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# Codification and Re(tro)codification of a Minority Language: The Case of Lower Sorbian

*Lower Sorbian – codification – orthography – Slavonic microlanguages*

The codification of languages or language varieties belongs to the realm of standardology in linguistics (cf. Brozović 1970). It is interesting to note, although not really surprising, that questions of standardology first attracted the interest of linguists in Slavonic-speaking countries, albeit in rather different ways.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand it was the Prague school of linguistics that developed a framework for the description of standard languages (cf. Jedlička 1990), prompted at least partly by the diglossic situation of Czech (according to Ferguson 1959). On the other hand it was Soviet linguistics with its hands-on experience of working with the many languages of the Soviet Union that had no written tradition at all or used very imperfect writing systems. The linguistic bases on which theories were developed differed considerably and so did the respective approaches. The Prague school had to deal with reasonably stable standard languages whereas linguists in the Soviet Union often had to create a

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<sup>1</sup> On standardology with special reference to Slavonic languages, see Müller/Wingender 2013 and section XXV. in the handbook *Die slavischen Sprachen — The Slavic languages* (Gutschmidt et al. 2014: 1958–2038), in particular Wingender 2014.

standard or to replace an existing standard that was unsuitable (or deemed to be unsuitable). The Prague school has the merit of having described the essential characteristics of a standard language: the existence of a codification (ideally of all formal aspects of language, from pronunciation to syntactic structures), the obligatory nature of the standard language (in certain situations), its polyvalence, stylistic differentiation and “elastic stability” (to use the *oxymoron* coined by the Prague school), and finally its interaction with (or at least relationship to) other standard languages.<sup>2</sup>

Of all these traits it is codification that is seen to be the central aspect of every standard language by professional linguists and lay persons alike. Codification in linguistics is essentially the fixation and externalisation of norms. Whereas language use is always governed by norms and usages that are generally defined very broadly and allow for considerable variation codification declares specific forms to be correct and others not to be so. An important aspect of codification is the creation of an external reference system defining what is acceptable and what is not. Whereas the systems of norms that govern the use of all kinds of language tend to be gradual on a scale (better—worse) codification in its idealised form is binary (correct—incorrect).

It seems to be assumed tacitly that codification is essentially the same for all languages, be they large or small. This, however, is not the case.<sup>3</sup> I claim that small languages (and especially those that are in a minority position) differ in their codification significantly from large, self-sufficient languages.<sup>4</sup> I intend to show this by analysing the history

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2 Cf. Wingender (2014: 1959) and Boeck et al. (1974: 14) (for the last aspect). The characteristics basically correspond to the linguistic component in Wingender’s tetrahedral model (Wingender 2013: 27–29).

3 It is again interesting to note that interest of linguists in the problems of small languages has been particularly strong in Slavonic-speaking countries, cf. the theory of Slavonic microlanguages as developed by Duličenko (cf. Duličenko 1981). And Duličenko is one of the few that point to this systemic difference (“die weniger strenge Normiertheit der slavischen Kleinschriftsprachen” Duličenko 2014).

4 “Small” and “large” are relative concepts; a given language is small or large in comparison to another (cf. Nekvapil 2007). Thus a language may be small in relation to one language, but large in relation to another. The same holds

of codification of a small language in a minority position, viz. Lower Sorbian.

Lower Sorbian is today one of the two Slavonic minority languages recognised by the Federal Republic of Germany, the other being Upper Sorbian. Sorbian (both Upper and Lower) is today the westernmost part of the Slavonic continuum and a linguistic island (or rather an archipelago, since it consists of a group of smaller islands) in German-speaking surroundings. In the past the Slavonic continuum extended much farther to the West, but these regions eventually succumbed to Germanisation, leaving Sorbian as a solitary outpost (cf. Stone 2017).

There are two diverging theories regarding the genesis of Upper and Lower Sorbian. The majority view, generally held by Sorbs and going back at least to A. Muka, holds that in the past Sorbian was more unified and diversified in the course of history due to external factors (cf. Löttsch 1965). The minority position, first expressed by the Polish scholar Z. Stieber, assumes that Sorbian evolved when two linguistic communities speaking different varieties came into contact as a result of migration and converged (cf. Schuster-Šewc 1959). Be this as it may: at the time when the first steps towards codification were taken, i.e. in the 16th century, Upper and Lower Sorbs already belonged to different political, ecclesiastical and administrative realms, and therefore the codification of their language(s) followed different paths. When in the 17th/18th century Abraham Frencl, one of the central figures of (Upper) Sorbian cultural life in the period of Enlightenment, regretted the linguistic division of Upper and Lower Sorbs and advocated the introduction and use of Upper Sorbian in Lower Lusatia,<sup>5</sup> the 19th century editor of the text, true for the concept of “minority language.” Thus today Upper Sorbian is small compared to German but considerably larger than Lower Sorbian. And German, being obviously the majority language in Germany, is a minority language, e.g., in Poland. Most endangered are languages that are at the end of the line: in the present case Lower Sorbian that is dominated by both German and Upper Sorbian.

