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New Speakers in the Context of the Minority Languages in Europe and the Revitalisation Efforts

Until recently (socio)linguistic studies concerned with minority languages and efforts at their revitalization focused chiefly on native speakers. By contrast this paper concentrates on new speakers as a relevant current sociolinguistic phenomenon and on postvernacular languages or xenolects formed on this basis. The text examines definitions of new speakers and connected terminology; moreover, it deals with a typology of postvernacular languages, with questions of legitimacy and authenticity, or a possible integration of both groups of users. Prospects of these topics are outlined. Micro case studies on the current situation of new speakers in three small vernaculars of Central Europe (Sorbian, Wilamowicean and Huncokár German) are used as comparative material.

Key words: minority languages, language assimilation/revitalization, native speakers, new speakers, linguistic authenticity and legitimacy, Central Europe case studies.

Novi govorci v kontekstu manjšinskih jezikov Evrope in revitalizacijski napor

Do nedavnega so se (socio)lingvistične raziskave osredotočale pretežno na revitalizacijo domačih govorcev. Za razliko od tega se ta prispevek osredotoča na nove govorce kot dandanes relevantni socio-lingvistični fenomen in na postvernakularne jezike ali ksenolekte tvorjene na tej osnovi. Prispevek raziše definicije novih govorcev in povezane terminologije. Še več, obravnava tipologijo postvernakularnih jezikov preko vprašanj avtentifikacije in legitimacije na eni strani ter možnosti integracije obeh skupin uporabnikov. Orisani so tudi izglei prihodnjega razvoja. Mikro študije primera o stanju novih govorcev so bile komparativno opravljene v treh manjših vernakularjih Srednje Evrope (Lužiški, Wilamowiški in Huncokáro-nemški).

Ključne besede: manjšinski jeziki, jezikovna asimilacija/revitalizacija, domači govorci, novi govorci, jezikovna avtentifikacija in legitimacija, študije primerov Srednje Evrope.

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1. Introduction¹

The minority languages of Europe have been undergoing profound sociolinguistic changes. Given the major trends of language shift and assimilation, the number of native speakers has been decreasing in a number of cases. The past decades have, however, brought about a considerably new phenomenon of new speakers, i.e. persons who acquired the minority language in another way than in the process of socialization. In this context, flexibility or, as the case may be, considerable transformations of variants and forms of a number of languages also occur. The aim of the following text is to clearly present and elucidate the relatively intricate coexistence and mutual relations of the two types of acquisition of the language and their users.

In the last decades of the 20th century, and especially at the turn of the 1990s, linguists and sociolinguists in particular took an increasing interest in the language assimilation and gradual disappearing of numerous world languages (Krauss 1992; Crystal 2000; Nettle & Romaine 2000; Brenzinger 2007; Austin & Sallabank 2011; Lewis & Simons 2013). Next to the description and analysis of these phenomena, a counter-current started to emerge, gradually bringing to the fore more significant, ambitious and sophisticated efforts at (ethno)linguistic revitalisation considered not only as a narrow research specialisation but also as a practical and activist endeavours. In this field Joshua Fishman (Fishman 1991, 2001) became a person of distinction; a number of his concepts and models in the area of revitalisation, e.g. reversing language shift/RLS, became commonly known, and inspired a great many followers (Hinton & Hale 2001; Grenoble & Whaley 2006). Many ethnic groups in Europe (e.g. the Catalans, Basques, Welsh, Sámi and others) and other continents (the Maori, some Native American ethnic groups and others) succeeded in halting or at least slowing down language and ethnic assimilation.

In spite of the given successful cases in the field of revitalisation and despite the fact that the official social climate of the last decades has been favourably inclined towards the minority populations, ethnolinguistic assimilation has continued in many places. Minority population vitality has grown weaker and weaker. In several regions coincidentally, language revitalisation activities, however, have resulted in the rise of a new phenomenon – significant groups of new speakers.

Until recently, the return of an endangered language back to the level of intergenerational, handover like transfer in the home and family milieu (native speakers) was considered an obvious and desired goal of language revitalisation.² Although this model is still taken as the most effective or ideal one, the new, considerably altered situation cannot be ignored. Within many minority communities in Europe, there are currently groups of people (often large ones) who did not acquired knowledge of the language as part of socialization within the family but did so as part of school instruction or even as adults in the system

of (immersion) education, in the form of language courses (often even online ones), as enthusiastic self-learners, and so on.³ While only a few decades ago it was a marginal and largely ignored issue, the significance of the phenomenon of new speakers is now growing. The causes of the given reality lie in both the continuing language shift in many parts of the world (i.e. the trend of not passing the minority language on to younger generations) and changes in the existing established approaches to the phenomenon of ethnicity, often defined mainly on a linguistic basis. More recently, in many places the sharp inter-ethnic and inter-lingual boundaries are increasingly interlinked. A new dichotomous profiling is in progress: not only along the traditional majority versus minority line, but also among the minority language speakers themselves – traditional versus new users of the language. The traditional question of whether or to what extent language implies ethnicity emerges once again in a new form.

