

CHANGES IN THE STOCK OF GIVEN NAMES IN THE CONTEXT OF A NEW DICTIONARY OF LATVIAN GIVEN NAMES

Vardyno pokyčiai naujojo Latvijos asmenvardžių žodyno kontekste¹

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ABSTRACT

The article introduces the forthcoming Small Dictionary of Personal Names (*Mazā personvārdu vārdnīca*), planned for publication in 2026. The first part outlines how the principles of compilation differ from those used in the previous dictionary. Special attention is given to the approximately 7% of names in the new dictionary that were not included in the earlier Latvian personal name dictionary by Klāvs Siliņš (*Latvijas personvārdu vārdnīca*, 1990). The article explores and analyses possible reasons for these differences. One reason is the differing criteria and justifications used in the two dictionaries; another is that the names may have spread

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in Latvia only after the publication of K. Siliņš's dictionary. These include newly borrowed names such as *Maikls*, *Mišela*, and *Raiens*, as well as very rare or even unique Latvian-origin names like *Ārvalda* and *Magone*.

KEYWORDS: Latvian language, given names, dictionary of personal names, changes in the stock of given names in the 21st century.

ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje pristatomas naujasis Latvijos asmenvardžių žodynas (*Mazā personvārdu vārdnīca*, numatomas publikuoti 2026 metais). Pirmojoje straipsnio dalyje aptariami ankstesniojo ir šio žodyno sudarymo principų skirtumai. Daugiausia dėmesio skiriama asmenvardžiams (apie 7 proc.), kurių nėra ankstesniame Latvijos asmenvardžių žodyne (Klāvs Siliņš *Latvijas personvārdu vārdnīca*, 1990). Pateikiamos ir analizuojamos galimos priežastys, kodėl kai kurie vardai neįtraukti į ankstesnįjį žodyną: tai, visų pirma, skirtingi antroponimų atrankos principai, antroji priežastis – asmenvardžio paplitimo laikas jau po K. Siliņo žodyno parengimo (pavyzdžiui, nauji pasiskolinti vardai, tokie kaip *Maikls*, *Mišela*, *Raiens*, arba itin reti latvių kilmės vardai, pavyzdžiui, *Ārvalda*, *Magone*).

ESMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: latvių kalba, vardai, asmenvardžių žodynas, XXI a. vardyno pokyčiai.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this article is related to the work of both authors on a new dictionary of given names of Latvia scheduled for publication by the Latvian Language Agency at the end of 2025. The aim of the article, primarily, is to provide a concise overview of the conceptual framework and structural design of the forthcoming dictionary, with particular attention to the methodological principles of data selection and the criteria employed in determining entry names. Furthermore, the study delineates the distinctive aspects that distinguish the new dictionary of personal names from previously published lexicographic works. The second part of the article is devoted to the attainment of the study's main objective: it presents observations and insights acquired during the compilation process, focusing on recent developments in the corpus of personal names in Latvia – specifically, on given names that are absent from an earlier published dictionary and analysis of the factors contributing to their omission.

The only comprehensive publication of Latvian given names to date is K. Siliņš's *Dictionary of Latvian Personal Names (Latviešu personvārdu vārdnīca)*, in this article hereinafter abbreviated as LPV, published posthumously in 1990. K. Siliņš collected anthroponymic material for nearly 50 years, completing the manuscript in 1980 (Siliņa-Piņķe 2024: 300). Although he was not a linguist by profession, he compiled the dictionary with remarkable care and dedication. More than 30 years have passed since its publication, during which time personal naming preferences, social structure, and even broader aspects of society and culture have undergone significant change. Many new given names have been created or borrowed. Furthermore, the compilation principles of the two dictionaries differ considerably.

1. MAIN PRINCIPLES OF COMPILING A NEW DICTIONARY

Unlike K. Siliņš's dictionary (LPV), which aims to cover an entire millennium (Siliņš 1990: 8), the new dictionary focuses exclusively on given names currently in use in Latvia. Each entry will provide a detailed description of the name's origin and contemporary

distribution, and the dictionary is designed for a broad readership. One of the first tasks for the authors of the new dictionary was to define and delimit the scope of material, as the allocated time for the project was very short.

It was decided that the dictionary would include entries based on:

- 1) traditional Latvian calendar names (2025 data);
- 2) the 200 most popular female and male names among Latvian citizens in 2022;
- 3) the 200 most popular names given to girls and boys during the past 20 years (2002–2022; also limited to Latvian citizens) (see also Siliņa-Piņķe 2024: 301).

