Review of

Negotiating language practices and policies in Sorbian-German families in Upper Lusatia

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Reviewer: KIMURA Goro Christoph

Introduction

In recent years, family language has increasingly become a major topic within the study of language policy. This thesis, which focuses on the negotiation of language use in Sorbian-German interlingual families in Catholic Upper Lusatia, is the first research that directly investigates in the Sorbian context this highly important issue for language revitalization. The text is logically structured and written in clear academic style, with only a few marginal typographical errors and structurally ambiguous sentences (see appendix).

Comments to the individual chapters

After a brief introduction to the aim and structure of the thesis in chapter 1, chapter 2 (theoretical background) carefully introduces the main concepts related to the topic of the thesis. The concepts are clearly explained and defined, and especially the development and current state of (Family) Language Policy is aptly summarized. A more focused discussion on the role of the family within language revitalization efforts could have been added to highlight the relevance of the topic of this study. The validity of Fishman's claim on the centrality of the intimate intergenerational language transmission context in his *Reversing Language Shift (RLS)* model could be used as a basis.

Chapter 3 gives a well written introduction to the history of the Sorbs and the current situation of the Sorbian language(s) in Lusatia. "[T]he continuing hierarchy between the languages and the deep-rooted strategies of accommodation for German" (p.42) emerges as the focal point of the discussion in the following chapters. This basic asymmetry is reflected in this research, where "the main pattern of language use in the participating families is that the minority language Sorbian is spoken by one parent, and the majority

language German is spoken by both parents." (p.43), as stated in chapter 4 which introduces the study of family language policies in Lusatia. When discussing family language policy in the Sorbian context, the once heated discussion on the role of the family, especially the "Sorbian mother" (Serbska mać), vs. the institutional support of the Sorbian language, that arose in the socialist time of German Democratic Republic, would have been helpful to situate the present study in a broader historical context: How has the condition of the transmission of Sorbian changed since then?

The autobiographical accounts on the own family, linguistic background and attitude in the section on researcher positionality in chapter 4 contributes not only to better understanding the motives of the author to conduct the research. Having done this self-reflection, this thesis presents also a good example how such reflexive stance can sharpen the sensitivity about the possible influence of the own personal attitude to the participants. While clearly favouring a pro-active stance towards the use and transmission of Sorbian to the next generation, the author is conscious of her own positionality and able to distance herself from her own preference when dealing with the data. The wording in the following chapters carefully avoids to judge the narratives of the participants in the study from a normative perspective. Every utterance of the interviewed individuals is respected as valuable in its own right.

The reflexive ability of the author is also fully displayed in chapter 5 and 6, which deal with research methodology and presents the families investigated. The biographical and ethnographic approach is presented in such a detail that the concrete situation of research can be imagined. See for instance: "Some of the children checked every now and then whether the lamp on the recorder is lit, the sign that I had explained to them that the recorder is on and recording." (p.55) The language choice to talk to the participants and to write the thesis is also carefully examined and explained.

While the number of 28 people from six families investigated is small from a quantitative point of view and cannot be representative, as the author admits, the numerical weakness of the samples is more than compensated by the variety of the linguistic background and the diversity of attitudes of different individuals represented in the data, and by the deep and multifaceted analysis of the data in this thesis in the following chapters, including the four language portraits in the appendix.

Applying the tripartite model of Spolsky, the chapters 7 to 9 discuss language practices, ideologies, and management as conveyed by the participants. In chapter 7 the

asymmetrical use of Sorbian and German is presented in detail. While each family developed its own patterns of habitual practice, one of the major divisions is whether or not the Sorbian-speaking parent continues to use Sorbian when addressing the children in the presence of the partner. Half of the families use both languages (One Parent One Language) and half of the families use only the majority language German when they get together (One Parent One Language and One Parent Two Languages). Interestingly, this division seems not to necessarily correlate with the ability of the German-speaking parent to understand Sorbian. This finding points to the necessity of investigating beliefs and ideologies, which are dealt with in the following chapter.

While the data provides ample insights to the language practice, one methodological limitation is that the "practice" part is, though including participant observation, mainly based on narratives. So, it cannot be confirmed how far it is really so. The author, however, is conscious about "the narrative character of the interviews" (p.61) and seeks to overcome this weakness, for example, by comparing accounts of different participants. For example, the children's report to use Sorbian between themselves was relativized by the comment of the father that the siblings often use German (p.93). Similarly, see p.226 in chapter 9. These examples suggest that there could have been a bias in the narrative to overestimate the use of Sorbian, to accommodate to the supportive stance of the researcher towards the use of Sorbian.

