



# Folk concepts of multilingualism and minority: A focus on Setos and Võros

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# Methodology and research questions

- Study of representations which non-linguists construct and articulate resulting from their experience
- Such representations result in discourses of hierarchy (Hult 2010)
- Study of individual and semi-public discourses
- How speakers of Seto and Võro conceptualize both multilingualism and minorities?
- How they report on their multilingual practices?



# Data

- selected data from fieldwork done December 2010–May 2011
- Seto and Võro data of ELDIA project
- sociolinguistic surveys:
  - ~ 300 Seto respondents
  - ~ 300 Võro respondents
- Individual and focus group interviews

# The Baltic States





# Main facts about Setos and Võros

- Seto people

5 000 - 12 000 speakers in south-eastern Estonia, Pskov oblast in Russia and bigger Estonian towns

- belong to the Orthodox church and cultural area
- ethnic identity of their own

- Võro people

50 000 - 75 000 speakers in south-eastern Estonia and Estonian towns

- mostly secular Lutherans
- identify themselves usually as Estonians

Seto and Võro languages are mutually comprehensible, traditionally they are defined as South Estonian dialects

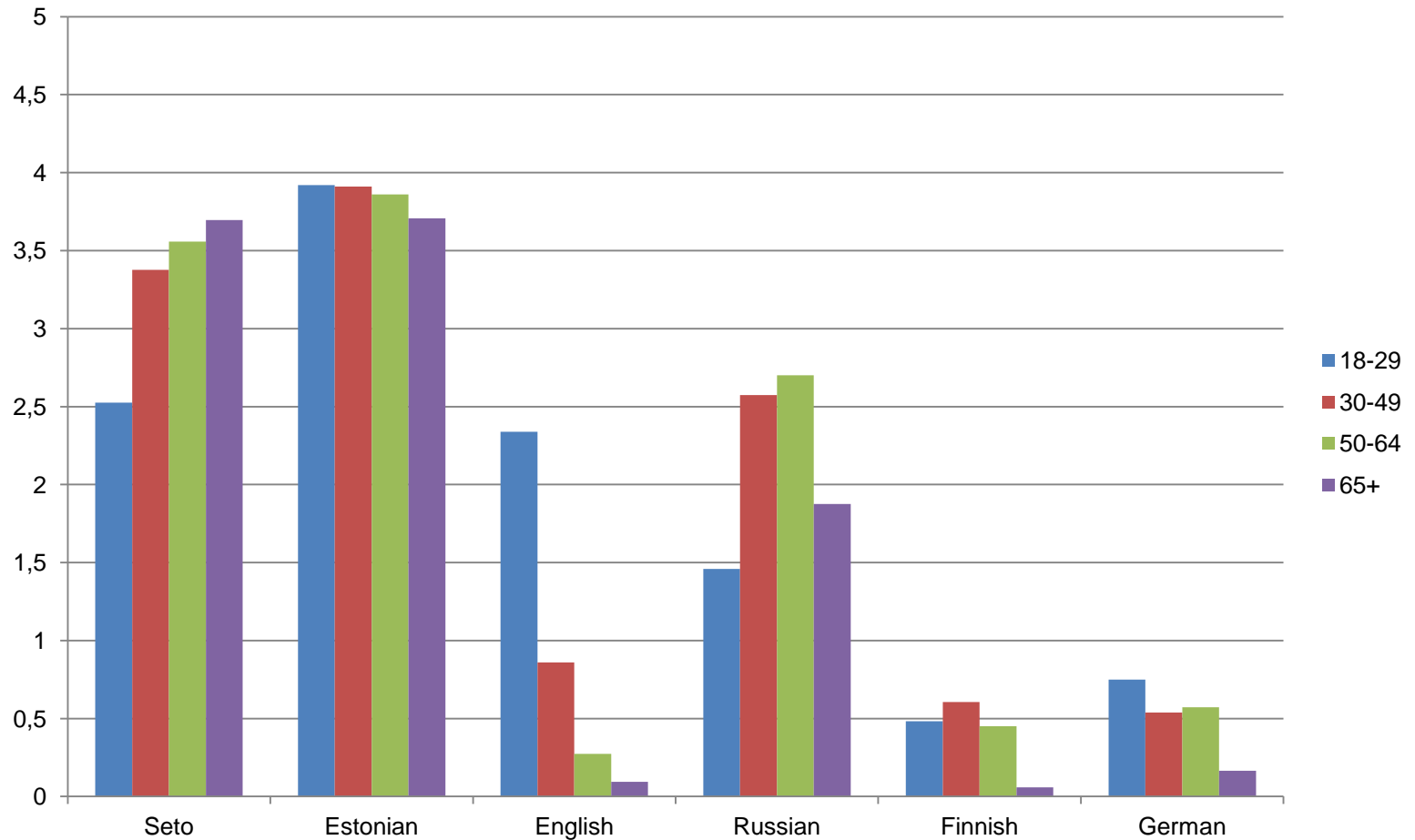


## Questions from the interview template:

- What languages would it be good to know?  
Why?
- Are you bilingual/multilingual? Why/why not?
- What do you think about the word “minority”?
- Are you a minority member?  
Do speakers of Seto/Võro belong to a minority?
- I speak/write Seto/Võro, Estonian, English, Russian, Finnish, German *fluently-well-fairly-poorly-not at all*

