

GRAZER PLURILINGUALISMUS STUDIEN

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Dominated Languages in the 21st Century: Papers from the International Conference on Minority Languages XIV

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Nicole Dołowy-Rybińska

Dilemmas of identity and language among young Kashubs in the light of 21st-century cultural change

The article presents the results of field research among young Kashubs in 2012, which consisted of participant observation and interviews with young Kashubs (16–25 years old) involved in activities concerning the protection of the minority language and culture. The objective was the study of young people's views of the Kashubian world, to what extent their knowledge of the minority language is related to attitudes supporting identification with the minority, how they perceive their culture and what they would like it to be in the future.

Due to the weak intergenerational transmission of the language in the 20th century, many young Kashubs did not learn Kashubian at home. Some of the author's interlocutors learned Kashubian at school, some learned it on their own, and others cannot speak Kashubian, but make it a symbol of their Kashubian identity. When the pressure of assimilation is strong, then choice of whether or not to declare themselves as Kashub is each young person's individual decision. Whether a person decides to identify with the minority culture depends on the image of this culture. In the case of Kashubian, it is still strongly related to a folkloristic image which does not fit into the everyday life of the younger generation. Young Kashubs rebel against this stereotypical image of their culture. Being teenagers, just like any others, they do not want to be perceived as relics of the past. Nevertheless, being critical of the folkloric aspect does not mean a revolt against tradition, as it, next to the language, can be seen as a factor determining the boundaries of being Kashub in the modern world.

1. Introduction

In traditional cultures belonging to a specific community was determined by birth, blood ties and inheritance. It was confirmed by daily life: work, religion, celebrations and customs. The community constituted the only cultural context into which a person was born, raised, lived and died. The language used by the community was its only language and reflected the way of life of the people and their beliefs (Nash 1989: 10–15; Fishman 1980: 84–97). Such a situation could not last forever. The creation of nation-states with nationalistic tendencies (Brubaker 1996), compulsory education,

military service, the development of the railway, urbanization, and new media forms – all these factors have led to ongoing acculturation, and – as a result – in the gradual assimilation of weaker, minority cultures. Prior to this, the objective determinants of the cultural identity of minority participants had become progressively less clear. In postmodern societies, group membership, the language used and cultural identity, are constantly being negotiated. Membership in such a defined minority group is no longer a person's fixed destiny but an individual choice. The question of being a member of a certain group has also been relativized. To define what it means to belong to a minority culture is especially difficult for the younger generation born in the post-modern, transcultural and globalized world (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998).

Lack of clear ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969; Donnan & Wilson 1998), previously determined by language, costumes, customs, etc., compel the creation of new identification strategies for minorities. The first of those strategies, referring to the 19th-century romantic conception of traditional cultures as authentic, resulted in the folklorization of minority cultures. Folklorization aims to simplify the aesthetic and semantic meanings of a complicated cultural entity, to separate its elements and to reconstruct with them a new, simplified, image of the culture. Folklorization confirms the superiority of dominant cultures by connecting folklore with simple expressions, folk culture which has not managed to modernize and was not able to create a high, elite culture testifying the development and maturity of a culture (Lavoie 1986: 71–72). 'Folklorization', next to 'exotization' (Said: 1979) is the basic strategy used by dominant cultures against 'others' whom they want to devalorize. In order to underline minority differences and continuity, some traditions and customs were conserved and performed in front of the public on special occasions. One of the most important symbols of membership therefore becomes – a more or less 'authentic' traditional costume. Minority institutions maintain the invariability of customs testifying those cultures' distinctiveness.

The second strategy can be called politicization of minority cultures (Eriksen 1993). To resist, the minority must acculturate increasingly and, at the same time, resolutely look for new, distinctive elements. Minorities endeavour to develop many activities which can be understood as 'invented traditions' regarded as 'establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities' (Hobsbawm 1983: 9). To reach this objective a group can make use of the fashion for an alternative, minority lifestyle (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009) or the conventions within the political arena and human rights discourse (Bell 1975: 169). The results of these two strategies are important. Firstly, the notion of tradition and heritage has come under pressure because of the folklore. As a result the younger generation has a problem with it. Taking the example of the Kashubian culture the author would like to emphasize that the folkloristic image of this minority culture has a negative impact on young people's identification strategies. Modernization does not have to mean be-

ing cut off from tradition if it is to be understood as maintaining the symbolic connection with the past and ancestry (Shils 1981). Traditions conceived in this way can reflect the new context and become an inspiration for activities. Quoting James Clifford (1988: 14): 'Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages.' Tradition is no longer a schematic reconstruction of non-existent contests but it has become an object of individual interpretation and construction of new meanings.

