

Researching young peoples' minority language practices

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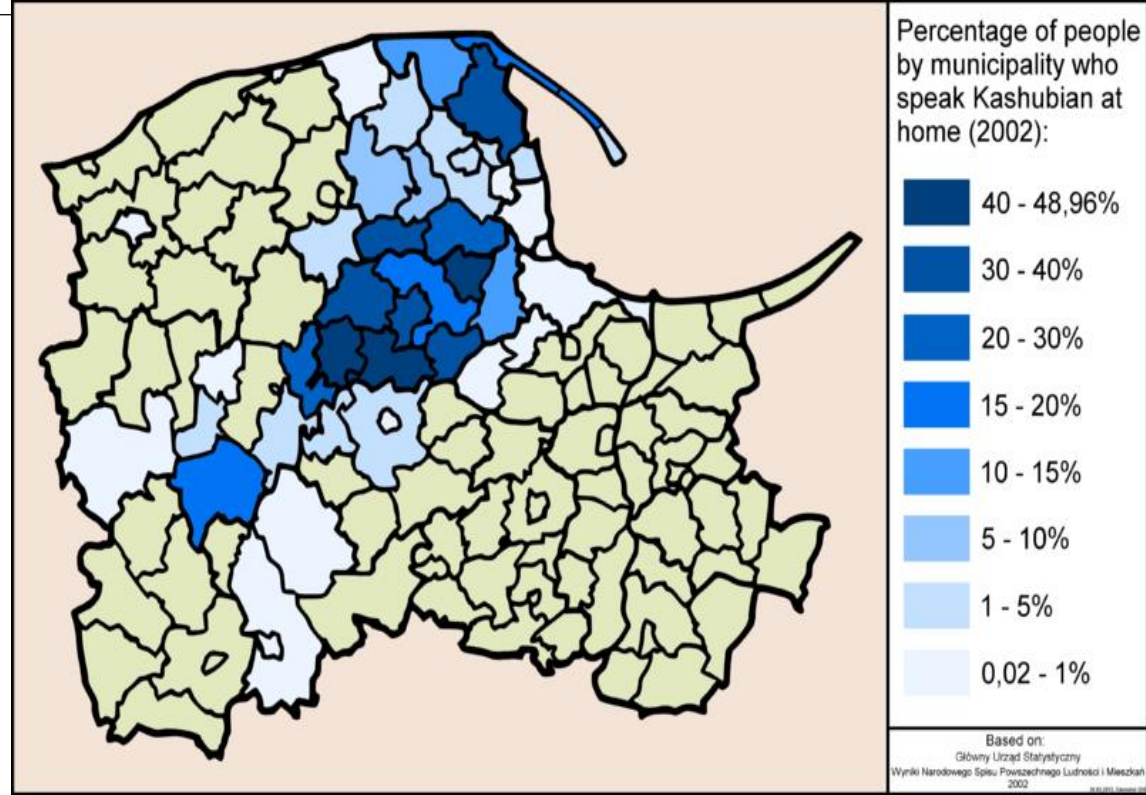
The European languages



STATE

- Orange box: Languages in monolingualism situation
- Striped box: Languages in bilingualism situation
- Vertical striped box: Discussed languages' variety*
- Red dot: Isolated languages
- Blue triangle: Speakers in the State

Kashubs



- Kashubian has the status of a regional language of Poland (since 2005);
- There are about 350,000 Kashubs; ca. 100,000 use the Kashubian language, most of them belong to the oldest generation.
- The intergenerational transmission was weakened in the second half of XX century.

