

CAN THE BUSINESS HELP A CONTESTED LANGUAGE?

**The role of commercial projects in standardization
of Silesian in Poland**



**Regional Languages in Education:
from Literature towards Literacy**

SILESIAN AS A CONTESTED LANGUAGE

NCN Sonata-BIS grant no. 2020/38/E/HS2/00006

Linguistic diversity in Poland: collateral languages, language-oriented activities and conceptualization of collective identity,

project leader: Prof. Nicole Dołowy-Rybińska

'Contested languages': genetically close to the dominant language, considered its dialect by the authorities (and some speakers) and as such denied government support and rights

→ Tamburelli, M. & Tosco, M. (eds.): ***Contested languages: The hidden multilingualism of Europe***, 2021

SILESIAN AS A CONTESTED LANGUAGE



Dialectal division of Poland
(Urbańczyk 1962, dialektologia.uw.edu.pl)

Silesian declarations in the Polish National Census:

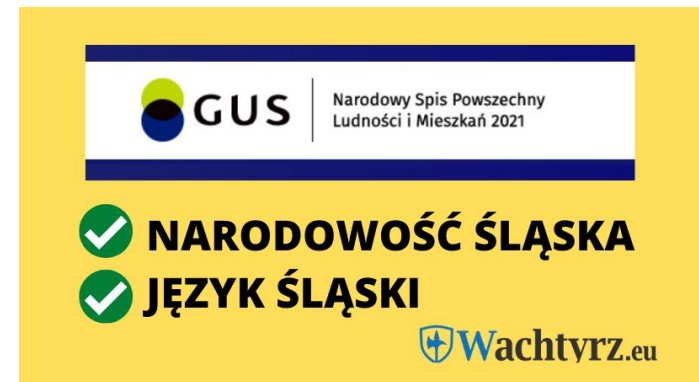
| | 2002 | 2011 | 2021 |
|--|----------------|----------------|------|
| Ethnonationality (1 st) | 173,153 | 435,750 | ? |
| Ethnonationality (total) | - | 846,719 | ? |
| Language | 56,643 | 529,377 | ? |

The largest and unrecognised minority in Poland

OFFICIALIZATION EFFORTS

| Current Linguistic Situation | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Literature | + |
| Traditional media | + |
| Digital media | + |
| Dictionaries (translation) | + |
| Dictionaries (monolingual) | +/- |
| Language regulator (institutional) | +/- |
| Bible translation | +/- |
| Education | +/- |
| Official recognition | - |

→ Czesak 2015: Współczesne teksty śląskie (...) + updates



6 attempts to update the **2005 Act on national and ethnic minorities (...)**: 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2020 – all of them **rejected**

→ Jaroszewicz 2019: *Krytyka prób emancypacji śląszczyzny. Płaszczyzna prawno-ustrojowa, społeczno-polityczna i personalna, „Slavica Wratislaviensia” CLXIX.*

SPONTANEOUS STANDARIZATION?



WIKIPEDYJŎ
Swobodnŏ yncyklopedyjŏ

Active: May **2008**,
16 June 2022: **55,726** articles (including
42,000+ automatic translations)
→ 'Amaryllis Gardener Syndrome'



Maciej Mętrak
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Active: July **2016** (started April 2015)
2022: Unfinished and chaotic,
mostly abandoned by Silesian users

PROFESSIONALIZATION

Society for Cultivating and Promoting
the Silesian Speech, active since 2007



PRO LOQUELA
SILESIANA



Upper-Silesian ABC book (2010)
introduced a **new spelling system**
(*ślabikõrzowy szrajbõnek*)

PROFESSIONALIZATION



SILLING

Silesian Language Corpus: 1,102,837 words (2,001,281 with sources restricted by copyrights), based on varied texts form between 16th to 21st Century (over 55% from 1990-2018). Published in **2018** and supported by the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodship and Patronite donations.



Automatic Polish-Silesian translator and online dictionary, spelling dictionary

Software localisations



Original literary works and translations (both commercial and Open Access)

PROFESSIONALIZATION



PROFESSIONALIZATION



Silesian Language Agency – active since 2015, worked for both the local and international companies (Coca-Cola, Tchibo, Samsung, Traficar etc.)

Silesian Language Course, 21 lesson long 3 week online video course open since 2018, around 400 participants



Samsung Mobile Phone Software, first published in 2015; language described as *Polish (Silesia)*

Marketing campaigns and copywriting – some campaigns embraced the regional variations of Silesian

Outdoor ads, videos, social media

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS

gryfnie

The most succesful Silesian brand, active since **2011**.
More than 100,000 fans of Facebook, originally
online, now stores in 4 cities.



www.gryfnie.com



Google Street View

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS



facebook.com/gryfnie/

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS

"If there are people who need it [standardization] then I'm not against it. The important thing is to preserve the language, but how is it written, what signs are used... I don't think it really matters."

(16.11.2021)



facebook.com/gryfnie/

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS



→ the only clothing brand consistently using *śląbikōrz* script as an ideological choice



THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRIPT CHOICE

SILESIAN WRITING SYSTEMS



'PHONETIC' **vs.** STEUER'S **vs.** ŚLABIKŌRZ **vs.** ... **vs.** POLISH ALPHABET

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRIPT CHOICE

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

(Language activist, user of Steuer's script, 24.11.2021)

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

(Local activist, 25.11.2021)

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRIPT CHOICE

SILESIAK WRITING SYSTEMS



SILESIAK ALPHABET **vs.** POLISH ALPHABET

Ślabikörz

Steuer's

'Phonetic'

Etc.