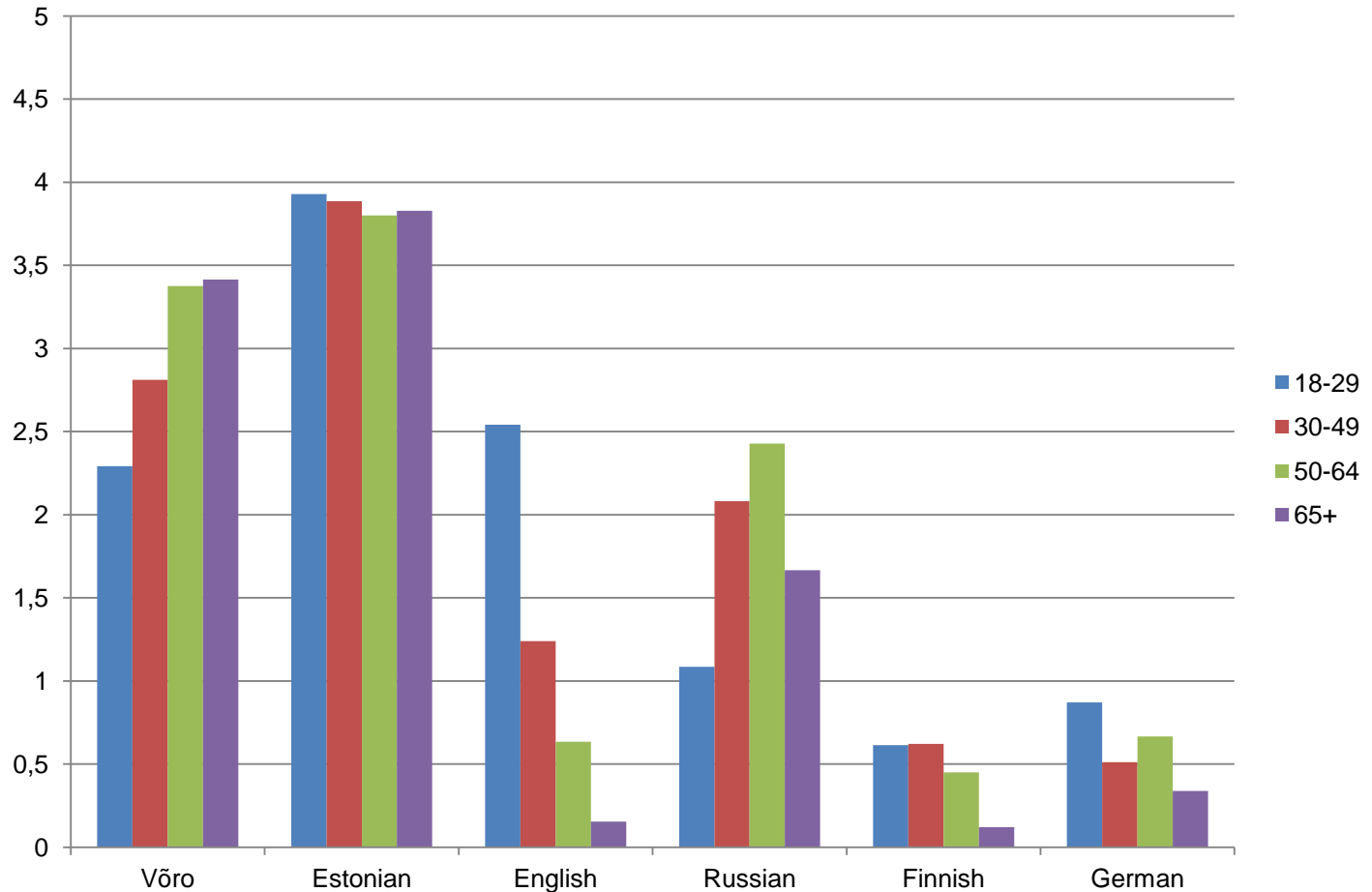


# Reported speaking skills of Setos





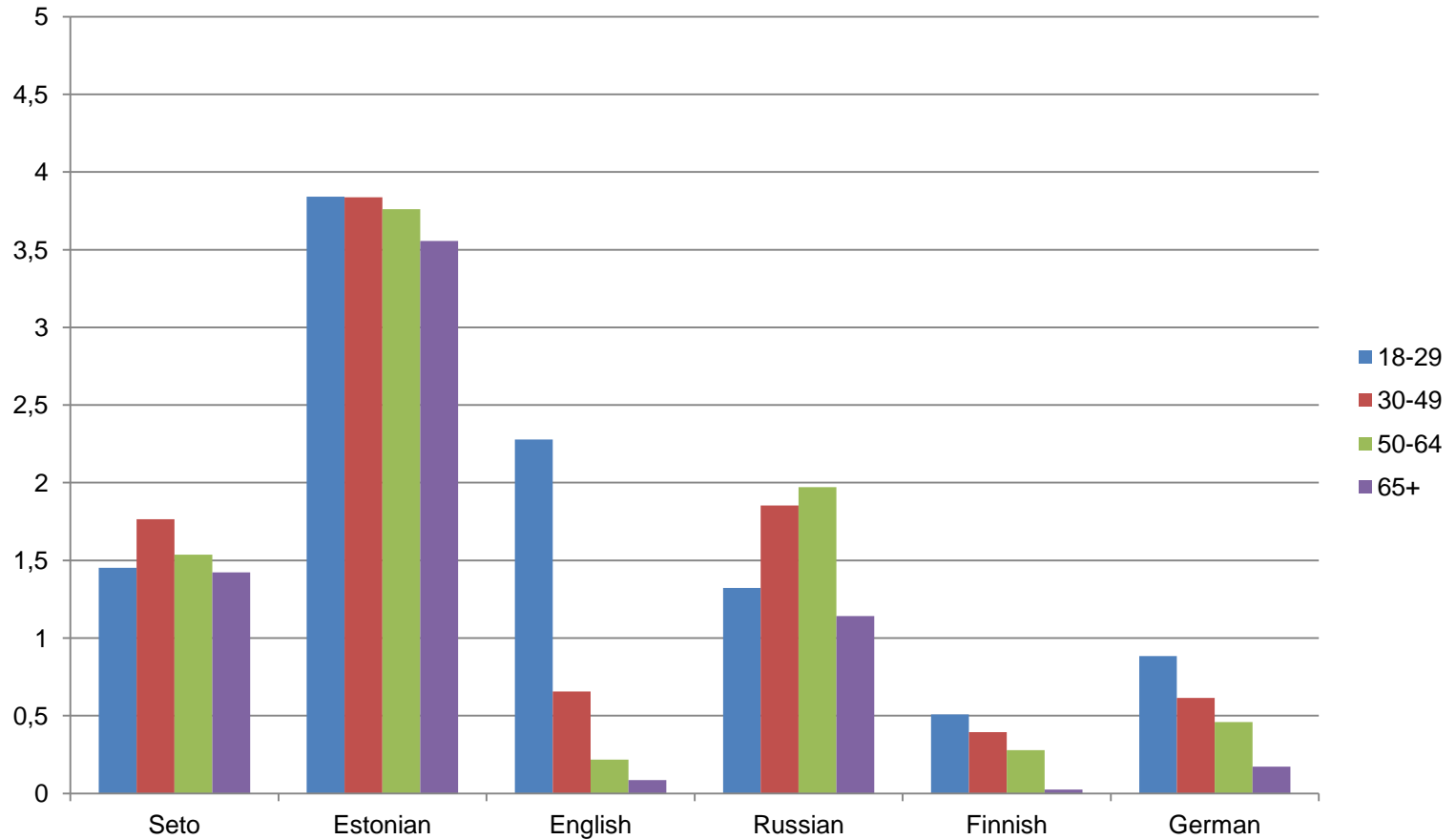
# Reported speaking skills of Võros





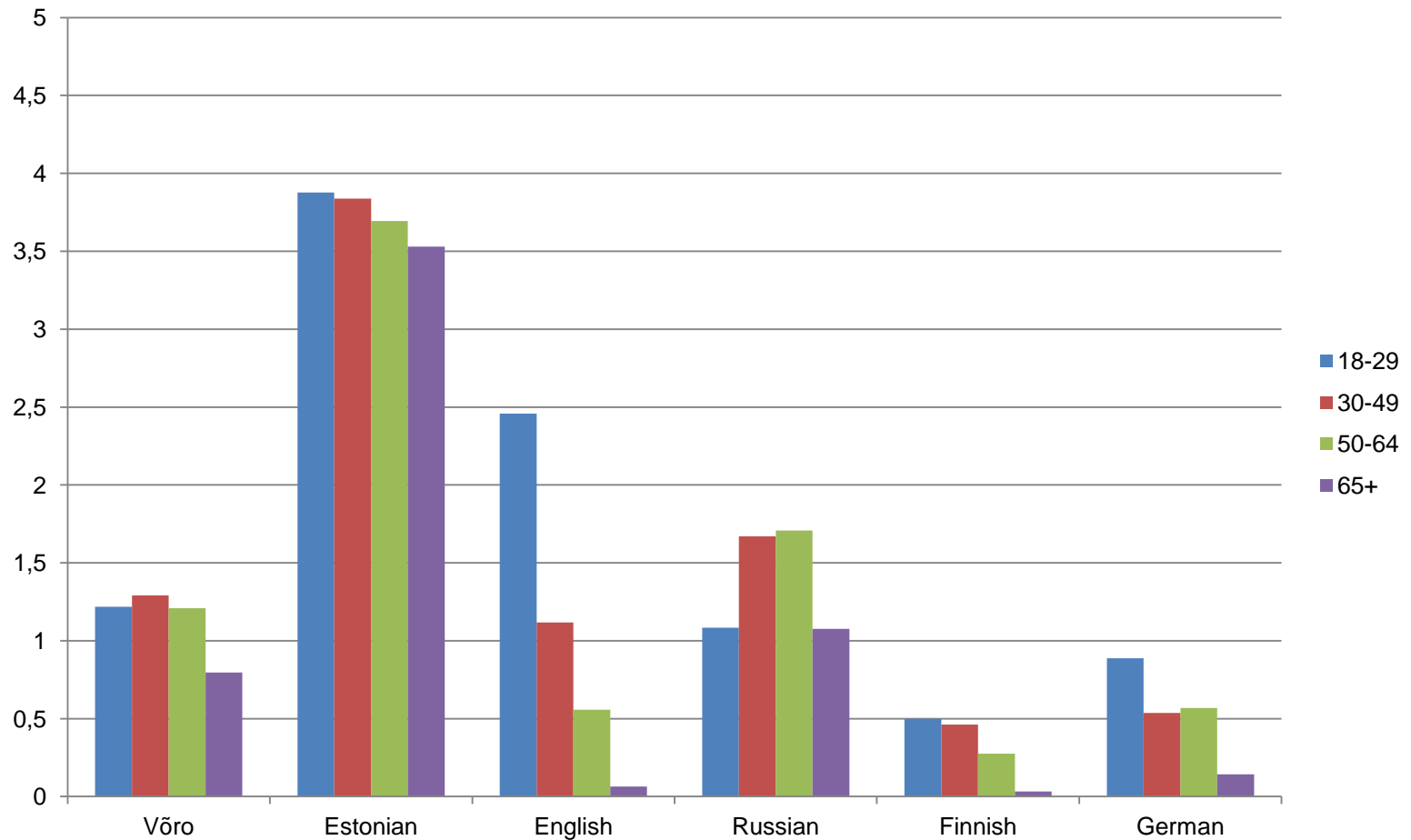


# Reported writing skills of Setos





# Reported writing skills of Võros





# Are you bilingual/multilingual?

- “people have not likely thought about that when they speak a kind of unrecognized language that it could be a language skill on its own” (EE-EST-FGP-04m)
- “if a person can think in this language then it is believed that (s)he knows that language too” (EE-VRO-FGA-03f)
- “multilingual rather () yeah but I kind of have not differentiated between Võro and Estonian (EE-VRO-FGAG1-03m)
