

DOI: 10.11649/a.1666

Article No.: 1666

Adeptus
nr 11/2018 r. pismo humanistów

Nicole Dołowy-Rybińska, is an anthropologist, sociolinguist, and professor in the Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her work focuses on the transmission and revitalization of endangered languages, as well as the relation between using a minority language and maintaining cultural consciousness. She has conducted fieldwork in Kashubia, Poland; Lusatia, Germany; Brittany, France; and Wales, United Kingdom.
e-mail: nicoledolowy@gmail.com

Nicole Dołowy-Rybińska

Influences of the discourse on language endangerment and multilingualism on young members of European language minorities

Introduction

Over the recent years, we have observed an important growth of interest and public resonance in the notion of language endangerment and the interrelated concept of the loss of bio-cultural diversity. Not only have research and studies on ethnolinguistic vitality and language documentation proliferated with numerous institutions and foundations supporting them, but they have also permeated popular knowledge with headlines in magazines (e.g. National Geographic) and programmes announcing 'language extinction' or 'language death'.

The character of minority language activist movement in Europe has also changed over recent decades. This change is on the one hand correlated with the achievements of the leftist movements of 1960s and 1970s with their uncompromising struggle for minority language rights to be recognized by states, and, on the other, with the global, economical and ideological changes in the contemporary world. West-European minority language movements related to the ethnic revival (Smith, 1981) emerged when the ethnolinguistic vitality of numerous European lesser-used languages diminished together with many

The study was conducted at author's own expense.

No competing interests have been declared.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences & The Slavic Foundation.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s) 2018.

of their speakers. That resulted from these languages possessing no official recognition and facing the dominance of the state languages in all the important domains of life shifted to the more prestigious languages. The goal of these movements was to enhance the pride and self-esteem of knowing the minority language and of being a part of a local community. Whereas (some) minority languages have been gaining (some) recognition and rights in Europe, the process of language shift has increased gradually. Sociolinguistic research conducted in many different regions around the world (Fishman, 2001; Tsundola, 2006) has revealed that at the present time we are dealing with several interrelated processes: the intergenerational transmission of minority languages in Europe has been weakened but at the same time there exist ethnic, immersion and bilingual schools where the young generation can gain knowledge of them; the use of minority languages in everyday life diminishes but there is an increase in institutions and activities organized around practicing minority languages; the speech communities have changed with different types of minority language speakers who identify with it: native, learners and new speakers to name just a few. All these changes also include minority language practices, identity strategies and the character of minority cultures, which have been modified significantly. Different forces have been mobilized to maintain and revitalize minority languages in Europe, which has also influenced the minority language movements.

Protecting, documenting and revitalizing minority languages became ingrained effectively in the neo-liberal capitalistic system. With the protection and support of minorities within the foundations and grants system, the way minority cultures function today has also changed. The minority languages movements have embraced market strategies and are governed by its dictates, and use its techniques (Urla, 2012). The spontaneous, often illegal and grass root actions that characterized the movements of the 1970's (with the flagship action of the eradication of monolingual road signs by the Welsh *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*) were turned into state-sponsored projects from which the organizers also acquired some (not only symbolic) gains. Language protection may today be seen 'in terms of the strategic planning of the business enterprise, with a focus upon forward planning, prioritizing, evaluating strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats' (Williams, 2000, p. 180). This has also influenced the young generations belonging to minority language speech communities.

Young generations of minority language speakers are imbued with a discourse of language endangerment reproduced on a massive scale by electronic media and they

carry on their shoulders the moral responsibility for the future not only of the language of their community but also of the 'humanity' itself. Simultaneously, they are influenced by the narratives of the older generation of language activists with their 'pride' and affection, and thanks to the 'profit' discourse (Duchêne & Heller, 2012) related to multilingualism young people find the reason to act on behalf of their languages.

Due to these reasons, the language of a young generation of European minority language speakers, who are engaged in the language protection movement on different levels and to different extents, is interesting as it shows the impact of international organizations and market positions on the way people who are 'new' to the field of language protection formulate their reasoning. These young people are not the initiators of these discourses but they reproduce them unconsciously and find in them explanations for their activities. They do not pose the questions such as what ideologies and whose interests are behind these discourses. In order to establish to what extent the discourse on language endangerment is unified, I will provide an analysis of the narratives used by young members of four different language minorities in Europe.

Research Methodology and Approach

The excerpts analyzed in this article come from a 100 semi-structured interviews with young people at the age of 16 to 25 belonging to four European language minorities: Kashubian (in Poland), Upper Sorbian (in Germany), Breton (in France) and Welsh (in the UK). The interviews were conducted as part of a research project on the attitudes of young minority members towards their respective language and the way they start to involve themselves on behalf of the minority groups and languages. The research was ethnographic in form (Wolcott, 1999) and was based on a tripartite phenomenological interview model, combining life history with focused in-depth interviewing and participant observation (Seidman, 2006, p. 56). The interviews were held in languages that were known both by me and my interlocutors. In Kashubia it was Polish, in Upper Lusatia – Upper Sorbian, French in Brittany and English in Wales. The interviews were then transcribed and translated into English for the purpose of this article.