The increasing importance of new speakers (frequently dynamic and activist) has since about the turn of the 21st century, grown so significant that at present this issue is an important and closely studied branch of ethnolinguistic revitalisation (Hornsby 2015b; O'Rourke et al. 2015, 1–20). Most recently works aspiring to be compendia of the state-of-the arts of concern for this young branch of sociolinguistics are being published (Smith-Christmas et al. 2018).

2. Theoretical Framework and Approaches

2.1 New Speakers – a Revisited Phenomenon

Obviously, the category of non-native speakers is not new. Beside the users of inter-generationally transmitted mother tongue (referred to also as native, first, inherited, primary, L1 and other expressions)⁴ there have always been people (learners) who mastered a certain language in some other way – as non-native, non-mother, second or acquired – in today's categorization as L2 (Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 2). These and other concepts are still insufficient in practice since they neither cover nor reflect the metamorphosis of the communication order of modern post-nationalistic times (Pujolar 2007) characterized by new types of speakers, language and communication. This is in particular a situation where learning a language that is exposed to a linguistic shift (and eventually its re-transmission to the youngest generation) occurs in contexts other than hitherto customary. The given reality may concern both persons from within the community in question and enthusiasts and sympathizers from without – it is not necessarily related to ethnic origin and identity but, for example, to regional affiliation, to settling in a certain area or to hard-to-define symbolic or emotional ties and personal inclinations or affections.⁵ From the (socio)linguistic point of view, the forms of the language acquired in this way do not often coincide with the traditional forms.

To refer to such forms, coexisting in parallel with their traditional versions, the term postvernacular languages or xenolects is used, to refer to their users, the term new speakers is most common. In this connection, the term potential users of the language, are in opposition to the current speaker (Grenoble & Whaley 2006, 172).

Although the very reality of new speakers is not particularly new, this phenomenon has only recently become the subject-matter of purposeful interest and revisited viewpoints and approaches of (socio)linguistics and many other humanities fields (Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 2).⁶ Thus, today we can speak not only about a subdiscipline but also about new attitudes, views and paradigms – following also variationist sociolinguistics (Kasstan 2017).

2.2 Approaches, Definitions and Typology

2.2.1 New Speakers

Concerning a clear delimitation of new speakers, an unambiguous definition has not yet been offered. An effort to elaborate it can be seen in a subchapter in the study by Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 4–5. The text starts with the following basic label: “At its most basic level, the designation ‘new speaker’ refers to social actors who use and claim ownership of a language that is not, for whatever reason, typically perceived as belonging to them, or to ‘people like them’ ” (Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 4).

Subsequently, the authors subject the above designation to detailed, systematic commentary and deconstruction considering other aspects – namely levels of competence, circumstances of language acquisition or language learning and the motivations of new speakers as well. Among other conclusions, they also present the view that “/.../ the practices and profiles of what we now call new speakers have frequently been ideologically evaluated as sociolinguistically deviant, since they do not conform to an implicitly agreed model” (Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 5).

Also, in another theoretical key text on new speakers the authors define themselves against efforts to provide a clear-cut designation and delimitation of the concept. Having analysed the background of the phenomenon in detail, they reach the conclusion that

/.../ rather than aiming at a neatly formulated definition, there was a growing consensus that the ‘new speaker’ concept needed to be framed as a social category which would be subject to social negotiation and variation, and delineated largely by ‘new speakers’ themselves (O’Rourke et al. 2015, 6).

The new speaker category can be viewed and evaluated within the context of its potential at the levels of implicit–explicit or emic–etic (Jaffe 2015, 25).

Reference should also be made to the fact that in looking for a definition of the concept some authors call into question even the very dichotomy of the native speaker and the new speaker as suggesting and implying hierarchy (O'Rourke & Pujolar 2013; O'Rourke et al. 2015, 10).

2.2.2 Postvernacular Language

The concept of post-vernacular language, used quite sporadically not long ago, was popularized by Jeffrey Shandler (Shandler 2004, 2006, 19–30) and is currently employed by a number of authors. To illustrate its meaning three comments can be quoted:

A vernacular language is one you use in your everyday life, while a post-vernacular language is one you may not want to use in your daily life and as means of communication, but may learn to connect or reconnect with your heritage, culture and heritage, for fun, out of interest, or for other reasons (Omniglot blog 2015).

In a time of rapid shift and loss of smaller, regional and minority languages / ... / some languages serve the purpose of identity building within a community even after they have ceased to be used as a vernacular for daily communication. This occurs / ... / through a number of cultural practices, such as amateur theatre, music and folklore, translation, attempts to learn the language in evening classes, etc. (Reershemius 2009).

