged specialist on the languages of the region, and I was appointed as general editor to co-ordinate the task. And in all three editions, we have graded each language with a colour-code according to the level of danger it faces: and they are these:

**Safe** if the language is spoken by all generations. The intergenerational transmission of the language is uninterrupted. (Therefore such languages are not found in the Atlas.)

**Stable yet threatened** if a language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken transmission, although multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant languages has taken over certain contexts. (Such languages are not usually in the Atlas, but potentially they will be in the future, and we specialists must watch them.)

**Vulnerable** if most children or families of a particular community speak their parental language as a first language, even if only in the home.

**Definitely endangered** if the language is no longer learned as the mother tongue or taught in the home. The youngest speakers are of the parental generation.

**Severely endangered** if the language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; the parent generation may still understand it but will not pass it on to their children.

**Critically endangered** if the youngest speakers are of the great-grandparents' generation, and the language is not used every day. These older people may only partially remember it and have no partners for communication.

**Extinct** if no-one speaks or remembers the language. We editors decided to include such languages if they have been spoken in the past sixty years, approximately the lifetime of UNESCO itself. Of all the categories, we have found that this is the most controversial.

The controversy over the status of Cornish and Manx began on the very day of publication of the Atlas, 21st February 2009, International Mother Tongue Day. I found myself, from the BBC studios in Paris, confronting a representative of the Cornish Language Partnership, live on BBC Radio Cornwall. Later the same day the controversy over the status of Britain's minority Celtic languages spread to Wales and Scotland too. And the reaction from the Isle of Man was more heated and sustained than even from Cornwall.

There was no denying the fact that the term 'extinct' had hit a nerve, and that the term had been a blunt and unsubtle instrument. So we – that is, UNESCO and our editorial team – had to refine this instrument to take account of two situations: *language revival*, where a language has been brought back into use after falling silent for a generation or more; and *language revitalization* where a language has been resuscitated by some deliberate programme from the point of near-extinction.

The term 'generation' is important here, because, even for the previous editions, UNESCO had decided to include in its maps those languages that had fallen silent in the past two generations, or, say, about fifty years – in other words, the lifetime of UNESCO.

I am not a Celtic specialist, but I do have a concern for the linguistic situation of the British Isles, and I would like to try to portray the situation accurately. Away from the controversy over 'extinction', I had previously been involved in mapping that situation when I was co-editor of the Routledge *Atlas of the World's Languages*, which appeared in 1994 and in a revised edition in 2007.

When I was invited by the Manx Language Officer in October 2011 to visit the Isle of Man and see for myself the work of bringing Manx back into viable everyday use, I was pleased and amazed at what I saw. Not only is there a network of adult learners' classes on the island (one of which I attended) supported by the Language Officer, but, crucially, education in the Manx medium is being offered at primary-school level. The Bunscoill Ghaelgagh is the only fully Manx-medium primary school on the island, and its history is an instructive lesson for anyone engaged in the revival of a language that has almost been lost.

Primary education is of course the most vital aspect of language revival and revitalization, but it would be idle to pretend that a revived Manx has penetrated every aspect of the linguistic life of the island.

Perhaps it will one day, because classes for adult learners (who include a large proportion of incomers from mainland Britain) are flourishing.

Now, although it is said that languages are being extinguished at a rate of one every few weeks in the world at large, in Europe the extinction of a language community is a comparatively rare event. My visit to Man made me think of the obvious parallels between this situation and that of the second most recent language to face alleged extinction and possible reversal, even revival: namely Livonian, known to its speakers as *rānda kēļ* or ‘coast language’, the Finnic language spoken on the northern edge of the coast of Kurzeme province in western Latvia. Its closest linguistic relative is Estonian, and it is not related at all to Latvian, the national language. It is thought that the Livonians have lived on and near the Baltic shores since the first half of the first millennium AD at least. They have had settlements on both sides of the Gulf of Riga, and we know this primarily from the accounts in the 13th-century Chronicle of Henry of Livonia. The eastern dialect of Livonian lost its last native speaker in 1868. The western dialect, on which I did my own field-work, has passed into history on its native soil in the past few years, but in 2011 a 101-year-old speaker was known to be living in an old people’s home in Toronto; she moved away in 1944. She has since died, and so, in terms of native-born mother-tongue speakers, the language could be said to be extinct.

