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Ideological debates around the script of collateral languages: the case of Kashubian and Silesian in Poland

Keywords:

Kashubian; Silesian; collateral languages; language standardization; writing systems

Abstract:

Our paper discusses the modes of creating normalized orthographies for two collateral languages of Poland, Kashubian and Silesian. In both cases, the creation of a literary form is a way of raising their prestige and an argument for their legal recognition. While Kashubian has a status of a “regional language” of Poland, Silesian is still contested despite large community support for its linguistic autonomy.

We analyze how different orthography systems are created, promoted and what ideological debates they provoke. We distinguish between two kinds of scripts. The first option is a “compromise”, closer to the standard Polish, which aims to facilitate learning collateral language in formal education for those who are Polish first language speakers. The second is a “classical” or “identity-strengthening” version that builds upon the historical forms of local scripts. It aims to distinguish it from the standard Polish to reinforce the groups’ identity as separate from the dominant society.

Based on an analysis of in-depth interviews with language activists and the context in which the Kashubian and Silesian languages function, we explore the ideological debates around the creation of collateral languages’ writing systems.

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Introduction: standardizing collateral languages

Collateral languages belong to the same language family as the dominant, state languages, and are in geographical and linguistic proximity with them. “Collaterality” refers to Kloss’ (1967) distinction of *Dachsprache*, the dominant language, *Abstandsprache*, “language by distance” implying the language proximity concept, and *Ausbausprache*, “language by development – a variety that gained the status of a language through standardization enabling its use in different domains. Similarity of the collateral and dominant languages influences the status and prestige of the former. Linguistic intelligibility, mostly based on intuitive or social/political criteria rather than measurable linguistic distance, is often used as an argument in denying their recognition and contesting their independent status as languages (see Tamburelli & Tosco 2021). They are often perceived as dialects of the dominant language, and as such they are associated with orality and the lack of standardized written form. When applying the *Abstand* criteria to collateral languages, their codification and standardization seems pointless. As a result, thinking about languages in the *Abstand* perspective excludes the subjectivity of the speech community that strives for the recognition of their language and its distinctiveness. On the other hand, the *Ausbau* criteria strengthens the philosophy of selective recognition of languages, supporting only varieties that are “mature” enough in socio-political terms. Hence, the distinction between “languages” and “dialects” in the *Ausbau* perspective leads to the paradox of exclusion that Tamburelli (2021) called the “*Ausbau* circle”: only the forms recognized as “languages” are included in the protection system and have a chance for further development. The others called “dialects”, not considered worthy of protection, are deprived of recognition and disallowed their “*Ausbau*-ization” (Tamburelli 2021: 24). The emergence of a written form of language variety, which introduces it into new domains, strengthens its position, whereas the form of script itself may further strengthen its distinctiveness from the dominant language.

The “*Ausbau* circle” proves how important for the recognition of collateral languages is their capacity to serve different registers. The existence of a written form is among key factors helping the widespread recognition of autonomy and “maturity” of a particular variety as an independent *Ausbau* language. A suitable writing system has to fulfill not only linguistic requirements – it becomes a symbol of identity and generates ideologies surrounding the particular variety. Consequently, its proponents have to choose between adapting the orthography of the dominant language with minor additions or implementing a completely different system to emphasize the difference between the dominant language and the newly

forged idiom (Stęplewski 2019: 67). As stated by scholars researching nationalism, a unified writing system acknowledges the creation of the normalized language and by extension a community encompassing all formerly separate ethnolinguistic groups using closely related but different language varieties (e.g. Anderson 2006: 67-82). This near indisputable importance of one 'proper' standard for the legitimization of a contested variety, shared both inside and outside of its speakers' community, clearly shows how the standard language ideology is being forced upon the minority language users by the majority discourse (see Milroy 2001, Vogl 2012: 13-18).

Based on Stęplewski (2019: 82) we may identify four core questions that a community has to answer while working on language standardization: 1) How to approach the existing writing tradition in that language, if present?; 2) What is the script-related model of culture to be followed?; 3) Is there a willingness to adopt elements of the script of other languages considered to be prestigious, or the contrary (4) – is there a need to emphasize the uniqueness of the language by distinguishing its writing system from neighboring scripts? Proposed orthography may be based on either the contemporary spoken variety of the language (phonological spelling) or – if they existed – on historical written forms (etymological/morphological spelling). The first approach requires establishing a new system but is more intuitive and democratic, as every learner has the same starting point. The second reinforces the group's identity by establishing a link to the past, but is harder for new learners, as it requires learning the script more differentiated from the dominant language (Lüpke 2011; Stęplewski 2019: 146). Consequently, the choice of a writing system is not only a formal decision on the shape of the script. It is also a decision that will affect the community's striving for recognition.