Giernesiei can now be said to be a 'post-vernacular language' where the traditional-speaker community is at best fragmentary and the language is used primarily for identity display rather than for its traditional communicative functions in phatic domains (Sallabank & Marquis 2018, 69).

It should be emphasized that the primary semantic level of the language, as a communication tool, serving the transfer of information, experience, emotions, ideas, is the narrowing of the framework. Simultaneously, the extending secondary meta-level of meaning – the symbolic value incorporated in the language outside the semantic content of any statement or utterance (Bourdieu 2005; Shandler 2006, 4).

In the given contexts, closer typological specification of the given issue can be pointed out: a definition of three different contexts within two types of possible acquisition of the language – A (linked to the family/home) and B (linked to the society/neighbourhood) – and the competence of bilingual speakers in the language (Wmffre 2004, 151–154).

In terms of language competence, the four given categories can be taken as three types, i.e.: 1/ full native; 2/ intermediate native; 3/ non-native. Moreover, AB– category (learners) can be understood in juxtaposition to all the remaining ones (native speakers). Native competency may be conceived in two ways: either as competency – even that acquired by socialization outside the home environ-

ment – or, more rigidly, only in connection with the background (Wmffre 2004, 152–153).

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Table: 1 Spectrum of competency of bilingual speakers

full native competency AB+	Intermediate native competency A+B– or A–B+	non-native competency AB–
native speakers brought up in a homoglot native environment	native speakers brought up in a heteroglot non-native environment or non-native speakers brought up in a heteroglot native environment	non-native speakers brought up in a homoglot non-native environment

Source: Wmffre 2004, 152, revised.⁷

Full knowledge of the language and complete ignorance of the language are two opposing extremes on the scale with a number of intermediate steps and specific types. One of them is known from many minority areas as the stunted native speakers, i.e. persons who, despite having acquired the minority language in childhood spent their adulthood in the majority language environment. Another type may be children brought up in the minority language by their parents who themselves are not native speakers of the given language and may not even have considerable contacts with native speakers (Morgan 2000, 126, 132). Particularly in the urban environment the speech of the native and non-native young speakers may start blending (Wmffre 2004, 153).

2.2.3 Xenoelect

A further term used to refer to new forms of existing languages is xenoelect. Although semantically not quite settled, its rough definition can be adopted for the purpose of this study: “An artificial language constructed from a number of dialects with features distinctive of a number of dialects hacked together” (Xenoelects 2004). In the process of development a shift can gradually occur on the axis of xenoelect/non-xenoelect⁸ – endoelect/non-endoelect⁹ (i.e. a fully established new mother tongue)¹⁰ (Le Pipec 2013, 112). It is obvious the current (socio)linguistics, and in the extension other social sciences as well, has to take into account, much more significantly than in the past, the existence and role of new speakers in the theoretical and epistemological fields, in many cases already exceeding the traditional users of the language (O’Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo 2015, 1–3) as well as the flexibility or fluidity of the recently seemingly firm boundaries in the language field (Hornsby 2015a, 107).¹¹

2.3 Postvernacular Languages: Typology

Within efforts to maintain and revitalize endangered minority languages, new speakers represent a phenomenon of growing importance. Where this issue is

concerned, a significant influence of the shift, the beginning of which dates back to the late 20th century, of the national and European institutions to regional ethnolinguistic minority groups can be detected. Compared to the not too distant past, minority languages are now given far greater official recognition and support (O'Rourke et al. 2015, 6).

Nevertheless, languages with new speakers do not form a single set; among them a variety of different types and situations can be defined. Typical examples are given for each group; the total number of postvernacular languages in Europe is however, much higher:

- a/ revival (reinstallation) of a language that had already completely disappeared: Cornish;¹²
- b/ maintenance of a language that has recently disappeared from everyday communication in certain (symbolic), mainly cultural domains: Manx, Wilamowicean;
- c/ dramatic and ongoing decrease of the native speakers at present; in parallel, however, significant efforts to revitalize (on both practical and symbolic levels): Breton, Lower Sorbian, Yiddish, Lemko;
- d/ strengthening interest in the language while the considerable number of native speakers still persist: Welsh, Basque, Galician, Scottish Gaelic, Occitan, Lower German, Kashubian;
- e/ specific cases: Irish Gaelic.¹³

Recently, in almost all the given contexts, there has been a shift from the ethnic aspect (i.e. language considered as a sign or even a property of the given ethnic group) to a far more loosely conceived language open to all novices and speakers regardless of their ethnic or territorial origin or self-identification. In this framework there are generally significant efforts for external (cultural, social, political, economic) diffusion of autochthonous languages beyond the existing ethnic-territorial concept or vision.