The chosen European language minorities differ in terms of their population, the number of minority language users, the level of language assimilation and status of the group. The Kashubian language is spoken by approx. 100,000 people, but the intergenerational trans-

mission of the language was seriously weakened during the second half of the 20th century, so few members of the younger generation acquire it at home (Mazurek, 2010; Synak, 1998). Kashubian has been recognized as a 'regional' language of Poland since 2005 but before, the widely-held perception of it being a dialect of Polish influenced its prestige negatively. In Upper Lusatia among the Catholic minority the Sorbian language is still the primary medium of communication, but the linguistic community is very small, with a maximum of 10,000 people (Elle, 2010; Walde, 2004). Sorbs are recognized as a national minority in Germany and the languages (Upper and Lower Sorbian) are protected by the Lands Constitutions and supported by the Foundation for the Sorbian Nation. In Brittany, the inter-generational transmission of the language was largely interrupted after World War II. Most of the approximately 200,000 Breton language speakers belong to the oldest generation (Broudic, 2009). There is, however, an emerging group of new Breton speakers – people who have learned Breton outside the intergenerational transmission and use it (Hornsby, 2005). Neither Bretons nor the Breton language have any legal status in France although in 2008 the regional languages were recognized in the constitution as 'a heritage of France'. Welsh is used by about half a million people, especially in North Wales, where the transmission of the language has been preserved. However, despite devolution, language officialization, a number of measures implemented in favor of Welsh, organizations and institutions watching over establishing the place for Welsh in public life, the Welsh Language Commissioner, the ever-increasing numbers of new Welsh speakers and the language learners the overall number of speakers is in decline (Morris, 2010; Williams, 2000). Regardless of the differences, there are young people in each group who are willing to participate in the life of minorities and are involved in many types of activities on their behalf.

The research was conducted between 2012 and 2014 and used sociolinguistic and ethnographic methodology: I observed these young people's language and cultural practices, talked with them and participated in those events organised for them or by them. As part of this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which concerned the young people's involvement in minority life, the way they perceive their culture and the motivations leading to their gradual engagement. Within the group of my respondents there were those who had just started to be interested in the minority culture or to learn the minority language, those who were already engaged in different activities related to minority life, as well as those who could be called language activists. The interviews were based on their autobiographical narratives and within that context they were concerned

with their 'mental models' – 'subjective, personal representations of specific events, actions and situations' (van Dijk, 2011, p. 390).

In the interviews there were no direct questions concerning either the condition of the minority languages of their group or their opinion on language endangerment as a phenomenon. However, as mental models are controlled by socially shared group ideas and attitudes, the young people I spoke with were raising this subject, directly or indirectly, in the form of opinions, thoughts and examples. It is also necessary to add that my analysis was not intended to relate to the discourse itself but was focused on these young people's language practices. Nevertheless, while working on the collected narratives I realized that the discourse these young people used was not neutral. Moreover, it was similar for all my interlocutors regardless of the differences in the condition of their languages, their age and the level of their engagement. I also realized that the way they talked about minority languages repeated the dominant discourse on language endangerment produced by international organizations (Duchêne & Heller, 2007). This fact was of great importance for me because it proved the force of this discourse as it had already been appropriated and reproduced by these young people who had just begun to be actors on the stage of language protection.

How young people talk about their language, what kind of arguments they use and how they explain their engagement is deeply rooted in the ideological models they fall into and in the vast context they function in. Through the discourse they also create, reaffirm and express their identity as part of a group because through the language they are 'recognized as taking on a certain identity or role, that is, to build an identity here and now' (Gee, 2011, p. 18). The young people I spoke with share a world vision. They have exhibit cultural models, which they pick up 'from talk, interaction, and engagement with texts and media in society and within their own cultural spheres' (Gee, 2008, p. 25). They do not acquire a language endangerment discourse at courses, nor even through their own experiences that are often opposed to the theories they hear but at the same time they become perfect recipients of the discourses that they face in everyday life. The ideas young people find are sometimes difficult for them to assimilate. Reproducing the discourse helps them express certain abstract ideological beliefs, or opinions through some existing and shared forms of texts and talks, that would otherwise be inaccessible to them (van Dijk, 1998, p. 192).

The world of language activists including people who are involved in minority languages protection to different extent can be perceived as a culture that describes itself through

some designations. They create knowledge which 'is distributed across people and things in the environment and emerges out of collaborative endeavors' (Keating & Duranti, 2011, p. 333). The young people I spoke with are already, or aspire to become, a part of a group of language activists who themselves reproduce the discourse of international organizations, endangered languages researchers, and publicists but who also influence this discourse. The movement of minority rights protection has itself a long history transmitted indirectly to the younger generation. As in any other group, language activists have developed their ideologies 'in order to defend its interests and to guarantee the loyalty, cohesion, interaction and cooperation of its members, especially in relation to other social groups or classes' (van Dijk, 2011, p. 380). Sharing these ideologies, and hence sharing some mental representations related to the discourse but also to other practices of people, constitutes the basis of the common group's identity creation.

While the discourse of language endangerment tends to be 'objective,' 'neutral' and represents 'knowledge' (as it is often supported by the authority of researchers), it indeed very often has a form of repeated truisms. Without ignoring the quality of the scientific research which is behind (at least some of) these statements, it should be stressed that this discourse as such is based on ideologies which control the group's opinions and attitudes (van Dijk, 1998, p. 49). These help people to interpret social practices, to understand one another, and to become a part of the larger group they want to participate with. Through this discourse, a conceptual representation of ideas concerning minority languages and their functioning is held and due to its appropriation by young people, these ideas are replicated in their minds (Tomlin, Forrest, Pu, & Kim, 2011, p. 38). Therefore, the analysis presented below is not a linguistic analysis of the young people's discourse but serves to demonstrate the power of the diffusion of some of the ideas and ideologies shared by a group and constitutes the way they perceive their engagement and activities. The appropriation of the language endangerment discourse serves to strengthen the common identity of young people who enter the world of language activists, and who start to commit themselves on behalf of minority languages.

