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Maciej Mętrak (Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences)

ORCID: 0000-0002-5285-4580, email: maciej.metrak@ispan.edu.pl

Beloved books and contested standards: Translations of “The Little Prince” into selected collateral languages of Poland

Keywords:

collateral languages; Kashubian; literary translation; Masurian; the Little Prince; Silesian;

Abstract:

Language standardisation is often closely connected with the literary process. Literary works, both original and translated, influence the language itself and how it is viewed inside and outside of the speakers' community. The paper discusses the possible influence of translated literature on minority languages on the example of three collateral languages of Poland: Kashubian, Silesian and Masurian. To do so, we are looking at the roles played in these linguistic communities by the translations of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's “The Little Prince”, usually one of the first books translated into minority languages around the world.

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Introduction

Seen from a minority language perspective, literature influences the language itself and its perception inside and outside of the speakers' community. Not only can it promote certain spelling systems in print, but above all, introduces the idiom into new contexts and registers. The appearance of prominent written works in a particular language raises its social prestige, thus, translations may become equally or sometimes even more important than original works. In our paper, we are discussing the influence of translated literature on three collateral languages of Poland: Kashubian, Silesian and Masurian, by showing the roles played in these communities by the translations of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "Le Petit Prince" ("The Little Prince"). As it is often the first book translated into small linguistic varieties around the world, we would also like to comment on the importance of this particular novella for minority communities, combining an academic approach with some insights of active translators.

The collateral languages of Poland

After World War II and post-war resettlements, the population of Poland became one of the most homogenous in Europe, with the most recent 2021 Census data stating 96,28% of the country's population identifying only with the Polish nationality (*Narodowy Spis Powszechny...* 2023: 113-114). Still, some of the former ethnic and linguistic diversity survives and is legally protected, mainly under the *Act of 6 January 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages*. Polish law recognises 10 languages of national minorities¹, 4 languages of ethnic minorities² and 1 regional language (Kashubian), whose speakers are not granted minority status. This list, however, is not exhaustive and much of Poland's multilingualism remains hidden. Despite the influence of monolingual ideologies, many regional varieties have over time reached a certain level of *Ausbau*, with some of them developing their own ethno-linguistic identities divergent from the dominant Polish. Such idioms may be considered collateral languages as defined by Jean-Michele Eloy (2004) and Tomasz Wicherkiewicz (2014)³, and include several West-Slavic varieties classified as either independent languages or sub-varieties of the Polish language by both their users and from an outside perspective. Apart from the already mentioned Kashubian, they are usually denied official recognition, based on their close genetic relationship with Polish.

¹ Defined as minorities which can identify with a nation state existing today (e.g. Belarusians, Czechs, Germans).

² Defined as minorities without their own nation state (Karaims, Lemkos, Romani and Tatars).

³ Such minoritised languages, autochthonous and linked with a certain territory, are genetically closely related to the dominant state language, with which they share some level of common development and usually form a diglossic relation. As such they rely on *Ausbau*-factors in differentiating themselves against the dominant language, and are often perceived as a low-prestige variety of the *Dachsprache*.

The case of Kashubian, spoken in East Pomerania by almost 90.000 users (according to the 2021 national census, with around 108,000 users declared in 2011), may serve as an example of changing linguistic ideologies. While its relationship with Polish has been discussed at least since the mid-19th century, it was only in the 1980s when its classification as the most distinct Polish dialect became widely questioned. The change of opinions on the language by linguists, politicians and the Kashubian people themselves led to its recognition as an independent language, completed with its inclusion in the *Act of 6 January 2005*. Long before that, it had emerged as a literary language, with the earliest Kashubian-influenced translations of Lutheran religious texts dating back to the 16th century, soon followed by entirely Kashubian texts. Since Florësz Cenôva (Pol. Florian Ceynowa) published his first works in 1843, Kashubian writers have been developing and amending the Kashubian orthography. Two main currents are clearly visible in the written language: one of them stems from Cenôva's propositions, which emphasise the idea of Kashubian as a language system in its own right, that needs its own orthography. The other is based on Polish orthography and revolves around the notion of Kashubian as a Polish dialect that has developed its literary form (Bandur 2020).

