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Review of the Book by  
Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor, István Fekete  
*Das Schlesische und seine Sprecher. Śląski lekt  
i jego użytkownicy / Etablierung in der Gesellschaft,  
Attitüden, Vitalität der Germanismen /  
Rozpowszechnienie, postawy społeczne wobec śląszczyzny,  
żywność germanizmów w lekcie śląskim*

Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor, István Fekete, 2022, *Das Schlesische und seine Sprecher. Śląski lekt i jego użytkownicy / Etablierung in der Gesellschaft, Attitüden, Vitalität der Germanismen / Rozpowszechnienie, postawy społeczne wobec śląszczyzny, żywność germanizmów w lekcie śląskim*, Berlin: Peter Lang, pp. 343.

The book, *Das Schlesische und seine Sprecher. Śląski lekt i jego użytkownicy / Etablierung in der Gesellschaft, Attitüden, Vitalität der Germanismen / Rozpowszechnienie, postawy społeczne wobec śląszczyzny, żywność germanizmów w lekcie śląskim* – *The Silesian Lect and Its Users. The Spread of and Social Attitudes Towards Silesian*, by Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor and István Fekete, is undoubtedly an extremely interesting text for all researchers of minority languages. It focuses on the issue of Germanisms in the Silesian lect. At the same time, it touches upon extremely sensitive issues: indeed, it examines the taboo which the Silesian lect undoubtedly is, as well as its relationship with the German language. The authors also point out that: “The Silesian lect used to be a political phenomenon in Poland and also – at least before the Second World War – in Germany” (p. 177).

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The book is bilingual, which is its great advantage. This makes it accessible to researchers who do not know either German or Polish. However, a Silesian version is missing. This is probably because the authors, who are very competent and always aim to produce work of the very highest standard, believe the Silesian lect does not have an adequate conceptual apparatus to make a satisfactory translation.

Overall, the work comprises two compatible parts: German and Polish. It is also supplemented by a dictionary of German lexical borrowings in the contemporary Silesian lect, published on the website of the BIS publishing house of Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg<sup>2</sup> and the website of the School of Polish Language and Culture of The University of Silesia. The dictionary contains approximately 700 lexemes which belong to the list of Germanisms included in glossaries and dictionaries of the contemporary Silesian (region) lect. It consists of four parts: alphabetical, frequential, regional differentiations, and information on etymology (which provides German words from which given Silesian words originate). And, in the opinion of this reviewer, one needs to pay particular attention to these contexts before setting out to read the book.

The subject of the study is the Silesian lect of the Upper Silesia region, referred to (in this study) as a lect<sup>3</sup> which, in a way, frees the study from the (political) discussion of the status of the Silesian lect, specifically: "(...) the (...) study is precisely about 'words of German origin', defined as Germanisms in the title and text" (p. 171). The authors define them as German lexemes assimilated and adapted by the Silesian lect, while the question the authors attempted to answer was the extent to which Germanisms are used nowadays. In the research, this was connected with the sociolinguistic position of the respondents, which is presented in great detail in chapter two. Moreover, the authors divided the material into three parts and made an in-depth analysis of it in each part.

In Analysis I (pages 43–100 in the German part and 193–250 in the Polish part) a sociolinguistic analysis of Silesian lect users is presented. The range of the study covers seven regions (Opole, Rybnik, Wodzisław Śląski, Katowice, Bytom, Gliwice, Tychy) and the research shows how age, gender, education, profession, and origin determine the users' language preferences in everyday life. The respondents were also asked whether they spoke German (which in the context of the research is justified). The target group of the study were: "(...) residents of the Silesia region, more precisely, residents of the Upper Silesian region, Silesians who use Silesian lect in communication on a fairly regular basis, at least in their private, family life" (p. 193) – in other words, the respondents were active users

<sup>2</sup> The dictionary can be downloaded for free from the website of the School of Polish Language and Culture University of Silesia or by using the address <https://oops.uni-oldenburg.de>.

<sup>3</sup> Lect is defined as: "(...) a successor and substitute term for dialect, which in the German language, at least until recently, was referred to as 'Wasserpolnisch'" (p. 171).

of the lect, which makes the findings representative, even though the proportion of the respondents' sex was not fully respected (which the researchers themselves point out (p. 49, 199)).