In the article I analyze 1) how some of the most general ideas and discursive strategies used within the discourse of language endangerment are applied by young members of language minorities by comparing and analyzing the most important aspects of language endangerment discourse and references to it in the narratives of young people; 2) how young people construct their identity as members of a group through the use of language

endangerment discourse and build oppositions between those who understand and apply it and those who are neutral or reluctant in committing themselves. I base this part on the analysis of the discourse of responsibility for the future of the world's languages; 3) the current paradigm of multilingualism. I carry out this analysis by presenting which category of arguments for language protection and acquisition young people use and propagate.

Discourse of Language Endangerment

The strength of the discourse of language endangerment is the result of two factors. On the one hand, this discourse is replicated by all the organizations that deal with the protection of linguistic diversity. On the other, its strength results from the strategy of creating the 'imagined community of right-thinking people' (Cameron, 2007, p. 270) responsible for the future of our planet and understanding the existing problem, and therefore, in opposition to the ignorance of others, has a powerful impact.

The campaign for the preservation of endangered languages has been underway for the last several dozen years now. Launched by international organizations, which protect the world's cultural and linguistic heritage, it has begun to spread far and wide (Duchêne & Heller, 2007). Its fundamental task has been accomplished: public opinion has been made aware that among many languages still existing in the world, most are in a very difficult position and, according to some estimates, their number will diminish significantly during the next years. The tactic used by the campaigns' organizers influences people's opinions through the use of popular metaphors depicting widespread damage and loss these minority languages are faced with. This presentation of the problem, which is also characteristic of the discourse of climate change (Bell, 1994), serves to mobilize people and resources to counteract the phenomenon which seems to be too abstract and depends on many different factors that can change over time (Cameron, 2007, p. 269). This effective discourse has been quickly adopted by the mass media that often today speak more readily about the disappearing linguistic diversity of the world and about the extinction of languages.

The growing interest in the issues of endangered languages reflects itself also in the number and influence of existing organizations, NGO's and foundations working on the promotion of the world's languages, as well as of the fund raisers and sponsors of many grants for large scale research devoted to these issues (e.g. SOAS – Endangered Languages

Documentation Programme, UNESCO – Research on Language Endangerment, Linguapax, Mercator Network, Foundation for Endangered Languages, SIL, Terralingua, and others). It is worth mentioning that apart from supporting research and activist campaigns, they also provide – mostly through social networking platforms – information on the condition of the world's languages, propagating the language endangerment discourse on a large scale. The struggle for the maintenance of endangered languages shifted from the domain reserved for researchers and activists to a problem concerning everyone. This has started to generate significant financial means (for the interests and ideologies behind these discourses see Duchêne & Heller, 2007). In this section of the paper, I focus on selected aspects of this discourse and how it is appropriated by the young generation of minority language members in Europe.

The first aspect we notice when deconstructing this discourse is the (over) use of numbers and statistics. The citations below are characteristic not because of their particularity but because of their frequency:

It is estimated that, if nothing is done, **half of 6000 plus**¹ languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century. (UNESCO; <http://unesco.go.ke/culture-prog/10-our-programs/284-endangered-languages.html>)

Many linguists predict that **at least half** of the world's languages will be dead or dying by the year **2050!** Languages are becoming extinct at **twice the rate** of endangered mammals and **four times** the rate of endangered birds. If this rate continues, the world of the future could be dominated by **a dozen or fewer** languages. (BBC; http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/yoursay/language_and_identity/endangered_languages/languages_more_threatened_than_mammals.shtml)

One language dies every 14 days. By the **next century**, nearly **half of the roughly 7,000 languages** spoken on Earth will likely disappear (National Geographic; <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/07/vanishing-languages/rymer-text>)

The discursive strategy used by the organizations working on behalf of languages, adopted by researchers and circulated by mass media, is related to the fondness for numbers and their precision. It consists of pointing out how many languages exist in the world and how fast they are dying out. These concrete numbers (6,000–7,000) provide people with something

¹ Phrases in bold in this and other quotations indicate emphasis added by Nicole Dołowy-Rybińska.

tangible that helps them conceive the phenomenon and allows them to realize that there are (still) many languages left but their number is finite. That is why within the discourse of endangerment the rapid 'disappearing' of subsequent languages ('half of the world's languages will disappear') in a certain period of time ('by the end of/the next century') is pointed out. In addition, the precise description of the loss ('one language dies every 14 days') is also very suggestive.

This manner of speaking about the situation of certain languages has also been adopted by young people who are at the beginning of their engagement with their language. They use numbers not only to describe the condition of the world's languages but also when referring to their own community. Here are a few examples of many I have collected:

A language is dying **every day** (B24FK)²

There are still a **few thousand languages**, but this may quickly change. So many languages **died out** in our times (E17FS)

From about 200,000 Breton speakers **every day 5,000–8,000** people are passing away (Y17MB)

Welsh is dying, every year there are **3,000 speakers less** (Y16FW)

The 'numbers' strategy has an important attracting and influencing force. The languages described in this way gain solid shapes; they become a fact and not an idea. By mentioning the rate of their disappearance we perceive them as living organisms, which can be counted, described doomed to extinction or saved (Jaffe, 2007, p. 61). The recipient of such a message attains the feeling of knowing what the struggle is about, and can imagine the scale of the problem. The effectiveness of this discourse lies (among others) in the fact that those who receive such a prognostic ask immediately: Does it have to be like this? Is there anything that could be done to save these languages? Remaining indifferent is taking the side of 'murder' or at least of those who did nothing to prevent this disaster when they still could. By situating oneself on the side of those who fight for the survival of the world's languages, a person can be presented as humanitarian and sensitive.