In 1996 a group of Kashubian language activists and scholars agreed upon a mostly Polish-based standard spelling, which we refer to as the 'compromise' variant. This was chiefly a result of pro-Polish ideologies adopted by the milieu (Bandur 2020), as well as practicality of using a script similar to the majority one (Pomierska 2022). This norm has been since embraced by the Kashubian Language Council (KLC) (*Radzëzna Kaszëbsczégò Jãzëka*), formed in 2006 within the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association (*Kaszëbskò-Pòmòrszczé Zrzeszenié*), and is used and promoted in KLC publications, including teaching materials for schools and universities. At the same time, the 'classical' orthography, based on Cenôva's ideas improved by Friedrich Lorentz and interwar Kashubian writers was still used in education until 2001 in the primary school in Głodnica – the very first institution teaching Kashubian. Although the classical orthography was later abandoned, the ongoing standardisation kept sparking lively debates about the Kashubian language and its written form. The discussion was joined by a younger generation of writers and activists, who grew up after 1996 and had no say in establishing the compromise. The older generation of activists was also not unanimous in their opinion: Artúr Jablonskji (Pol. Artur Jabłoński) between 2013 and 2015 published three novels written with many lexical, phonemic and morphological features of the northern dialect of the Kashubian language. The features, as well as the alphabet designed to fit the north-east

Kashubian phonology, complied neither with the compromise orthography nor with the KLC's attempt at creating a unitary Standard Kashubian distanced from the spoken language, influenced by Polish spelling conventions, grammatical rules and vocabulary. Jablonskji's idea was to make the standardised variety more flexible and inclusive, offering space for the richness of spoken Kashubian and its regional varieties, especially the author's northern dialect.

Independently, in April 2014 a group of younger activists formed a literary group with their journal SKRA (later: SKRA – Pjismjono wo kùlturze) started by its editor-in-chief Maciej Bandur (Kash. Macéj Bańdur). Although in the beginning the journal used the compromise orthography, the language of the publications showed a considerable amount of dialectal and non-standard features present in the authors' language. The journal was also open to Jablonskji's take on orthography, and published his texts from October 2014 onwards in accordance with the rules used earlier in his novels. The contestation about the standardisation process reached its peak when in 2016 "Gramatika kaszëbsczégò jãzëka", a new Standard Kashubian grammar, was published by Hana Makùrôt (Pol. Hanna Makurat-Snuzik), an academic and a KLC member. In a critical review of the publication, Bandur listed inconsistencies of the proposed standardised grammar with the spoken language and general knowledge of Kashubian. The review was followed by a discussion with the author (see: Bańdur 2021: 255-82) and a series of academic papers by Jocz (2018, 2019) and Makurat (2018). Soon after the debate around Makùrôt's book, Bandur abandoned the compromise orthography and proposed a revised classical orthography based on Cenôva's and Lorentz's work, with some features taken from the 1996 proposition. It was in this system that the translation of "*The Little Prince*" was published in 2018, which will be presented further in this paper.

The Silesian language is traditionally considered one of the 4 main Polish dialects, but in the last 2 decades a linguistic autonomy movement has gained impetus, partially inspired by the earlier Kashubian success, and supported by a considerable part of the Silesian community. With over 450.000 self-declared users in the 2021 Census (and even 530.000 in the 2011 one), Silesian can be described as the largest, but unrecognized, minority language in Poland. Similarly to Kashubia and Masuria, Silesia lies in a borderland area with a long history of linguistic and cultural contact between Slavic and German populations, and the complicated Polish-German relations in the past still influence the public perception of Silesia outside of the region. The Silesian language is thus often still marked with a stigma of "improper Polish", heavily influenced by German vocabulary. Efforts to elevate the prestige of this linguistic variety include several, as of yet unsuccessful, attempts to update the Act of 6 January 2005

undertaken between 2007 and 2024⁴ (c.f. Mętrak 2021, Jaroszewicz 2023). Without any official support, grassroots linguistic activities became an important part of the larger Silesian political and linguistic movement, built upon the strong sense of local identity and historical periods of autonomy. Among them an important role is played by the literary production in Silesian (Pospiszil 2019). While the idiom has been used in a written form since the 19th century in newspaper columns and to record traditional folk narratives, only recently the scope of its use has been broadened. The first orthography dedicated to Silesian was created in the interwar period by Feliks Steuer and in the early 2000's it has been used as a default 'autonomous' Silesian system. Nowadays Silesian literature, both original and translated, is being created in several competing orthographies, used by authors and activists coming from different backgrounds and representing different ideological visions of the Silesian community (Jaroszewicz 2022, Dołowy-Rybińska & Mętrak 2023). The so-called alphabet-book spelling (*ślabikōrzowy szrajbōnek*), created in 2009 as a project backed by several regional organisations and designed with the help of academic linguists, in the following years became the most popular mode of writing Silesian among autonomically inclined authors (c.f. Jaroszewicz 2019, 2022). In parallel with the visibly different 'autonomous' spelling, however, there is a strong tendency of writing Silesian with the standard Polish alphabet, usually by people indifferent or critical towards the idea of Silesian linguistic and cultural independence from the majority Polish identity.