Chapter 8 highlights the individual beliefs, attitudes and collective ideologies shared among the participants and presumably more generally in Lusatia (and beyond). There is a clear contrast in the perception of German as necessary and obligatory and Sorbian as additional, optional. This leads to instances when Sorbs hesitate to use Sorbian among themselves and Germans do not feel the necessity to learn Sorbian albeit living in a region where Sorbian is spoken. The one-sidedness of the blaming the Sorbs as being closed and exclusive when they use Sorbian, while allowing the Germans to remain in their self-closure not having to open themselves to the language of their partner or neighbourhood, is not recognized as unjust or unfair by the participants of the research.

It can be positively stressed that the author does no only analyse the discourse itself, but also takes implicit ideologies into account that are not mentioned explicitly, as for example the importance of Sorbian for the family, which is not found in the interview data but can be derived from the efforts to transmit Sorbian to their children (p.118). The critical and balanced way of analysis can also be appreciated. For example, admitting that the monolingual ideal which creates separate monolingual spaces

restricts the use of Sorbian and contributes to the further shrinking of the use of Sorbian (p.129), the author also points out that simply "opening up would not lead to more speakers of Sorbian, but would run the risk of further reducing the use of Sorbian to a symbolic use serving the need to perform group identity", if the norm of accommodation were to persist (p.141).

The management, that is attempts to modify or change practices with or without negotiations, within and beyond the family domain, is the topic of chapter 9. This chapter not only gives many examples of simple and organised management, but also discusses the interplay between different levels of management. As the author confirms, "the discussed acts and attempts of language management beyond the family illustrate the wider context in which the individual family language policies emerge" (p.234). Sometimes, the organised management is positively perceived and followed in the simple management, sometimes it is contested or rejected. This confirms the necessity to pay attention to agency as done in this thesis. Lastly, some other possible influences on bilingual language socialization are depicted.

As already pointed out by critics to the Spolskian model and admitted by the author, it is difficult to separate practice, ideology and management, as management is part of practice and ideology is guiding management. So, in chapters 7 to 9, the three aspects are all present in each chapter. This is sometimes confusing, for example when ideologies not discussed in chapter 8 appear in chapter 9 (bilingual family ideology (p. 175) or the ideology of sociolinguistic naturalism (201)). But in general, the author managed to focus on different aspects of the family language policy and its context in each of the three analytical chapters.

The final 10th chapter properly sums up and discusses the results. The strength and limits of this study are also carefully examined. The merit of this thesis is presented as having given detailed insights into the language habits of interlingual families within the context of the wider community, according to the data gathered from the six selected families. As it can be assumed that there are families that are more Sorbian-centred and those that are more monolingually German-oriented, the families who participated in this study seem to represent intermediate cases between the possible two poles. The main text ends by suggesting linguistic assertiveness as a constitutive element of possible future language policies to support Sorbian in Lusatia.

General comments

The thesis has empirical and theoretical merits that contribute to advance the field of research. Empirically, it has convincingly analysed the diversity and fluidity, as well as constant and transversal aspects of family language policies of interlingual families in the Catholic Upper Lusatia. The empirical analysis has shown how asymmetrical bilingualism in various variations penetrate throughout the life of the family members. Among other points, the study has revealed that the use of German in interlingual contact situations cannot be explained as a simple pragmatic choice as it might seem at the first glance. It is rather an outcome of management based on specific ideologies. Especially, the ideas of monolingualism and purism seem to be major obstacles that restrict the use of Sorbian.

The author also points out how the family is embedded in society, paying due attention to the significance of several other domains beyond the family and the interrelationship among various domains. In this sense, this thesis is not only about the six families investigated. It gives insights into the linguistic situation in the Catholic Upper Lusatia as whole as seen from members of the six families who inhabit it. Thus, this thesis gives much more than the modest title "Negotiating language practices and policies in Sorbian-German families" suggests. Especially the repeatedly demonstrated strength of the Church (religious) domain to provide occasions and motivate the use of Sorbian is striking. It seems to be the only domain where the norm of linguistic subordination is countered and it provides also a kind of safe space to use the language by ritual use and singing which does not require spontaneous speech. Even when a family frequently visited German language mass, the children got a closer relationship with Sorbian in the church. For many, the church is the only place apart from the school which provides opportunities to read Sorbian. As though the school also promotes Sorbian, its use in school seems to be much more contested.

While the solid methodology and careful analysis of this research can be highly evaluated, it is regrettable that the consultation stage after the data analysis was not realised, as there are repeatedly cases, where uncertainties could have been clarified by asking the interviewed persons afterwards (see for example p.104, 125, 145, 201, 206). Clarifying such details could deepen the analysis and contribute to a more accurate understanding. Though, it can be safely assumed that, as the author confirms, these details would not change the overall picture provided by the study, so it does not lessen the value of the empirical findings provided by this thesis.