² Identifying method: [B] symbol given to the speaker, [24] age, gender: [F]emale / [M]ale, minority (K – Kashubian, B – Breton, S – Sorbian, W – Welsh).

The second type of strategy used here is based on biologization of the discourse of languages (Harmon, 2002; Maffi, 2005) and situating them in a single profile with the concepts of ecology and 'diversity'. 'Diversity' has become a keyword of this discourse and the most popular 'biodiversity' effectively integrates languages and cultures (and their protection) with plants and animals (Muehlmann, 2007). One of the most general notions, apart from *language endangerment* is *language death*. Such an approach detracts from the complexity of people's language practices and changes of cultures as well as people's identities that occurred with language shift and other social processes. It also presents language as a biological organism having a life-cycle. Language 'is being born', 'exists', 'develops', 'gets weak', and finally 'dies'. The young people I spoke with use exactly the same expressions:

(...) now the Kashubian language is dying a **natural death**. (I22FK)

This language will not be **alive** if we don't speak it every day. Then it will **die**. (N18MS)

Welsh is **getting weak and dying**, English is **killing** it. (D20FW)

Breton is as important as French or any other language and **has a right to exist**. (Q20MB)

This way of presenting a minority language has been appropriated by young people not necessarily in a conscious way. It has just become the way of speaking about the condition of languages of the world. Language endangerment discourse features 'linguistic diversity' as a guarantor of the preservation of the complexity of world's cultures, in the same way as 'biodiversity' is the guarantor of the ecological balance (Harmon, 1996). If we have a closer look on how this discourse is constructed, we can see that the languages and cultures are treated here as unchangeable entities linked by indissoluble ties. Their 'death' is thus presented as having tragic consequences not only for the world's biodiversity but also for all humanity. Let us first look at some excerpts produced by international organizations:

(...) we know that **human life** across the planet **depends** on our ability to **develop cultures** enabling survival in a variety of environments. These **cultures have been transmitted by languages**, through oral traditions and, more recently, through writing. So when language transmission breaks down there is always a large **loss of inherited knowledge**. Once that knowledge is lost – whether its value is recognized or not – a community and the whole of **humanity is poorer**. (Foundation for Endangered Languages; <http://www.ogmios.org/manifesto/index.php>)

Without a language record **a civilization is dead**. With no hope of resurrection. And with **3,000 of the planet's 6,000** language cultures now facing threat of extinction in **your lifetime**, that's something **humanity can't afford** to let happen (Endangered Languages Documentation Programme; <http://www.eldp.net/en/our+projects/projects+list>)

The adopted discursive strategy is based on indicating that the world's wealth will be (irretrievably) erased together with these languages. These are cultural richness (often compared to biodiversity), knowledge related to these languages, and indirectly the culture itself enclosed in these languages respectively. Using these arguments, a picture of a catastrophe is evoked, and this catastrophe outreaches the languages themselves: without the multiplicity of languages the human world would be diminished or even lost. Within the frame of this discourse, human knowledge and identity is tied to a language in its unchangeable form. This essentializing discourse (Jaffe, 2007) enables us once again to ignore the anthropological and sociolinguistic research describing the complexity of forms and genres of language practices and identity strategies interrelated with them. I mentioned these examples to show how the discourse of the members of language minorities is formed. Of particular interest is that among the young generation, language practices are extremely differentiated. Within one group there are not only different types of speakers (native speakers, minority language learners, heritage speakers and new speakers), but we can also find different attitudes to languages as well as different ways and stages of self-identification with a minority culture within one family (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2017). Despite this complexity, the discourse essentializing languages is being fully appropriated by young people, which proves the strength of its influence.

We can find both the arguments of the uniqueness and the necessity to protect every language expressed by my interlocutors:

Any language **deserves to be saved**. It is part of a culture, multiculturalism, respect for everybody, otherness. (F18MB)

And that the protection of the world's multilingualism is as important as the preservation of the diversity of plant and animal species:

For me every language is unique. I imagine a flower-filled meadow, and every **language is one plant** and we try to **keep all these plants**. So they must be under protection. And it should be like this with languages because they are also **very rare** but they

belong to the world. Each language has its beginning and history, and it would be a shame if it ceased to exist. (E17FS)

They also argue that every language belongs to the heritage of world's culture and its preservation is important:

(...) this is such great **heritage** that you just cannot ignore it and say 'oh well'... (A20MK)

(...) we have to protect it cause it's our **heritage**. Our cultural heritage. And it was transmitted from generation to generation. We still have a chance to keep it. (V20MW)

Finally, they admit that every language should be protected against stronger ones, which are always determined to marginalize weaker languages:

It is not organized in such a way so as to reach an agreement together and maintain both cultures, cultural distinctiveness, but **the stronger culture eats the weaker one** (V20MK)

Often, in line with the concept of, 'linguicide' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), we hear that languages are not dying a natural death but are being killed by stronger cultures and languages:

I know English people are OK but [when they settle in Wales] something wrong is happening and English language is coming to Wales. And now **they're killing our Welsh language**. And this keeps on pushing it out. (B20MW)

Discourse of language endangerment, the necessity of protecting linguistic diversity as part of the world's ecosystem guaranteeing that the knowledge encoded in the languages will not cease to exist, have been adopted and appropriated by young engaged minority language members. They use the terminology and arguments employed by international organizations, researchers and language activists. This discourse is aimed at mobilizing those who are sufficiently aware to stand up against the dangers facing the world. But to find this force in individuals, a parallel discourse must be engendered – the discourse of personal responsibility for the future of the world.