The *ślabikōrz* script, designed as an interdialectal mode of writing down all Silesian dialects and initially promoted in a children's reading primer (Adamus 2010) is in a large part consistent with the basic rules of Polish orthography, but contains 5 additional graphemes. Created to cater for the needs of different Silesian dialects it is, however, often used in a simplified form with only 2 additional letters needed for the variety used in Central Upper Silesia – the sub-region most active in the political and linguistic autonomy movement. This orthography has been used in commercial projects (e.g. advertisements for big international companies such as Coca-Cola) and in the digital media, including software localisation (e.g. Samsung phones). It has also been chosen as a default Silesian script by the most active local publishing house, Silesia Progress, which since 2012 has been responsible for publishing a vast corpus of Silesian texts, among them many translations of well-known literary works (most recently J.R.R. Tolkien's "Hobbit", 2022). What should be noted, however, is that while widely

⁴ 6 projects focused on granting Silesian the status of a regional language, 2 aimed at declaring Silesians an ethnic minority.

publicised, most activities around the *ślabikōrz* script are undertaken by a relatively small group of professional language activists, so its real community impact is not easy to assess.

Masurian has been described as a subdialect of the Masovian dialect of Polish. It has been used in the region of Masuria in today's north-east Poland since the beginning of Polish (Masovian) and German colonisation in the 13th and 14th centuries after the successful contest of the Baltic Prussian tribes by the Teutonic Order (Perzowa 1987). In 1525 the Teutonic State became the Duchy of Prussia, adopting Lutheranism, which can be perceived as the beginning of a distinct Masurian identity, further strengthened in the 19th century. In 1831 students with Masurian roots of Albertine's University in Königsberg formed a corporation, whose colours and anthem later became acknowledged as the unofficial symbols of Masuria. At the same time, the Germanisation of the educational system led to the first linguistic rights conflicts between the advocates of German as language of instruction and the proponents of preservation of Polish-language education (Jasiński 1994: 30-34). Since the 19th century most Masurians did not consider themselves to be a part of the Polish nation, even though most of their religious literature was written in archaic Polish, and the language of the press mixed archaic Polish with German loanwords and traces of Masurian dialectisms. Members of Masurian society used 3 languages: Polish in writing, German in administration and education, and Masurian in everyday oral contacts. In the first half of the 20th century the prestigious role of German language, along with a growing sense of belonging to the German nation, resulted in a pro-German outcome of the 1920 East Prussian plebiscite. The assimilation process intensified under the rule of the Nazi regime, leading to severe religious, linguistic and identity conflicts with new Polish settlers when the region became a part of communist Poland after the II World War. Brutal process of official "national verification", mass expulsions and emigration to both East and West Germany caused the number of Masurians to drop from around 500,000 at the beginning of the 20th century (about half of them speaking Masurian) to less than 100,000 in the late 1940s, of which only 6-10 thousand remain until today (Sakson 2017: 36). Many of them have joined the German minority organisations in the 1990s (Czesła 2002: 99-101) and the younger generations assimilate with Poles. A large part of Masurians is still bilingual (Polish and German⁵), but the Masurian language is virtually dead as a means of everyday communication. Some remnants of Masurian are still in use as part of informal speech, but

⁵ While no statistics are available, German language media exist, such as weekly radio programme *Allensteiner Welle* on state-run Radio Olsztyn or printed periodicals such as *Masurische Storchenpost*.

broken intergenerational transmission caused by its low prestige and acts of ridicule led to a situation when most of the younger descendants of Masurians know very little of the variety.

Masurian was rarely used in written form, perceived as broken Polish. The only book fully translated into Masurian was John Bunyan's allegorical novel "The Holy War", published by a Masurian miner Jakub Sczegan in Germany in 1900 (Sczegan, 1900). Several activists and local leaders tried to write in Masurian, no author, however, intended to develop a common spelling system or to standardise any particular local variety. In the 21st century the usage of the declining language variety has achieved some interest, starting with Dietmar Serafin's newspaper columns, the first comic book (Kozak & Serafin 2011) and Erwin Kruk's amateur online dictionary (Masurian-Polish). Günter Donder's "*Kleines Masurisches Wörterbuch*" can be perceived as the first attempt to propose a complex spelling system for the Eastern Masurian variety (Donder 2011). The growing interest in Masurian in social media resulted in publicly consulted projects of a Masurian spelling system – a compromise for all subgroups. Initial proposals were not accepted due to the inclusion of letters unknown from the Polish orthography. As the discussion continued, new simpler versions appeared, finalised with a spelling based on the mixture of old dialectological and ethnographic writing conventions, some ideas from Donder's East-Masurian stories and ideas proposed by Piotr Szatkowski, a Masurian activist and translator. A first test for this new proposition was the Masurian translation of "*The Little Prince*".