Over twenty-five years ago, when my interest in Livonian was first aroused, there were still more than fifteen people still alive who spoke Livonian as their mother tongue, all over them over sixty years old. No new generation of speakers was growing up, because the Livonians were all dispersed in different places, mainly Latvia but also elsewhere. In the Soviet Union there had been no possibility of official support, because before the world war the Livonians had lived in a strategically sensitive area. In that sense the Livonians were in a virtually unique situation in Europe. Even during the last years of the first Latvian republic the Livonians were in an unfavourable position, and support for them came mainly from abroad, not from the state, if it came at all.

A couple of decades ago, when I was researching the Livonian language and visited Tartu in search of written sources and recordings, it was possible to meet elderly Livonians and hear them speak. I well remember travelling to Riga with Professor Eduard Vääri to visit Oskar Stalte and talk to him about his life and use the recordings as language samples.

At the same time my interest was fostered in not only the threatened Finnic languages but the world's endangered languages in general. As co-editor of the Routledge *Atlas of the World's Languages* I had the opportunity to explore the spread and shrinkage of the world's languages, large and small. Even in the country where I live there are languages which, like Livonian, are literally driven to the edge. And, eventually, over the edge, unless a conscious effort is made to resist extinction. In the British Isles, Manx is a very good example.

The parallels I have been considering between these two languages don't concern their internal structure, but rather the outward sociolinguistic aspects of their attrition. If I wanted to compare, say, the elements of language structure, the levels – lexical, morphological, syntactic – which came under the influence of their big neighbours' language, I would not really be comparing like with like, for two important reasons.

Firstly, language affiliation: the Finnic group, part of the larger Finno-Ugrian family, has no immediate connection with the Balto-Slavic group, which are counted within the great Indo-European family. Manx, on the other hand, is within Indo-European like its English usurper.

Secondly: the influence of puristic norms. Livonian was not a written language until the 19th century, and only then due to the work of outside scholars. By that stage in its attrition, the influence of Latvian had gone very deep. Manx, on the other hand, though it was giving way to a structurally different language, English, had already enjoyed a period as a canonical written language. Biblical Manx was classical Manx, and as the language of the church it was part of the life of the speech community. Its orthography owes a lot to English, but the norms of its usage align themselves with Irish and Scottish Gaelic, as part of a clear continuum.

Therefore I'd like to concentrate on some specific aspects of Manx and Livonian: their *decline as speech communities, the development of orthographic norms, and language revival*.

## **2. Decline as a speech community**

In the case of Manx, there are glimpses from anecdotal written evidence of the gradual decline of the spoken language. The spoken language must have been undifferentiated from Irish Gaelic at least until the arrival of Scandinavians in the 11th century and probably well after that. By the 16th century the Bishop of Sodor and Man is

found remarking on a linguistic division in the island, influenced by Scottish Gaelic in the north and Irish Gaelic in the south.

There is a coincidental parallel here with spoken Livonian, which was withdrawing into Western and Eastern variants by this period.

Dialect differences persisted in Man for centuries, but by the time it was committed to writing in the 17th century it had developed away from both norms. When committed to writing, Manx was frozen as a snapshot in time in 1610, and as the spoken language atrophied in the following centuries, it came to be seen as the classical standard. The Book of Common Prayer was translated into Manx then, and it had canonical authoritative force. Although the translator was not necessarily a native speaker, he was a resident of the island in a position of authority in the church. It served a need, as the majority on the island spoke Manx.

That is not the way Livonian was frozen in time. The first written records of it are fragmentary and incidental to the Chronicle of Henry in the 12th century, but these do not capture the spoken language. The first serious attention paid to Livonian came from the Baltic German scholars of the Enlightenment era, the late 18th century. In other words, knowledge of the earlier forms of Livonian comes from outsiders' commentaries; in the case of Manx, however, the earliest attestations are in native written Ogham inscriptions. Runic inscriptions in Old Norse also suggest that there would have been some mixing of the Celtic and Scandinavian populations.

What about absolute numbers of speakers – how does Manx compare with Livonian down the centuries? As long as both languages were purely oral, there seems to be no reliable record of speaker numbers. For both languages it is possible to roughly chart the decline in use in the 19th century. In the case of Manx, Henry Jenner noted in 1874 that 30% of the population were habitual speakers (12,340 out of 41,084). The absolute population and number of speakers were well in excess of the Livonian figures: the last speaker of the Eastern or Salis dialect was dead by 1868, and we have figures compiled by outsiders for the western dialect: 2,074 in 1835, rising to 2,929 in 1888. There seems to have been a steady rise in the number of Latvian-speaking incomers in the Livonian fisherfolk communities, and bilingualism in Latvian was necessary for trading commodities and dealing with the most immediate local authorities. By the nineteen-thirties, only half the population of the Livonian villages was Livonian-speaking. Inter-marriage with Latvian speakers was occurring just as it was on Man with English speakers.