Young people have to think about their culture and in the way that it has to be preserved. In this sense, participation in a minority culture can be considered attractive because of the possibilities of self-realization, lifestyle or political ambitions. Unfortunately, according to different research (sociolinguistic and anthropological), this option is rarely chosen (c.f. Wyman 2012; Morris 2010; Nicholas 2011). That is why young people's attitudes toward the minority language and culture as well as their image and the possibility of creating them, can be of crucial significance for the planned revitalization strategies and the projection of these strategies into the future. In this article the author examines the dilemmas of young Kashubs relating to their cultural belonging, minority language use and their attitude to folklore and tradition. The objective of this research was to investigate young people's views of the Kashubian world and their opinions about the folkloric 'model' of the Kashubian culture as well as ideas of how to change it and how to attract culturally indifferent young people to it.

2. Methodology

The presented research is ethnographic in form (Wolcott 1999) and consists of field work carried out among Kashubs in 2012. It is based on a tripartite phenomenological interview model combining life history with focused in-depth interviewing and participant observation (Seidman 2006: 56). This research refers to the domain of language and cultural attitude (Baker 1992; Garrett 2010) and to the sociologically and anthropologically formulated issue of cultural continuity and change (Tönnies 2001; Giddens 1991; Castells 2010). In Kashubia the author carried out 30 semi-structured interviews with young Kashubs (16 to 25 years old). The interviews were based on a questionnaire but during the conversation questions were profiled correspondingly to the particular interlocutor, his/her interests, education, experience, etc. The respondents can be divided into two main groups. In the first there are pupils from two high schools where the Kashubian language is taught and a few teenagers participate in some forms of organized Kashubian culture. The second group is of young

people who are engaged in Kashubian life. Some are involved in voluntary services in Kashubian associations and organizations (Kashubian students clubs, political organizations, cultural associations, etc.); others are studying the Kashubian language at university. The remaining people questioned are committed to different aspects of Kashubian cultural/language life.

The respondents belong to a group of people identifying openly with a minority culture. Obviously, it is not a representative group of the younger generation of Kashubs in which the majority are not interested in cultural/ethnic affairs. However, we can assume that these people could create an elite who would actively maintain the Kashubian culture and language in the future. The future of the Kashubian language could therefore depend on their opinions, choices and observation of the reality. The fieldwork results comprise the self-representation of a chosen group of people connected to the Kashubian culture and its language and not the representative opinions of young Kashubs as such. Although, the respondents do not come from the Kashubian milieu they come under the same language ideologies and observe the attitudes of their peers closely. Yet, what they present is based on 'ideologies and beliefs about the characteristics of social groups and categories and about the implications of belonging to them' (De Fina 2006: 354). They represent an interesting – even if not 'objective' point of view concerning the problems of their generation. In addition, the research carried out has a background in long-term field work in Kashubia, in participant observations and taking part in different forms of events, cultural projects, meetings and lessons in high schools. The quoted words of the respondents can be treated not only as particular opinions but as a point of view of young engaged Kashubs.

3. Sociolinguistic context

To understand the present situation of the Kashubian language, the attitudes of young Kashubs concerning their language and culture and their willingness to identify with it, we should first look at the wider perspective of European collateral languages where we can identify languages and cultures in similar situations: Scots vs English, Low German vs High German, Occitan vs French, Latgalian vs Latvian etc. The distinction here is that they belong to the same language family as the dominant language and therefore were treated for a long time as a patois of the official state languages and suffered a great deal because of the language ideologies of their times. These languages still function today under different names (regional languages, dialects, languages of ethnographic groups, etc.). Many of them, but not all, are now protected. For a long time they did not have a standard version and the people asso-

ciated with these languages did not have a strong consciousness of national distinctiveness (Wicherkiewicz 2005, 2014; Joubert 2011). Their uncertain status results in identification problems and the lack of awareness of many people poses the question of whether to even protect them. The following is a closer look at the Kashubian language in particular.