3. New Speakers as a Sociolinguistic Phenomenon

3.1 Sociolinguistic Differences Between Traditional and New Languages

In terms of sociolinguistics, the main differences between native and new speakers can be viewed from several angles. In the case of Breton users, for example, they can be defined as follows:

Table 2: Main sociolinguistic differences between dialectal and new Breton

	native speakers	new speakers
location	rural parts of western Brittany	all over Brittany, including the capital Rennes
number	150,000–200,000, but declining at an alarming rate	ca 40,000
age	generally over 65	relatively young
literacy	few can read or write Breton	can read and write in Breton
pronunciation	little influenced by French	heavily influenced by French
type of Breton	dialectal	standard
vocabulary	full of French words especially for modern concepts	few French words, many new words formed from Celtic roots
motivation	speak Breton because it is their native language; sometimes ashamed of this	speak Breton because they want to; sometimes militant

Source: Hornsby 2005, 195; George 1986b, adapted and updated.

Regarding European minority ethnolinguistic populations exposed to strong assimilation and seeking revitalization the given facts, valid in Brittany (Hornsby 2015b, 34, n.; Dołowy-Rybińska 2011, 117–123; Hlaváčková 2013, 30, 37; Kokaisl et al. 2016, 225–229; Třesohlavá 2011, 52–54.) may be generalized in general terms – most of the sociolinguistic dichotomous phenomena could be similarly documented elsewhere (Wmffre 2004, 160; George 1986a, 52, n.). However, it is always necessary to take into consideration the particular situation and vitality of the given ethnic group (among other aspects, its status, demographic factors and the standard of institutional backing).¹⁴

3.2 Issues of Authenticity and Legitimacy; Orthoepy

The above question of whether and how to distinguish native and new speakers (O'Rourke & Pujolar 2013) arises particularly clearly against the background of searching for language authenticity/legitimacy. The traditional model of the native speaker derived from the phenomenon of NORMs (i.e. nonmobile, older, rural males) is referred to (and even simultaneously questioned) in the given context. It was the speech of such people that (within ideas of Romanticism) became the symbol of the pursuit of linguistic purity or norm (Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 5–6); the position of the above model is, however, being weakened by the growing role of new speakers.

Coexistence and the mutual dynamic of groups of native and new speakers can take many diverse forms and nuances. If we disregard atypical cases, there are usually two opposing dichotomic groups: 1/ native speakers using traditional dialectal and polystylistic forms of speech with a (rather) weak practice in reading and writing the language, versus 2/ fully literate new speakers using the standard (often purified) monostylistic form. Between the two, clashes sometimes arise over authenticity and overall official legitimacy (Adkins 2013; Armstrong 2013;

McLeod & O'Rourke 2015; O'Rourke 2011).¹⁵ Persistent native speakers can be held in high esteem (Galicia, the Basque Country, Ireland, etc.); but there may also be disharmony, or even antagonism and conflict between the traditional (true) form of language on the one hand and its postvernacular form on the other. If the number of native speakers is still relatively high (for example, Gaelic, Breton, Occitan), in addition to fruitful coexistence with revitalizing activists, they may also encounter ambivalent or negative attitudes towards a standardized form of language (Kasstan 2015; O'Rourke et al. 2015, 12) that can be perceived as an artificial code or just a literal translation of the majority language (O'Rourke 2011; O'Rourke et al. 2015; Costa 2015). New speakers, thus, often search for their "ideological niche" (Hornsby 2017) in an intricate fashion.

At other times, however, where there is a large number of native speakers (Galician), activist new speakers may be seen as an avant-garde of revitalizing efforts and the drivers of social change, bearing responsibility for and commitment to the future of language. Due to the accentuation of social and political injustice in the field of language, such activists in many ways resemble other types and currents (in general) of minority efforts (e.g. environmentalists, feminist movements, etc.) (Morgan 2000; O'Rourke et al. 2015, 14).

Similarly, it is difficult to generalize the mutual understanding of traditional (often dialectically varied) and new languages. In some cases, the new (often purified) form of language is traditionally perceived as a foreign language and a difficult-to-understand variant of their language (xenolect); in dialectically varied languages (e.g. Breton), it can be felt as another dialect (Hornsby 2005, 198). The question of correct pronunciation (orthoepy)¹⁶ can also be controversial.¹⁷

However, where there is a negligible number or of age/social handi-cap of native speakers (Lower Sorbian, Mirandese etc.),¹⁸ the new form is unambiguously and almost automatically predominant. In such a situation, language legitimacy and authenticity are no longer based on the inherent characteristics of the language of native speakers, but rather on groups that have the interventionist ability to construct and claim legitimacy. This is particularly evident in some extreme cases (Cornish, Manx), where, in the absence of native speakers and in the context of several competing variants of the standardized language, they may even determine non-linguistic phenomena – especially the power and the ability to promote individual activist groups (O'Rourke et al. 2015, 13). The issue of the authenticity and legitimacy of new forms of traditional languages is thus a relatively complex issue. On the one hand, it undoubtedly interferes with the process of standardization and codification, which, every language with a standard norm has gone through. The norm was mostly created by linguists based on one or more (pluricentrism) dialects/variants, and it took some time to evolve and push through.¹⁹ Also, a number of minority languages have had a standardized and literary form for a long time; in such case (native speakers getting familiar with the standard form of the language at school, in

radio broadcasting, etc.)²⁰ the situation is qualitatively different from the position of new speakers. Other minority languages are undergoing the phase of normativisation only now.²¹