While the mechanisms of language standardization are to a certain extent universal, historical standardization efforts of national languages and the situation of languages standardized recently in minority and collateral situations differ greatly. Historically, standardization was closely connected to the forming of nation-states and was parallel to various processes of social modernization. Contemporary standardization efforts take place against a different framework and three main differences have been identified by Costa, De Korne, Lane (2018: 11-13).

The first is the relationship with political hierarchy: while earlier standardization efforts were conducted concurrently with the forging of nations and state boundaries, minority standardization takes place within an established system and inherently challenges the existing order. Its goals often include compensation for historical discrimination by raising the language

status. The second difference stems from the contemporary character of the process. The standard forms of major languages were codified in much less open societies and the opposition towards projects supported by the elites was weaker. The cost of print and access to publishing houses, in the 18th and 19th centuries mostly controlled by the state, created a bottleneck effect. With today's bottom-up approach towards standardization, there are competing ideas within the community, and changes can be easily contested. The role of media, especially the digital ones, opens a space for discussion, but the debate can lose its constructive character. The third difference lies in the approach towards multilingualism: while dominant languages were standardized to become the only languages in their respective societies, collateral and minority languages are always in relation to at least one dominant language. Thus, the proponents of every standardization project have to take into account the default multilingualism of a minority group.

The codification and standardization of collateral languages are in the center of language ideological debates (Blommaert 1999) that situate issues connected with language in the context of larger socio-political processes, those that concern the development of the speech community and its subjectivity. Such ideological debates are conducted both by actors representing the dominant society, who protect the position of the dominant language (Bourdieu 1991), and by members of the minority community, who grant themselves the right to decide on its form and character.

Language ideological debates are embedded in "longue durée" (Braudel 1958). Similarly to language ideologies, they are rooted in historical, political, cultural and societal processes that influence them and they always take place in relation to the broader context in which they were created, especially the relations of power (Blommaert 1999: 5; Bourdieu 1991). This aspect of language ideological debates is particularly important for collateral languages as these debates point towards their relationship with the dominant language (to which they are compared) and to judgments about the "proper" forms of language use (orality vs. literacy; many dialectal varieties vs. the standardized form etc.).

As language ideological debates reflect the relationship between power relations, linguistic issues, and social structure, standardization of contested languages as a process of their empowerment often causes resistance on the part of the dominant society and creates conflicts within the speech community itself. These internal debates reveal inequalities and differences among speakers of contested languages as the struggle concerns the definitions of social reality,

“various representations of reality which are pitted against each other – discursively – with the aim of gaining authority for one particular representation” (Blommaert 1999: 9). The ideological debates within two collateral language communities in Poland: Kashubian and Silesian, are the subject of this study. We are not interested in the writing systems *per se*, but in the vision of the community behind a particular choice: how it is strengthened, and what arguments are used to obtain public approval for this vision.

Case studies: Kashubian and Silesian

One of the arguments against recognition of collateral languages in Poland was (in the case of Kashubian) and is (for Silesian) their primarily oral mode of functioning. Well into the 2000’s Kashubian was described as *in statu nascendi* as a written language (Zieniukowa 2009) despite Kashubian language publications dating back to the mid-19th Century. Debates about Silesian as a written language remain heated even though literary production in Silesian flourished over the last decade. The often repeated argument that “a variety so close to the state language can only be perceived as its dialect” was used by linguists referring to Kashubian (Breza 1992) and still is in relation to Silesian (Markowski 2012). These debates in both cases refer to codification of languages and the existence of a unified standard, as only an idiom that is codified and has a standard form – recognized both inside and outside of its community – is perceived to be a “full-fledged” language (Jones & Mooney 2017). Although Kashubian gained official recognition in Poland, it obtained a status of a “regional” (and not minority) language, which positions Kashubian directly in relation with Polish.

The “*Ausbau* circle” is clearly visible in the example of Silesian, that is denied recognition and the status of a (regional) language. Such a stance is often backed by linguistic classification of Silesian as a dialect of Polish (from the standpoint of *Abstand*, but not exclusively). The lack of recognition of Silesian as a language impedes its socio-political development including the possibility to teach it at school, to subsidize its written production and to use it in public life, which in consequence hinders its recognition from the *Ausbau* perspective. However, even without the official support, there are numerous language initiatives in Silesia that increase its status. The most important concern language codification and standardization.