5 “Derowegen stünde wohl zu hoffen, wenn in der Niederlausiz sich die Herren Pastores des Oberlausizschen reinen Haupt=dialecti auf der Cantzel nur bedienen wollten, daß leichtlich dahin gebracht werden könnte, daß der gemeine Mann die hier oben ausgegangenen Kirchenbücher verstehen und zugleich nutzen würden [...]” (Muka 1881: 74).

A. Muka, explained in a footnote that this might have been possible in the 16th century but that now it was too late.<sup>6</sup>

Of the two Sorbian standard languages Upper Sorbian seems to have a more interesting history of standardisation since it is the product of a merger of two separate traditions, viz. the Catholic and the Protestant variant of Upper Sorbian, a merger that was proposed in the second half of the 19th century but took a considerable amount of time to be accepted by the language community. If, however, the focus is more on the 20th century and on the specific problems of the codification of small minority languages it is undoubtedly Lower Sorbian that has more to offer.

As is the case with many other small languages in Europe the oldest written witnesses of Lower Sorbian date back to the 16th century and originated in the wake of the Reformation. We have a translation of the New Testament from the year 1548 written by Mikławuš Jakubica (Schuster-Šewc 1967) in a peripheral Eastern Lower Sorbian dialect that, however, played no role in the history of the codification of Lower Sorbian, not only due to its dialectal eccentricity, but mainly because of the fact that the manuscript was hardly known at all until it was (re)discovered in the 19th century. The first book printed (at least partly) in Lower Sorbian, edited by the well-known astronomer Albin(us) Moller(us) (Moller 1959), appeared in 1574 (and thus antedates the first printed Upper Sorbian book by more than twenty years). Both texts show that their authors did not particularly worry about codification and tried to put the language into writing as best they could. Still they differ in an important aspect, viz. orthography, and they actually exemplify the dilemma of a small Slavonic language in German surroundings: the orthography could either follow Slavonic examples that were already well advanced in their codification such as Polish or Czech, the nearest neighbours, or it could adapt the usage of the dominating language of the region, viz.

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<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that Muka blames the clergy of the 16th century for not having been patriotic (“narodnje zmysleni,” Muka 1881: 74) enough and the schools for not having been Sorbian. According to Muka another reason for the estrangement was the belief inculcated by the Germans (and eventually accepted by the Sorbs) that the Upper Sorbs cannot understand the Lower Sorbs, which actually divided the Sorbs even more (Muka 1881: 74ff).

German. The third possibility was to arrive at a compromise. The script did not matter yet as it was always Gothic, which corresponded to the Polish, Czech and German tradition in those days. The orthography of Jakubica's manuscript translation of the New Testament is mainly based on German writing traditions with an admixture of Polish and Czech,<sup>7</sup> cf., e.g., German *fch* (corresponding to today's *š, ś, ž, ź*, thus ignoring the distinction of voiceless and voiced, hard and soft), Czech intervocalic *g* (= *j*), Polish *szcz* (= *šč* or *šč*), Czech and Polish *z, c* (= *z, c*) and the attempts to indicate palatalised consonants by *i* or by diacritics on the following vowel. Moller(us), by contrast, relied almost entirely on German writing usage, ignoring many more phonological distinctions in Lower Sorbian than Jakubica, thus using *f* (or *ff*) for *s, z, š, ž, ś, ź* (cf. Schuster-Šewc 1958: 7–25).

These earliest specimens of written Lower Sorbian remained more or less isolated, and so did the other texts that survived, be it in manuscript or printed form. The main reasons for this were the Thirty Years' War that was particularly devastating for Lusatia and an attempt of the German authorities to Germanise Lower Lusatia by confiscating and destroying Lower Sorbian books (both manuscript and printed). This effectively stalled any further development for about a century.

Thus the beginnings of the history of Lower Sorbian already show some peculiarities typical of small minority languages. Whereas large languages usually have a longer manuscript tradition that allows them to develop writing traditions (actually precursors of a codified orthography) that evolved further in print smaller languages generally lack this pre-Gutenberg history of developing a more or less stable usage. Instead they are characterised by individual solutions with all the imperfections of first attempts. Furthermore the printed tradition is rather modest and favours the imposition of a single dominating solution instead of a slowly evolving compromise between several competing systems.