Translated works & minority literacy

In popular opinion, literary translation is still often considered only a utilitarian enterprise aimed at making certain works accessible to people who do not know the original language. As described by Laurence Venuti in his seminal work on the history of literary translation, the translator used to remain invisible: the highly valued translations were those that read fluently, like a work created originally in the receiving language (Venuti 2008: 1-6). However, after the so-called culture turn in the humanities in the 1970s and 1980s, translators have been recognised as active (co-)creators of literary work and of the literary canon in the receiving language. Modern translation studies put more emphasis on the position of the translated work in the target literature by taking into account the social and cultural background of the translation process. The act of translating is thus interpreted less as linguistic work on the text itself, and more as a process happening between different cultures. Such intercultural relations are asymmetrical and hierarchical by nature, as the translation traffic between two languages is almost never equal in both directions, with some languages (large ones with huge

cultural production) becoming the source of translations, and others (smaller, often minoritised) mostly its target (cf. Cronin 1995: 88).

To better describe this dynamic, we may use the framework of polysystem theory created by an Israeli literary scholar, Itamar Even-Zohar. From this perspective, literature in each language is considered not a closed system, but rather a node in an interwoven web of relations between different literatures and cultures. Such an approach means that not only works originally created in a particular language can play a major role in its development. Conversely, in some circumstances the translated foreign works take a central place in a language's literature and become a major force for change, expanding the literary and linguistic repertoire. As it seems, all 3 such situations described by Even-Zohar are often experienced by minority language communities:

“What then are the conditions which give rise to a situation of this kind? It seems to me that three major cases can be discerned, which are basically various manifestations of the same law: (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is “young”, in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either “peripheral” (within a large group of correlated literatures) or “weak”, or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature. (Even-Zohar 1990: 47)

As we have already stated, language standardisation is often closely connected with the literary production in that variety. What Even-Zohar relates to literature, can be thus transposed to the language as well: collateral and minority languages are either a) in the process of constituting their standard (‘not yet crystallized’); b) pushed into a diglossic situation by the dominant language (‘peripheral’); or c) endangered by not being able to cope with the challenges of modernity, despite having an established position in the past (‘in crisis’).

What can be the role played by literary translations in each of these contexts? Unlike larger languages with a mostly monolingual speaker basis, minority and collateral language speakers are usually bilingual. They do not need the translation for pragmatic purposes, as the works translated are already available in their dominant language versions. The language and its community may, however, benefit from the appearance of translated works in both the practical and ideological way. Minority translations can facilitate the standardisation of small languages and allow them to be used in formerly unexplored contexts. From a language perspective, translation can be seen as equally or more demanding than the original work. While it does not require creating new content from scratch, it often forces the translator to

struggle with the deficiencies in the receiving language – lacking vocabulary, styles and registers – especially if it has not been used in that way before (Łukasiewicz 2017: 22, Makurat 2019a: 128). Apart from strictly linguistic input, the appearance of certain works in a minority language helps to raise its prestige and serves as a way of communicating that the minoritised idiom – often seen by the majority population as obsolete or underdeveloped – has become a full-fledged literary language. The processes currently happening in collateral and minority languages in many ways resemble the development of today's national languages in the early modern period. This parallel has been noticed by Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, a distinguished translator and translation critic (Łukasiewicz 2017: 21-22). In her collection of essays on literary translation, she compares the contemporary regional language literatures in Poland with the development of the Polish language in the Renaissance period. The emergence of standard literary Polish in the 16th century was also stimulated by the appearance of a corpus of translated Latin writings, created despite the lack of pragmatic need, as Latin was well-known among the literate people of the time.

Availability of translations of culturally important works in a certain vernacular is often listed among the criteria for granting the status of being a language to a contested variety (Majewicz 1989: 15). Historically, the first of such milestones for European languages was the Bible, preceded by shorter religious texts such as prayers, sermons and catechisms. Bible translations often played a significant role in the development of literary standards, the best-known case being Martin Luther's German Bible published in its entirety in 1534. Two West-Slavic examples include Jan Kochanowski's *David's Psalter* (*Psalterz Dawidów*, 1579), which became one of the most important books of the Polish Renaissance, and the Czech *Kralice Bible* (1579-1593), still referenced in the 18th/19th century Czech literary language revival, over two centuries after first being published. While not as universally authoritative as before, the Bible and its translations remain important in some minority contexts, as evidenced by the prominence of SIL International, created for the purpose of translating Christian teachings into endangered languages. In the case of Polish collateral languages, the prestige associated with biblical translation is still strong, as seen from the discussions about regional Bible translations. Several such attempts were criticised in 2006 by the Council for the Polish Language (*Rada Języka Polskiego*). The opinion, stating that dialects are incapable of properly expressing the meaning of biblical texts, clearly did not recognise the potential of language development held by such initiatives (*Uwagi...* 2006).