One of the main data sources is the list of traditional calendar names for 2025. This list is updated every few years by the Commission of Experts on Calendar Names of the State Language Centre according to criteria such as the origin, meaning, euphony, frequency, stability, and traditionality of the name, as well as its coherence with Latvian naming traditions (VVC). In 2025, nine new given names were added to the traditional calendar: it was updated with female names as *Aleksa*, *Dominika*, *Grēta*, *Madlēna*, *Mila*, *Vanesa*, and male names *Eliass*, *Francisks*, *Vestards* (VVC). These names are also included as new entries in the dictionary.

Most of the anthroponymic data was obtained from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP), prepared by its staff according to the parameters specified by the authors.

The question – why was such a selection made? The authors had several specific goals, namely:

- 1) to create a clearly defined scope, ensuring that the “rules of the game” are transparent and that name variants do not cause unnecessary complications;
- 2) to address as broad an audience as possible;
- 3) to familiarise users of the dictionary with the origins of given names included in the calendars;
- 4) to present the most commonly used given names in Latvia, those most frequently encountered in everyday life;
- 5) to highlight trends in name-giving over the recent decades and to acquaint readers with these developments (Balode, Siliņa-Piņķe 2025).

After processing all collected data, nearly 1,200 given names were identified and grouped into dictionary entries. Each entry provides information on the origin of the personal name and, where possible, the time of its introduction or spread in Latvia, as well as its popularity both nationally and regionally during different periods of the 20th century. Names differing only in root vowel length, – such as *Adelīna* and *Adelina* or *Zinaida* and *Zinaīda* – are combined into a single entry, while other names receive their own separate entries. As a result of this grouping, the forthcoming dictionary currently contains 1,162 entries.

For the descriptions of name origins, one of the main references is K. Siliņš's dictionary (LPV), which is critically assessed and compared with the most recent given name dictionaries in other languages (including German, English, Swedish, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian, Finnish, etc.) as well as with 21st-century onomastic studies. Additionally, to verify

or clarify the time of a name's arrival or spread in Latvia, data from the upcoming electronic *Historical Dictionary of Latvian Given Names* is also used, drawing on first recorded cases from 18th-century Evangelical Lutheran parish registers, as well as sources such as the website *periodika.lv*. Finally, after compiling and evaluating all available data, the authors select the most credible or plausible explanations of origin for the Latvian context, occasionally proposing their own interpretations based on a range of sources.

During the analytical process, the selection of given names for inclusion in the new dictionary and the subsequent comparative analysis were guided by the established methodologies and principles employed in the compilation of anthroponymic dictionaries in other languages. The authenticity and reliability of name sources, as well as well-defined criteria for name selection, constitute the principal methodological values underpinning this approach (Maciejauskienė 2004; Sinkevičiūtė 2010; 2014; Eggert, Nissen 2023, etc.). The experience of other languages in the context of personal name change has also been taken into consideration. For instance, Stanley Lieberman's (2000) extensive study of changes in the popularity of the children's given names in the United States demonstrates that tastes in names (and other fashions) reflect broader societal shifts. Similarly, Katharina Leibring (2023) compares the corpus of spoken names among all Swedish residents in the late 1990s with both contemporary popular baby names and the current stock of names among the general population. The present study of Latvian anthroponymy has furthermore been informed and supported by expertly compiled dictionaries prepared by leading specialists in the field, which serve as both methodological models and sources of validation.

2. NEW GIVEN NAMES AND POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THEIR ABSENCE IN THE LPV (COMPARISON OF TWO DICTIONARIES)

During the course of the work, it became clear that not all of the planned entries have equivalents in the LPV. Of the 1,162 entries in the forthcoming dictionary, information about 82 names – just over 7% – could not be found in the LPV. These particular names form the basis for the analysis presented in this paper.

When considering the reasons for these discrepancies, one of the first hypotheses advanced was that they arise from the different selection criteria for entries used in the two dictionaries. In the LPV, K. Siliņš notes: “As far as possible, only names given to Latvians are listed, although not consistently, as the nationality of the name bearer cannot always be reliably determined from the sources”² (Siliņš 1990: 26). Furthermore, “The personal names recorded only in 1973 and/or 1975, and which are completely uncharacteristic of the Latvian personal name system, were not included in the final text of the dictionary” (Ibid.: 33). In contrast, the forthcoming dictionary includes the names of Latvian citizens of diverse ethnic backgrounds, provided that they are among the 200 most popular names or are listed in the traditional name-day calendar.

² Quotation translated by the authors of the article.

