



Ecology
of the
Estonian
language

The Ecology of Estonian in the 21st Century: Working for a Sustainable Equilibrium

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Language ecology

- Ecology is a science about the interaction of a species with its environment.
- Language ecology is “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment”.



Einar Haugen
(1906-1994)

Haugen, E. (1972). The ecology of language.

Language environment

- A territory populated by speakers, organizations and institutions, and characterized by a distinct language regime.
- Language regime is a stable pattern of the use of one or several languages in domains of:
 - home and neighborhood
 - education and research
 - work and services
 - administration
 - media and cultural industries

Language competition

- Language competition occurs when two or more languages are used in parallel in the same environment.
- Language regime affects the language practices of speakers, but is, in turn, affected by these practices.
- As a consequence of language competition some languages may face the loss of domains.

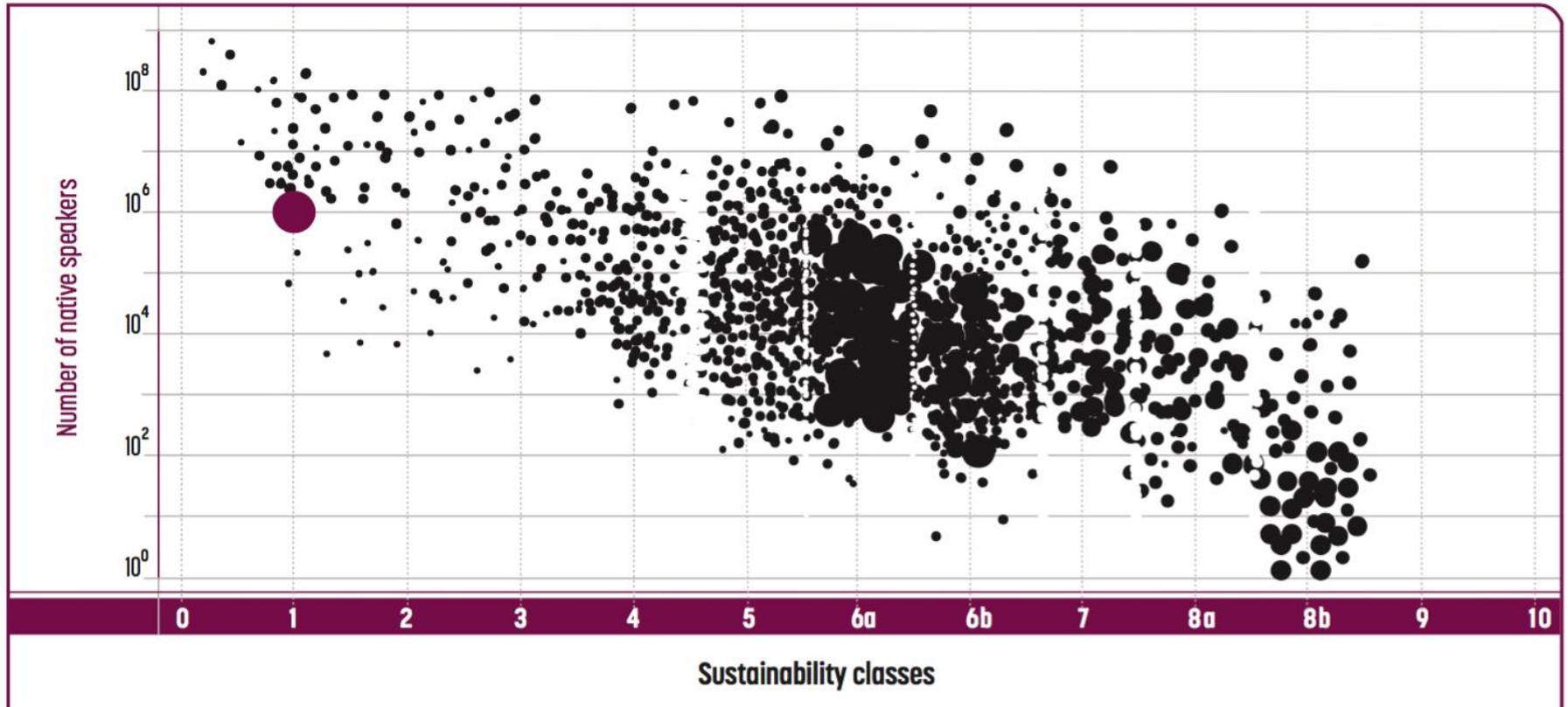
Sustainability

- The sustainability of a language is ultimately determined by its use in the home domain.
- The key factor is intergenerational transmission of the language from parents to offspring.
- Intergenerational transmission depends on the use of this language in other domains.
- The larger is the number of domains a language is used, the more sustainable it is.