The Discourse of Personal Responsibility

The manifesto of the Foundation for Endangered Language presents a typical statement:

This mass extinction of languages **may not appear** to be obviously tragic. **Some** people believe that a reduction in the number of languages will increase communication, and help to build nations, even global solidarity. (<http://www.ogmios.org/manifesto/index.php>)

People here are divided into two groups. The first one includes those who are not concerned about languages, are not conscious of the negative consequences of possible language extinction or even worse – they believe that language unification is a ‘natural’ and necessary process (for nations, for business, for self-success etc.). These people are presented in a negative light as those who cannot see the obvious. The second group is comprised of those who see and understand the situation of today’s world and are ready to stand up against the globalization trends. They are engaged on behalf of minority languages or become language activists (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2016). The young people with whom I spoke situate themselves quite clearly in the second group.

My interlocutors use the specific language of passionate and engaged people. They adopt the way of talking used by those with whom they identify – the community of minority language activists. It is particularly visible when they speak about how their languages can be ‘saved’. They use forms such as, ‘it should’, ‘we must’, ‘nobody will do it for us’, situating ‘us’, in opposition to ‘them’. Young people often emphasize that they feel responsible for the future of their languages and cultures, that they act for their good because in their opinion they constitute the highest values without which neither these languages nor the world could exist. References to the responsibility of every speaker of a minority language appeared often and in different contexts during the interviews:

The Welsh people. **Everyone** who speaks Welsh has a duty and obligation to ensure that **they** continue to do so and [they should] create opportunities for it. (A20MW)

Bretons. The first enemy of the Breton language is not Sarkozy but the Bretons themselves. Because people who are against Breton are the Bretons and **they** retard Brittany. And I think [that] if **we** want to develop our culture we have to first motivate all Bretons. (Q20MB)

Ourselves and no one else. If we just speak Kashubian then... of course, it depends also on schools, on education, on the young generation. On what identity **they** choose, if **they** want to cultivate this culture or not. (...) But it always depends on **us**, Kashubs. (G25FK)

Each for their own part. Every Sorb. The language will [exist] as long as it will be used by families. (B22MS)

According to young people, the responsibility for the future of minority languages lies on those languages users who have to transmit them to the next generations. Politicians, teachers and activists are far behind on this list. This discourse of responsibility is no longer characteristic of international organizations (who place direct responsibility on financial power and state involvement), but on those activists whose goal is to mobilize individual people to become involved.

Young members of linguistic minorities are at the same time aware that many people surrounding them do not shoulder this responsibility, do not use the language, do not transmit it to the next generation and do not send their children to bilingual schools. At this level, it can be seen that they make distinctions between members of a community who may not be interested in the protection of their language (it is emphasized by the use of the form 'they'), and 'us' who identify with a group. Yet, they are also conscious of the obligations they themselves have (when speaking of responsibility the form 'us' is used). These statements are the result not only of young people's own observations but also constitute a part of the discourse taken from more experienced activists and organizations working on minority languages which describe the current condition of the world's languages pessimistically. My interlocutors indicate clearly that it is the indifferent people who are the biggest threat to their languages. The way young engaged minority cultures' members perceive ethnically indifferent people is revealed in the use of the form 'they', and in speaking about them in a tone of contempt and regret:

They are self-contained, narrow-minded, **they** have a lot of **prejudices**. (T16MB)

There is common **nihilism**, unwillingness-to-do-anything. I'd call it the **civilization disease**. I observe it in my peers, **they** don't have any goal in their life. (K22MK)

Well, I think that the majority of Welsh people are **indifferent**... even my parents, you know. [They think] what I do is very stupid and extremist. (K25MW)

There are Sorbs who **don't know what to do** with this, who **do not value** it and don't transmit it. It makes me angry. **They** just don't care if it survives or not. (I22FS)

Above all, however, my interlocutors perceive such people as thoughtless. This thoughtlessness is manifested by them thinking that not passing the language on and receiving education in the dominant language will benefit them and their children as well as provide them with an easier start in life and increased opportunities. Therefore, they act as dictated by economic conditions, and thus also as dictated by the dominant society, which manages to convince them that using a minority language considerably limits their opportunities. They are subject to symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991) because they believe that they willingly renounce their ancestor's language that is of little use in the contemporary world. In the discourse of young engaged minorities' members, indifferent people are guilty of language 'death', and their guilt lies in its abandonment, in rejecting the values of their community in favor of the 'illusory goods' offered by the outside world. In this regard, people are responsible for the future of their languages but at the same time they are subject to the rules of the market, political forces, ideologies and discourses and they do not accept these responsibilities. Therefore, the real responsibility – as perceived by my interlocutors – does not lie with the people, but with the activists themselves whose obligation is to convince others to use their language and to identify with a minority culture:

We [activists] need to make sure that we are passing on our language and passing on our culture. And make sure that people are aware that their culture is important and that it's up to them to be a part of this. It's not just that people know about the culture but **to make them** want to be a part of it. (E25FW)

I think one way is to put ourselves in the position of a victim and say that we are persecuted and that we should get compensation. But we can also say – Forward! Let's live in Breton, let's live the Breton culture! I think that if Breton is to be preserved it will only be because **Bretons themselves** decided to save it. But **we need to help them** to realize it. (W20MB)