More recently a similarly prestigious role seemed to be fulfilled by another collection of texts: Wikipedia (see Kornai 2013: 3). While it is not obvious at first glance, the Bible and

encyclopedias share a common trait. They aim to describe the world in a way most complete for their readers' sensibilities, be it a traditional religious worldview or a rational scientific account. Thus, the existence of such works in a minoritised language serves as an indicator of its development, the fact that the idiom can be used to describe the world in its fullness. The linguistic authority of Wikipedia was established between 2005 and 2007, when rules for creating new language versions were tightened, banning fictional conlangs (Píša 2012: 33-36)⁶. With the introduction of this element of selection, idioms in which the encyclopedia is available could claim that their 'linguageness' has been recognised by a consensus of an international community, considered authoritative. The existence of Silesian Wikipedia, for example, has been used as a proof of language's development in some of the Silesian attempts at changing the Polish *Act of 6 January 2005* (...). Apart from the status perspective, the open online encyclopedia allows minority language users to write and publish articles, not limited to forms and topics traditionally explored in those languages. Wikipedia's influence, however, seems to be limited by the same factors that made it popular in the first place, mainly its grassroots character. In the case of small languages with a limited number of users, the lack of a centralised approach and control allowed underprepared editors to influence the translations – with the famous Scots Wikipedia scandal in 2020 revealing that one third of its content had been written by an American teenager with a very limited knowledge of the language (Harrison 2020). In its wake, similar criticism pointing out the inadequate competencies of the editors has been aimed towards Kashubian and Silesian versions, both to a large extent neglected by their users after a short period of enthusiasm when they were first created (2004 and 2008 respectively). Too big a project to be handled without a large community support, minority language Wikipedias seem to have collapsed under their own weight, with their prestigious role diminished (for comparison of several minority Wikipedias see: Wigger 2017: 136-138).

The final example of a milestone project for minority language communities is a relatively recent one. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince" was first published in 1943 and has been gradually translated into many world languages. Today's popularity among minority languages started after 1st January 2015, when the book fell out of copyright in most countries 70 years after its author's untimely death. As of January 2024, 570 different language and dialect translations are available, according to a regularly updated online index (www.petit-prince-collection.com), with the actual number probably even higher. Apart from the work

⁶ For the current set of rules, see: https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Language_proposal_policy [accessed: 13.06.2023].

being available in the public domain, there are several other factors making it an ideal basis for minority language projects and the first book to be published in a newly emerging language standard. As a widely known work, it may serve a prestigious role, it is suitable both for children and adults, potentially becoming a sort of a reading primer for a certain language, and while relatively short, it tackles serious philosophical themes (cf. Mętrak 2019). Among the minoritised and non-standard languages of Poland, the first to create its version of “The Little Prince” was Lemko (“Малий Принц”, 2013), published when a copyright fee was still needed, followed by reconstructed Prussian (“Līkuts princis”, 2015), Greater Polish dialect (“Książę Szaranek”, 2016), Kashubian (“Môli princ”, 2018), Silesian (“Mały Princ”, 2018), Podhalanian dialect (“Mały królewic”, 2019), Wymysiöeryś (“Der Kliny Fjyšt”, 2020), Cieszyn Silesia dialect (“Mały Ksiönże”, 2020 in digital format, 2023 in print), Podlachian (“Mały Prync”, 2021, only in digital format), and Kurpie dialect (“Mały Kśęć”, 2022). The 3 examples described closer in this paper are languages collateral in relation to dominant Polish, with a considerable number of users expressing a distinct ethnolinguistic identity (as evidenced by the Census data). Other mentioned varieties are either not that closely related to Polish (Baltic Prussian, Germanic Wymysiöeryś and East-Slavic Lemko and Podlachian) or their speakers see themselves as users of local Polish variants (Greater Polish, Kurpian and Podhalanian), so the books published in those varieties do not serve an ideological purpose and are mostly seen as a curiosity or a novelty item.

Kashubian: “*Môli princ*”⁷

As already stated, the Kashubian translation of “The Little Prince” appeared in the middle of a debate concerning the state of the Kashubian orthography. The book itself was meant to be a kind of linguistic manifesto: not only was it the first book published entirely in the ‘old-new’ orthography, but it also aimed to remain as close to attested spoken language as possible. The language of “*Môli princ*” is characterised by a deliberately small number of neologisms (3-4 lexemes in total), instead it introduces dialectal (mostly Northern Kashubian) vocabulary rarely used in literary works. Also in terms of inflexion and syntax, “*Môli princ*” makes use of contrasts, features and constructions not included in the repertoire of standardised

⁷ In January 2024, in the final stages of work on this paper, another Kashubian translation of “The Little Prince” became available, prepared by Zbigórz Jankòwsczi in the standard spelling (Saint-Exupéry 2022, backdated due to funding reasons). While the comparison of both versions deserves a thorough study, even a cursory glance shows different strategies chosen by their translators. The newer version utilises much less Germanisms in favour of neologisms and words identical with Polish and is described as translated “partially from the original” (Saint-Exupéry 2022: 3), but with help of English and Polish editions.