Assessing sustainability

- The *Ethnologue* scales (www.ethnologue.com):
 - 0 – International languages (6)
 - 1 – National languages (96)
 - 2 – Provincial languages (68)
 - 3 – Languages of wider communication (166)
 - 4 – Educational languages (236)
 - 5 – Developing languages (1619)
 - 6a – Vigorous languages (2462)
 - 6b – Threatened languages (1061)
 - 7 – Shifting languages (463)
 - 8 – Moribund (702)
 - 9 – Dormant (218)
 - 10 - Extinct

Sustainability of Estonian



Source: <http://www.ethnologue.com/cloud/ekk>.

Language competition in Estonia

- Estonian as a small national language (Level 1) of the majority in Estonia
- Russian as the language of a large minority and an international language (Level 0)
- English as the international language (Level 0) and the language of new immigrants

State development plans for Estonian

- Development plan of the Estonian language 2011-2017.
- Development strategy of the Estonian Language 2004 – 2010. The goal:
the Estonian language will be the main means of communication of the developing contemporary high-technological and open multicultural society on Estonian territory.

Soviet legacy

- The share of Estonians dropped from 93% in 1940 to 61% in 1989.
- Russian speakers of Estonia had little or no motivation to learn Estonian.
- Learning Russian was both the necessity as well as strongly imposed by the Soviet authorities.
- When Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian speakers in Estonia were largely monolingual while the Estonians were bilingual.

Estonian language policy

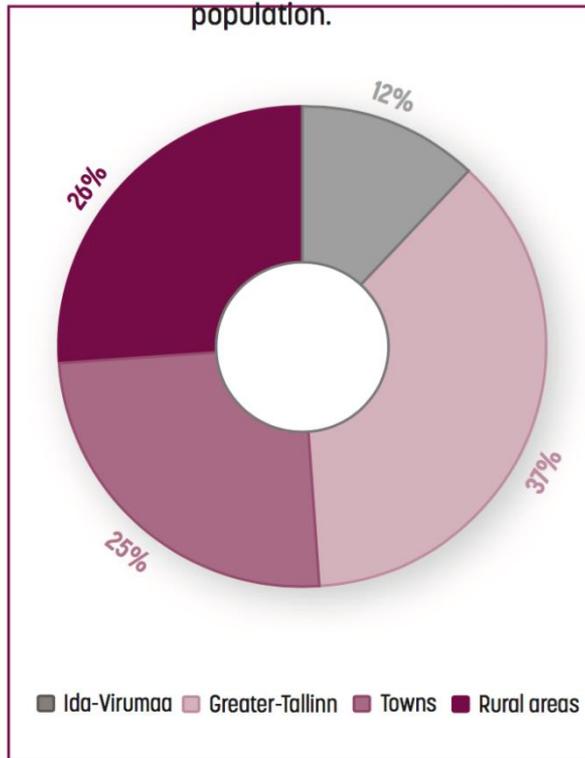
- Estonian language was restored as the only state language, no official status for Russian.
- The right of the customer to have service in Estonian language everywhere in Estonia.
- All official communication in public sector need to take place in Estonian (except where Russian speakers form majority).
- Language Inspectorate established.

Educational language policy

- Soviet legacy – segregated school system for Estonian speaking and Russian speaking children.
- Extensive teaching of Estonian in Russian schools.
- In 1993 a legislation: grades 10-12 need to use Estonian as language of instruction.
- Implementation started 2007, and only 60% of teaching in grades 10-12 must be in Estonian.