Kashubian is the only one collateral language of Poland that has been recognized by the 2005 *Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Language* as a “regional language”. This was possible through great political involvement of the Kashubs and their bottom-up

efforts, initiated in the early 1990s. It permitted the Kashubian language to function outside the home and neighborhood environment, primarily in the education system, with lessons of Kashubian easily accessible a few hours per week. The Census of 2021 revealed that Kashubian is spoken by approximately 90,000 people, but few members of the younger generation acquire it at home (Mazurek 2010) as the intergenerational transmission was seriously weakened in the second half of the 20th Century. Thanks to the legal recognition of Kashubian, its prestige is growing, but the Kashubs themselves are not recognized as a minority and the language ideologies emphasizing the intelligibility of Kashubian with Polish are still present, enforcing its perception as a dialect (Dołowy-Rybińska 2020).

While some literary works using elements of the Kashubian language were printed from the late 16th Century onwards, the first Kashubian alphabet was proposed by Florian Ceynowa (1817-1881) in the 1840s, with further developments in the following decades. In part inspired by Pan-Slavic ideas, Ceynowa's script included several letters with diacritics borrowed from the Czech alphabet. His path was continued by autonomically inclined Kashubian writers and activists in the first half of the 20th Century (namely by authors organized around the "Zrzesz Kaszëbskô" magazine) and their ideological followers in the 1990s ("Tatczëzna" magazine). Beginning in the 1880s a parallel pro-Polish option was proposed by Hieronim Derdowski (1852-1902), whose works openly stated the Kashubian's need to assimilate into the Polish national and linguistic environment (Kożyczkowska 2019: 110-119). Two conflicting discourses clashed in the 2nd half of the 20th Century – one stating the independent character of Kashubian, the other describing it as a dialect of Polish. Published in 1975 the "Rules of Kashubian spelling" (Breza & Treder 1975) proposed a simplified "dialectal" alphabet with only 3 extra letters used for phonemes non-existent in standard Polish (ë, é, ô). After the political changes of 1989, Kashubian organizations of various ideological stances started to work on a compromise to prepare the official Kashubian orthography. In 1996 a new standard was created, leaning towards the "assimilationist" script but introducing some additional letters borrowed from Ceynowa's tradition (ã, ò, ù). They were used, however, only when the standard Polish script was not sufficient (Bandur 2020). This proposition prevailed and its use was strengthened in 2005 when Kashubian was officially recognized. While it might have seemed that the debate on Kashubian script ended, in 2018 it started anew, when Maciej Bandur published a translation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "Le Petit Prince" (*Môli princ*) written in his so-called "classical orthography", based heavily on the original Ceynowa's proposition. Publication was accompanied by articles explaining the need to modify the current spelling, considered too

similar to the majority standard (Bańdur 2021). The new proposition was backed by a number of autonomically-inclined authors (Jablonski 2021), but as for now the 1996 standard remains the main and almost exclusive option used in Kashubian print and media, being the one supported by the authorities.

Silesian, traditionally considered one of the dialects of the Polish language, is the largest (though unrecognized) minority language of Poland. According to the 2021 Census, there are almost 450,000 speakers. The need for officialization among Silesians is clearly visible, as evidenced by 6 attempts to extend the statutory provisions of the Act on Minorities to a second regional language made since 2007 (see Jaroszewicz 2019). Recognition by official bodies (e.g. the Council for the Polish Language) is invoked as a condition for Silesian becoming a full-fledged language also by the opponents of its emancipation. The high language awareness of the Silesian is related to a large group of recipients and the commercial potential exploited by numerous companies. On the other hand, there is a prejudice against so-called “Silesian separatism”, especially in the context of Polish-German relations. Nevertheless, over the last two decades the language-oriented activities in Silesia – including the creation of the Silesian script – have been very intense with different literary works created, some of them with a wider, supra-regional reach.

In the case of Silesia, writing in local Slavic varieties using the standard Polish script has been popular since the 19th Century and many short pieces were printed in local newspapers. The first proposition of an original script was created in the interwar period by Feliks Steuer (1889-1950), a university-educated dialectologist and a teacher. While leaning towards the Polish national identity, he wanted to preserve the local linguistic heritage and wrote academic studies on Silesian dialects, as well as literary works (Pluta 2000). His Silesian script employed mostly the same letters as the Polish standard, but established a different method to write palatalized consonants and introduced one additional grapheme (û) based on Czech spelling. Inspired by Steuer’s proposition but using more letters with diacritics, the so-called “Silesian phonetic alphabet” (ślůnski alfabyt fűnetyčny) was created in 2006 and both have been used on Silesian Wikipedia (founded in 2008). Steuer-based propositions prevailed as Silesian identity markers until 2009, when a new proposition, backed by several regional organizations was presented in Cieszyn.