Kashubian. The translator's idea was to show the richness of the Kashubian language to the fullest and present the spoken dialectal Kashubian varieties as a self-sufficient source of that richness in contrast to the standard, which in Bandur's opinion does not use that potential enough, incorporating many Polish calques, constructions and borrowings or creating artificial vocabulary which replaces inherited lexicon (Bańdur 2021: 255-82).

"*Môli princ*" was translated directly from the French original. In order to avoid interference, Bandur deliberately did not consult Polish translations, using instead Czech and English ones for comparison. The book was published almost entirely in Kashubian, from the foreword dedicated to the right pronunciation of the orthography, to the afterword written by Artúr Jablonskji. Other than that, the book included a small Kashubian-Polish word list of rare vocabulary and a bilingual English-Kashubian acknowledgement for those who had contributed to the crowdfunding, which had enabled the publication. "*Môli princ*" achieved patronage from local media, Radio Gdańsk, Radio Kaszëbë, and *Pomerania* (Kashubian-Pomeranian Association's journal) as well as from a major Kashubian Facebook fan page run by Kaszëbskô Jednota. The book was successfully published, the crowdfunding project raised 218% of the expected sum and drew attention of people from Kashubia, Poland and Europe, so that all available copies were distributed among contributors, libraries and other institutions or sold. Crowdfunding participants had a possibility not only to obtain their own copy, but also to sponsor a copy for a public library of their choice. A similar idea was later reused by Szatkowski in crowdfunding for the Masurian edition. The Kashubian translation was noticed in scientific and popular texts, e.g. Obracht-Prondzyński (2020), Jocz (FORTHCOMING), Pomierska (2022) and got a thorough description (together with the Silesian translation) in a bachelor's thesis (Włodarska 2022).

The (neo-)classical orthography, proposed in "*Môli princ*", after a few minor amendments was used in other books published by Vëdôvjizna SKRA: "*Revjinë*" (2020), "*5 x SKRA: Antologijô tekstów z lat 2014-2019*" (2021) and also by Kreativer and Region publishing houses: "*Aba. Pòvjôstkji vëbróné z lat 1992-2021*" (2021), "*Drobjinë*" (2022), "*Mòje zvjornjenja – a jú svjat!*" (2023). It appears also in scientific texts (Bilewicz & Olko 2023) and continues to be used on daily basis by a humble, but slowly expanding group of Kashubian speakers e.g. in social media, such as the Facebook group *Jakô mdze Kaszëbskô?* ("What will Kashubia be like?").

Silesian: "*Mały princ*"

The Silesian edition of “The Little Prince” translated by Grzegorz Kulik was published in November 2018⁸. Among the versions described in this paper, it is the only one issued by a major Polish publishing house (Media Rodzina) and not as an independent project backed by minority activists. It became the 2nd book in a series of translations of literary classics into regional languages and dialects of Poland, containing the translations of “The Little Prince” and “Winnie the Pooh” into Greater Polish, Silesian and Podhalanian. Interestingly, as underlined by the choice of words on the book covers (printed in Polish), the 3 varieties do not share the same status: both Greater Polish and Podhalanian are described as “gwara” (‘dialect’/‘subdialect’), but Silesian translation uses the word “język” (‘language’).

The author of the Silesian translation is also one of the most prolific Silesian language activists, responsible – among other things – for the creation of the Silesian online language corpus (Korpus Ślōnskij Mōwy), software localisation projects and several literary translations. In the case of “The Little Prince”, the translator worked using the French original but also comparing several translations – English, German, Czech and Kashubian, but not Polish to avoid any interference from the Silesian’s *Dachsprache*. The text is written in the simplified *ślabikōrz* spelling (see above), treated here as an already established standard and an obvious choice for written Silesian, as the book doesn’t include any information about how it should be read or any reference to theoretical works introducing the alphabet. As already stated, the phrase “Silesian language translation” is included on the cover of the book, which is an important sign of the ideological stance of the translator (clearly accepted by the publisher as well), as in both Polish and Silesian there are ‘neutral’ ways to avoid directly classifying the idiom as a language or a dialect. Similarly, the short Silesian-Polish dictionary included in the book treats Silesian as completely separate from Polish, providing translations even for words almost identical with standard Polish instead of relying on the high level of mutual intelligibility. Unlike the Kashubian and Masurian editions, however, being issued by a Polish publisher, the book treats Silesian only as a language of literary content, as it is not used on the edition notice page and all technical details are printed in Polish. Polish is also the main language in which the book is presented on the back cover. Additionally, this edition contains a CD with an audiobook read by Silesian actor and theatre personality Mirosław Neinert.