A second possible reason for the discrepancies is the arrival and spread of new given names in Latvia, and within the Latvian anthroponymic system, after the compilation of the LPV. To test these hypotheses, the names were grouped according to the analytical framework conducted during the preparation of the new dictionary. This resulted in a focus on 82 entry names – 49 female and 33 male names (see Table).

Table. Latvian given names (in alphabetic order) not included in the LPV analysed in this article

Female names	<i>Alisa, Amalda, Amanta, Amina, Anabella, Ārvalda, Bernedīne, Denīze, Dite, Dzelde, Dziedra, Dzīle, Džesika, Eimija, Ēmija, Emilia, Gabriella, Halina, Heidija, Imalda, Jelizaveta, Jevgenija, Junora, Keita, Keitija, Ketlīna, Kristena, Liepa, Liza, Magone, Maria, Megija, Meija, Menarda, Miervalda, Mila, Mišela, Nataļja, Nikole, Olivia, Oļesja, Polina, Reičela, Samanta, Sofja, Sofja, Vasilisa, Viktoria, Žaklīna</i>
Male names	<i>Ako, Aldris, Aleks, Alekss, Anvars, Ārvalds, Braiens, Damirs, Daniils, Danila, Daņila, Denis, Digmārs, Dilans, Domeniks, Edvarts, Gaits, Guntris, Jevgenijs / Jevgēnijs, Kevins, Kirills, Maikls, Malvois, Markus, Meldris, Nikita, Nikolass, Raiens, Raits, Ritvaldis, Sigmunds, Valgudis, Viestards</i>

2.1. Given names uncharacteristic of the Latvian anthroponymic system

To determine whether a name is predominantly used by Latvians or by other ethnic groups in Latvia, data received from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) were analysed. However, the initial assumption – that most of the names absent from the LPV would primarily be uncharacteristic of the Latvian anthroponymic system and would largely represent names of Russian origin in their Latvianised forms (though not exclusively) – was not confirmed. Of all the given names analysed, those more typical of Latvia's non-Latvian ethnic groups accounted for less than one quarter, amounting to only 19 names in total: *Alisa, Amina, Anvars, Damirs, Daniils, Danila, Daņila, Denis, Jelizaveta, Jevgenija, Jevgenijs/Jevgēnijs, Kirills, Mila, Nataļja, Nikita, Oļesja, Polina, Sofja*, and *Vasilisa*.

Only a few of these names can be considered particularly popular: *Daniils, Jevgenijs/Jevgēnijs*, and *Nataļja*, each with more than 2,000 bearers. In addition, the names *Alisa, Nikita*, and *Oļesja* each have over 1,000 registered bearers. Names such as *Damirs, Jelizaveta, Jevgenija, Kirills*, and *Polina* are relatively less common, with 500–1,000 bearers, while the remainder are rare or very rare. Most of these names have been included in the forthcoming dictionary due to their marked rise in popularity in recent decades, which has brought them into the group of the 200 most popular names for boys and girls.

Only five names belong exclusively to this category, meaning that the only plausible explanation for their absence from K. Siliņš's dictionary is their atypical use within the Latvian naming environment:

1) *Anvars* was included in the manuscript of the LPV with a dating from 1973 or 1975, but the scientific editor, Ojārs Bušs, decided to exclude it from the published version because it was entirely uncharacteristic of the Latvian given name system (Siliņš 1990: 33). Today, the name is extremely rare and has been included in the forthcoming dictionary only because, at some point after the publication of the LPV, it was unexpectedly added to the traditional Latvian name-day calendar³;

2) *Jevgenija*, a name that has been occasionally given to girls in Riga and especially in the eastern part of Latvia – Latgale throughout the 20th century. It is noteworthy that the LPV records the variant with palatalised consonant, *Jevgeņija* (Ibid.: 180), which in practice is considerably less common;

3) *Jevgenijs* and its variant *Jevgēnijs*, as already noted, are common male names among non-Latvian ethnic groups in Latvia. In the LPV, the variant with a palatalised consonant *Jevgeņijs* is included (Ibid.: 180), which is only slightly more popular;

4) *Nataļja*, which is a more popular variant of *Natālija* – the form included in the LPV (Ibid.: 246);

5) *Oļesja*, a name that rose to popularity mainly during the 1980s, and is therefore absent from the LPV.

It remains unclear why the above-mentioned variants of the names *Jevgenija* and *Jevgenijs* were not included in the LPV, since parallel forms for many other given names are listed, for example, *Jelēna* and *Jeļena*, or *Jozefīne*, *Jozefīna*, *Jozepīne*, and *Jozepīna* (Ibid.: 178, 183). Conversely, variants of other well-known names, such as *Alisa*, *Jelizaveta*, *Kirills*, *Nikita*, and *Polina*, may not have been recorded due to their later spread in Latvia.