We as young activists. We need to build this conviction **among people** that it is worth transmitting this language and this culture forward. (K22MK)

We need to try to **engage young people**, which means making them realized how important it is, to talk about it. We have to dare putting people into some actions. (H25FS)

The oppositions between 'we' – activists, and most of all young activists, and 'them' – people who somehow belong to the community, is clear when my interlocutors speak about responsibility. We also notice another layer in this discourse, above the level of identity enforcement. This discourse also mobilizes young people into action, evokes feelings of responsibility in them and produces energy for further work. The discourse they use is, therefore, not only taken from older activists but is also strongly internalized by them with its emotional and ethical message to help them as they stand in the difficult and unappreciated role of activists. As Duchêne and Heller (2012) have noted, the current discourse concerning endangered languages and involvement on behalf of the languages moved from 'pride' as a result of having exceptional gifts in the form of an additional language and belonging to a group, to the direction of 'profits' which can be achieved thanks to the knowledge of a minority language. For young engaged minorities' members who were born in the late capitalism, the differentiation between 'pride' and 'profit' is not constitutive because – as is seen when analyzing their discourse – it seems not to exist: 'profit' is inscribed in the 'pride' discourse where it reasserts itself.

Discourse of Multilingualism Profits

Among the most strongly maintained language ideologies (Woolard, 1998) in Europe is the ideology of monolingualism (Hornsby, 2010) which is 'taken as normal, and therefore as essential to linguistic and cultural development both at the level of the community and at the level of the individual' (Heller, 2006, p. 85). The ideology of monolingualism is based on the conviction that there is a direct relation between language users and their belonging to a nation that is reflected also in the personal, moral and ethical features of individuals. Within the frame of this ideology, any other language introduces chaos to such a unity, atomizes its consistency, and thus also creates endangerment for the existence and functioning of the state.

Language minorities subordinated to these ideologies are expected to abandon their languages of their own free will and for their own good in order to achieve a higher status, better position in employment, etc. They are thus subject to symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991) believing that a change of language is better for them. They become the object of 'monolingualizing tendencies' (Heller, 1995, p. 374) used by the bureaucratic state system to affiliate the nation with one standard language. The appearance of the counter-

ideology – the ideology of multilingualism – demanded a long waiting period because for a new narrative to be considered valid the preceding one needs to be contested. Prior to this, social change has to occur because ‘new stories arise when there is a new reality to be explained, when the social arrangements are so different that the old narrative no longer seems adequate’ (Bruner, 1997, p. 275). Before multilingualism was presumed to have any value, important language changes related to the weakened intergenerational transmission of their languages occurred in European language minorities. When the language endangerment discourse became strong, European language minorities ceased to be articulately bi- or monolingual and became (at least to a certain degree) linguistically assimilated. Reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991) postulated by revitalizers and some researchers had to be related to the reenactment of the multilingualism of communities whose language practices had become very complicated and which were permeated with the ideology of monolingualism. To succeed it was necessary to use persuasive arguments and create a discourse promoting multilingualism over monolingualism. For the indifferent people the ‘pride’ argument was no longer sufficient to convince them that learning and using a minority language had any sense. The subsequent stages of discursive endeavors for language maintenance were thus transferred into the ‘profit’ paradigm.

The argument used the most often for supporting multilingualism, which came into the everyday discourse of people promoting minority languages and acting on behalf of them, is that multilingualism is ‘a natural state’ because it exists all around the world (Edwards, 1994). This approach is the basis for other arguments that point to more concrete benefits related to having a number of languages especially when acquired through transmission at home or during the early stages of education. Such justification can influence parents who are still convinced by the ideology of monolingualism and who have to decide whether to bring up their children in a way not necessarily perceived as appropriate by the society. Revitalizers refer to the research that has confirmed the ‘false’ evidence that pleads in favor of monolingualism and to put forward the ‘true’ evidence of those who attest the good judgment of multilingualism. The arguments advanced here are that a child with at least two languages has better language skills and understands how language functions better and, in consequence, it is easier for him/her to use it and to solve problems; it is easier to distinguish meaning from form; multilinguals learn any additional language faster; it is easier for them to listen and remember; multilingualism raises cognitive abilities and creativity (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 1981; Edwards, 1994). Therefore, by being multilingual the child’s chances

of obtaining a better job in the future and of cooperating effectively with other people increase. Those arguments which are based on scientific research, but do not refer to them directly, are employed by organizations promoting minority languages in a variety of ways, for example, in brochures for parents, and on web sites on (the benefits of) multilingualism. These arguments have also been voiced by my interlocutors who use them often:

The fact that I speak Breton makes me think about my vocabulary all the time, on how to express something. I want to **correct** myself all the time, **develop, learn** more. (N23FB)

Speaking another language always makes your **life richer**. There are **more opportunities** than [for] those who speak only one language or only two. (I19FW)

This is also an **investment** in language. Learning languages is very **important** and it seems that if you learn one more language in your childhood, it is **easier later**. (F23FK)

The best example of such discourse comes from a Sorbian student:

[When you speak two languages] your mind **develops differently**. Also **new possibilities** open up for you when you know a German and a Slavic language. Languages are keys. In contemporary world, everything happens **through languages**, even in computers. (...) When you are bilingual you have a different **attitude to languages**. You know that any person in the world has his own mother tongue. When you go to Africa, and they have their language there, and you know it, then you are prepared, **open**, and they will receive you totally differently than for example the German tourist who demands that everybody speaks German. (B22MS)

These words are significant because they contain all the ideas related with the promotion of multilingualism in the concise form: the relation between language and identity, quicker mental development of a bilingual child, growth of opportunities in the future, and a positive attitude to learn other languages.