Due to these external circumstances the real history of the codification of Lower Sorbian and especially of its orthography did not begin

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7 Cf. the detailed description in Schuster-Šewc (1967: XXV–XXXII) and the edition itself (1–415).

until the 18th century,<sup>8</sup> and it was, as in the case of many other languages, connected with religious publications, in particular the Lower Sorbian translations of Luther's small catechism and especially of the New Testament, both by Gottlieb Fabricius (Fabricius 1706 and 1709).<sup>9</sup> In his preface to the catechism he discusses the problems he encountered in his attempt to put Lower Sorbian into writing quoting the general opinion that orthography is one of the most difficult aspects of Sorbian ("Daß in der Wendischen Sprache eine der größten Schwürigkeiten mit sey/ wie man dieselbe recht schreiben möge/ ist eine ausgemachte Sache bey denen/ die davon einige Wissenschaftt haben/ zumahl Sie noch nie gründlich excoliret worden." Fabricius 1706: unpaginated preface). He counters the claim that it is not possible to write Lower Sorbian by pointing to Upper Sorbian ("Wie falsch und ungegründet aber dieses sey/ solches haben nicht nur die Hrn. Ober-Lausitzer in ihren bißherigen Schrifften zur Gnüge erwiesen"; *ibid.*), expressing at the same time his conviction that the book he is publishing will prove the point, too. Then he refers to Polish and Czech as models for Lower Sorbian in the area of orthography ("Es hätte zwar alles nach dem Exempel der Polen und Böhmen noch accurater können eingerichtet werden"; *ibid.*) and explains that he did not follow their example<sup>10</sup> in order to simplify matters for the young people who had already learnt to read German. Thus his Lower Sorbian orthography would be essentially German. Finally (and here going beyond orthography) he indicates the dialect basis chosen, viz. the central dialect of Chóšebuz/Cottbus,<sup>11</sup> justifying his choice with an

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8 Cf. for an overview of the history of Lower Sorbian orthography up to the end of the 19th century Šwela (1903). The development of Sorbian (both Upper and Lower) towards standardisation is described in Fasske (1994).

9 The influence of these two books was particularly strong and lasting since they were republished several times within the 18th and the 19th century (cf. Jenč 1881: 14–16, 20–21).

10 The only exceptions were the introduction of the diacritic dot over *n* and *z* to render the palatalised dental nasal and the voiced hushing sound since German lacked these phonemes and therefore also corresponding letters or letter combinations in its orthography.

11 However, he allows for the pronunciation to deviate from the orthography where dialects differ: "Doch wo der Dialect mit dem *r* gebräuchlich ist/ kan

aesthetic argument (“Sonst wird man finden/ daß man sich bey denen in dieser Sprache sehr häuffigen und unterschiedlichen Dialectis nach demjenigen gerichtet der umb Cotbuß herumb gebräuchlich ist/ und vor den zierlichsten und accuratesten gehalten wird”; *ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> So essentially the Lower Sorbian orthography introduced by Fabricius followed the principle “as German as possible, as Slavonic as necessary,” in the latter case using diacritics as in Czech. This would remain the guiding principle for Lower Sorbian orthography (and, incidentally, also for Upper Sorbian, at least in its Protestant variant) up to the introduction of the so-called analogous orthography that essentially put an end to the German influence on Sorbian orthography (see below).

According to Fabricius’s own words he was well aware of Upper Sorbian attempts to create a suitable orthography (see above). There two tendencies met: a “Slavonic” tradition shaping Upper Sorbian orthography according to the Czech model, using diacritics and correspondences such as *z* for /z/, *f* for /s/ and *c* for /ts/ (this was championed by Michal Frencl in his earlier publications, cf. Frenzel (1670), but also typical of Catholic printing, cf. Ticinus (1679)) and a “German” (or “Germano-Slavonic”) tradition, using di- and trigraphs instead of diacritics, *z* for /ts/ and *f* for /z/ as advocated by Zacharias Bierling (Bierling 1689). Essentially the Bierling model gained the upper hand, not least because the Upper Sorbian bible used it, and remained in force until the advent of the analogous orthography. Fabricius does not refer to this discussion directly; his choices, however, indicate that it was the Bierling model that he followed. And this would essentially remain so until the Gothic script and the traditional orthography were replaced by the Roman script and the analogous orthography. The principles of Fabricius’s orthography would be slightly refined by the author of the first grammar of Lower Sorbian, Hauptmann (Hauptmann 1761) and further advanced