Language environments in Estonia

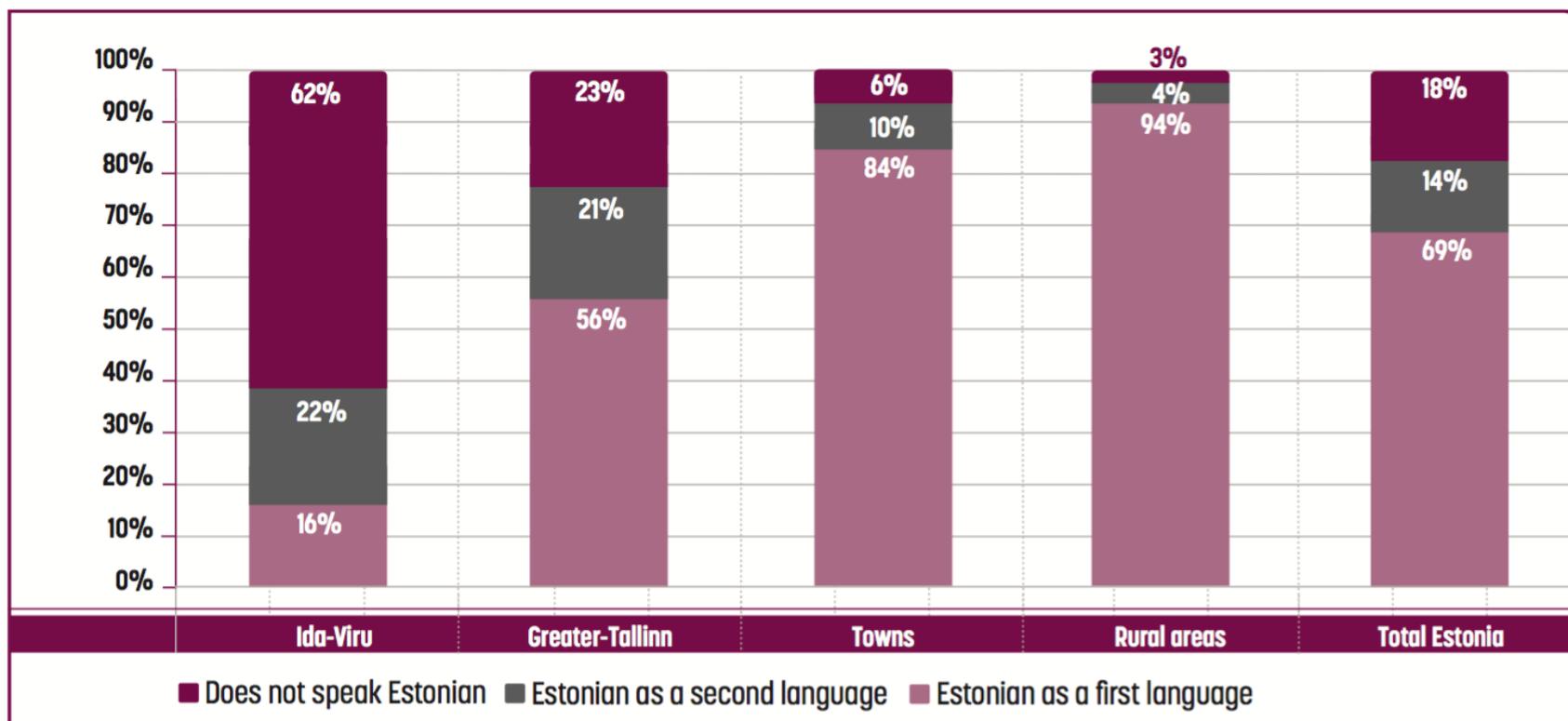
FIGURE 4.1.2 Percentage of Estonia's language environments by population.



Source: 2011. aasta rahvaloendus.