2.2. Newly arrived given names in Latvia

The second aspect we considered significant concerns the changing trends in name-giving in Latvia. After compiling the data, this category proved to be the largest, comprising half of all names analysed, 45 names in total, of these, 14 were previously described as primarily belonging to the Slavic anthroponymic system. This indicates that changes are also occurring in the naming practices of non-Latvian communities.

The remaining 31 names, which are not characteristic of non-Latvians, include the following: *Aleks*, *Alekss*, *Anabella*, *Braiens*, *Denīze*, *Dilans*, *Domeniks*, *Džesika*, *Eimija*, *Emija*, *Emilia*, *Gabriella*, *Heidija*, *Keita*, *Keitija*, *Ketlīna*, *Kevins*, *Kristena*, *Maikls*, *Maria*, *Markus*, *Megija*, *Mišela*, *Nikolass*, *Nikole*, *Olivia*, *Raiens*, *Reičēla*, *Samanta*, *Sofia*, and *Viktoria*.

Of these, only *Alekss*, *Megija*, and *Samanta* appear in the traditional name-day calendar, and they are also the most common names in this group, with more than 2,250, 1,500, and 3,300 bearers, respectively. However, *Keita*, although borne by over 2,200 individuals, is not

³ The authors believe that this was a mistake, as the name *Anvars* is characteristic of the Arabic anthroponymic system. Compare *Anwar*, an Arabic personal name derived from the Arabic *anwar*, meaning 'bright' or 'radiant' (R. Kohlheim, V. Kohlheim 2013: 57).

included in the calendar. Relatively uncommon names with 500–1,000 bearers include *Aleks*, *Kevin*, *Maikls*, *Nikolass*, and *Raiens*, while the remaining names are even rarer, with only 100 to 500 bearers. All these names have nevertheless been included in the forthcoming dictionary, as they belong to the group of the 200 most popular names for girls and boys⁴.

Furthermore, a data visualisation by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), entitled *100 Most Popular Names of Newborns Over 100 Years*, shows that these names are most frequently given to children born abroad. It can therefore be concluded that either factor – being an atypical name for Latvians or being a newly arrived name – would, on its own, suffice to explain their absence from the LPV.

2.3. Changed forms of names and scarce names

It should be noted that for 11 names, the LPV provides a similar, usually more common, form. For example: *Aleksis* (not *Alekss*), *Dominiks* (not *Domeniks*), *Emīlija* (not *Emilia*), *Gabriela* (not *Gabriella*), *Heidi* (not *Heidija*), *Marija* (not *Maria*), *Markuss* (not *Markus*), *Nikola* (not *Nikole*), *Olīvijs* (not *Olivia*), *Sofija* (not *Sofia*), and *Viktorija* (not *Viktoria*). All these (the forms given in brackets) are included in the extended name-day calendar⁵, except for *Emilia*, *Maria*, *Olivia*, *Sofia*, and *Viktoria*, which do not comply with Latvian grammatical norms, i.e., they end in *-ia* rather than the normative *-ija*.

During the analysis, an additional category emerged alongside the previously identified groups: names that are very rarely (or never) encountered in actual use but are nonetheless included in the traditional name-day calendar. It is difficult, and in some cases even impossible, to determine why these names are absent from the LPV, as the reasons may vary. They may have appeared in Latvia after 1980, when the LPV manuscript was completed, or the number of bearers may have been so small that they did not come to K. Siliņš's attention or enter his records. In total, 32 such names were identified: *Ako*, *Aldris*, *Amalda*, *Amanta*, *Ārvalda*⁶, *Ārvalds*, *Benedīne*, *Digmārs*, *Dite*, *Dzelde*, *Dziedra*, *Dzīle*, *Edvarts*, *Gaits*, *Guntris*, *Halina*, *Imalda*, *Junora*, *Liepa*, *Liza*, *Magone*, *Malvis*, *Meija*, *Meldris*, *Menarda*, *Miervalda*, *Raits*, *Ritvaldis*, *Sigmunds*, *Valgudis*, *Viestards*, *Žaklīna*. Almost all of these names have fewer than 70 bearers, with the majority having fewer than 10. Only *Edvarts*, *Liza*, and *Žaklīna* have approximately 100 bearers, while the name *Ārvalda* is not registered at all.