Census figures, when they acknowledge the existence of Livonians at all, have not provided an accurate picture. In both Tsarist and Soviet

times, the Livonians were not distinguished from the Latvians in census statistics, yet an official figure of 866 Livonians given in 1920 differs widely from the Finnish scholar, and Livonian lexicographer, Kettunen's estimate of 1500 Livonian speakers which itself would seem a conservative estimate compared with those 19th-century figures I just quoted. (Of course this begs the question of the difference between mother tongue and ethnic allegiance.) What constituted a 'Livonian' may not have had a linguistic basis, and there is the additional fact that in 1915 the whole population was forced into temporary exile for the rest of the duration of the First World War. In 1935 a survey showed that 820 out of 1205 people identifying themselves as Livonian spoke or understood the language. The coastal strip of the Baltic was then and later a strategically sensitive area, merging into a Latvian hinterland. The Isle of Man, on the other hand, is a coherent unit bounded by the sea.

The decline in the 20th century was just as steep in both communities, but for dissimilar reasons. I have referred to both communities as 'fisherfolk' in my title, which is a bit of a simplification in the case of Man, with its more diverse economy. But they are peoples with a long coastline to their name – in fact the Livonian name for themselves is simply *rāndalist*, or coastal people. When the mass expulsions occurred in conjunction with both world wars, the way of life of the people was instantly expunged. The community recovered after the First War, and the arrival of Latvian independence brought a period of friendly relations with central authority, or at least benign neglect from it, until Latvia became a one-party dictatorship in 1934, and distinct Livonian identity was seen as hostile to the nationalist ethos. From the Soviet invasion in 1940 onward, it wasn't possible for a coherent Livonian community to rebuild itself. Fishing was collectivised, the 12 villages were abandoned, the area was placed under military surveillance, with watch-towers dotted along the coastline in the atmosphere of Cold War mistrust. When I first began researching this language, it was not possible to visit the coast at all (in the middle nineteen-eighties), but with the advent of *perestroika* and then the independence of the Baltic countries, it did become possible – and what I found was a series of abandoned and neglected villages, the houses demolished or sinking into the undergrowth.

It was not so with the Isle of Man. What all these geopolitical forces flung at the Livonians in terms of snuffing out the language, was just as effectively accomplished by the march of English. One important factor in the steep decline of Manx was of course its eradication from the island's education system. Mother-tongue education in Manx at the elementary level was abandoned in the middle of the

nineteenth century. For any language, this is a death-knell. Even the Livonians had the advantage here – until the dictatorship, some sort of primary education in their own language was available. The pressure on Manx was different. The abandonment of mother-tongue education was symptomatic of outside pressures: immigration and emigration; the exportable nature of seafaring trades (in the Navy or the merchant navy, for instance); the growth of tourism. In more recent times you could add: the nature of its tertiary industries, such as banking. So the church and the courts became the last bastions for Manx in public use. In the professions that run the church and the courts, however, training was provided increasingly in English. Parents actively discouraged their children from learning and speaking Manx, as a hindrance to getting ahead in life. The rot spread from the towns outwards, you might say – Douglas and then the other towns became heavily Anglicised.

Before moving on to the next factor, pause to consider where the languages stand now. For Manx, since the death of the last mother-tongue speaker in 1974, the celebrated Ned Maddrell, we have the steadily growing revival movement, which I will come to later. For Livonian, the last native-born speaker to die on Latvian soil died as recently as 2010. But the language was not yet quite dead as a mother-tongue, as there was one mother-tongue speaker, aged 101, living in a nursing home in Toronto, Canada. Grizelda Kristin was her name, and she still spoke it fluently, but she had to wait for researchers to come to her door to release her fluent tongue. Her life was an emblem of Livonian's fate, in a way. Sent abroad to Finland as a young woman for training in home economics, she returned to Latvia and worked there until the Soviets came. In 1944, like many other Latvians, she fled with her husband in an open boat to Sweden. From there she passed through displaced-persons' camps in Germany and emigrated to Canada, where her husband died and she lived out her days in linguistic isolation.