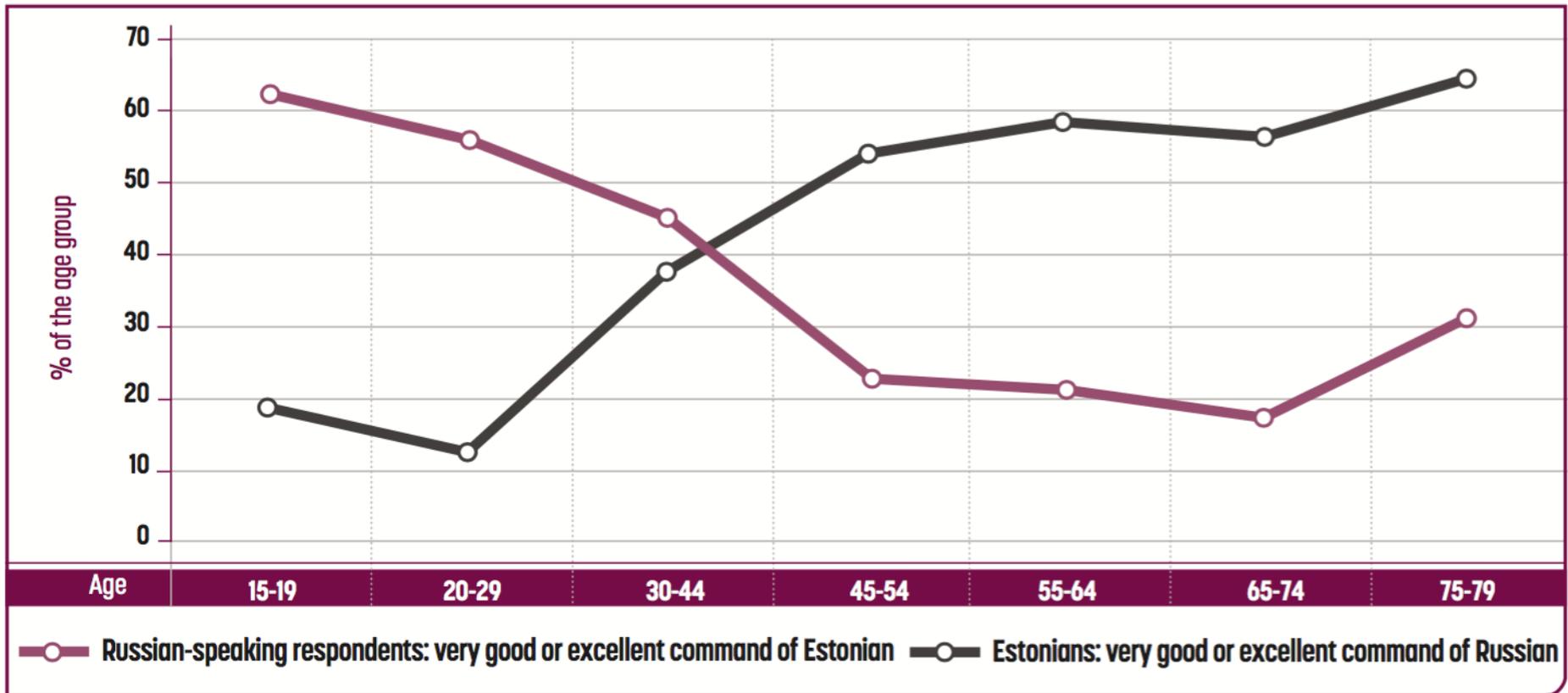


Ethnolinguistic composition



Data: Statistics Estonia