This so-called “alphabet book spelling” (ślábikůrzowy szrajbůnek) got its popular name when an ABC-book was published (Adamus 2010). The idea behind the proposition, developed with

the support of linguists (Tambor 2010), was to create a universal writing system to be used in all regional varieties of Silesian: while most of the spelling rules are based on the Polish standard, new letters were introduced (ã, ǒ, ȃ, ô, ȓ), some with a different phonetic value in different regional varieties of the idiom. After more than a decade of use, this script has become the default in written Silesian and most of the contemporary works in the language use the *ślabikōrz* script, albeit often in a simplified form with only 2 additional letters (Jaroszewicz 2019, 2020). A small group of activists and writers still use the “classical” Steuer script and many users less involved in the ideological aspects of language standardization write Silesian texts using more or less consistent adaptations of the standard Polish alphabet, even in large and publicized projects (e.g. the translation of the New Testament, and different commercial endeavors).

Research methodology

The article concerns the research carried out within the project “Linguistic diversity in Poland: collateral languages, language-oriented activities and conceptualization of collective identity” affiliated in the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Within this research, we are particularly interested in literacy practices in collateral languages of Poland (Masurian, Podhalanian, Podlachian and Silesian), while Kashubian, recognized as a regional language, serves as a point of reference. Another important subject of investigation is the process of creating the literary norm and the standardization of those languages. On the one hand, we are observing how those languages function in the written form in different domains (including printed and online media). On the other hand, we interview language activists, people engaged in creating, distributing and promoting the written varieties of the language. Those people may be called after Blommaert (1999: 9) the “ideology brokers”, actors who claim authority in the field of the debate. Both in Kashubia and Silesia, we interviewed people who not only write in Kashubian and Silesian respectively, but who also participate in ongoing public discussions that concern the written form of those languages. In the analysis we follow the ideas of the actors of ideological debates, the concepts they expressed and the way they formulated metalinguistic discourse, in accordance with the “grounded theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In each of the regions, between September 2021 and December 2022, we recorded 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the “ideology brokers”. As in both communities there are different opinions concerning the process of language standardization and the form of the script,

for our interview partners we tried to choose people representing various groups and standpoints. They have been selected on the basis of our knowledge of the communities and important actors in ideological debates. Therefore, even if the sample of respondents is low, their statements represent a few most influential Kashubian and Silesian perspectives. Some of our interview partners are language activists directly involved in establishing language standard. In Kashubia, where language policy is closely linked with Kashubian language education, there are teachers of Kashubian who at the same time are actively involved in the public discussion on the status of the language, translators, and activists. Among people interviewed in Silesia there are writers and journalists, as well as engaged linguists and people of different professional backgrounds participating in language standardization.

The interviews were based on the protocol that concerned the questions of personal language practices and engagement on behalf of the minority language, literacy practices, the use of the written language, and the opinions on language codification and standardization processes. Nevertheless, besides asking the same basic questions every time, the interviews were open to allow our respondents to explore the topics they were particularly interested in. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in Polish – a common language for researchers and respondents, with the excerpts quoted later translated into English. We did our best to protect the anonymity of our respondents. As they are public persons recognizable in their communities, some parts of the quotations had to be omitted.

Orthographic decisions always have specific ideological consequences (Lüpke 2011) and both of the analyzed communities have a history of ideological debates surrounding their scripts. In the first step we identified three main areas of debate surrounding the script choice present in the material gathered during our interviews: 1. The feasibility of improving upon a more or less accepted standard, influencing its users' habits and the work of already established institutions; 2. The role of the dominant language and its script in making the collateral language easier to learn and use for the people educated in the majority language school system, as well as ideological consequences of the script choice for the collective identity; 3. The dialectal variation of the collateral language and the level of its unification needed for practical purposes. Secondly, we provided content-oriented discourse analysis. The following part of the paper is structured around the three broad subjects, with several quotes from the interviews describing particular issues in both of the analyzed case studies placed in context and commented upon. More general remarks and questions deserving further research are presented in the final paragraphs.

An ongoing debate vs. acceptance of the *status quo*?

During the last 25 years when the “compromise” writing system was in force, the Kashubian language changed its status, prestige and visibility in the public space. Not only the number of pupils learning Kashubian increases every year, there are also university courses and training curricula for teachers and other people using Kashubian in their professional life. Every year dozens of books are published in Kashubian with the majority serving educational purposes. Most of these publications are subsidized with public money in the “compromise” script. For its supporters, newly proposed “classical” orthography is perceived as unnecessary or even dangerous for the language. One of the first teachers of Kashubian and a person engaged on behalf of the language criticized the idea:

“It [the “classical” writing] is too difficult, the Kashubian language definitely cannot bear it. They want the Kashubian language to be different from Polish. After all, **our goal is not to differentiate**, but to make everyone who looks at the text in Kashubian and knows the language **read it without any problems**. And if the person does not know [the script], the small number of diacritics, also allows to read it correctly. (...) And **why change it** [the writing system] **if it currently is good enough** to read, to use it?”