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schon ein jeder dasjenige *sch* welches wie ein *r* soll ausgesprochen werden/ nach seiner Art zeichnen/ und es also lesen/ wie es seines Ortes Gelegenheit mit sich bringet/ welches auch gar leichte kan in acht genom[m]en werden bey denen andern Buchstaben/ so dem Wechsel unterworffen sind.” (Fabricius 1706)

12 More or less the same argumentation can be found in the unpaginated preface to Fabricius (1709).

by the translator of the Old Testament, Jan B. Fryco (Frizo 1796). The latter even devised a system that unified Lower Sorbian in its written form while at the same time allowing for variety in pronunciation, thus creating a monocentric Lower Sorbian written standard with pluricentric realisation. His system, however, was too detailed and probably also too far from the standard established by Fabricius, so it was abandoned in the second edition of the Old Testament in favour of a modified form of the Fabricius tradition.<sup>13</sup> The 19th century continued this tradition with some changes so that the codification of Lower Sorbian using Gothic script and the “German” system was well established and more or less uniform towards the last quarter of the century, mainly due to the efforts of J. B. Tešnař (himself an author, but also the editor and proofreader of most religious publications of his time, cf. Pernak (1998)) and K. Šwjela (editor of the only Lower Sorbian newspaper, the weekly *Bramborski serbski casnik*). In the course of this long development some of the most blatant German elements were given up, e.g. the use of *h* after a vowel to indicate “length”<sup>14</sup> or the marking of nouns (and not only of proper names) by a capital initial letter. A major problem was the differentiation of nonpalatalised and palatalised consonants since German orthography did not offer any ready-made solutions.<sup>15</sup> Essentially there were two possibilities: the use of *i* or *j* after the palatalised consonants before a vowel (referred to as *jotowanje*) or the use of diacritics either on the consonant itself or on the following vowel (*dypkowanje* if the diacritic sign was a dot or *smužkowanje* in case of acute).<sup>16</sup> In the course of the 18th and

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13 Another reason for this change might also have been the fact that the New Testament, published in 1822, was bound together with this second edition and sold as the first complete Lower Sorbian bible, so it seemed advisable to unify orthography. Since the orthography of the New Testament had been in use for more than a century it was chosen as the basis for the unification.

14 This was done in spite of the fact that Lower Sorbian had no phonemic length. Usually “length” indicated by *h* in fact marked an accentuated syllable.

15 This is not surprising since German does not have a correlation of palatalisation and the earliest attempts to write Lower Sorbian simply ignored this central feature of the language.

16 Originally it was mainly *dypkowanje* that was used since it was more in line with the graphic traditions of the Gothic script, but the later development tended



19th century a mixed system evolved that even managed to render some phonetic differences.<sup>17</sup>

A major change announced itself in the second half of the 19th century as a consequence of the so-called “Slavonic renaissance.” Championed mainly by the Czechs, first under the name of “Slavonic mutuality” or “Slavonic reciprocity,”<sup>18</sup> it fought for the unification of the Slavs against a perceived or real threat coming from their non-Slavonic neighbours to subjugate and/or assimilate them. An important aspect of the movement was linguistic: in order to prevent assimilation Slavs should try to overcome their linguistic differences at least symbolically. For the Slavs using the Latin alphabet this could be achieved by using Roman script and a diacritic writing system. For the Czechs and Slovaks this meant mainly a change of script from Gothic to Roman<sup>19</sup> and some adaptations of the writing system that had to be purified by ousting non-Slavonic (essentially German) elements such as *w* (to be replaced by *v*), *au* (*ou*) or *ff* (*š*). But on the whole the changes in the writing system were not so far-reaching since the languages already had a tradition of using a diacritic system. For Sorbian (and this meant both Upper and Lower Sorbian) the changes would have to be more substantial since the basis of their writing system was German. As already mentioned a “Slavonic” system was developed, at first for Upper Sorbian only (cf. Faßke 1984), switching to Roman script and a diacritic system of marking palatal and palatalised consonants.<sup>20</sup> It became known under the name of *analogiski*

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towards *smužkowanje*, obviously under the influence of the Roman script. In Czech where the diacritic system was originally developed (in the 15th century treatise *Orthographia bohémica* attributed to Jan Hus, cf. Schröpfer (1968)) it was also a dot (*punctus rotundus*) later to be replaced by the *háček*.