Where this issue is concerned, new questions also arise: e.g. whether all minority languages (Friulian or Ladin, among others) urgently need to create a standard form? The questions of wider tolerance towards using various (dialectal and other) forms of the language, including the acceptance of its simplified form, also remain open. Due to the language handicap of non-native speakers, the possibility of potential acceptance of “simplification” or “creolization” of the language for its survival is also considered (Holton 2009; Kasstan 2015). Arguments supporting the given approaches mainly stress that language is not a mere system of rules, but, as a living organism, it reflects social, cultural, historic, economic or political contexts. Therefore, it should not be perceived as a museum piece, but, within its survival and operation as a communication code of a certain community, it should adapt to the new holistically conceived of reality.

3.3 New Speakers as Relay Race Baton Bearers

In a number of cases, disputes about authenticity, legitimacy or orthoepy are (gradually) being overshadowed by the demographic reality. Practice shows that, in the context of the coexistence of traditional and new forms of language, new, xenolectal forms are increasingly being promoted with the gradual decrease in the number of bearers of the first type (especially in the absence of at least partial uninterrupted generational continuity).²² Although they no longer act as a native tongue but rather as a symbolic or iconic language code, they also have a general prerequisite to become not only the new dominant and official form of a given language, but, in many cases, also the only prospective chance of a certain language to surviving in the future.

Where native speakers disappeared entirely (Isle of Man) or where this is about to happen (Lower Lusatia), new speakers, as the only group able to ensure the relay of the “language baton”, are taking over the position of the bearers of the language continuum almost automatically (Ó Murchadha et al. 2018, 9; Smith-Christmas & Ó Murchadha 2018, 283). Even though in such cases disputes over orthoepy and other issues between individual groups of language users may well occur, it is quite obvious that the situation has changed qualitatively and the given language does not leave open any other option for its survival in subsequent generations.

On the other hand, even in cases where the potential is still relatively strong (Basque, Galician), new speakers can reinvigorate the overall vitality of the language. It is, nevertheless, clear that in the field of (possible) bridging of the above-mentioned linguistic dichotomy, i.e. the integration of new speakers

among native speakers (Armstrong 2013; Hornsby 2005; Hornsby 2015a; O'Rourke 2011), further comprehensive comparative research has to be conducted and good practices adopted and introduced.

4. New Speakers – Three Central European Cases

It has already been stated that, especially in the last decade, the phenomenon of new speakers has become a subject of increased interest in sociolinguistics and other social sciences. However, the territorial focus of experts' interest is somewhat uneven. Significant attention has been paid to some (minority) languages in a number of Western European countries – particularly Breton, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Irish, Basque, Galician, Catalan, Occitan or Guernesiais (Puigdevall 2014; Smith-Christmas et al. 2018).

Looking closer, however, the situation is different in Central and Eastern European countries. With the exception of Poland (Olko, Wicherkiewicz & Borges 2016, 17–149), the concern of social sciences and humanities with new speakers in the region, and with the practical level of this phenomenon, is still rather in its infancy.

Nevertheless, taking some of these cases as examples can show and document that interest in these issues (especially in relation to specific situations) has gradually been increasing in Central and Eastern Europe. The following three micro case studies are intended to indicate some trends that can be encountered in the area today. At the same time, they can also be used as basic material for further comparison.

4.1 The Sorbs

Lusatia, a historic region in eastern Germany, is homeland to the small Slavic ethnic group – the Sorbs. To an extent, they still speak in two close Slavonic languages – Upper Sorbian (ca 10,000–12,000 speakers) and Lower Sorbian (ca 1,000–2,000 users). Even in the past, both distant and more recent (20th century), there were in Lusatia a number of (qualitatively very distinct) examples of new speakers of Sorbian. The same is true for the children of Silesian Germans moved to predominantly Sorbian speaking Catholic areas of Upper Lusatia after World War II or students of two GDR language schools for adult learners of Sorbian. For private reasons or because of work, many individuals of non-Sorbian background acquired the Sorbian language, some even mastered it flawlessly.