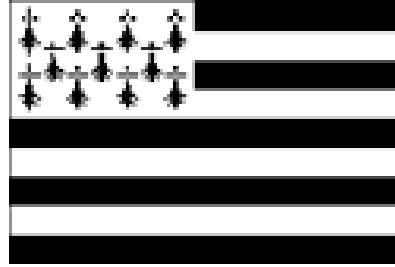
Sorbs



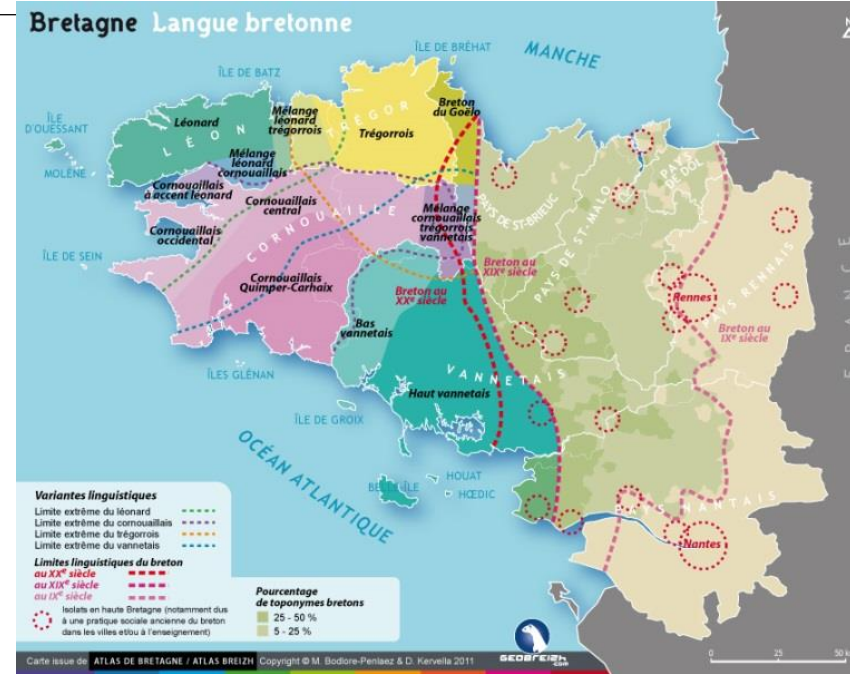
- Upper and Lower Sorbs live in Germany (Saxony and Brandenburg);
- There are ca. 60 000 people with Sorbian identification.
- Upper Sorbian is used by 10-12 000 people; the intergenerational transmission is preserved but weakening.
- Lower Sorbian is used by less than 1000 old people ;
- The intergenerational transmission of LS was broken in the 30s' of XX century.
- The Sorbian language infrastructure exists since after WWII.



Bretons:



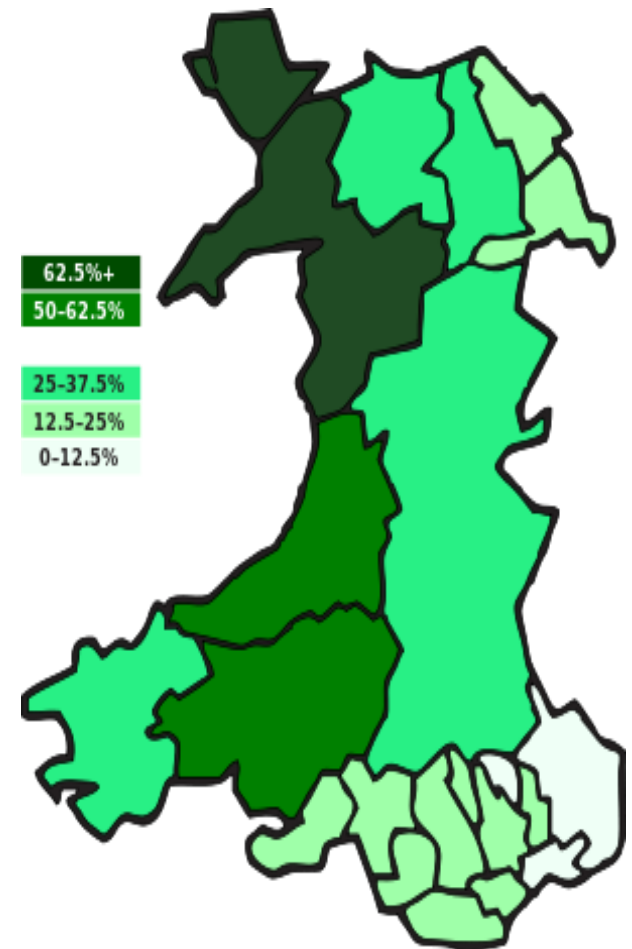
- Breton has no official status in France;
- About 4,1 mln. people live in Brittany
- About 200,000 people use the Breton language but 70% of them are over 60 years old.
- Interruption of intergenerational transmission of the Breton language in the second half of XX century.
- *Ethnic and linguistic revival* in Brittany in 1970's.
- *Néo-bretonnants* – people who have learned and use the Breton language.



Welsh:



- Devolution changed the Welsh language situation;
- Welsh is a co-official language of Wales;
- About 3,1 mln people live in Wales;
- Ca. 562,000 people know (to different degree) the Welsh language;
- Institutionalized revitalization of the Welsh language.



