

Kashubian and Silesian Identities in Online Discourse: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach

Traditionally, ethnic identities have been viewed as static and fixed entities. This contributed to perceiving identities as blocks of specific sociocultural phenomena, normatively ascribed to individuals who self-identify as members of specific group(s). People of Kashubian or Silesian identities have also been treated as highly homogeneous communities rather than conglomerates of individuals with similar, yet distinctive perspectives on the factors that constitute their Kashubianness or Silesianness. Although there exists a considerable body of literature on these groups and their identities (for instance, Dołowy-Rybińska, 2008; Geisler, 2015; Kamusella, 2007; Majewski, 2012; Synak, 1993), collectivist approach is still preferred over individual one. Moreover, little attention has been paid so far to how Kashubian and Silesian identities are constructed through discursive practices.

The goal of the paper is to challenge that paradigm by investigating and unveiling the plethora of identity practices as they become apparent and emerge on the intersection of language and interaction. I am to show that Kashubianness and Silesianness is displayed in a variety of features, and that all those instances make up what is conventionally known as Kashubian and Silesian identities, respectively. In doing so, I intend to demonstrate the complexity and various layers of these identities as reflected in language.

Working within the sociocultural linguistic framework (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005), I investigate the notions of Kashubianness and Silesianness through the five principles that constitute the core of this approach: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. Following Bucholtz and Hall, I assume that identity emerges in discourse, and that it represents a social and cultural phenomenon which is achieved through intersubjective practices. My analysis is based on a corpus of some 10,000 Facebook postings from three fan pages: *Kaszëbskô Jednota* (<https://www.facebook.com/Kaszebi/>), *Ruch Autonomii Śląska* (<https://www.facebook.com/ruch.autonomii.slaska>), and *Stowarzyszenie Osób Narodowości Śląskiej* (<https://www.facebook.com/Slonzoki/>), generated between January and July 2015.

I demonstrate that the sociocultural linguistic framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis of identities emergent through language in interaction. Furthermore, I argue that this approach facilitates better understanding of in-group dynamics as far as ethnic identity is concerned, especially among communities that have been understudied and constitute minorities in their respective nation-states. Consequently, the multi-faceted character of ethnic identities that emerges in interaction provides a range of possibilities and directions for future research.

References:

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