Until some time ago this fact remained outside the scope of attention of (socio)linguists and language planners. Only in the last two decades within more systematic activities of linguistic revitalisation – e.g. beginning in 1998, a network of *Witaj* (Welcome) immersion nurseries and schools came into existence (Kaulfürstowa 2008) – can we refer to new speakers emerging as a substantial

community in Lusatia as well. This is true especially for Lower Lusatia where, at a maximum, only a few hundred mother-tongue speakers, who use the local dialect, still live while the learning of the standardized Lower Sorbian language has already been undertaken by many more students and interested newcomers.

This trend can also be observed in Upper Lusatia, where the linguistic situation is even more propitious. After 2000 practical reasons (an insufficient number of native speakers of school age) resulted in the abandoning the traditional division of school instruction into A-classes (with Sorbian as the language of instruction) and B-classes (with Sorbian as a subject only), and the transition to the Concept 2plus, i.e. fully bilingual Sorbian and German instruction, was introduced. Within this new model, children from German speaking and Germanized families were integrated in the Sorbian schools, often with very poor Sorbian language competence. This solution, in the meantime, proved its benefits (the overall increase in the number of persons familiar with the given minority language) and showed considerable weaknesses (the native speakers do not undergo instruction in the linguistically mature and intact milieu) (Kaulfürstowa 2016, 2018).

However, until a short time ago, the phenomenon of new speakers in Lusatia had not been explored as a special topic (Dołowy-Rybińska 2017; Šatava 2018). Yet, some current public responses (Bart 2018) and schedules of the Domowina Sorbian publishing house suggesting this group of speakers be taken into account when preparing language teaching textbooks confirm the hope that also the Slavic part of the population of Lusatia prospectively consider the existence of new speakers more strongly and more systematically and will integrate them into the linguistic planning levels within the framework of efforts to preserve and revitalise the Sorbian language.

4.2 The Wilamowiceans

A significant example of currently ongoing revitalisation is Wilamowicean (Wymysiöeryś), a tiny Germanic language in the small town of Wilamowice in Polish Upper Silesia with but a handful of remaining native speakers. The Wilamowicean language is a unique combination of medieval Middle German, Low German, Dutch, Frisian, Scottish English and Polish (Wicherkiewicz 2003; Olko et al. 2016, 17–149; Wicherkiewicz et al. 2017).

The Wilamowiceans, settled in Upper Silesia since the 13th century, were rediscovered by social sciences and humanities as late as the 1990s; in 2001 there were only about a hundred elderly native speakers left. Distinct revitalisation attempts however, started only in about 2010 (Wicherkiewicz & Olko 2016, 34–41) and were particularly related to local enthusiast Tymoteusz Król (Król 2016).

Current activities aimed at the revitalisation of gravely threatened Wilamowicean are a good example of the post vernacular model. Despite the existence

of only a few native speakers, the language has been recognized in Wilamowice again and its role of a local symbol upheld. There are language courses (a number of them attended by students not from the families of Wilamowicean speakers); within the linguistic landscape even public inscriptions in Wilamowicean have appeared. Textbooks of Wilamowicean and texts in it have been written and published with specific letters created for writing down the speech. A number of cultural performances have been presented in the language, practically already extinct from everyday communication.

During the revitalization of the Wilamowicean language and the emergence of local new speakers, the activists proved a good knowledge and understanding of processes, models and methods (e.g. master-apprentice) of ethnolinguistic revitalization, and showed awareness of the current attention paid to the phenomenon of new speakers in Western European countries. It was therefore possible to use that experience and apply it to the local conditions (Olko et al. 2016, 17–149).

4.3 The Huncokárs (Huncokár Germans)

Similar efforts are being made with respect to the almost vanished Huncokár²³ dialect of German in the hilly region of Malé Karpaty (Little Carpathians) in western Slovakia. German woodcutters (from Bavaria, Styria and Tyrol) came to this region in the mid-18th century. Until the beginning of the 20th century they had lived in isolation, and beside the traditional culture (Slobodová Nováková 2016) they also retained their specific speech based on the Central Bavarian dialect (Fedič 2014). After World War II a large proportion of the Huncokárs were expelled to Germany. At present, there are only a few native speakers left.

In recent years, efforts have been intensified for rescue documentation of the disappearing Huncokár traditions and also for at least partial revitalisation of the language and culture (Slobodová Nováková 2014, Slobodová Nováková et al. 2018). These activities are carried out from the top (academic workplaces,²⁴ regional museums,²⁵ the local authorities, etc.) as well as from the bottom (significant interest of people of Huncokár origin or sympathizers from outside the group).²⁶ Linguists also created a system of writing the Huncokár dialect and a textbook of this vernacular; in creating specific letters for writing and in attempting to, at least symbolically, use the language, experience gained in the creation of the written form of Wilamowicean was also utilised – see above (Hornáček Banášová et al. 2017; Hornáček Banášová & Dujková 2018). The dialect has now found its place in specific cultural events devoted to Huncokárs traditions. The role of the Huncokár community is being revived in the historical memory of the region. These revitalising efforts can be seen as an exemplary articulation and interconnection of academic activities from the top to capture the interest of particular individuals; this parallel double-track has a clear synergising effect.