On the one hand, the arguments touch upon the convenience of Kashubian speakers for whom similarity with Polish makes the reading easier. On the other hand, there is a lack of understanding for those who want to use Kashubian script to differentiate it from Polish. The closing argument against new system is that the official script is “good enough” and any changes may worsen the situation of Kashubian. This is also an opinion of Kashubian activist who participated in the creation of the “compromise” system, for whom protecting the *status quo*, whatever it is, seems better than reopening a discussion leading into the unknown:

“Despite the fact that now there are signals on this topic, I do not engage in this dialogue. Because **fiddling with it is Pandora’s box**. If we start fiddling with it, others will chime in. And look, formally, since 1996, (...) nothing like that happened which would be a threat in this topic.”

While the Kashubian debate centers around an existing standard, the Silesians have to act in a more unstable environment, and some see the lack of institutional support as a chance rather than a problem. As explained by one of the activists supporting the “classical” (Steuer) script,

leaving the situation ungoverned allows for a “natural”, evolutionary emergence of the Silesian standard (cf. Greń 2007):

“We are a huge community and this pluralism is desired, for it is alive – ancient Greek has one accepted mode of writing, because there’s no room for development. **I am glad that new ideas for Silesian codification appear.** (...) Bottom-up codification won’t happen in one decade if we are talking about such a huge group of speakers. (...) Sure, some people expected that there will be one [standard] out of thousand in 3 months. **But it’s already a success when you have twenty instead of a thousand.**”

The relatively new *śląbikōrz* spelling standard has already taken a dominant role in the works of autonomically-inclined Silesian authors, even without the official support. Since its inception in 2009, the proposed spelling has been used in literature, to print both original works and translations, and in various media. Not only has it been accepted as one of the standards for Silesian Wikipedia, but also has been used to translate software, including many ubiquitous programs, such as smartphone interface. The *śląbikōrz* spelling is thus seen – similarly to the Kashubian “compromise” spelling – as an already well established system, even to the point in which the use of competing propositions may be seen as counter-productive. While nearly all interviewed users of this standard had critical remarks towards its different aspects, they were opposed to changing and improving a “good enough” system, at least until the language gains institutional support, as can be seen in this opinion of one of the most prolific local language activists:

“I think that this ‘**critical mass**’ of work written in this particular code [*śląbikōrz*] is already **exceeded**, so nothing new is going to happen here. Although nothing is certain, for it’s all quite fragile. (...) It may unfold differently, but most of the texts are written using *śląbikōrz*. (...) **If it has been accepted by so many different groups, it means we should agree about that and don’t meddle with it.**”

Such a view, however, is not universally shared, and voiced by the *śląbikorz* users it becomes preaching to the converted, rather than a voice in the debate. The proponents of the “classical” script do not necessarily see the conflict between different Silesian systems. They rather consider them to be parts of the same set – Silesian scripts – as opposed to writing without any consistent system with Polish orthography modified on the spot. While they acknowledge that the “compromise” *śląbikōrz* standard is the most popular across different media, they

emphasize that its use is limited to a narrow activist circle and its appropriateness can and should be contested. The main point in using any of the scripts dedicated to Silesian is to distance the “true” Silesian elites (i.e. supporters of linguistic/cultural autonomy) from people writing within the Polish linguistic environment, whose works don’t serve the Silesian cause by situating Silesian as a sub-standard Polish variety, as stated by the already quoted proponent of the Steuer spelling:

“I do not see a point in convincing people who use the *ślabikörz* system. Our actions should rather aim at convincing the people who write intuitively with ‘Polish letters’ to write in a consistent Silesian spelling. (...) As long as Silesian elites don’t adhere to the philosophy of ‘just writing like in Polish’, everything is OK.”

Thus, unlike the more fixed Kashubian situation, in Silesia the debate is still ongoing and without the official recognition and support, even the most popular proposition is only one among many and its seeming success remains fragile.

Pragmatic vs. ideological arguments

While the ideological aspects of script choice remain the background of language debates in both described cases, the arguments used by the “ideology brokers” touch mainly upon pragmatic aspects of language maintenance and revitalization. In a situation of broken family transmission, when minority languages are generally the second language for the young generation and have to be transmitted through formal or out-of-home education, the ease of learning the language becomes an important factor in its codification. Writing in a standard close to the majority language might be seen as problematic from an activist standpoint, as it does not distinguish the collateral language from the closely related dominant one, but it is much easier to acquire by the dominant language speakers than learning a new system. The problem, as seen by an interviewed Silesian journalist and activist, is that no matter which standard gets implemented, writing ‘intuitively’ in Polish would still be easier:

“I consider such writing [using the Polish alphabet] as a kind of melting into Polish. If we were to politically establish Silesian as an independent language, it [the script] should somehow differ from Polish. (...) What is problematic is how to convince other people, if the language is codified, to use this codification.”