### **3. Development of orthographic norms**

Here I wish to compare the evolution of the written forms of both languages, and there are some contrasts and some similarities between the two stories. Let us start by considering Manx as a written language. I have already mentioned the sparse inscriptions in Ogham, and also the translation of the Book of Common Prayer in 1610 by Bishop John Phillips, who was a Welshman. In tracing the history of written Manx I have referred to the work of Mark Sebba, of the University of

Lancaster in England, who has made a special study of the development of this unique orthography, so different from its neighbours in Scotland and Ireland. The idiosyncratic spelling system, even to an untrained eye, shows the influence of English. That in turn implies that its creator was at least bilingual and that he assumed the same of his readers – or simply had no linguistic training. No-one can adopt English spelling conventions and aim for the principle of one letter for one sound. The influence of Welsh on the spelling seems to be only slight – perhaps restricted to the values of the single vowels and, insofar as it's different from English, the use of *ch* for the unvoiced velar fricative. But I don't want to analyse letter-sound correspondences in detail here.

Phillips' translation actually remained unpublished for centuries, and so it was a later Bishop, Thomas Wilson, Bishop from 1698 to 1755, who exercised greater influence on the written word by having the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, again, translated into Manx, and the first religious work to be published was in 1707, the *Coyrle Sodjeh*, or Principles and Duties of Christianity. Wilson also took his orthographic cue from English. Between the two Bishops one has to assume there was a period of illiteracy in Manx, and general illiteracy in the language must have continued long after that. Sebba suggests that the educated clergy were using written Manx in the 18th century as a guide for preaching to their monoglot uneducated Manx parishioners. This goes a long way to explaining the priority of English models in the orthography. And it is fundamentally different from the orthographic course taken by the other Gaelics. And from the monoglot Manxmen's point of view, the experience of reading is a universal one for users of small languages – it's just a step up to something bigger, better and wider.

Sebba emphasises Bible reading, after the Bible appeared in print in 1769, as a social activity, the literate master of a household, or preacher, reading to his illiterate hearers. Reading was not a private activity, and could only become so when secular writing appeared. If you're familiar with Robert Carswell's excellent anthology of Manx literature, you will see that many of the earliest writings are singable, or declamable, like the *carval* songs, and the ballads about significant events in the life of the seafaring nation. The tradition of individualism in literature has not yet established itself here.

The Manxman John Kelly, introducing his 'Triglott Dictionary' in 1805, took the view that the orthography of English, as a stepping-stone out of Manx linguistic impoverishment, was a clear precept for Protestant preachers to take and lay people to follow, and that the Catholic Irish had suffered for not doing the same. English led a

mission of moral improvement. As Sebba puts it, “Here we start to see an imperial and religious project which has language shift as an intermediate goal”. In case after case, in my own study of orthography creation around the world, I have seen the same assumptions taking root. For orthography creation everywhere is, by and large, a missionary project. So Sebba concludes that Manx orthography was a kind of ‘Trojan horse’ designed to ensure the demise of the language.

Now that the orthography is embedded in the written body of Manx work, and has become canonical for the language revival movement (along with old sound recordings as a guide to correct pronunciation), Manx is faced with an anomaly: it is “autonomous” from its closest Gaelic neighbours, but not autonomous from English. Modern Manx linguists like Fargher, for example, have called the writing system “an abomination”.

And yet – Scottish and Irish Gaelic have different but closely related spelling conventions. If Manx had taken a different course and aligned itself with them, would we be speaking here today of a distinct language? For historical reasons to do with vocabulary and sound change, we might well be, but conceivably all of Gaelic, all the Goidelic languages, could be seen as merely a dialect continuum. If spoken languages have primacy over written languages, that might be argued. But in the modern world of the written symbol, it is that much harder to argue.

Turning now to Livonian orthography, again there is the confrontation between outsiders bent on a mission and an initially illiterate native population. My own master’s thesis was on the decline of Livonian, but I can also draw on more recent work by a heritage speaker of the language, Valts Ernštreits, who actually wrote his own doctorate in the language and defended it in Tartu. His thesis concentrates on the development of the written language. Again, I will not be going into detail about letter-to-sound correspondences here: suffice to say that they have always been much closer than in Manx, for the historical reasons that I can explain here.

The medieval Teutonic Knights, as described in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia, subjugated and converted the pagan Livonians to Christianity, but the question of converting them to literacy did not arise. What did arise, and was strengthening by the trading links of the Hanseatic League in later centuries, was the superimposition of a German-speaking educated elite over both the Livonians and their Latvian neighbours. And this did have orthographic consequences, because until 1908 Latvian itself was written in a pseudo-German orthography. Place names in modern Latvia indicate that Livonian was

once far more widespread in the centuries before written records of it began.