4.4 Summing Up: Connecting the Topic

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In these (and other) minority Central European ethnolinguistic populations, seeking to accomplish a greater or lesser extent of (ethno)linguistic revitalization, there is also visible interconnection of information and exchange of experience. For example, the above-mentioned case study of the Wilamowiceans was used not only in Slovakia (the Huncokárs), but was also popularized in Lusatia as well (Dołowy-Rybińska 2017).

With regard to the above, we also need to point to a well-known, but still not fully expertly analysed and interpreted phenomenon – namely a dichotomizing approach to the concept of nation in Western and Eastern Europe (Plamenatz 1973; Auer 1997). With a certain simplification, we can say that, while in the West of Europe the word nation is strongly associated with nationality and statehood, the Herderian concept, i.e. the interconnection of the word nation with the language and culture, has prevailed in the eastern parts of the continent. Language, understood here as the main identifying feature of ethnicity, also includes strong nation building elements in the sense of making efforts to establish one's own political unit.²⁷ In Eastern Europe, many people now have difficulty understanding the fact that a distinctive language does not automatically imply a special ethnic dimension or identity.²⁸ However, this fact may change in the context of the growing importance of new speakers. The fact that new speakers are often (sometimes predominantly) persons coming from outside certain linguistic/ethnic communities necessarily greatly reduces the existing primordial, blood ties and shifts (possibly even full-fledged) knowledge of the language to a position open to all those interested. Thus, it is possible to assume that the Western European concept of the role of language (or ethnicity) in Eastern Europe will probably increase in the future.

5. Conclusion

In the past, (socio)linguistic studies dealing with minority languages focused primarily on native speakers. This language form was considered to be the only authentic and legitimate language; new speakers from the ranks of those interested in the language tended to be ignored. Similarly, language revitalization efforts concentrated on strengthening or reinstalling intergenerational language transmission. It is only recently that the view of the phenomena of new speakers and postvernacular or xenolect languages has changed. These facts are now much more widely reflected on; it is even possible to speak about a new sub-branch of sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, they are still often perceived ambiguously or ambivalently (both in the academic and practical fields).

In spite of this shift, a number of unresolved and open levels still remain in the framework under discussion. In addition to the issues of legitimacy and authenticity, there is the fact that the knowledge of a language does not mean

its automatic use; it also does not automatically generate ethnicity. Another relatively little explored level is also the integration of new speakers among the native speakers.

In terms of the territorial view, the phenomenon of new speakers, analysed and interpreted in detail especially in the context of minority ethnic groups of Western Europe, is obviously becoming a subject of both practical and academic concern in Central and Eastern Europe as well.

It can be assumed that in the context of the current processes of ethnolinguistic assimilation/revitalization, the phenomenon of new speakers will continue to take on increasing significance. This is particularly in case where the existence of new speakers is the only chance for the language to survive (Manx, Lower Sorbian, Wilamowicean ...). (Socio)linguistics, ethnology and other social sciences will be more and more frequently confronted with the phenomenon (for example, in the field of super-diversity research).²⁹ It is obvious that this is not a purely academic, ivory-towered theme; on the contrary, within the general attention currently devoted to the situation of minority languages, their promotion and revitalization,³⁰ it is a very practical one, whether pursued in general terms or along the corpus and status linguistic planning trajectories.³¹

References

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Notes

- ¹ The text originated within the project APVV-15-0360 – Dimensions of Revitalisation of a Minority Group in Slovakia (the Huncokári) at Dept. of Ethnology and Non-European Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Trnava, Slovakia.
- ² See the eight-point scale of the GIDS – Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman 2001, 466); cf. the innovated ten-point scale of the EGIDS – Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis & Simons 2010, 11–15). The material by UNESCO group of experts refers to the theme in detail (Brenzinger et al. 2003).
- ³ An individual group consists of novices recruiting from among semi-speakers or rememberers – i.e. persons with only a partial or very limited knowledge of the traditional language striving to learn it. This level of language teaching qualitatively differs very much from the standard foreign language learning (Armstrong 2013).
- ⁴ To refer to native speakers, the concept of fluent speaker is sometimes used; it is obvious, however, that both the native and the new speakers can be fluent in the language (Grinevald & Bert 2011, 49).
- ⁵ Nevertheless, there are cases of involuntary new speakers – e.g. in a great part of schools in Wales, the teaching of Welsh is compulsory even for children from English-speaking families that do not always necessarily identify with the current bilingual policy of the region.
- ⁶ The appearance of specialised webpages The New Speakers Network in 2014 proves this, <http://www.nspk.org.uk/about/> (accessed 23 January 2019).
- ⁷ The table adapted following communication with the author.
- ⁸ In the context of native/non-native form of language acquisition.
- ⁹ Ditto.
- ¹⁰ Cf. possible frequent shift of pidgins to the position of creole languages.
- ¹¹ The role of language as a firm element that, in the European context, often legitimizes the rise of national movements and nationalism dates back already to the turn of the 19th century (Herder 1772; Humboldt 1836).
- ¹² The revival of Cornish, a Celtic language of Cornwall which disappeared from use in the 18th century, is a unique case.
- ¹³ In Ireland there are only a few tens of thousands of speakers of Irish although it is defined as the national and first official language. A much higher number (1.78 mil. according to the 2011 Census), however, give at least some knowledge of Standard Irish considerably different from the still living traditional local varieties.