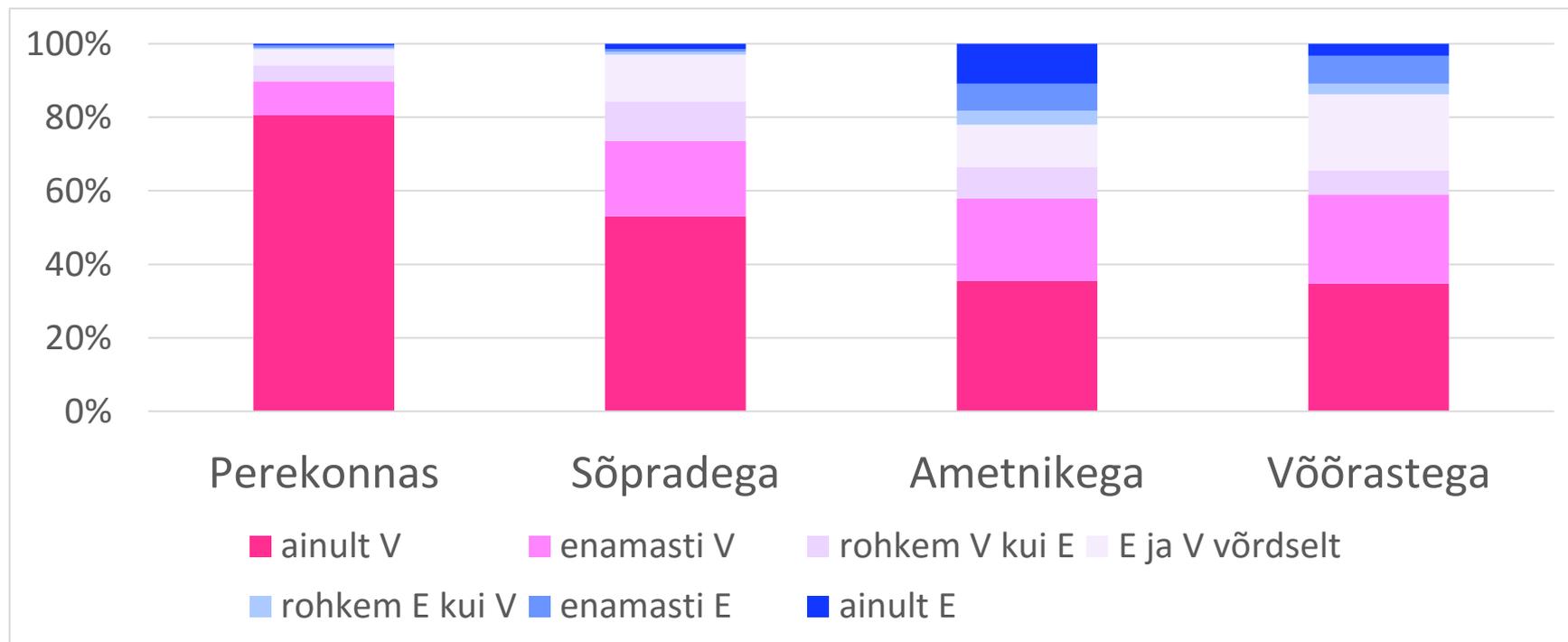
Fluency of Estonian and Russian as L2



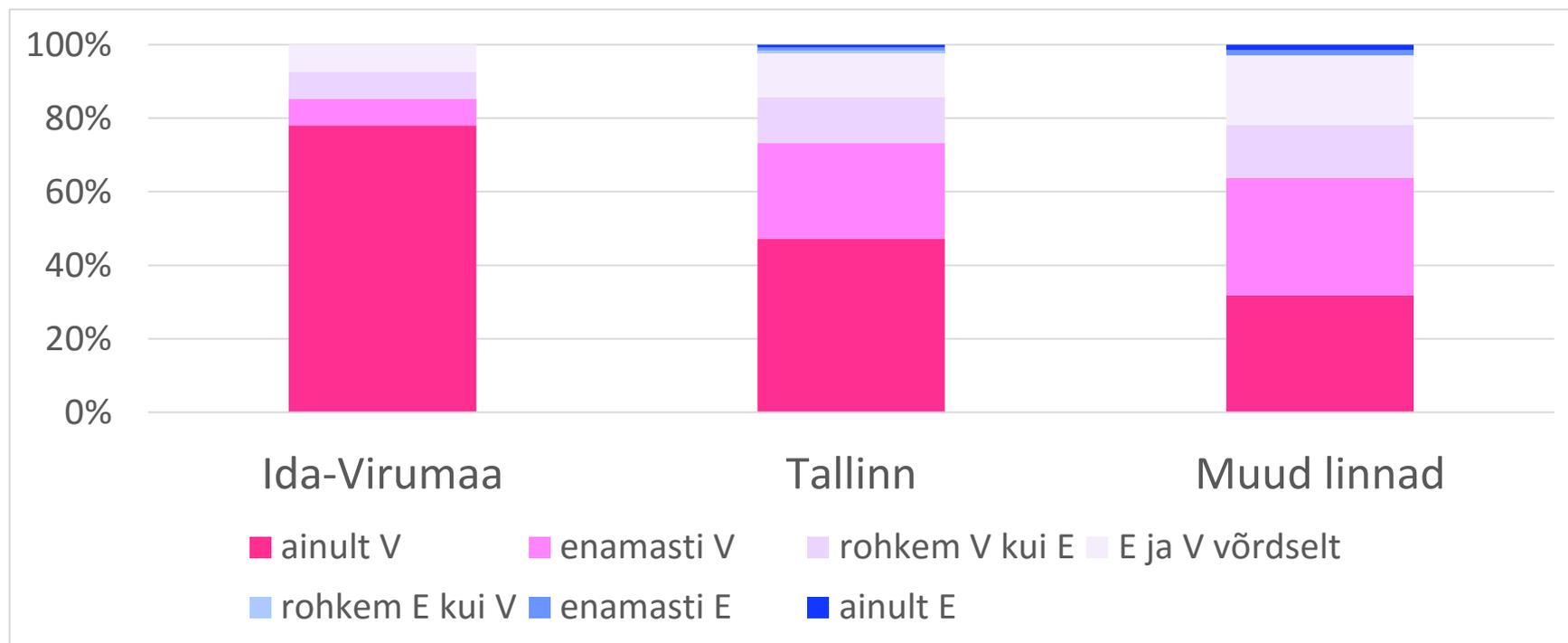