Livonian does not appear to have been committed to writing before it became an object of study by outsiders. The first systematic study of the language, and the first attempt at an orthography, based on the Latin alphabet supplemented by diacritics, was the work of a Finn, A. J. Sjögren (1794–1855), continued after his death by F. J. Wiedemann. This orthography was the basis of that used in the first printed book, a translation of St. Matthew's Gospel, in 1863. In other words, the work of a secular trained linguist actually provided the model for the first missionary script. The Gospel was actually printed in London by the Bible Society. Remarkably, there were separate editions in the Eastern and Western dialects. The alphabet was based on the German Fraktur in use at the time for Latvian, with modifications.

A body of work in the language has been published since then, during the first and second periods of Latvian independence – not during the Soviet era, 1940 to 1991. And it was during the Soviet era that the speaker community declined most rapidly. The year when the language can be said to have been most thoroughly codified was 1938: in that year the Livonian-German dictionary compiled by Lauri Kettunen appeared, and so did the New Testament, or *Ūž Testament*. But there is a subtle difference between the two orthographies employed in these works: in the dictionary, more diacritical marks appeared as a form of faithful transcription which would not be practical in application. Kettunen was not overtly attempting a practical orthography so much as an accurate representation of the spoken language. There were certain considerations to bear in mind: a purely phonetic transcription would be a disservice to users of the language, and more importantly, the language was already being written, in a slightly inconsistent way. Furthermore, the rounded vowels ö and ü were rapidly falling out of use as Latvian took over as a first language, replaced by the /i/ and /e/ common to Latvian. Palatalization of consonants is a strong feature of both languages, which argued for adoption of Latvian orthography. The vowel system, at its fullest extent, is more aligned with Estonian, which in any case had a more stable and better established orthography than Latvian. But unique to the Livonian language in this context is the prevalence of the reduced schwa vowel in unstressed syllables. Various solutions have been attempted: in the early years of independence, from 1921 onwards, school readers were prepared by Kettunen and the Estonian scholar Oskar Loorits. The schwa vowel was at first represented by its own phonetic symbol; later it was replaced by the Estonian letter o with a tilde, which represents a tense central slightly rounded vowel. The

school readers thus served as a kind of orthographic experimental laboratory, before the 1938 dictionary came along. There were also annual almanacs for adult readers, and even some poetry writing.

All these developments are in some contrast to the situation on Man, and certainly that on Man in the early twentieth century, by which time there was no provision for the social and public use of Manx. But creative writing, at least of songs and poetry if not of sustained longer works, was going on, and the outlet for these was in both cases periodicals. The journal *Līvli* (The Livonian) appeared from 1931 onwards, irregularly, and was even revived in the nineties after independence. As it was typewritten and distributed in stencilled form, the diacritics had to be inserted by hand. In the case of Man, the outlet for creative writing (rather than a combination of local news and creative writing) was in short-lived periodicals established by language activists. And nowadays this outlet is reduced to a column in a weekly English-language newspaper.

Any more ambitious publishing than this had to be subsidised and executed by outsiders. A Livonian hymn-book (or collection of spiritual songs) was published in Helsinki in 1939. Certainly Livonian cultural activity was always sponsored by ‘kindred peoples’, usually with a missionary purpose. Finnish and Estonian sources were the usual sponsors of this – and it all culminated in the building of a cultural centre in the village of Mazirbe (Ire in Livonian), funded by supporters in the independent ethnic kindred nations of Finland, Hungary and Estonia, and opened in August 1939, on the very eve of the Second World War, whose outcome was to dash all hopes of seeing its intended use. But it still stands today, and it is once again a Livonian cultural centre.

In the Soviet period, the Livonian-language presses fell silent. One or two small self-published items circulated in secret in single copies. Likewise on Man, during this same period, and for different reasons, the Manx language was rarely seen in print. For any newly-written language, a periodical press is essential, because the range of subject matter it necessarily covers provides fertile ground for new expressions, terminology, word coinages, which may or may not catch on among the speakers. And, for the future, if the revitalised languages are to survive, their use in the new social media will have to be encouraged as well.

#### 4. Language revival

I chose to compare these two language situations not because the languages themselves have much in common or are very different, but rather because they might be seen as the two most recent admissions to the European intensive-care ward, so to speak. Transmission of the spoken language between generations has broken down, but thanks to the presence of the written language, and plenty of recorded documentation, revival is possible, and it is happening. Making them viable vehicles for communication in a community is a realistic prospect. Compared with some less well-documented ones, these languages are fortunate. Attempts at revival of a lost spoken medium have begun for other languages with starting-points much worse than these.