- ¹⁴ On current views of ethnolinguistic vitality, see Ehala (2010) and Yagmur & Ehala (2011).
- ¹⁵ It may even lead to the emergence of a gap between generations. In Brittany, for example, grandparents, often familiar with the traditional form of the language (but not having passed it on to younger generations), refuse to speak Breton with their grandchildren who have acquired the knowledge of the postvernacular form of the language during school lessons or in language courses (Hlaváčková 2013, 36–37).
- ¹⁶ The phonology of Cornish is a specific example in this field: due to absence of audio-recordings of the language, its orthoepic norm was created both by means of an analysis of the old written records and from the accent and intonation of the Cornwall dialect of English (George 1986a; George & Broderick 1993).
- ¹⁷ Compared to the standardized form of the language, for example, the Breton language of older native speakers shows much greater number of words borrowed from French; at the same time, however, in comparison with the new purified form, there are much fewer imitations of the French speech in the field of syntax (word order) and semantics. Néo Breton also reduced the system of mutations. Another significant feature is the loosening of the orthoepic norm: native Breton speakers tend to pronounce vowel ,r' as an alveolar vibrant in opposition to uvular (French) ,r' [R] of the new speakers (Hornsby 2005, 195–200).
- ¹⁸ Traditional dialectal varieties of Lower Sorbian are already spoken by only a few hundred native speakers, aged mostly over 70. A far greater number of pupils and students have, however, undergone instruction in the standardized variety (considerably influenced by, among other things, Upper Sorbian).
- ¹⁹ For example, after the rise of unified Italy in 1861, various estimates give only 2.5–12.6 per cent of the population of the country being able to speak Standard Italian based on the dialect of Tuscany (Price et al. 2002, 177); in a number of regions this form has not established itself till today.
- ²⁰ It is precisely the aspect of the gradual evolutionary establishing itself of the standardized form, which is a feature that may be lacking in a number of minority languages (Dolowy-Rybińska 2017, 127).
- ²¹ In Switzerland for example, Rumantsch Grischun – an artificial umbrella form of Romansh combining elements of five autonomous standard varieties of the language – came into existence in 1982. In other cases, codification is still under way – e.g. in Kashubian (Knoll 2016, 249–266). Towards the theme of minority languages standardization, see monothematic issue of the journal *Sociolinguistica* 29 (Darquennes & Vandenbussche 2015).
- ²² If the position of the new code is strong, the language of traditional speakers may paradoxically gradually shift to the position of a peculiar or outdated variety (Ireland). Sometimes within activist postvernacular linguistic efforts, there is the phenomenon of “waiting for the disappearance of the last native speakers” who are perceived as a “cumbersome burden” (Pentecouteau 2002, 175).
- ²³ Slovak exonym given to this group, Huncokári, is a distortion from German word Holz hacker = woodcutters.
- ²⁴ Dept. of Ethnology and Non-European Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Trnava (Slovakia), in particular.
- ²⁵ For instance, an exposition at Červený kameň castle. In the Little Carpathians mountain range a hiking trail has been set up to connect locations linked to the history of the Huncokárs; texts in the Huncokár dialect have been installed there.
- ²⁶ For instance, a number of Huncokár webpages.
- ²⁷ There are obviously exceptions, e.g. precisely in Lower Lusatia, among the Greek Aromanians and elsewhere.
- ²⁸ Gaelic speakers in Scotland may be given as an example; the knowledge and use of the language,

however, does not in any way imply a hypothetical Gaelic ethnic group or Gaelic nation.

²⁹ In the meaning of the concept by Steven Vertovec.

³⁰ See the existence of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages of 1992.

³¹ For instance, in the Romany Studies context of Europe it would be interesting to analyse more closely to what extent the standardized Romany language of the non-native speakers influences back, through field work, radio broadcasts, publication activities, etc., the right i.e. traditional Romany language in the area of phraseology, lexicology, pronunciation and other aspects. Another theme of great importance may be the phenomenon of the secondary acquisition of Romany language by speakers of Para-Romany languages – i.e. the majority language based varieties with a strong admixture of mainly the lexical component of Romany.