Kashubs today are western Slavonic people living in northern Poland, in the vicinity of Gdańsk. According to the statistics, there are up to 500,000 Kashubs and people of mixed, Polish and Kashubian descent. However, most Kashubs declare a double identity: Polish and Kashubian (Synak 1998; Porebska 2006; Mazurek 2010). There are many reasons for this. Kashubian belongs to the same language family as Polish and for many years was treated as a dialect of the Polish language. Up until the last few decades Kashubian had mainly existed as an oral language and could be heard in many local variants (Treder 2011: 76).

Despite the growth of the Kashubian intelligentsia in the mid 19th century and its efforts to standardize the language, Kashubian did not gain a higher status and Kashubs did not manage to create a supra local community (Anderson 1983). The 20th century was a difficult time for Kashubs who found themselves on the border between two hostile nations: Poland and Germany. After World War II the communist People's Republic of Poland proclaimed itself mono-ethnic and – as a result – a monolingual state and Kashubs lost their chance for language recognition. In that immediate future Kashubian culture could exist only as part of Polish folklore and Kashubs were considered as being an 'ethnographic group' (Wicherkiewicz 2011: 148).

The public use of the Kashubian language was forbidden during this period and children were punished, reprimanded and ridiculed for using it in schools. During the communist era in Poland the inter-generational transmission of the Kashubian language was greatly weakened. Today only 80,000 people use the language in everyday life and 40,000 declare they use it regularly (Mordawski 2005: 51). Research conducted by Jan Mordawski has pointed out that only a very small percentage of children are raised with Kashubian as their first language. The younger generation Kashubs living in small villages still have some knowledge of Kashubian from home usage (as the first language of their grandparents and sometimes parents), from their milieu (they can hear it on the streets), but they cannot and – most of the time – do not want to speak Kashubian themselves. Those few who speak it are creating a linguistic Polish-Kashubian blend, often not aware of what they are doing.

During the communist period and under the pressure of the communist People's Republic of Poland the Kashubian culture was rapidly assimilated into the Polish culture. The existence of the Kashubian culture which was distinct from the Polish culture was denied by the system. Folklorization was part of a plan to marginalize minorities in communist Poland and to make them invisible (Łodziński 2010: 23).

Nevertheless, the situation of the Kashubian language began to improve with certain positive changes following the collapse of communism in 1989. Kashubian organizations began to develop and to act for the preservation of the Kashubian language and the Kashubian ethnic community. The rights of Kashubs gradually gained a legal status¹ and Kashubian was turned from a rejected dialect into a state-protected regional language with many measures aimed at preserving it: Kashubian can be used in churches; Kashubian-language signs and street names have appeared; Kashubian has been included in the school education programme in the region (although unfortunately not as a language of teaching nor even as a required subject for every child, but as a foreign language taught three hours per week at the formal request of parents); in some localities Kashubian is recognized as an official language in which Kashubs may settle their administrative affairs; courses have been organized for Kashubian language teachers and for public officials and Kashubian has appeared in the new media (press, radio broadcasting and in a very small measure, TV) (Obracht-Prondzynski 2007: 29–31). There are some Kashubian language web sites, chats rooms and forums. Although still not many people use Kashubian on the internet, we can observe an increasing presence of this regional language in the virtual world (Dołowy-Rybińska 2013: 125–127). The Kashubian language commission has been created and the process of language standardization is progressing quickly.

To a certain extent a fashion for ‘Kashubianness’ has developed over the last decade. Kashubian is present all across Kashubia: on bilingual signs, plaques, names of objects, restaurants, shops, and on every possible souvenir made for tourists. An increasing number of Kashubian events have been organized: picnics, regional meetings, open days in villages and towns. They are supported with Kashubian symbols and have an important significance in reinforcing the collective identity (Billig 1995): flags, costumes, music, and Kashubian cuisine. All these are identified with the word: ‘Kashubian’. Through the education system, young people with no connection to the Kashubian language and culture in their homes are able to learn something about it. We can also observe that a small but determined group of young Kashubian activists have started to campaign in the cultural and/or linguistic domains, others have a political approach. Their opinions concerning Kashubian culture and language constitute the main part of this article.

1 In the first Polish ‘Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Language’ (2005) and then in the ‘European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages’ (ratified by Poland in 2009).

