

Upper Silesian Questions

Jolanta Tambor, *Oberschlesien: Sprache und Identität* [Upper Silesia: Language and Identity] (Ser: westost-passagen, Slawistische Forschungen und Texte, Vol. 12). Hildesheim, Zurich and New York: Georg Olms Verlag. Translated from the Polish by Brigitte Schniggenfittig, 2011, 285 pp.

The author of this useful overview of the (Upper) Silesian ethnolect (language?) is an ethnic (Upper) Silesian herself who acquired Silesian at home, in her family. Tambor refrains from drawing on her personal background, which would be helpful and interesting to the reader. But the original Polish-language monograph was borne of her *Habilitationsschrift*¹ (a kind of second PhD, required in Central and Eastern European academia), and in the continental tradition one is expected to remain objective while writing this kind of work, meaning, among other things, to cleanse it of any trace of the author's personality. Furthermore, writing on Silesian is not an easy task, because, until the turn of the 21st century, speaking Silesian entailed widespread discrimination at school, where Silesians, a priori assumed to be Polish speakers, were taught "correct Polish," or rather, were "untaught" their own language (116–117). The only way to attain career and social advancement for a Silesian in communist and post-communist Poland was through mastering standard Polish (118). Tambor has excelled at this game, having become an associated professor of Polish at the Institute of the Polish Language at the University of Silesia in Katowice, where she is also head of the (summer) School of Polish Language and Culture.

The German edition is a translation of the shortened (with fewer Silesian-language texts) and slightly changed and updated Polish original. Interestingly, a substantial subsection on attempts to codify Silesian as a written language (87–96 in the original) is not retained in the translation, though in 2008 Tambor co-organized (with Andrzej Rocznik) the first codification conference of Silesian in Katowice, and headed the group who worked out the standard spelling of Silesian in 2009. Instead, in the volume under review, she added some brief information on the use of Silesian in book production and in theater (110–111). She also mentions the Silesian-language primer *Śląski ślabikorz* (Silesian Primer),² but without giving its bibliographical details or mentioning that she oversaw the project as its scholarly consultant. Tellingly, the titles of the original and the translation of the monograph under review avoid the term "Silesian language," leading the reader to expect a broad sociolinguistic panorama of the use of languages and dialects in Upper Silesia. Furthermore, it is interesting that the language described is euphemistically referred to as the "Silesian ethnolect." Together with the above point on the continued non-acceptance of Silesian as a language in its

1 Jolanta Tambor, *Mowa Górnślązaków oraz ich świadomość językowa i etniczna* [The Speech of the Upper Silesians and Their Linguistic and Ethnic Identity] (+CD with sample recordings of Silesian speech) (Ser: Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach, Vol. 2401) (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006).

2 The actual title of the publication is a little different: Rafał Adamus et al., *Górnślōński ślabikōrz* [Upper Silesian Primer] (Chorzów, Poland: Pro Loquela Silesiana: Towarzystwo Kultywowania i Promowania Mowy Śląskiej, 2010).

own right in Poland, it is indicative of the entailed reluctance to grant it the status of “regional language” (already extended to Kashubian in 2005). And this is all despite the Silesian-language Wikipedia (founded in 2008) and granting of the ISO693-3 code *szl* to Silesian as a language a year earlier.

None of the aforementioned salient developments is mentioned in the book, and neither is the publication of several extensive bilingual dictionaries of Silesian,³ the relatively extensive production of books in Silesian and partly in Silesian by A Rocznik’s publishing house (Narodowa Oficyna Śląska / Ślůnsko Nacyjno Łoficyzna [Silesian National Publishing House], established in 2003), the explosive use of Silesian on the Internet and in Internet radio broadcasting, the Silesian-language TV station Telewizja Silesia (founded in 2008), or the repeated attempts of the Silesian (Katowice) Region MPs (led by Marek Plura) to gain legal recognition of Silesian as a regional language in Poland. Perhaps, this kind of “objectivity” is just a reflection of the current confines of the political correctness in Polish public discourse. Silesian is still taboo in Poland, as is the yet-unregistered Związek Ludności Narodowości Ślůskiej (Union of the Population of the Silesian Nationality, founded in 1996) that aspires to represent over the 850,000 Silesians, including over half a million Silesian speakers (according to the 2011 Polish census). Thus, in pursuing a scholarly career at a Polish university, writing on the Silesian language requires one to tread carefully so as not to cross the proverbial thin red line, especially after Tambor was nominated as Plenipotentiary to the Silesian (Katowice) Governor on National and Ethnic Minorities in early 2011.