While in the current political climate of Poland official recognition seems improbable, the *ślabikörz* spelling, first popularized by a reading primer, is usually seen as the default choice for teaching the language to children and new speakers (e.g. it is used in a commercially available language course provided by the PoNaszymu.pl translation agency). Even the activists supporting the “classical” Steuer script agree that their system seems harder to learn for pupils versed in Polish orthography. At the same time they see the “classical” spelling as a better symbol of Silesian identity – both due to its distinctiveness and the longer tradition. As stated by one of the interviewed activists, in a hypothetical case of Silesian being officially recognized, the go-to script differs according to the policy chosen by the authorities:

“If Silesians were to be suddenly granted the status of an ethnic minority (...), **if we were to get any results [teaching Silesian], *ślabikörz* spelling would have been better. If the Silesian were granted the status of a regional language without the Silesians becoming a minority, Steuer’s alphabet would be better as it differs more from Polish.** If only the language gained state support, the identity would not. If the identity is to be supported [Silesians become a recognized minority], the language is supported as well.”

Even the people actively involved in the Silesian linguistic autonomy movement agree that the pragmatic approach should in the first place consider which script is easier to learn. Interestingly, while it is the *ślabikörz* spelling that uses more additional letters, the Steuer alphabet is generally considered more problematic, as it differs from the intuitive approach to the written language by speakers used to the Polish system:

“**Steuer’s script is too different from the Polish alphabet.** We have to take into account that the children should not struggle too much with it. **Learning two completely different scripts for two similar languages – that could be a great problem for kids.** It would be better if the Silesian one was derived from Polish.”

In Kashubia, the “compromise” writing system was created with schoolchildren in mind, for most of whom Polish was the first language. Such a system was supposed to be as easy as possible for the dominant language speakers. Kashubian language teacher and activist, mentioned in the previous section, also considered the ease of reading in Kashubian as the most important achievement of the writing “compromise”. Nevertheless, some people engaged in Kashubian movement, for whom underlining the ethnic boundaries between Kashubs and Poles is of great importance, do not accept the “compromise” system because it gradually blurs the

line between the minority and dominant languages. The Kashubian activist, writer and teacher commented on this issue:

“The problem is to teach children how to read with Kashubian pronunciation these letters, or groups of letters, that are exactly the same as in Polish. On the other hand, there is also a big problem to unlearn the mistakes that pupils make by calquing the Polish language when reading in Kashubian, which is due to the fact that **these two varieties are very closely related**. (...) You should not teach Kashubian [through the Polish language] for many reasons. There is no such one-to-one correlation between Polish and Kashubian. Additionally, **this suggests to the pupils that Kashubian is just a slightly modified Polish.**”

Still, the “compromise” script, supported by official institutions, is well-established among people in Kashubia. Even if some language activists acknowledge that the “classical” system better reflects the character of the Kashubian language as distinct from Polish, their main argument against changing it refers to the convenience of people reading in Kashubian. Even the Kashubian writers supportive of the ideology behind the “classical” spelling are conscious, that using it condemns their works to a very narrow reception, as people are familiar with the “compromise” spelling, and the new system requires additional linguistic knowledge from the reader. As underlined by another writer and translator referring to his Kashubian translation of one of the classic pieces of world literature:

“(...) on the plus side, this language [“classical” writing system] would be even more flexible and easier to read, I see a lot of positives. But here, as an author [writing in Kashubian], I am focusing on the fact that **the primary recipients of the book** published in a few hundred copies, **are pupils**. It [the book] is translated and published for them, to show that it is possible to read something interesting in this language (...), that the world literature can also be published in Kashubian. But for it to work, **it must be in the standard applied at school.**”

Weighing the pros and cons, the book has been published in the “compromise” system and therefore contributed to the maintenance of the *status quo*. In the center of dilemma on challenging the well-established script, as expressed in language debates, is the consciousness of Kashubian language endangerment. Here also two opposite arguments clash: the first one refers to the ease of learning Kashubian by children at school and by other Polish speakers who live in Kashubia; the second one believes that the new writing system may prevent Kashubian from gradual fusion with Polish. Advocates of returning to the “classical” script argue that the

official orthography is too dependent on the Polish standard. It positions Kashubian in subordination to Polish (Kożyczkowska 2019) and strengthens the ideological status of Kashubian as a “dialect” of Polish (Bandur 2020). In their opinion the “classical” writing system express the community’s distinction from Poles. Making Kashubian as distinctive from Polish as possible is thus presented by our next respondent, a Kashubian writer and activist, as a remedy for its subordinated status:

„(...) I am, of course, writing and using this new orthography (...) although sometimes I **have doubts in the face of everyday life and my pupils**. (...) Well, because there are few people, let’s be honest, (...) who write [in “classical” orthography]. They try to **reverse it in a situation where it is generally**... Well, maybe this is the moment when you **need to show the difference by setting a border**, after all. Because otherwise, it may become completely blurred.”