Different approaches have been used in each case. The Isle of Man is still a viable community, well-defined and relatively prosperous; the Manx people have existed continuously there for over a thousand years. Few of them are still fisherfolk, the economy is diverse, and most importantly for the language, there is a measure of political independence and has been for centuries. The fate of the language rests with its own people.

The House of Keys, the island's parliament, and the Manx Heritage Foundation subsidise the post of a Manx Language Officer. Adrian Cain, the present officer, introduced me to his two predecessors as well. Impressively, there is also a paid Manx Music Officer, who oversees the teaching of Manx music in schools and the holding of traditional music events. Adrian Cain's task is not easy. He has to oversee the provision of education at the Bunscoil Gaelgagh, the Manx-medium primary school, he has to run adult learners' classes, he has to supervise road signage in Manx, organise events that promote the Manx language, and keep up the profile of the language in the English-language press and media on the island. There are plenty of forces at work to encourage indifference to the language and its fate. It might be easy to blame incomers from England – but when I attended one of his adult classes during my visit, I found that quite a few of the interested learners were incomers. Manx Radio and the Manx Museum also get support from the Language Officer. One important medium is the Manx Gaelic Newsletter sent out by Adrian to e-mail subscribers. The latest issue discusses the use of Manx on Facebook and how to link the associated website [www.learnmanx.com](http://www.learnmanx.com) to a mobile telephone. There are also video clips to be seen on the site. The Language Officer's energetic work keeps the language permanently in the public eye. The annual Cooish festival is a celebration of Manx language and culture.

Here are the links:

***www.org.im – Manx Language Officer’s address:  
greinneyder@mhf.org.im  
www.learnmanx.com***

With Livonian, the approach has to be different. There is no base community in a state of physical cohesion to refer to. Ethnic Livonians using the heritage language are scattered. There would be nobody for a Language Officer to minister to. Therefore an Association of interested people is the hub of activity. There have been Livonian cultural associations ever since the nineteen-twenties, when the Livonian Association or Līvõd Īt was established in Latvia. Nowadays the latest association, the Society of Friends of Livonia or Liivi Sõprade Selts, is based in Tartu, Estonia, which has been the centre of Livonian studies in the Baltic lands for a long time. They organise cultural events, conferences and group excursions to places of Livonian historic interest. Publication in and about Livonian is also catered for, in Latvia, by Līvõ Kultūr Sidām, or Livonian Cultural Centre. But one essential difference is that although it is subsidised, it is not actively promoted by central government in either Estonia or Latvia. Therefore the language is destined to be the focus of a minority interest group and, even on its home territory, the reminders of the language’s presence are pretty weak. It is as if, to compare with Manx, the language activities were operated out of Dublin or Edinburgh. But as with Manx, there are also organised adult learners’ classes in Livonian.

When I first began my research into Livonian, the resources were scanty, and the points of comparison with its situation were hard to find. The comparison that I liked to make back in those days was with Nancy Dorian’s study of East Sutherland Gaelic in Scotland. From a sociolinguistic point of view, there were some points in common, notably among the attitudes of the last users. Because the geographical area was comparable, it possibly made for a fairer comparison. But seen in terms of attrition and revival as languages, Manx and Livonian seem to have walked hand in hand into the operating theatre. Let us hope for a securer future for them – against all the odds.

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### **Kokkuvõte. Christopher Moseley: Liivi – Euroopa ohustatuim keel?**

Artiklis võrdleb autor oma kogemuse põhjal UNESCO maailma ohus olevate keelte atlase peatoimetajana liivi keele seisundit mitmete teiste Euroopas ohustatud keelte omaga. Võrdlus peamiselt Mani saare gaeli keelega (Manx) toob esile huvitavaid paralleele liivi keele olukorraga.

**Märksõnad:** liivi keel, Mani gaeli keel (Manx), ohustatud keeled, keele revitalisatsioon, ortograafilised normid

### **Kubbõvõttõks. Christopher Moseley: Līvõ kēļ – Eirōp amā ädātōd kēļ?**

Ses kēras autor ītlōb līvō kēļ pīlōkst mitsmōd munt ädātōd kēļdkōks Eirōpōs. Sādlimi gāl kēļdkōks, mis rōkandōb Man kōļa pāl, nāgṭōb interesantidi paralelidi līvō kēļ vōlmizōks.