The second proposition of arguments militating for multilingual education refers to the positive attitude of polyglots to others and to the world: 'a person who speaks multiple languages has a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives (...) [and] a better understanding that other outlooks are possible' (Cook, 2001). That is why, as researchers have proven and activists highlight, multilinguals can understand and appreciate the representatives of other cultures better, they are also less influenced by racist and xenophobic attitudes and lack of tolerance. The Sorbian student, apart from the intellectual

profit, mentions the openness of a bi-/monolingual person to others with the possibility of a better understanding of them, along with an easiness in establishing relations because – as he claims – in the case of multilinguals they are based on mutual respect that is often lacking in monolingual persons. Such statements are frequent:

(...) It seems to me that I am more **open** to the world than some of my friends who speak only French. I am more **interested in other cultures**... (DD16FB)

(...) when you know two languages and have two identities, which you have to somehow reconcile, you become more **tolerant to different ideas** and so on. (M25FS)

(...) we are **open to different cultures**. (V20MK)

I think we've got **more respect** for other cultures because I know specifically what my culture is and what it is not. (U22MW)

My objective here is neither to undermine the arguments on behalf of multilingualism nor the declarations of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, their statements are often not based on their own experience but have been taken from people and institutions that propagate the idea of multilingualism. However, they do confirm them using their authority as members of a minority language community, as minority language speakers and as (future) language activists.

Conclusion

The way narration is developed by young people influences the story they construct. It relies upon them whether the subject and protagonists speaking are presented as passive or active in relation to the surrounding reality, or if they are presented as the victims of the system, or as individuals taking their fate into their own hands. The analysis of the discourse of young language minorities' members demonstrates the strength of the influence dominant discourses of language endangerment have on their (minority) language and – following on from that – on the way they perceive the surrounding world. They reproduce the discursive strategies such as the use of numbers in the descriptions of endangerment and present languages as living organisms. The analysis of their discourse, especially concerning the responsibility for the future of minority languages, leads to the conclusion that through it they can build

their collective identity. Not only as those who stand 'on the right site of the barricade' and who try to protect the world's linguistic diversity, but also as members of a minority group at large, and as participants of the language movement in particular.

Appropriation of the discourse of language endangerment by young people mobilizes them to undertake immediate action, to generate protest and to join the movement and therefore to acquire self-awareness of their own identity. The discourse of responsibility for the future of languages strengthens their own conviction of the rightness of the activities they undertake and keeps them in an euphoric state even when the actions themselves fail to achieve the intended objective. While presenting themselves as a part of the dominated minority group but fighting for recognition, language rights and for survival, they show a certain pride in their identity. Finally, as young people raised in the times of late capitalism, they also look for the appropriate arguments which they can use to attract others to the language they are protecting. Mixing arguments used by an older generation of activists, the popular knowledge gained from scientific publications and mass media messages, they present the world of multilingualism as a profitable one from which they can benefit when speaking more than one language.

Bibliography

- Bell, A. (1994). Climate of opinion: Public and media discourse on the global environment. *Discourse and Society*, 5(1), 33–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926594005001003>
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Broudic, F. (2009). *Parler breton au XXIe siècle : Le nouveau sondage de TMO-Réions*. Brest: Emgleo Breiz.
- Bruner, E. M. (1997). Ethnography as narrative. In L. P. Hinchman & S. Hinchman (Eds.), *Memory, identity, community: The idea of narrative in the human sciences* (pp. 264–280). New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Cameron, D. (2007). Language endangerment and verbal hygiene: History, morality and politics. In A. Duchêne & M. Heller (Eds.), *Discourses of endangerment: Ideology and interest in the defence of languages* (pp. 268–285). London: Continuum.
- Cook, V. J. (2001). *Requirements for a multilingual model of language production*. Retrieved January 22, 2018, from homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/Papers/RequirementsForMultilingualModel.htm
- Cummins, J. P. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In C. F. Leyba (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3–49). Los Angeles, CA: California State University.

- Dołowy-Rybińska, N. (2016). Becoming an activist: A self-representation of young European minority languages campaigners. In J. Olko, T. Wicherkiewicz, & R. Borges (Eds.), *Integral strategies for language revitalization* (pp. 405–436). Warszawa: Wydział “Artes Liberales” UW.
- Dołowy-Rybińska, N. (2017). *“Nikt za nas tego nie zrobi”*: Praktyki językowe i kulturowe młodych aktywistów języków mniejszościowych Europy. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Toruńskiego.
- Duchêne, A., & Heller, M. (2007). Discourses of endangerment: Sociolinguistics, globalization and social order. In A. Duchêne & M. Heller (Eds.), *Discourses of endangerment: Ideology and interest in the defence of languages* (pp. 1–13). London: Continuum.
- Duchêne, A., & Heller, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Language in late capitalism: Pride and profit*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Edwards, J. (1994). *Multilingualism*. London: Routledge.
- Elle, L. (2010). Sorben – demographische und statistische Aspekte. In M. T. Vogt, J. Sokol, D. Bingen, & J. Neyer (Eds.), *Minderheiten als Mehrwert* (pp. 309–318). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, J. A. (Ed.). (2001). *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited: A 21st century perspective*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gee, J. P. (2008). *Social linguistics and literacy: Ideology in discourses* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Harmon, D. (1996). Losing species, losing languages: Connections between biological and linguistic diversity. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, 15, 18–108.
- Harmon, D. (2002). *In the light of our differences: How diversity in nature and culture makes us human*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Heller, M. (1995). Language choice, social institutions and symbolic domination. *Language in Society*, 24(3), 373–405. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500018807>
- Heller, M. (2006). *Linguistic minorities and modernity: A sociolinguistic ethnography*. London: Continuity.
- Hornsby, M. (2005). *Néo-breton* and questions of authenticity. *Estudios de Sociolinguística*, 6(2), 191–218.
- Hornsby, M. (2010). The ideology of monolingualism as ‘standard’ in Brittany. In M. Watson & L. Milligan (Eds.), *From vestiges to the very day: New voices in Celtic Studies* (pp. 67–75). Aberdeen: AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies.
- Jaffe, A. (2007). Discourses of endangerment: Contexts and consequences of essentializing discourses. In A. Duchêne & M. Heller (Eds.), *Discourses of endangerment: Ideology and interest in the defence of languages* (pp. 57–75). London: Continuum.