⁸ Interestingly, it was not the earliest attempt to translate Saint-Exupéry’s work into Silesian, the first being short passages from chapters XI and XII published in an anthology of translations by Marek Szoltysek, one of the authors writing in Silesian before the current standardisation attempts started, using only the Polish alphabet (Szoltysek 2002: 30).

Due to the largest group of potential readers and the fact of being printed in a publishing house with a huge marketing capacity, the Silesian translation became a considerable commercial success, and information about it was present both in the regional and nationwide media. While the publisher refused to share information about the book circulation (as they are not publicly available), we may estimate that it was larger than the other 2 versions by an order of magnitude (thousands instead of hundreds, with several re-issues). However, in the media, it was shown mostly as a curiosity and reported in a humorous way, even in articles supportive of the idea (Błaszkiwicz 2018, Kowalczyk 2020). This fits well within the majority discourse in Poland, often showing regional linguistic varieties as sub-standard idioms not fitting for the modern world and appropriate only in short comedic forms or traditional folklore contexts (c.f. Czesak 2012). According to the translator, this exact problem motivated him to undertake efforts to “modernise” Silesian by showing it as a full-fledged language capable of transmitting the message of modern world literature. He describes the growing Silesian literature as an important identity-building phenomenon. From his perspective, writing in a minoritised language does not have to serve economic or practical goals (Mętrak 2019: 160).

On the contrary, publishing even a seemingly neutral children’s book in a contested language can be seen as a political act, something opposing the current legal situation in which the language is denied its rights (Pospiszil 2019: 88). As such, the books are bought not only by people fluent in Silesian but also those uninvolved but supportive of its development, standardisation and officialisation. Still, what can be seen from interviews conducted by the authors of this paper in different subregions of Silesia during other research, the linguistic autonomy movement concentrated around the *ślabikōrz* script, of which Kulik’s activities form an important part, caters mostly to the needs of the central Upper Silesian area⁹. Northern (Opole) and – especially – Southern (Cieszyn) Silesian dialect users often distance themselves from these actions, the proof of which can be the already mentioned Cieszyn-dialect translation of “The Little Prince”, published online by Tomasz Sochacki in 2020 (recently issued in print, Saint-Exupéry 2023).

Masurian: “*Mali princ*”

⁹ As evidenced by this opinion from a young language activist from Opole Silesia, commenting upon the Silesian translation of the “Little Prince”: “I gave it to my grandma to read and she said: what’s that rubbish!? You can’t even read it! I analysed it all and I realised that this person is not suited to be a translator. He just digs up words that were used by one person 200 years ago, written in some diary, and he uses such words. But nobody ever heard such words here in Opole Voivodship” (recorded in October 2022).

The translation of “The Little Prince” was the first complex application of Szatkowski’s orthographical proposals. The book’s foreword, written completely in Masurian, contained some ideological explanations of translating the book: dedication for the whole “*Masurian nation that needed some new hope, continuation of the fight for save the Masurians’ native tongue and an impulse to rescue this several hundred years old culture*”. Several lines later it is stated that the translation’s intention is to “*prove to everyone how the literary Masurian language could look like if it would not be destroyed by bad times and people that did not pay attention to small tongues and nations that were not able to defend themselves from enemies*” (Szatkowski, 2018a: 5).

As for the orthographical choices, it is stated that the works on many versions of the spelling system commenced in about 2015 and ended with this proposal, which was believed by the author to be the best compromise in this matter, merging the traits of Masurian from Działdowo and Ostróda in the West to Gołdap and Elk in the East. However, the proponent was aware of the difficulties, stating that “*the purpose of this spelling system is hard to fulfil – to blend the best of the Masurian from the Eastern and Western Masuria, based on the central dialect and the common orthography*” (Szatkowski, 2018b: 10-11). The book is understandably intended for readers not used to written Masurian, so it contains a short theoretical introduction (in Masurian) and Polish explanations of harder words on the margins of the main text.

The publication of the Masurian translation of “*The Little Prince*” has gained some limited media coverage: a short report by TVP Olsztyn (regional service of the Polish public broadcaster), an article in *Kurier Szczeciński*, by a website run for the community of the collectors of “The Little Prince” in many languages and editions. Local broadcaster Radio 7 broadcast the subsequent chapters of the translation, recorded in collaboration with Szatkowski.

“The Little Prince” was published in 2018; the usage of this spelling system was continued in later works: both editions of “*Słownik mowy mazurskiej*” (The dictionary of the Masurian speech), “*Elementarz mowy mazurskiej*” (The primer of the Masurian speech, Szatkowski 2019), and four issues of *Céch, Mazurski Cejtunek*, a short-living magazine distributed mainly in cooperation with the Lutheran and Methodist parishes in Masuria.