4. The dilemmas of young engaged Kashubs

4.1. Being a young Kashub

The situation of the Kashubian language, its low prestige and the reputation of being the simple language of the rural parts of this region of Poland and of uneducated people, which existed almost until the end of the 20th century, had a negative effect on Kashubian teenagers. Not only did most of them not have the opportunity of getting to know the language at home because their parents did not want to burden them with the knowledge of this ‘unnecessary’ language, but even those children who knew Kashubian associated it with fun, with ‘performing’ in the world of adults. As a result, young people who remained in the more rural areas did not feel the need to transmit Kashubian to their children:

Sometimes we speak Kashubian at home. I respond in Kashubian but my younger brothers don't. The same with my friends: We don't use Kashubian unless we wanted to say something funny or when we pretended to be adult. For us Kashubian was the language of jokes. My friends who stayed there do not want to speak Kashubian and do not want their children to speak it because in their opinion it's just a nuisance in life. (interview with M23F²)

In those situations, the measures undertaken at the beginning of the 1990s aimed at the revival of the Kashubian language and its standardization had to be combined with campaigns promoting the language and with combating the stereotypical perception of this language which regrettably exists to this day. A very important role in changing the status of the Kashubian language and its perception has been played by its entry into schools. Unfortunately, the education of young Kashubs encounters numerous problems (e.g. the lack of qualified teachers; few lessons; Kashubian lessons considered as extracurricular; standardization and existing differences between home and school language). Nevertheless, if we take into account that most of the educated Kashubian families had been culturally and linguistically assimilated (into Polish culture and language) during the second half of the 20th century, then a part of the younger generation will not be conscious of its Kashubian roots and school therefore comprises their first connection with Kashubianness and is a point of departure for them to reflect on their identity:

2 Identifying: symbol given to the speaker, age, gender: [F]emale / [M]ale.

Has the fact that you had to learn Kashubian forced your Kashubian identity? (NDR) My Kashubian identity started there. Then I started to question myself if I am Kashub or Polish. In my case thinking in Kashubian categories about myself started thanks to school. (interview with T19M)

There are not many Kashubian native speakers amongst young language activists. This is related to the fact that Kashubian has been maintained more successfully in small communities, villages living mostly from agriculture. Here Kashubianness is therefore treated either as something taken for granted, there being no point in thinking about it, or as a burden which could perturb a potential future career. The results of this research have revealed that most of the people engaged in the protection of the Kashubian language and culture, and young Kashubian activists, become members of this milieu by accident. An engagement in minority issues depends usually on whether a young person meets someone who arouses his/her 'ethnic spirit' (a teacher, animator, neighbour, etc.) and whether he/she finds him/herself in a group for whom participation in the minority culture is an important issue; whether together they create a community of practice (Wenger 1998) based on participation in minority life. These observations have been confirmed by research relating to the participation of young people in civic and/or community life. The research points out that the greatest influence on young peoples' decisions are the attitudes they acquire at home, participation in youth organizations and friendly relations with people already engaged in civic life (Caraveo et al. 2010: 142). One of the young leaders of the Kashubian national movement told the author about his first contact with the Kashubian language:

What was the beginning of your Kashubian language learning? (NDR) This interest started in school. I was a good pupil and my teacher proposed that I take part in a competition of knowledge about the Kashubia region. I went there rather to get a good mark than for any other reason. But I started to be interested. Before, I associated the Kashubianness only with family, that when we went to my aunt, people there would speak with a different accent or that my grandfather watched a 20-minute programme every week on Sunday. For me Kashubianness was only this. And suddenly I realized that we have all our history (...) I became so interested that I decided to learn the language despite not having an opportunity at school. I did it by myself, through the internet. (interview with A20M)

In fact, there are not many young people in the Kashubian movement with Kashubian as their first language. Even though they try to use it during meetings and like to talk about the importance of maintaining it by using it in everyday life, in reality, this aspect of Kashubianness is not so straightforward for them:

My native language is Polish. Even if I try to drive it out from inside me, it is hard because thinking in Kashubian is not easy. Even for someone who was born here and

lives as a Kashub. I try hard to look at what happens in Kashubia from the Kashubian perspective, but I still have problems with it. (...) I see that I think about many things in Polish, and I use Kashubian only to express those things. I would like to change, but I admit: It is hard. (interview with C21F)