Kashubian and Silesian ideological debates consider the dilemma between the ease of reading, writing and learning of a codified script on the one hand, and the ideological dimension behind this choice. In Kashubia, the “compromise” script is well-established and – besides some activists – it is accepted and commonly used. Therefore, the debates around the script reflect mostly the ideological issues and serve to indicate that Kashubs are more than a regional group of the Polish people. In Silesia the debate accompanies the ongoing formation of the written language and the ways it is used rather than more ideological dimensions of Silesian identity.

Unification vs. diversity

Another aspect of language ideological debate around the writing system in Kashubia touches upon the question of whether a minority language can survive in all its diversity after being standardized. And conversely, does the standardization of a minority language contribute to its maintenance and revitalization or does it overwhelm it. Also here, the arguments refer to education and different modes of using Kashubian. An engaged Kashubian language teacher is certain that:

“(...) to make it used at school, to save [the language], and to make it function at all, we have to standardize it. (...) It would be **physically and financially impossible for us to maintain its beauty and its diversity**. We have to accept it, at least now, not to divide, not to confuse. Because school doesn’t like turmoil. And these changes [in script] cause chaos, tensions, while the education must be stable.”

People supporting teaching of the standard often say that children do not acquire Kashubian at home, and their language does not possess the features indicating that they come from a particular place. Moreover, they claim, as quoted below Kashubian language activist, that in the situation of language endangerment, there is a place for only one Kashubian:

“There is only one literary Kashubian language, and I believe that we should teach only one, and only one has a reason to exist in the future. Because if we really think realistically about preserving the language, then what, are we able to preserve any alternations, if we are not able to preserve the language at all?”.

Another Kashubian activist and linguist challenges this perspective. His view on the condition of Kashubian is quite opposite:

“A feature of Kashubian is that **its dialects hold on very well.** (...) and the vast majority of people who speak Kashubian, use their own dialect. They speak in the way it was spoken in their home. (...) [we need] an orthography that will be a coherent system, but still **able to write down at least these three different dialects** so that their features can be taken into account and that each user can write in their own way.”

The argument given by this activist is that the proposed “classical” writing system allows for such flexibility. With the use of the signs non-existent in Polish, that reflect different sounds of Kashubian better, it is possible to write down and read the particularities of Kashubian dialects. Yet, as the other side argues, to be able to do this, these dialects must be known and used by people who read and write in the language. This seems not to be the case for the young, who are learning the literary language at school.

Such a dilemma is almost universal for all minoritized languages and the authors of *ślabikörz* spelling were aware of the problem. As a result the system has been created from the start as a universal one with different phonetic values assigned to the same letters in different regions of Silesia. Answering the concern of one norm limiting the diversity of a mainly spoken idiom has been the ideological framework of the project, but the real-life use of the last decade differs greatly from the idea of an all-encompassing Silesian standard. Out of the three dialect groups of Silesian: Central, Northern (Opole) and Southern (Cieszyn), only the first has developed an active community striving for linguistic autonomy. The other subregions preserve a regional identity, but rarely ethnic or national feelings other than Polish. It is the urban, densely populated Central subregion, where most of the linguistic activism happens and where

autonomous feelings prevail. This creates some interregional tensions, with the rest of Silesia far less inclined to participate in the standardization projects. The question remains whether to include their linguistic varieties in a pluricentric standard or rather focus on a smaller, more coherent variety.

Discussion

With regard to the two main collateral languages of Poland, ideological debates around the writing system touch upon three nodal points of the language policy and planning (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr. 1997). They refer to the corpus planning that encompasses creating new and modifying old forms, as well as selecting from alternative forms in a spoken or written code. Different kinds of decisions are made here about which written forms should be considered correct and which orthography can be used in officially published texts. The second aspect raises the question of the status planning that aims to manage the societal status and the functional range of a language or its variety. This touches upon not only linguistic, but also societal and political issues: the position of a minority vs. the dominant group, as well as the limits to which the dominant group agrees to a minority's subjectivity. This theme is also deeply related to the position of power and language ideologies of the minoritized community and its limits in claiming linguistic rights. Finally, the third point concerns acquisition planning (Cooper 1989). In the case of contested languages it is not even the teaching curricula that are questioned, but the teaching method itself. The decision is between whether to teach a collateral language in relation to and through the dominant language, or rather as a separate, full-fledged language. This decision goes further beyond teaching methodology and the choice of the script. It touches on the very question of the speakers' subjectivity, the collective identity creation, and the concept of minority community.