Theoretically, the inclusion of aspects from the Language Management Theory (LMT) within the Spolskian framework is a pleasant innovation. Thus far, while both approaches use the term "management", due to the quite different conceptualizations of this term by LMT and Spolsky, the two approaches have not been connected so directly as endeavoured in this thesis. In analysing management, the thesis productively applies the distinction of simple and organised dimensions of management and also the processual character of management from LMT. The benefits from applying aspects from LMT, though, could have been even greater if recent developments in LMT were taken into account, as the conceptualisation of the dimensions of management as a continuum or the fifth stage of the process after implementation which includes reviewing the management process. Including these evolutions would enable a more nuanced approach to the interplay between simple and organised management and paying attention to how the people reflect upon their own management or the management by others. Maybe this can be considered in the future, given the existence of data that has been gathered for this research and not yet analysed.

Another desideratum for the future is to give more extensive and concrete suggestions for families who want to pass on Sorbian to their children, which was the original motivation to start this research project. The last paragraph of chapter 10 dealing with this issue foregrounding assertiveness is plausibly backed up by the data in this thesis. But the data of this research delivers much more practical hints which could be rephrased as more general principles and strategies for practical use. This would be the task for the planned subsequent (German-Sorbian bilingual?) publication with applicable suggestions for the Lusatian community.

Conclusion

Summing up, I admit that this dissertation fully meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations by the provisions of the current law on scientific degrees and title and I evaluate it positively. The candidate should be allowed to proceed to the next stages of earning a PhD title, i.e. the public defence of the thesis.

Tokyo, 7.11.2023

Appendix   List of typographical errors and ambiguous parts

p.7 Introduction to the theoretical context and to the Lusatian context
p.63 On the negotiation of language practices and policies in Sorbian-German families in Upper Lusatia
-> These headlines of two parts of this thesis should be included in the table of contents.

p.8 no one could exert influence the families themselves
-> influence on?

p.8 As I finish writing this thesis, the most satisfying feeling for me is probably to see that there is a growing awareness of the need for a school to be embedded in a supportive language environment is growing.
-> is … is … ?

p.21 xpanded the agents
->expanded?

p.21 Goro Kimura points out that the focus on actual interaction in concrete situations and on language management as a metalinguistic commentary on what has been said or understood, circumvents an understanding of language planning as a deliberate intervention aimed at achieving long-term change.
->verb missing?

p.21 The shortcoming he attributes to the latter is the framing of intervention as 'artificial' and non-intervention as 'natural', without questioning what is considered to be the 'natural' process (Kimura 2005).
-> What does "latter" refer to?

p.23 discrinate
-> discriminate?

p.24 autochthonous minority communities ,
-> delete space

p.25 explores he extent
->the?

p.46 On the one hand, he explains why he does not speak Sorbian, it is something that is part of his life story and cannot be ignored.
->sentence structure not clear.

p.58 and those, were
-> And those, where?

p.66 a about a month later
-> about a month later

p.88 I will first turn those that are somehow linked to particular people
->turn to?

p.93 The father again, André, again reported
-> delete one of the "again"

p.104 lincted to the language competence
-> linked

p.104 everal Sorbs
-> several

p.106 Philipp did not suggest that they may use Sorbian, he reacts to how the others speak to him.
-> This sentence seems to be incomplete.

p.109 who uses German much more frequently than German
-> who uses German much more frequently than Sorbian

p.111 Dreißeig
-> Dreißig

113 These more general views form the backdrop to the strategies and practices of

language use with children and their negotiation, which I will address in chapter 9.
-> This sentence seems to be incomplete.

118 secondary school,,
-> delete one comma

122 In Angelas case
-> Angela's

127 This example most clearly illustrates how the Sorbian language is linked to the community and how someone using it is regarded part of of a common in-group
-> delete one "of"

131 The fact that Judith finds it acceptable to speak Sorbian in the presence of Germans who are not directly involved in the conversation as, may be due to subtle changes in the monolingual ideal or due to more general differences in how firmly people adhere to the rule of politeness.
-> This sentence seems to be incomplete.

142 Judith Dreissig
-> Dreißig

150 where places
-> were

161 whenSorbian

186 suggestsan expansion

201 phanatic
->fanatic?

208 the choice of which type of school to enrol the children in explicit
-> is explicit?

210 clear decisions in favour of schooling through were made
-> a word is missing?

229 acts of simple management aim at ensuring the possibility of using German.
->aimed?

233 whish
-> wish

234 beyound the family

237 usesd
-> uses? used?

241 seem tohave

245 they Sorbian-speaking parent
-> the?

246 Another participant who grew up outside the Sorbian-speaking area, where it was out of the question that the Sorbianspeaking parent would use Sorbian with the children
-> "who" necessary? Sorbian-speaking?

246 preedominantly