The difficulty of speaking Kashubian in everyday life can also be found in the case of those young Kashubian native speakers and learners living outside Kashubian communities. When the entire environment is Polish-speaking, using Kashubian is treated by many people as an assertive manifestation of political ideas, such as imposing Kashubianness on others. This kind of treatment of their language and culture is deeply rooted in the Kashubian consciousness, as Kashubs had to hide their identity for many years and treated their language as a tool of communication only in closed family circles and within groups of neighbourhood friends. As a result, it is difficult to find Kashubian speaking interlocutors who are from outside the Kashubian activist milieu (recruited from Kashubian language learners):

*In which situation do you have a chance now to use the Kashubian language? (NDR)
Well, unfortunately, not in many day-to-day situations. It is a language which is spoken by not many people I meet on the street. For example, I have never used Kashubian in a shop or in customer services. [I use it] in situations when I know my interlocutor speaks it. (...) with people I have met as Kashubs and we talk from the beginning in Kashubian. Because it is normal that Kashubs speak Kashubian with each other, isn't it? (interview with P19M)*

The answer to the author's question what it means 'to meet someone as a Kashub' was to meet someone at organized Kashubian meetings. Only during these occasions, in a closed group, people from outside speaking Kashubian will be accepted and even 'lionized'. In contrast, in family life the contrary was more in evidence. Kashubian-ness was hidden, its importance belittled. Children were 'protected' against it by their parents. This is why not many young people identified with it:

I was brought up in a Kashubian family. Both parents Kashubs, and grandparents as well, but ... In my case it was a 'frozen' identity, it had no significance. If someone asked me if I was Kashub, I would probably say yes, but without conviction. My parents and grandparents spoke only Polish to me. (interview with A20M)

4.2. Young Kashubs' attitudes to culture

As a result of Kashubian culture policy and a strong folklorization of it, both during the times of communism in Poland (as a result of a deliberate policy) and after (as a way of keeping the distinctiveness of the Kashubian and Polish cultures),

young people have a rather simplistic image of it. Often young Kashubs told a similar story when asked about their first ‘conscious’ contact with the Kashubian culture:

I think it was when I went to an orchestra competition and there was a Kashubian group performing. There were only old ladies on stage, in those costumes and they started to sing. I didn't know at all what language they were singing ... Only after did I find out that it was Kashubian. And I was skeptical about this, because I couldn't understand it at all. I thought that it was a language for old ladies who only crochet, sitting at home and nothing else.

How old were you?

U: About 6–7.

So, your first contact with the Kashubian culture ...

U: ... was like ‘oh dear!’. Because there were no young women, no girls and I thought that Kashubian must be like that.

And that image remained till high school?

U: I guess so. It was so orthodox for me. So: This is folklore, ok, we don't have to go back to it, they can live like this, but I don't need this. I think it was something like that. (interview with U18F)

This folkloristic image of the Kashubian culture revealed that many young people who have some contact with it (through school, cultural organizations, participation in groups, contests, celebrations, etc.) do not necessarily have an emotional contact with it. They associate Kashubianness with something ‘performed’ before spectators. At a prescribed moment, on stage, in front of a commission, an assembly of people, to be seen/heard speaking Kashubian, reciting a poem, singing, is well regarded. This Kashubianness can be further emphasized by wearing a traditional costume as a symbol of belonging to a group. However, leaving the stage means automatically switching to the Polish language, taking off the costumes, and let's forget about Kashubianness, and even to have a laugh at it. As a young Kashubian activists admits:

Young Kashubs make beautiful speeches about how their grandparents and parents suffered because of their language oppression and that we can now use it openly, that it's great, etc. And then I approach this person and start to speak Kashubian to him and he says: ‘Don't mess about, why are you speaking Kashubian? We can speak normally’. I hate this kind of hypocrisy and complexes. (interview with A20M)

The policy of folklorization has been oriented toward the minimization of the significance of Kashubs in the eyes of Poles and of minority members as well. They were made to believe that being Kashub was tantamount to being a relic of the past, to backwardness, in some cases, to recalling old times. Despite more than 20 years of measures undertaken to rehabilitate the Kashubian culture, many young people still are ashamed of their provenance and do not want to speak Kashubian. This is because Kashubianness

is in the general imagination related most of all with folklore. This is also the image that most young Kashubs have. This results in their perception of participation in the Kashubian culture and in a commitment to it. A young Kashubian language student confesses:

Whenever I meet new people, especially from other parts of Poland, but from here as well, and I say that I am Kashub, I can see in their eyes that they perceive me as someone straight out of an ethnographic park. Of course I think that our folklore is interesting, colourful, etc. but for our times ... it does not harmonize with our times. So I think that we have to make the Kashubian culture more up to date. (interview with B24F)

4.3. Kashubian culture – folklore or tradition

It is clear that young Kashubs do not want to be associated with relics of the past. They are just like any other teenagers living in the modern world. They could identify with Kashubianness if it fitted into their lifestyle. But this folkloristic image is so deeply rooted in their conscious (and unconsciousness) that even young Kashubian activists are often not able to answer the question: What is contemporary Kashubian culture? When they start to think about it, the first thing that comes to mind is that it is something that relates to folk culture. However, they link the Kashubian folk culture with its modernized aspect:

The Kashubian culture is all these elements that differentiate us from other cultures. So, up till now, it has been most of all the folk culture. Those folk songs which are sung sometimes in new arrangements – are interesting and worth listening to. This folk culture, which is as important as the older heritage elements, matches our new trends well. As the Kashubian embroidery on t-shirts or on some home utensils (towels or something). All this fits in well into our modern world. (interview with I22F)

Young people are looking for a modern Kashubian culture to confront the ‘artificial’ folklore (as they perceive it), which has been imposed on Kashubs. Yet, they do not want to be cut off from those Kashubian traditional and cultural values which seem to be a part of them and fit their world view:

[Kashubianness is] attachment to the family, yes. I don't want even to talk about those artificial Kashubian traditions, the rites, we are learning a lot about now. For example no one in my village has ever heard about 'Kite Beheading'. No one did it. And now it appears that it is an old Kashubian custom and must be performed at every rural event ... What else? Attachment to God and to the land (...). (interview with H24F)

We can observe that young people are looking for an adaptation of the Kashubian culture to modernity in adapting traditional, folk Kashubian culture elements to new forms. They are trying to bridge the gap between what folk is, functioning in the stereotypical

way of thinking of the Kashubian culture, and the requirements of the modern world. On the one hand, it can demonstrate a 'reflectivization' of tradition, of bringing it out of its fixed framework in which it has been functioning. It presents the possibility of being inspired by it and using it in a new context and new way (Giddens 1991). On the other hand, though, the existence of such references testify to how hard it is for young people to imagine the existence of such a culture behind these schematic concepts. Nonetheless, if Kashubian culture is to be interesting for them, they need some form of stimulus to make them realize that it is a living entity and it is not just folklore.

Many people think that Kashubian is something to be ashamed of. They don't have any incentive which would make them realize that this is cool. They speak in Polish all the time and meet old people only who speak Kashubian and don't have any reason to be interested in this language. If they meet someone young, interesting, modern person who would talk to them from a stage in Kashubian, it would force them to think that, man, it's cool and it's cool to do something with it. (interview 23M)

To make the Kashubian culture attractive to young people, there is a need for measures and stimuli to make them realize that Kashubianness can be 'cool' and that they can openly identify with it. Colin Baker acknowledges that the attitude of the contemporary community to a minority language remains positive only if the cultural practices are constantly revised and modernized. He considers that there is a need to create diverse forms of culture: 'A menu restricted to language lessons in school is a diet for a few. The menu needs to include a constant re-interpretation of minority language cultural forms. Minority language discos and dating, minority language rock bands and records, minority language books and beer festivals become as important as traditional cultural forms.' (Baker 1992: 136). Kashubian culture does not have to lose its connection with tradition to remain attractive. It must, though, adapt tradition to its more modern self. Otherwise, young people will not take the chance of entering it and to internalize with it: hence, to identify with the culture.