The reception amongst Masurians not engaged in the revitalization efforts, based on the author’s conversations with the community members during several lectures and field research journeys covering every Masurian county (over 50 semi-structured interviews), included some criticism. Some members stated that the orthography was too hard to learn, difficult to read and ahistorical. Some texts written in “The Little Prince” orthography have been read or recited by schoolchildren from Kętrzyn County during the yearly Masurian speech contest.

Unfortunately, based on this experience, we may conclude that in current language environment and circumstances (Masurian as a symbolic language, hardly used in everyday contexts, no Masurian courses offered by any public or private school) the spelling system with such complexity and many differences from the standard Polish orthography seems unintuitive for children and becomes more of a hindering than a binding factor for the regional community, both of non-Masurian and Masurian descent. Newer texts by Szatkowski tend to be written in a simplified version of “The Little Prince” orthography, believing that developing a writing system that is closer to the spelling of the dominant standard language could be a solution to the criticism voiced by the rememberers and the new speaker community.

Discussion

In the examples shown above we have seen a broad spectrum of roles played by minority language translations. Coincidentally, they seem to closely resemble the Even-Zohar’s threefold classification described earlier: the same text in different contexts can be either a neutral way of expanding a small but already existing corpus of literary works (Silesian, written in an accepted standard), a foundation of a newly emerging literary language (Masurian, the first attempt to publish a book in a form also suitable to be used as teaching material), or a way of refreshing an established but static/inert language (Kashubian, a manifesto, promoting new orthography projects and breaking the mould of translating into Kashubian from the dominant Polish language, mainly the works of Polish literature¹⁰). What other functions can be fulfilled by the translations into minoritized linguistic varieties? We have not commented upon the examples in which such publications are treated as a curiosity and serve only a humorous function, but an honest assessment requires to signal that it can also be the case.

Another interesting aspect to consider in the collateral language publications is the use of the dominant language (*Dachsprache*). While many translations to a minority language show the relations of more than 2 languages (the source language, the translation’s language, and the dominant language), in all three analysed cases, the translators chose not to consult the Polish translation¹¹. It was a deliberate choice, as the translation from the dominant and closely related language can be in a way dangerous for the minoritised variety. It can influence it directly on a linguistic level by calques and unconscious borrowings, but also subjugate the minority

¹⁰ See: Makurat 2019b: 55-65.

¹¹ We still have to take into account that all three translators are fluent speakers of Polish, acting every day in a Polish-dominated linguistic environment. As such the translations cannot of course be totally isolated from the influence of the dominant language.

identity by putting it into a relation with the majority literary and cultural heritage¹². Direct translation from a different original language, on the other hand, seems to be a safer way of expanding the linguistic potential and raising the status of a collateral variety.

While it is difficult to compare the three described languages due to their vastly different sociolinguistic situation, we may assume that the translations of “The Little Prince” played an important role in raising the awareness of them as literary languages with their own writing systems, both within and outside their users’ communities. In Silesia, “Mały princ” started a steadily rising wave of translations, with new books published every few months in the same script, further strengthening its position. In Kashubia, the controversial choice to publish “Môli princ” in a non-standard spelling, while not followed by the literary mainstream, reopened the debate about the language’s position. It also created a small but relatively active group of authors rejecting the compromise established more than two decades ago, considered no longer adequate in the current linguistic situation. Even in the case of almost extinct Masurian, the appearance of “Małi princ” served as a symbol of the language’s revitalisation and gave both rememberers and new speakers the starting point to discuss the possibilities of standardising the idiom.

In conclusion, literary translation can clearly play a similar symbolic and identity-building role as other public uses of the language, e.g. bilingual signage. In a minority context it is never just a pragmatic act aimed at making certain literary content available to the users of a certain language. Small number of available translators, their limited processing capacity and pragmatic obstacles, such as copyright fees, mean that the works translated into lesser-used languages have to be chosen very carefully. Not only do they have to be of high literary value, but also recognisable enough to appeal to the readers and accessible enough not to discourage them. Minority languages are also in a way expected to have their own versions of certain well-known works to prove their ‘maturity’, and “The Little Prince” currently seems to be the best example, as anecdotally evidenced by members of minority communities being asked to prove their linguistic autonomy by showing the book translated into their language (see: Mętrak, 2019: 165). With new translations of this novella appearing almost every year, we may paraphrase the well-known Yiddish saying by stating, that a language is a dialect not with an army and navy, but rather with its own prince, no matter how little he may be.

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¹² E.g. Kashubian translations of the works of Polish Romanticism, idealising (and domesticating) cultural traditions originally foreign to the region.

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