To be fair, the monograph is the first-ever in-depth description of the Silesian language with a look at its grammar, phonology, and lexicon, (121–166), set against the relief of the dialectal differentiation in the area where the language is (and was, in light of its rapid extinction) used (91–121). These two sections constitute the core, whereas the book opens with a reflection on the dynamics between language, ethnicity, and identity (13–24), which is then applied to an overview of the often tragic history of Upper Silesia in the 20th century, and the various demands placed from above on the region’s inhabitants in regard to their language and identity (25–90). The analysis is brilliantly deepened and illustrated with comments by Silesians and Silesian speakers taken from verbatim interviews and testimonies published in sociological and linguistic works, as well as in periodicals and on the Internet (helpfully, the quotations are in Silesian or Polish with parallel German translations) (284–285). The monograph closes

3 Andrzej Czajkowski, Lidia Schröder, and Sandra Schröder, *Wielki słownik ślůsko-niemiecko-angielski* [The Great Silesian-German-English Dictionary] (Katowice, Poland: Kaga Druk, 2006); Bożena Cząstka-Szymon, Jerzy Ludwig, and Helena Synowiec, *Mały słownik gwary Górnego Ślůska (część I)* [A Small Dictionary of the Upper Silesian Dialect (Part One)] (Katowice, Poland: Leksem, 1999); Bogdan Kallus, *Słownik górnoślůnskiej godki (Skrócony słownik górnoślůsko-ogólnopolski). Nowa propozycja zapisu „szkryft ślůnski”* [A Dictionary of the Upper Silesian Language (and a Brief Upper Silesian-Polish Dictionary). A New Proposal of Silesian Orthography „szkryft ślůnski”] (Katowice: Drukarnia Archidiecezjalna, 2007); Barbara Podgórska and Adam Podgórski, *Słownik gwar ślůskich. Godómy po naszymu, czyli po Ślůsku* [A Dictionary of the Silesian Dialects: We Speak in Our Own Way, or in Silesian] (Katowice, Poland: Wydawnictwo KOS, 2008); Andrzej Rocznik, *Słownik polsko-ślůski / Zbornik polsko-ślůnski* [The Polish-Silesian Dictionary] (3 vols.) (Zabrze: Narodowa Oficyna Śląska / Ślůnsko Nacyjno Łoficyzna, 2007–2010).

with the longest section, a probe into the exo- and self-stereotype of the Silesian, his social, economic, cultural, and linguistic world (167–270).

On the scholarly plane, the book's focus gravitates toward the industrial basin in eastern Upper Silesia, neglecting the other parts of the region, especially that of the Opole Region, alongside the interesting tendency of using Silesian as a symbol of their un-Polishness among the German minority living there. This explains, but does not justify, the avoidance of German-language literature on Silesian and the linguistic situation in Upper Silesia,⁴ or of other detailed descriptions and analyses of language use in the region during the last two centuries.⁵ An index, at least one like that of personal names in the Polish original, would improve the utility of this important contribution to the study of ethnicity and new languages in contemporary Central Europe.

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4 Cf. Reinhold Olesch, *Die slavischen Dialekte Oberschlesiens* (Ser: Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Lautforschung an der Universität Berlin, Vol. 3) (Berlin: Institut für Lautforschung and Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1937); or Norbert Reiter, *Die polnisch-deutschen Sprachbeziehungen in Oberschlesien* (Ser: Veröffentlichungen d. Abteilung für slavische Sprachen u. Literaturen d. Osteuropa-Instituts an d. Freien Univ. Berlin, Vol. 23) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1960).

5 Cf. Tomasz Kamusella, *Schlonska mowa. Język, Górny Śląsk i nacjonalizm* [Silesia and Language: Language, Upper Silesia and Nationalism] (2 vols.) (Zabrze, Poland: Narodowa Oficyna Śląska, 2005–2006).