Current discussions surrounding the standardization of Kashubian and Silesian allow us to phrase a several questions that apply also to other collateral languages and cannot be easily answered. The first of them relates to the stiffness or flexibility of the standard and is seen particularly well in the Kashubian case: a quarter of a century after the creation of the current written norm, the opportunities and difficulties its users have to face have changed. If the situation of the language is radically different, should it be reflected in an improvement or a complete change of the script, so it can better answer the needs of its current users and the changes of their linguistic and ethnic identity? If so, where is the breaking point – what changes in the speakers attitudes towards their own community justify a reconstruction of an already

established order? What elements should be treated as foundations that have to remain untouched, and what aspects can be negotiated?

As Costa (2018) argued, the most important challenge of language standardization and the creation of its script is that it should combine as many varieties of usage as possible with the least variation in form. Therefore, additional questions are to be asked: what level of dialectal unification is needed for practical reasons? How diverse can an official standard be without it being questioned as incoherent? The standard, on the one hand, legitimizes the group as a social entity. On the other hand, it inherently limits its diversity (Milroy & Milroy 1999). As Costa, De Korne and Lange argue: “Considering that diversity is often the very *raison d’être* for minority language movements based on the claims that all ways of communicating are equally legitimate and that language diversity needs to be protected, this trade-off is at best contentious and at worst a Faustian bargain” (2018: 1). While minority communities consider it a problem to be solved, majority languages often thrive without acknowledging their heterogeneity, with an official standard existing parallel to other varieties considered the part of the same language.

What distinguishes collateral languages from other minority languages facing challenges of standardization and revitalization, is their close genetic relationship with the dominant language. This closeness lies in the heart of their contested status as a full-fledged languages. Therefore, their users not only need to choose a standard and a script best fitted for their linguistic needs, but they also have to carefully consider their language’s relationship with the dominant language standard. Keeping the script too similar to the majority language not only interferes with the efforts of making it a symbol of cultural autonomy, but also – from an outsiders perspective – may result in treating the minority language as a misspelled variety of the dominant one (see the notion of an “eye dialect”, Woodlard 1998: 23).

Conclusion

The “ideology brokers” both in Kashubia and Silesia, combine the question of script choice with identity issues. In this respect, there are two main visions of the collateral language community related to the writing system. The first one may be called a “compromise” or a “conservative” one. It positions the minority language group and its language in the relation of dependence on the dominant community. The corresponding writing system of the minority language makes it resemble the dominant language, and therefore may function only in relation

to it. This attitude does not really take into consideration that people not related to the dominant language community may be willing to learn this language.

The “identity strengthening” vision ideologically reinforces the distinction and independence of the collateral language community in relation to the dominant group. The script expressing it takes into account the particularities of the language, introduces letters not present in the alphabet of the dominant language, and leans on the historical differences between the two languages.

Interestingly, “brokers” of both visions as presented in the article often use pragmatic arguments, as “a principal motivation of writing reforms is to make the acquisition of literacy easier and thus provide for wider access to education” (Coulmas & Guerini 2012: 449). The ease of teaching a language through the dominant one, well-known to all learners, is opposed to the ease of understanding the differences between the two scripts and the languages they convey. On the one hand, it is argued that the amount of texts written in a particular way legitimizes such a script as the only one that should be applied. Here, achieving the “critical mass” (of language production and acceptance of the public) becomes an argument for closing the debate. On the other hand, people claim that with the growing number of texts and rising consciousness of a community's self-determination, a need arises to change the script and to make it more relevant in the new circumstances. In fact, both sides are arguing for their representation of social reality.

In this respect, both sides of the debate also refer to the arguments on language endangerment as a justification for a particular writing system. These arguments, however, are used differently. In the “compromise” representation, the critical situation of a language is used as a reason for the simplification of the script, meant to motivate the dominant language speakers to learn the minority language. In the “identity strengthening” representation, the internal diversity of the collateral language is presented as richness that needs to be maintained. A way to do this is through the script choice that reflects this complexity, and at the same time permits multiple ways of reading it. Undoubtedly, the hardest problem to be faced by collateral language communities is finding the balance between artificially differentiating themselves from the dominant language, and risking the gradual blending with it by staying too close for pragmatic reasons.

Finally, we have to emphasise that however similar, the situation of Kashubian and Silesian differs on the most basic level. With their language supported by the state and a longer tradition of institutionalized teaching, the Kashubian community sees any proposal of changing the established standard as a practical issue, creating additional financial problems, influencing school and political administration, or even labor market. Silesian language ideological debate remains more theoretical, as all attempts at standardizing and teaching the language are still grassroots activities. On the one hand, it is an obstacle to the development of Silesian in *Ausbau* terms. On the other hand, however, it gives to the debate much more flexibility and makes it more democratic and open for different approaches.

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