Data: MeeMa, 2014

Language choice, Russian speakers

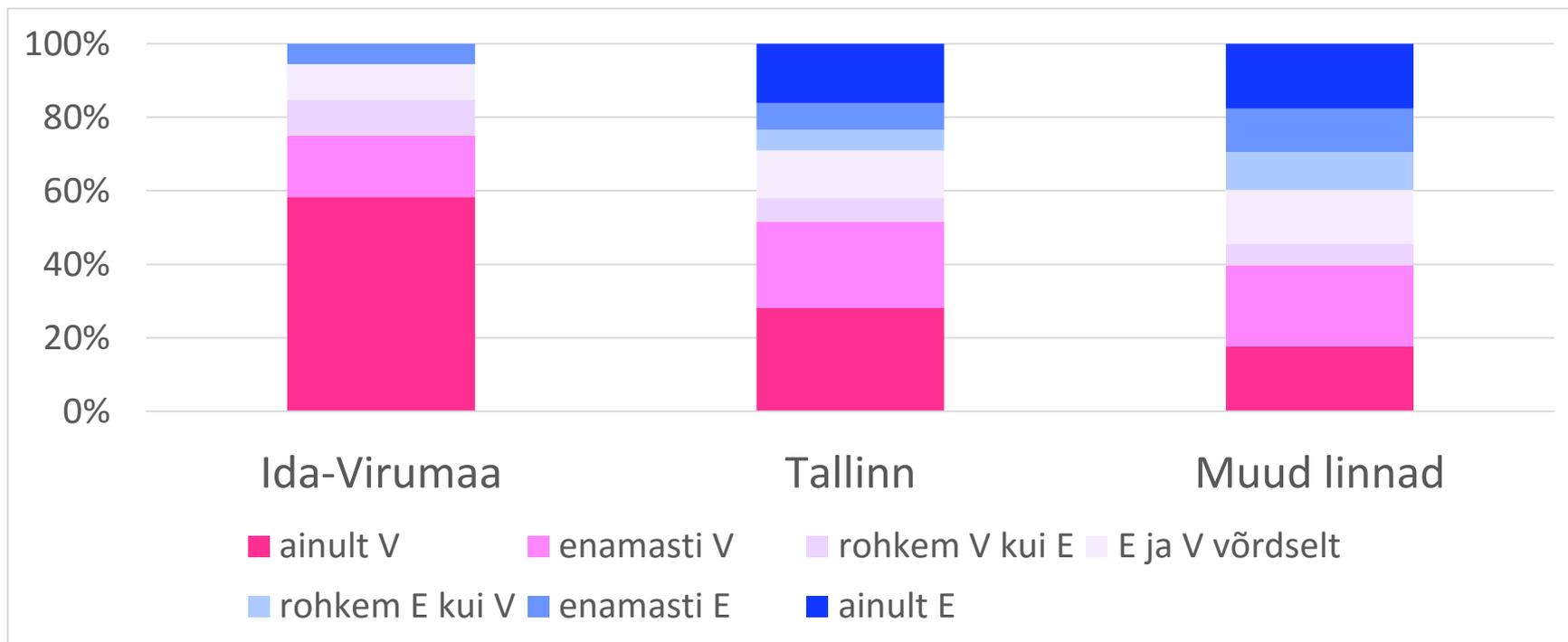