3. KEY POINTS EXPLAINING THE ABSENCE OF PARTICULAR GIVEN NAMES IN THE LPV

Firstly, there is one name whose exclusion is explicitly mentioned in the LPV introduction. The scientific editor of the dictionary, Ojārs Bušs, notes that “Livonian and

⁴ On recent tendencies choosing a name for newborns in Latvia see Balode 2023.

⁵ Extended calendar is available on the website of the State Language Centre: <https://www.vvc.gov.lv/lv/kalendarvardu-ekspertu-komisija> (see the document “Paplašinātais vārdadienu saraksts”).

⁶ In this list of given names, underlined names are of Latvian origin.

Estonian names (from ancient chronicles)” were among those omitted (Siliņš 1990: 34). Such example is the male name *Ako*. If a comparable dictionary were being compiled today, this criterion would no longer apply, as *Ako* is currently registered as a given name in Latvia with more than 10 bearers, i.e., it is no longer confined to ancient chronicles. Similarly, the name *Bernadīna*, which was recorded in the manuscript of the LPV, was excluded because it was not attested in real usage (Ibid.: 34). However, a similar name, *Bernedīne*, with fewer than 10 bearers, has been included in the forthcoming dictionary.

Secondly, the LPV contains specific names in forms that differ from those in the forthcoming dictionary: *Ārvaldis* (not *Ārvalds*), *Dita* (not *Dite*), *Edwards* (not *Edvarts*), *Gaitis* (not *Gaits*), *Haļīna* (not *Halina*), *Liepiņa* (not *Liepa*), *Līze* (not *Liza*), *Raitis* (not *Raits*), *Zigmunds* (not *Sigmunds*), *Viestarts* (not *Viestards*), *Žakelīna* (not *Žaklīna*), as well as names of the opposite gender are recorded in LPV, for instance, male name *Ārvaldis* (but not female name *Ārvalda*), *Dziedris* (not *Dziedra*), *Dzīlis* (not *Dzīle*), *Guntris* (not *Guntra*), *Miervaldis* (not *Miervalda*), and female name *Malva* (not male name *Malvis*), *Meldra* (not *Meldris*).

For specific names, it may be assumed that they were in use during the 20th century, but K. Siliņš may not have recorded them. This assumption is supported by searches in the “Periodika” online archive, which reveal newspaper articles mentioning real individuals with these names, for example, *Aldris* (in the 1970s), *Amalda* (in the 1920s), *Halina* (in the 1950s), *Imalda* (in the 1960s), *Junora* (in the 1930s), and *Menarda* (in the 1980s). Based on surnames and contextual details, it is highly probable that these individuals were Latvians.

Some of these names also appear in periodicals as the names of characters of literary works, such as *Aldris*, *Dite*, *Dzelde*, and *Junora*, which may have facilitated their subsequent adoption in real life. Additionally, for example, the name *Edvarts* is known as a literary pseudonym of the writer Edvarts Virza (1883–1940, real name Jēkabs Eduards Liekna).

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, the assumption that one of the main reasons for the absence of specific names in the LPV lies in the fundamentally different approaches of the two dictionaries – whether focusing exclusively on ethnic Latvian names or on names borne by Latvian citizens – was only partially confirmed. Among the long-established, typical names of Latvian minorities that are not included in the LPV, only *Jevgenija*, *Jevgenijs/Jevgēnijs*, and *Natalja* stand out.

More often, the absence of specific names can be explained by their arrival and/or wider spread in Latvia during the late 20th century or even only in the 21st century. This group includes various names of Western European origin (all adapted to Latvian orthography, with Latvian grammatical endings), such as *Braiens*, *Denīze*, *Džesika*, *Eimija*, as well as names representing the Slavic anthroponymic system, such as *Alisa*, *Damirs*, *Daniils*, and *Denis*. These examples demonstrate that name-giving traditions in Latvia have undergone significant change in recent decades, both among Latvians and within minority communities.

For nearly half of the analysed names, the reasons for their exclusion from the LPV cannot be determined with certainty. These are very rarely used and, in some cases, even

unique given names that nonetheless appear in the traditional name-day calendar. Although this group is quite diverse, it is here – and only here – that names of Latvian origin, such as *Ārvalda*, *Dzelde*, and *Dziedra*, are found. The inclusion of some of these names in the calendar may have contributed to their transformation from occasional occurrences into scarce but still attested names.

In any case, the forthcoming dictionary will present a highly diverse collection of given names. Only time will reveal which of these names will take root and flourish in Latvian naming practices, and which will gradually fade into obscurity.

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