- “but but now the Võro language is more important for sure (.I) use Estonian to a lesser extent” (EE-VRO-FGAG1-01f)
- “I do not say that I speak the Võro language I speak Estonian and Russian and a bit of English” ((EE-VRO-IIAG3f)



## Are you bilingual/multilingual?

- “I have not thought this way” (EE-VRO-FGAG2-02m)
- “well foreign languages ((laugh))” (EE-VRO-FGAG2-02m)
- “all mixed well”(EE-VRO-FGAG3-03f)
- “((I am)) still multilingual” (EE-SETO-FGA-02m)
- ”I cannot answer this () I cannot understand that ((I am)) multilingual” (EE-SETO-FGAG2-01m)
- “I am not for sure” (EE-SETO-FGAG3-05f)
- “sure ((I am))” (EE-SETO-FGAG3-04f)



# What do you think about the word “minority”?

- “people who are lacking something or have something that troubles them” (EE-VRO-FGAG2-03m)
- “when I myself don’t have a problem () well then ((I am)) not a minority” (EE-VRO-FGAG2-03m)
- “that idea of minority is for me very much against the grain” (EE-VRO-FGAG2-02m)
- “((I)) haven’t experienced that” (EE-VRO-FGA-04m)
- Estonia is so small () that there are not so many us here () we are not a kind of big ethnos yet () Estonians“ (EE-VRO-FGAG3-02f)



# What do you think about the word “minority”?

- well ((there are)) few of them ((Setos)) well – let’s start from Estonians () the size of Estonians is small” (EE-SETO-FGAG2-03m)
- ”well there are few people in Estonia altogether” (EE-SETO-FGAG3-03f)
- ”((there)) are few Estonians and willing or unwilling but Setos belong to Estonians too” (EE-SETO-FGAG4-03m)
- ”well we are a minority related to whom? we are people of our own on our own soil” (EE-SETO-FGA-04m)
- “then minority for a sure but () as a speaker a minority for sure” (EE-SETO-FGA-03f)
- “well it is a minority”(EE-SETO-FGAG5-05f)



# Conclusions

- explicit interdiscursivity (Koreinik 2011)
- despite the high evaluation of English, the average reported English skills are low
- significant differences between age groups
- ambivalence in the concepts of multilingualism:
  - languageness,
  - commodity,
  - a characteristic / an asset of a minority
- representations of minority as someone who is in trouble and in need or who belongs to a small group



AITUMA!  
THANK YOU!