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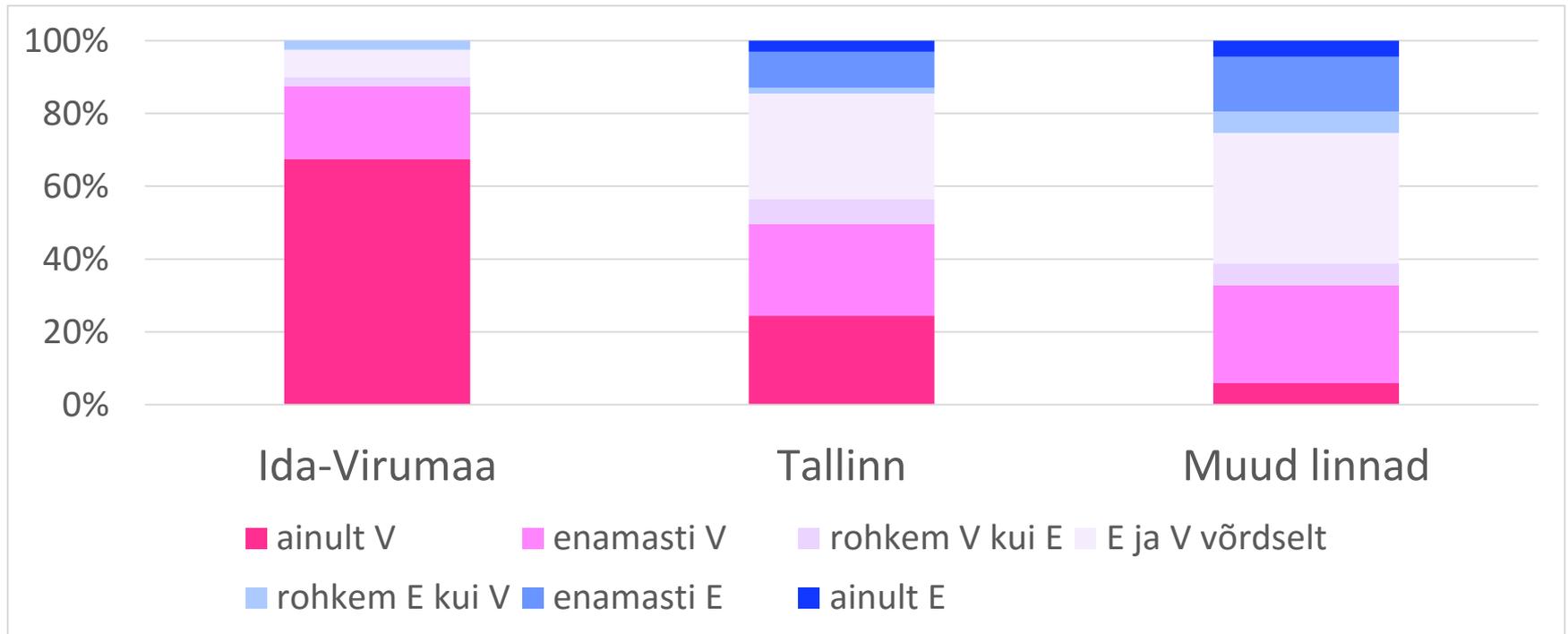
Language choice with friends