- Keating, E., & Duranti, A. (2011). Discourse and culture. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 331–356). London: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068.n16>
- Maffi, L. (2005). Linguistic, cultural and biological diversity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 599–617. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.34.081804.120437>
- Mazurek, M. (2010). *Język, przestrzeń, pochodzenie: Analiza tożsamości kaszubskiej*. Gdańsk: Instytut Kaszubski.
- Morris, D. (Ed.). (2010). *Welsh in the twenty-first century*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Muehlmann, S. (2007). Defending diversity: Staking out a common global interest? In A. Duchêne & M. Heller (Eds.), *Discourses of endangerment: Ideology and interest in the defence of languages* (pp. 14–34). London: Continuum.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education – or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Taylor & Francis.
- Smith, A. D. (1981). *The ethnic revival in the modern world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Synak, B. (1998). *Kaszubska tożsamość: ciągłość i zmiana: Studium socjologiczne*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.
- Tomlin, R., Forrest, L., Pu, M. M., & Kim, M. H. (2011). Discourse semantics. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 37–63). London: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068.n3>
- Tsundola, T. (2006). *Language endangerment and language revitalization*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Urla, J. (2012). “Tolat quality laguage revival”. In A. Duchêne & M. Heller (Eds.), *Language in late capitalism: Pride and profit* (pp. 73–92). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: SAGE.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2011). Discourse and ideology. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 379–407). London: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068.n18>
- Walde, M. (2004). Demographisch-statistische Betrachtungen im Oberlausitzer Gemeindeverband “Am Klosterwasser”. *Lětopis*, 51(1), 3–27.
- Williams, C. H. (2000). On recognition, resolution and revitalization. In C. H. Williams (Ed.), *Language revitalization: Policy and planning in Wales* (pp. 1–47). Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Wolcott, H. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing*. Oxford: Altamira.
- Woolard, K. (1998). Introduction: Language ideology as a field of inquiry. In B. Schieffelin, K. Woolard, & P. Kroskrity (Eds.), *Language ideologies: Practice and theory* (pp. 3–47). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Influences of the discourse on language endangerment and multilingualism on young members of European language minorities

Abstract

This article provides an analysis of the discourse on language endangerment used by the young members of European language minorities. The narratives come from a 100 interviews with young people who are engaged in activities on behalf of minority languages such as Kashubian in Poland, Upper Sorbian in Germany, Breton in France and Welsh in the UK. The way they formulate ideas on language endangerment and arguments they choose to encourage others to use these languages bears a strong resemblance to the discourse produced by international organizations, researchers and publicists. The analysis concerns three aspects of the discourse of young minority activists: appropriation of the dominant discourse of language endangerment and its role; constructing a collective identity as a part of a language movement through the discourse of responsibility for the future of the languages; discursive strategies of presenting the advantages of multilingualism and, in so doing, of learning and using a minority language.

Keywords:

minority languages, language activists, young people, language endangerment discourse, collective identity, multilingualism, Europe

Wpływ dyskursu zagrożenia języków i wielojęzyczności na młodych przedstawicieli europejskich mniejszości językowych

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia analizę dyskursu zagrożenia języków, używanych przez młodych przedstawicieli mniejszości językowych Europy. Wypowiedzi pochodzą ze stu wywiadów z młodymi ludźmi, którzy są zaangażowani w działania na rzecz języków mniejszościowych, takich jak kaszubski w Polsce, górnołużycki w Niemczech, bretoński we Francji oraz walijski w Wielkiej Brytanii. Sposób, w jaki formułują oni myśli dotyczące zagrożenia języków i argumenty, które wybierają, żeby zachęcić innych do używania tych języków, bardzo przypomina dyskurs używany przez organizacje międzynarodowe, badaczy i publicystów. Analiza dotyczy trzech aspektów dyskursu młodych aktywistów językowych: internalizacji dominującego dyskursu zagrożenia języków i jego roli; konstruowania zbiorowej tożsamości

jako części ruchu na rzecz języków poprzez zakorzenianie dyskursu odpowiedzialności za przyszłość tych języków; dyskursywnych strategii przedstawiania zalet wielojęzyczności i, w związku z tym, uczenia się i używania języków mniejszościowych.

Słowa kluczowe:

języki mniejszościowe, aktywiści językowi, młodzież, dyskurs zagrożenia języków, tożsamość zbiorowa, wielojęzyczność, Europa

Citation:

Dołowy-Rybińska, N. (2018). Influences of the discourse on language endangerment and multilingualism on young members of European language minorities. *Adeptus*, 2018(11). <https://doi.org/10.11649/a.1666>