4.4. Is there an 'authentic' Kashubian culture?

The folkloristic presentation of the Kashubian culture as well as presenting the Kashubian language as one which can possibly function only in rural areas, its traditional environment, has driven the younger generation from it and keeps them at a distance. The culture that is presented is therefore not their own culture but a product of a by-gone age:

The Kashubian language and culture (...) is shown most of all as a kind of ethnographic park. And young people have a feeling that it is like a history lesson: it was like this in the past, this is how the life of our grandparents looked like, so it doesn't

concern us. We can watch it, maybe even be interested in it, but it is not a part of our lives. Kashubianness is not advertised as something that could have a direct influence on young people. (interview with A20M)

The Kashubian language faces the same predicament. This language can be treated mostly as a symbol of Kashubian identity, above all by those who have learnt it in school or just have a passive knowledge of it from home. Nevertheless, it is difficult to feel an emotional relationship with this language. It is only when an individual using it independently finds a deeper relation with it, that he or she will use it in their own way. When they do not have to accommodate to the language, but the language accommodates to them:

I think I started to feel Kashubian when it began to fit me. Because before, when we had to learn it at school, we were only repeating it. Only, what had been written, fixed forms. We learnt songs, poems written by someone. But then I started to sing in a band. And talking to the audience, for the first time I used Kashubian words. It was what I wanted to say at that moment. Completely spontaneous. And I guess the process of conscious thinking of Kashubs started then. About Kashubianness, as we say. (interview with O24F)

The sine qua non condition of using the Kashubian language is its internalization; the condition of identifying with the Kashubian culture – the feeling that it is ‘authentic’. Here there is a need to indicate that the term ‘authenticity’ as regards a minority culture, is used in a specific way. It means only the subjective sentiment of individuals, that something is and can be their culture, and not as the repetition and reconstruction of models existing in the past (Clifford 2004: 156). In that case, how can today’s young peoples’ Kashubian culture function as ‘authentic’? The author would now like to quote the statement of a 22-year-old man.

P. did not learn Kashubian at home or in school. His father – despite a lack of knowledge of Kashubian – became engaged in Kashubian cultural life. While still in primary school the boy started to perform with Kashubian folk dance groups, where he entered the milieu of people who were strongly involved in the protection of Kashubian culture and language. From the beginning of his studies P. was drawn into the activities of the Kashubian Students Club ‘Pomorania’ in Gdansk and now acts on behalf of the Kashubia region and its culture. During the last two years he has participated twice in short Kashubian language courses. However, because of the lack of time and a Kashubian-speaking environment (even in the Kashubian Club Kashubian-speakers are in a minority), he has not managed to learn the language and has not begun to use it.

(...) the language is the medium of all this, because thanks to it all is transmitted at home. (...) And after, there’s literature, texts in the Kashubian language, music, media. Without the language there is no chance here. All will be reduced to folklore. This has

been seen before. They indoctrinated me that there is nothing but folklore, nothing but children dancing in Kashubian costumes. Of course, in my case it has developed with age, in a sort of consciousness, but in most cases it stays at the level that we are ordinary Polish people, but we can dance, have our folklore, we can go to festivals and that's it. But it has no influence on normal life. And the point is that it should influence it. It would be nicer and more normal for us to listen to the news in the Kashubian language, to talk in Kashubian with our friends, to read books in Kashubian. It would be just great. (interview with P22M)

This young activist who does not speak Kashubian claims that it would be 'nicer and more normal' for Kashubs (including him) to use Kashubian in their day-to-day lives. This indicates that young people need a form of proof of being Kashub. For obvious reasons they cannot find it in the folkloristic culture. The Kashubian culture with which they would like to identify must be modern and adequate to support the reality around it. Nevertheless, it should differ somehow from its surrounding, dominant, Polish culture. One of the distinctive elements, which can be adapted to the new circumstances and at the same time in an expressive way demonstrate its distinctiveness, is the Kashubian language.

(...) it is quite clear that [Kashubian culture] is developing progressively. (...) it functions (...) in the internet, it touches the best of the modern world. (...) Increasingly elements of Kashubian culture are being used in modern design and in addition it has influenced development. The Kashubian language itself is not the same as it was 20 years ago. There are new terms and many things are translated into Kashubian, most of all connected with technology. This culture is modern, but (...) it should spread wider. For example, we can have menus in our phones and GPSs in Kashubian, in computer games. Things we have used for years but they still do not exist in the Kashubian culture, in the Kashubian language. Because if these kinds of things do not exist in the Kashubian language, they are automatically outside the Kashubian culture. Therefore, when they are in the Kashubian language, we think: yes, this is Kashubian. (interview with J21M)