Language choice with officials



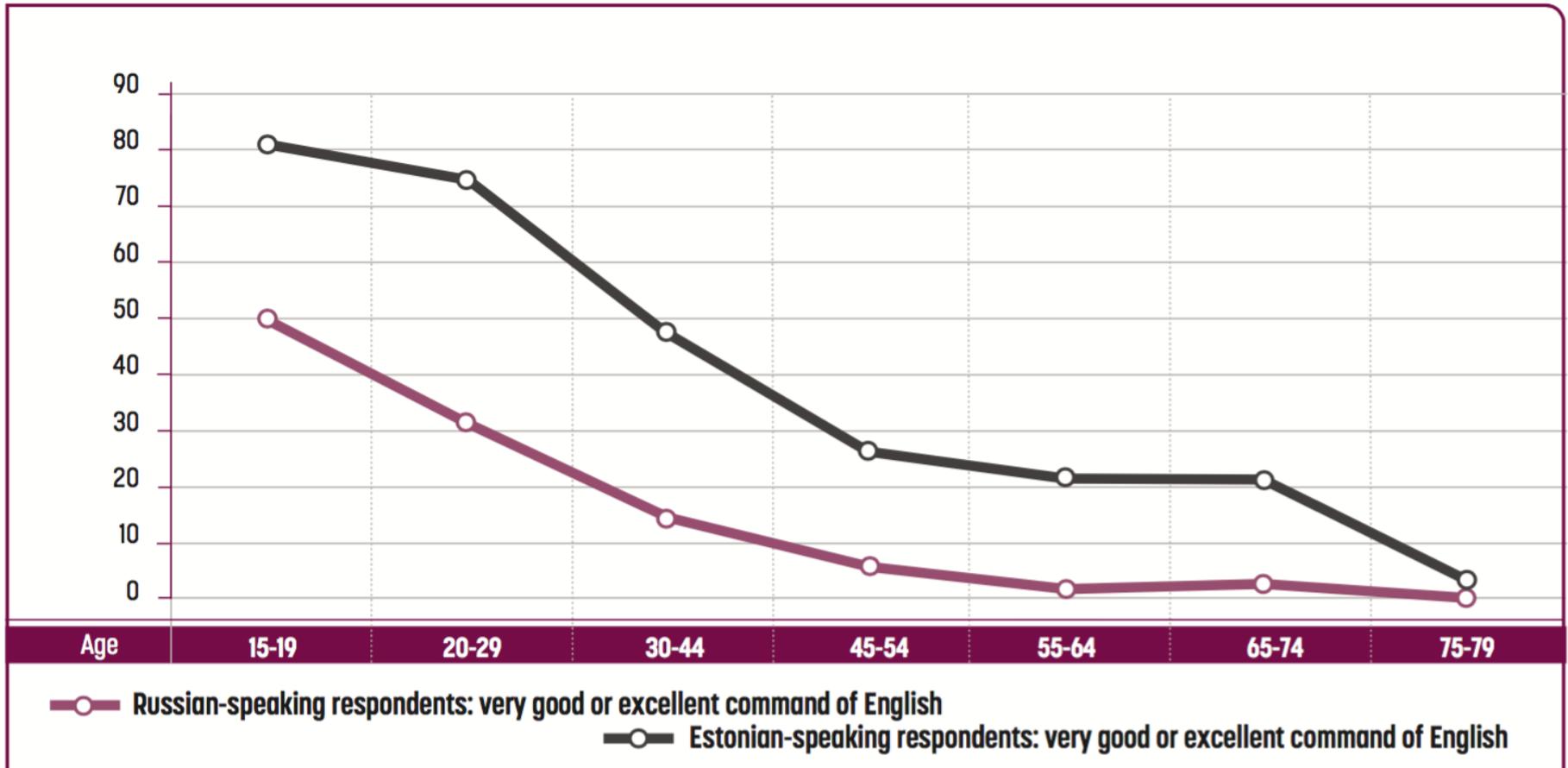
Language choice with strangers



Impact of globalization

- The use of English has increased:
 - in science (79% of PhD dissertations in English)
 - in education (5% of BA students study in English)
 - in services (English service widely available)
- The knowledge of English has increased from 25% in 2001 to 38% in 2011 (Census data)

Fluency of English as L2



Source: Meema 2014.

Multiple language policy agents

- Estonian Language Board vs.
- Estonian Development Fund (state run NGO):
 - by 2018 “More university programmes are delivered in English—doctoral studies, the vast majority of Master’s studies, and Bachelor’s studies with international bias will be in English”;
 - “more English environment for foreign families: public and local government services, schools, etc.”

Sustainable equilibrium?

- Right now, Estonian is holding on.
- The crucial variable is the possible impact of new residents, temporary and permanent:
 - their numeric proportion in the society
 - their language skills in English and/or Russian
 - their motivation to learn Estonian