IDEOLOGIES & ATTITUDES



***We were, we are and we will be speaking [Silesian]. We want the regional language to be recognised.
[Silesian Autonomy March, July 17th 2021]***

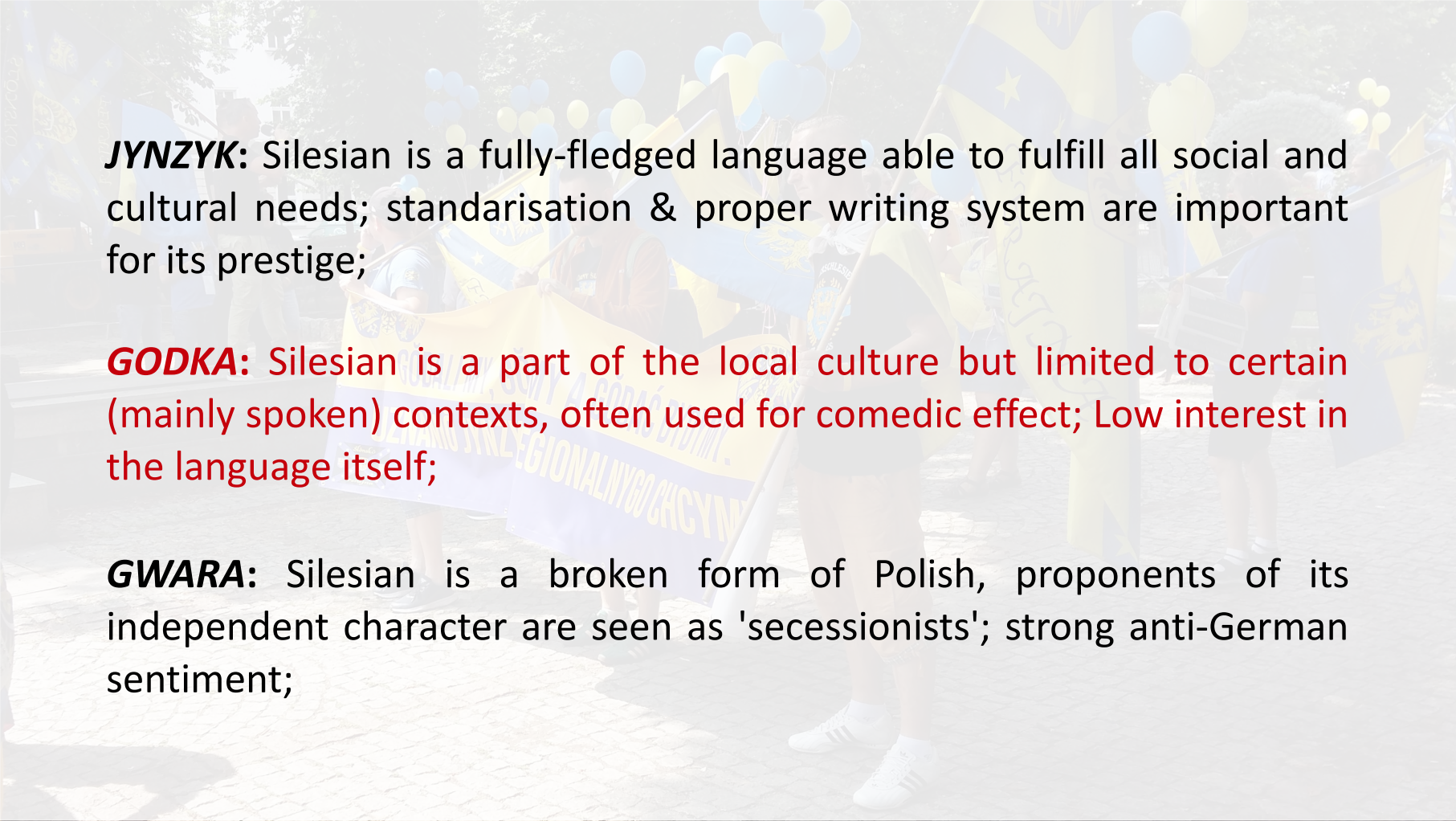
IDEOLOGIES & ATTITUDES

JYNZYK: Silesian is a fully-fledged language able to fulfill all social and cultural needs; standardization & proper writing system are important for its prestige;



GWARA: Silesian is a broken form of Polish, proponents of its independent character are seen as 'secessionists'; strong anti-German sentiment;

IDEOLOGIES & ATTITUDES



JYNZYK: Silesian is a fully-fledged language able to fulfill all social and cultural needs; standardisation & proper writing system are important for its prestige;

GODKA: Silesian is a part of the local culture but limited to certain (mainly spoken) contexts, often used for comedic effect; Low interest in the language itself;

GWARA: Silesian is a broken form of Polish, proponents of its independent character are seen as 'secessionists'; strong anti-German sentiment;

SUCCESES, CHANCES & FAILURES

- As a **collateral language**, Silesian is to a large extent **intelligible with Polish** – this may create some problems when assessing the accessibility and impact of certain actions (not every instance of language use impacts the language itself);
- **Business** recognises the value of regional identity before the state does, but in case of collateral languages it may create a risk of **exploiting the linguistic identity** as novelty only;
- Silesians seem to be not only the **largest**, but also the **most active** linguistic minority in Poland, yet still remain unrecognised. This leads to a '**Catch-22**' situation, where additional activities needed to achieve state recognition require some form of state support. (→ Tamburelli 2021)

DZIYNKUJA!/CĪŠI PAĻDIS!

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