Unfortunately, not many young people – who have had little or no chance of acquiring Kashubian – can identify themselves with Kashubian culture on parity with the Kashubian language. The question arises – and this concerns not only Kashubs but many minority groups trying to revitalize their languages: If culture is reduced to language, does it have a chance of surviving and developing outside a narrow group of language activists? A certain apprehension related to living in a transcultural world prevails. To what extent can the minority culture adapt yet still be itself in a recognisable form and not become just a copy of the dominant global culture (Denis 2001: 22–23). It is an irrational, existent anxiety. It relates to the contested boundaries of a minority cul-

ture and its visibility which under the pressure of the dominant culture could, without protest, disappear. This anxiety is heard in the words of young engaged Kashubs also:

I think that [the Kashubian language] is important, but we have lost our traditions, our culture, somewhere. It has all been reduced to the minimum of the language. It shouldn't be like this. It is important to discover our culture from the beginning. We just have to concentrate on the fact that Kashubian and Kashubs are not only the language, but there is culture, history, tradition behind it. Today the ritual life is disappearing; we have no idea what the 'empty night' or 'stag night' will bring. Today we put pressure on language and grammar and we are losing very important things. (interview with C21F)

5. Conclusion

The dilemmas faced by the character of the Kashubian culture in this century along with the role and position of the Kashubian language are of deciding importance for its future. If language is separated from the cultural context it would not remain a community language and only functioning as such can it be assured of its existence. During the past few years the situation of the Kashubian culture and language has changed: The language has been standardized, it is taught in schools, and functions in the media. There are increasing numbers of Kashubian meetings, festivals and anniversary celebrations. Kashubs organized themselves before the National Census of 2011 to put forward their Kashubian ethnicity. All these undertakings have gradually changed Kashubs' attitudes to Kashubianness. In some circles being Kashub has become fashionable. It distinguishes people, provides support in peer-groups and defines one's place in the globalizing world. Nevertheless, it is a very niche fashion. Few people from the younger generation use the Kashubian language actively in their civic life. Only the milieu of those engaged in its protection make use of the Kashubian language.

To attract young people who could be interested in Kashubian activities, organizers endeavour to think of new formulas involving the Kashubian culture. As the ethnic boundaries between Polish and Kashubian culture are rather flexible today, maintaining the Kashubian culture requires a definition as to what it is and a fresh look at the reconstruction of its cultural borders. Until recently, these existed in a folkloric approach. The young generation, therefore, born after the collapse of communism and brought up on television and the digital media, cannot identify with it.

This study, based on the statements of young engaged Kashubs, points out the dilemmas of the younger generation of Kashubs which are related to their linguistic identity. As most of them are not native speakers of Kashubian, they have to learn this language to become fluent and be ready and willing to use it. Those who are

able to do this treat the language as a symbol of their belonging to this culture. Born and raised in different communities with different attitudes to the language, young Kashubian campaigners try to overcome the stereotypical view of the regional language as being a patois. They try to modernize it. The language in fact adapts well to modernity and confirms in a straightforward manner that a person using it is linked to the minority culture. That is why, where the minority language functions as a basic tool of intercommunity communication, it is easier for young people to differentiate between what is the minority and what is the dominant culture. Unfortunately, where the intergenerational transmission has been weakened and the younger generation does not know the minority language, reversing language shift can be done only by the younger generation finding their own, individual place in the minority culture.

And this is not easy today. The statements of young engaged Kashubs have revealed that the apparent dilemma: Tradition or modernity must be reformulated. Young people have a need to have a connection with the past, to the heritage of their ancestors, to feel that the culture they are acting out is somehow distinct from their surrounding world. But they have a need to change the stereotypical image of their culture and language and to find a new *modus operandi* for the elements of tradition which still have an important place in the commonly held image of a group. The younger generation is living just as other people of their age and they do not want to change their way of life, their values and behaviour. Young people do not want to live in an ethnographic park, or to be treated as oddities. The folkloristic image of a minority culture still in existence has had a very negative effect on the willingness of the younger generation to feel attached to this culture. This is why the basic activity undertaken by young activists is to adapt some aspects of a minority culture to our new world technologies, to new currents in the arts and to novel applications. They will have to demonstrate that the Kashubian language can function without difficulty in the new media and projects in young people's everyday lives. This presence and function can be a sign for other, ethnically undecided young people, that their culture and language are up to date and can facilitate their identification with it.

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