Research methodology

- **linguistic anthropology** which actually perceives languages as a set of practices; in this approach language is both affected by the reality around it and actively creates this reality;
- **ethnography of speaking (communication)** which studies language uses within a wider context of the social and cultural practices and beliefs of the members of a particular culture or speech community.
- Language in this optic should be researched not only as a mode of thinking or a tool of communication but, above all, **as a cultural practice**, that is, as a form of action that both presupposes and at the same time brings about ways of being in the world.
- Languages are being examined through the lenses of anthropological interest such as: the transmission and reproduction of culture, the relationship between cultural systems and different forms of social organization, and the role of peoples' lives in the context and conditions of existence in their way of understanding of the world.

Research methodology:

- Ethnographic (participant observation + in-depth interviews)
- Discourse analysis.

Linguistic findings as representations of the world are never neutral! They are constantly used for the construction of cultural affinities and cultural differentiations between persons and groups. The differences concern not only the linguistic domains but also (and most of all) the social worlds.

- In a limited dataset of possible and meaningful language practices.
- Ethnographic research concentrates on a small sample of people and their practices which are possible to observe and interpret.
- In the world of minority/endangered languages every single language choice matter.

Research methodology

- Social and cultural context of language production and practices: when and why people decide to choose one language (minority/dominant)? with whom? in which form? what does it mean? How it influences social relations in the group? At what level does it come and how does it influence the language revitalisation processes? etc.
- By analyzing young people's language practices I have an understanding of the social reception of some the existing activities concerning minority languages and I analyse what other activities could have a positive influence on ML use.
- In today's world (especially of young people) it is important to examine the widest possible range of language practices: oral, written, face-to-face; digital, internet-mediated etc.

Cultural experiences

- Should be understood not as an outcome of events and intentional actions, but as an ongoing process or flow in which peoples' habits and routines are continually challenged and transformed.
- They include the everyday behavior of people which manifest in practices.

Language practices

- Organised by the cultural environment and repetitive acts, regulated by practical schemata which are changeable according to the logic of situation (Pierre Bourdieu)
- Practices are structured by a *habitus*, some permanent dispositions which are contained in the processes of upbringing and growing up in a specific cultural and social environment which influences people's behavior, acts, mental processes and the way of perceiving the world.
- Practices (routinised type of behavior) do not have to and usually are not based on conscious, normalised rules and are not perceived by people in that way.
- Practices exist as performances.
- Each practice demands practitioners.

Language practices as culture practices

- Languages are not abstracted from the cultural context but are one of the expressions and elements of people's reality.
- Language uses are not only conditioned or generated by cultural processes but they influence them in the same time. In that sense the linguistic phenomena ceases to have a privileged status as a research object and becomes a point of departure for research in cultural reality that is influenced by the language practices.
- Language use is always realised through contacts between people whose competences and resources are socially determined. Accordingly every linguistic contact and every language choice reproduces the social structure. Looking from this perspective the language practices of the younger generation should be understood as cultural practices that are based on their group's history and in the political, social and cultural context.
- In the case of linguistic minorities the context always refers to **conflict** (both with the dominant language and dominant society).

Language practices observation as a source of knowledge about existing language ideologies

- **L23M(K):** [...] when someone in school still spoke in Kashubian then – maybe not teachers, but other kids made fun of him. And that is what I saw observing many of my friends who spoke Kashubian at home, but when at school – they didn't. Because their schoolmates laugh.
- **S19M(W):** [...] there were always the 'uncool' kids [in the school], those who spoke Welsh. I didn't want to be the 'uncool' kid and probably that is why I didn't use Welsh not to be in that network.

Language discrimination

O21F(S): While playing football we had many problems. [...] Once it was like this: we came, prepared ourselves, we got changed, as usual. Obviously, we spoke Sorbian with each other. A referee approached to us and said “it would be better if you spoke German on the pitch, so the other team could understand you, they don’t want this [Sorbian]”. And we [said] “no”. Then she started: “you can’t use it, it is forbidden, you are not allowed to speak Sorbian and the consequences will be drawn.” And we “What? Wait a moment, we are on Sorbian speaking territory and we can use this language, even in court”. But we didn’t say it to her. She didn’t want to understand us and wanted to give us a warning. She was absent for a longer while and when she returned, she said that she called someone and that person said that we are not allowed to speak Sorbian. And she wanted to punish us. [...] That time I realized that Germans want to forbid us to use our language.