Undoubtedly, the main focus of the research was to ascertain the respondents' knowledge of German, as well as other foreign languages in general. Silesia was, and still is, a multilingual area. Historically, three language codes were used here: Silesian lect, Polish and German. Currently: "From the perspective of an outsider visiting Silesia (such as the initiator of the project [Gerd Hentschel – author's annotation]), the German language plays almost no role in the public sphere of the region" (p. 204). In other words, the examined area underwent a complete Polonisation (at least in the public sphere, because in the private one Silesian lect is still present). The results of the study show that relatively few people know German (7% declared very good knowledge, and 17.4% declare good knowledge). As a result, the respondents cannot be considered multilingual, assuming that one of the languages is German, especially because the language is learned in a formal education setting (school). The presence of Germanisms in Silesian is, therefore, in a limited way, related to the spontaneous mixing of languages (Silesian and German), while "(...) it turned out that any contact with the German language is not relevant in this case" (p. 211).

Above all, the results of the study show that currently German is a peripheral language, and its situation is similar to that in other regions of Poland. It is also not surprising that among people of the oldest age group: "(...) the 'remnants' of the pre-war period, when the Upper Silesia region was bi-ethnic and bilingual, Polish (Silesian)-German traces are only visible to a small extent. The figures (...) clearly show that nowadays the German language hardly functions in everyday communication" (p. 223). The results of the study clearly indicate, therefore, that we are dealing with an asymmetric bilingualism or relative asymmetric code switching in the Silesian region today: there is a balance in the use of Silesian and Polish in the families of those surveyed with the dominance of Polish in the public sphere. The exceptions are people with vocational education, who speak Silesian lect in their work environment.

In Analysis II (in the German version pages 101–106 and in the Polish, 251–256), the authors describe the presence of Silesian and German codes and the socio-biographical conditions that underlie their existence using multivariate statistical analyses. In connection with this, neither age nor the size of the place of residence has any influence on the frequency of use of either Silesian or Polish. It depends, rather, on a person's sense of regional Silesian identity, education and the declared desire to better the prestige of Silesian in public and private space (p. 256).

In Analysis III (pages 107–142 in the German version and 257–289 in the Polish one), we learn about the findings of the research in accordance with the main hypothesis put forward by Hentschel's team, in which they propose a gradual

decline in Germanisms in the Silesian region over the last 75 years (p. 257). As can be imagined, in relation to the persons studied, the more often they use Silesian, the more frequent are the Germanisms in their idiolect. It is also – as the researchers emphasize – very understandable that the lower the frequency of use of Silesian by those researched, the more often Polish is used.

This study, outlined in brief here, presents an indisputably important issue, which is the frequency of use of Germanisms in the Silesian lect. It is necessary, however, not only to discuss the situation of Silesian, but also the Silesian people. Silesians declare themselves to be a minority, although such a group does not in fact “officially” exist. According to the 2002 Census, 173,153 people declared themselves to be of Silesian nationality. In spite of this, in 2006, the District Court in Katowice decided that the conviction of people declaring Silesian nationality was not a sufficient reason to officially recognize Silesians as a nation (cf. Jałowicki 2012). With regard to this, Bohdan Jałowicki very aptly states that: “It is peculiar that the existence of a nation, nationality, is decided by the courts. (...) Nationality is a subjective sense of identity, an act of will – and the courts have nothing to do with it” (2012: 15). In the census conducted in 2011, 817,000 people declared that they belonged to the Silesian minority. Additionally, in 2002, the use of Silesian in domestic relations was declared by 56,643 people, while in 2011 the number of this group increased to over 800,000 people.

Many times, representatives of the so-called political and scientific elites have attempted to legally sanction both the situation of the Silesian lect and the Silesians themselves, therefore: “In this context it is of great interest to hear the opinion of a wide range of representatives of the general population on the status of their language and the role it should play in the Silesian community” (p. 292). And, this is what makes the book extremely important as, apart from researching the frequency of Germanisms in the Silesian lect, the respondents were asked questions concerning both the use of the Silesian lect and what presence they would like it to have in the public sphere (p. 239–243). As might be surmised, the respondents would like its presence to be much greater. Moreover, even though the Silesian lect does not have the status of a language in Poland: “It should be emphasized that a clear majority – seven out of ten respondents – support Silesian lect being a school subject (...)” (p. 242), while more than half of the respondents would like the Silesian lect to be an official language.

This book by Gerd Henschel – the main initiator of the study – Jolanta Tambor and István Fekete, undoubtedly deserves further attention and meticulous analysis, over and above what has been presented in this review. Matters concerning the spread of the Silesian lect and social attitudes towards it are important not only for linguists, but also for those leaders who would represent Silesians.

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## References

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