LP observation as a source of knowledge of Language Policy results

N22M(K): Because this language is important to us, we are thrilled that it is so far Poland's only regional language; it gives us many benefits, but it also makes us more proud of it. Because a dialect's not the same. A regional language is something more important, something we can be proud of and it can spur us into further action.

C21M(W): [...] Welsh is ignored. I try to use Welsh all the time anyway but... for example when I need to fill in a form at University I want this form in Welsh. Which I can't have anyway but I report it. The woman on the phone says 'you can't have it in Welsh', and I [say that] 'I can'. She said that I complain, that I am an arrogant person, that the Welsh community have unreasonable demands, that the Welsh language is too expensive... And all I asked for is a form! [For that reason] we are accused of being arrogant. Just [because] of the language we want to use.

Speech community?

- People born in families using minority languages, so called native-speakers;
- People born in linguistically assimilated homes for whom the minority language is a heritage language, important but not practiced;
- People who decided/were forced to learn this language with or without achieving high language competence – language learners;
- People who knew this language but have negative attitudes towards it and do not (want to) use it;
- People who would like to know this language and identify with a speech community but have never had time/money/possibilities to learn it, having at the same time strong positive attitudes towards it;
- People who have learnt this language (at school, on special courses, by themselves, by immersion in the speech community) and who decided to use this language and made it the language of (at least) a part of their lives – new speakers;
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Native speakers?

If parents spoke in a minority language to a child then it is this child's first language, hence – he/she is a native speaker of this language. **BUT:**

- when only one of parents use this language with a child when communicating with others in the dominant language?
- or: when grandparents spoke to the child's parents in the minority language but to a child everybody spoke in the dominant language?
- Is it possible that there are “**passive native speakers**”?

Language competences (?)

I19F(W): [My younger sister] is one of those who doesn't speak Welsh with her friends. She is doing more activities outside of [Welsh medium] school. It is not only that she doesn't speak Welsh, she doesn't read [in] Welsh either. Her academic studies in Welsh are just crap. She doesn't understand why. I try to explain it to her: 'when you don't practice something you'll never be good at it'. But now she is angry and thinks that the Welsh teacher hates her. I say 'no, it is because you don't practice it at all'.

W18F(K): Well, my sisters say: 'we can't speak Kashubian' and refuse to respond in Kashubian. If someone use Kashubian they say that I speak great Kashubian and that person should talk to me.

Language learners

- Those who decided themselves to learn this language and are positively motivated to practice it;
- Those whose parents decided to send them to a language school without explaining why this language can be important (if the community where the language is practiced is strong, the child can see the sense of learning it but when not many – or only old people – use it, the child's motivation to know this language can be minimal);
- Those who are able to use a minority language after some time;
- Those who have almost no minority language competences after spending years at school.
- There are some who become acquainted with other people who use the minority language and those who treat it as a “classroom language” only...

Language learners:

- Problem of language authenticity and ownership:

U25F(B): I met a person once with whom I could speak Breton. But every time I made a mistake – even not in grammar but in spelling, this person corrected me saying: “your parents are from here so you should pronounce this word like you pronounce it in this region and not as you said”. It blocked my conversation totally; I couldn’t say another word in Breton.

- Language blockage:

I22F(K): (...) when I speak in Kashubian [to my pupils], they understand but don’t want to respond in Kashubian. But I see a growing language barrier, like there is with a foreign language such as English. For them to say something in Kashubian, they really need to push themselves. They need a dictionary and their book to make sure they write things correctly, because they are afraid of making a mistake.

New speakers:

- those who still have difficulties in using a minority language;
- those who become fluent in a minority language and treat it as their first language;
- those who use a literary language form (as taught at school) and those who adopted a local/dialectal form and became accepted into a speech community as one of them...

In all cases these people make a conscious language choice:

CC20M(B): I have to say that when you go to such a school, you already face a **political choice**. A decision to learn the language and **use** it in conversations with other people, for whom it also **isn't their first language**... we can easily talk to each other in French, but when **we choose to speak Breton, it is already a decision that we have to make.**

Conclusions:

- Language practices concern every sphere of people's lives;
- Studying them is important to know both 1) how ML function and 2) what is the real impact of language policy (top-down and bottom-up) on people's language use, attitudes, opinions...
- These studies will not give us any "precise" data (as a numerical one) but they can help us to understand people's needs/problems better.
- This in turn is not to be underestimated when projecting minority language policies and revitalization.