17 Thus palatalised *n* and *r* were always marked by *dypkowanje/smužkowanje*, and so were the other palatalised consonants before *e* (in some traditions also before *i*) or in a position not before vowels. In other positions the latter were indicated by *j* after the consonant.

18 The idea was mainly propagated by Ján (Jan) Kollár, cf. his writings (Kollár 1929).

19 On the symbolic function of Gothic as opposed to Roman script in a Slavonic context, see Galmische (2001).

20 This also solved the problem of the two competing codifications, viz. Protestant and Catholic orthography.

(or *skladny*) *prawopis* since it was devised in analogy with the orthography (or orthographies) used by other Slavs, mainly the Czechs and Poles. After having been introduced in some books it was adopted by the cultural organisation of the Sorbs, the *Maćica serbska*, as their official writing system in 1847. The organisation hoped that the advantages of the new orthography would lead to a complete replacement of the traditional script and writing system but this did not happen. As a matter of fact the new script and writing system remained largely a project of the intellectual elite, whereas publications for the people, and especially those issued by the church, continued to be published in the traditional form. This biglyphic and biorthographic situation<sup>21</sup> lasted until the complete suppression of Sorbian publishing under Nazi rule in 1937/39. Only after the second world war was the traditional way of writing abolished in favour of Roman script and the analogous orthography, both for Upper and Lower Sorbian.

Originally devised for Upper Sorbian the new system using Roman script and the analogous orthography was also applied to Lower Sorbian very soon. This happened first in Smolef's "bilingual" edition of folk songs in 1841, but this was more of a dialect transcription than a full-fledged orthography for a standard language and was not applied consistently (cf. Śwela 1903: 19–20).<sup>22</sup> In the publications of the *Maćica serbska* in Lower Sorbian that began appearing in the seventies there was a tendency to use only *jotowanje* to indicate palatalisation before vowels, this obviously in parallel to Upper Sorbian practice.<sup>23</sup> There were also

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21 I follow the terminology proposed by Bunčić et al. (2016: 303–305) who, incidentally, also describe the Sorbian case. It could even be called a tri-orthographic situation, considering the co-existence of a Protestant and a Catholic variant within the traditional orthography.

22 As indicated in the publication itself (Haupt/Smolef 1841–1843) Smolef was helped in this by K. W. Broniš, a Lower Sorb, who used Roman script and some kind of diacritic system in his publications himself. In this, however, he was equally inconsistent (cf. Pohončowa 2007: 70–74).

23 There was, however, one exception to this rule: the long poem *Pšerada markgrofy Gera* by the Lower Sorbian poet Mato Kósyk used only *smužkowanje*, but this prompted a note by the editor, M. Hórník, that he personally would prefer the general introduction of *jotowanje* in view of a desirable unity and con-

attempts to use the switch in script and orthography to bring about a convergence between Upper and Lower Sorbian (cf. Hórník 1880). A consistent analogous orthography for Lower Sorbian that codified this tendency was only introduced in 1891 by A. Muka (Mucke 1891: 16–20). It was slightly revised in 1903 in order to bring the analogous orthography closer to the latest form of the Lower Sorbian traditional orthography (Šwela 1903: 23–37).<sup>24</sup> This essentially meant that the mixed system of *jotowanje* and *smužkowanje* before vowel was taken over from the traditional orthography and replaced simple *jotowanje* as introduced by Muka. Thus the internal unity of Lower Sorbian (*jadnakodolnoserb-skosć*) in the period of biorthography was put above the unity of Upper and Lower Sorbian analogous orthography (*jadnakoserbskosć*).<sup>25</sup>

As already mentioned all publishing activities in Sorbian were suppressed in the Third Reich after a short period of tolerance: the last publication in Lower Sorbian before the war was the calendar (*Pratyja*) for the year 1937.<sup>26</sup>

After the war Sorbian cultural life resumed very soon, not least because it was supported by sorabophile circles in Czechoslovakia and

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vergence of Upper and Lower Sorbian (“[...] wosebje dla našeje přezjednosće a dla přibližowanje w knižnej rěči,” Kósyk 1881: 113).

24 The author declared that one need not and could not try to attain identity with the Upper Sorbian orthography in every detail: “[...] až na jadnakosć z gónoserbskim pšawopisom do drobnege se njetreba a namožo žiwaš.” (Šwela 1903: 23–24). This orthography was also used in Šwjela’s grammar of Lower Sorbian (Schwela 1906).

25 In an editorial footnote Muka, the author of the 1891 codification, supported the change, arguing that it was more important to have a linguistically imperfect codification that was generally accepted than to have one that was linguistically better but not used by the language community because it was considered foreign: “Přetož wažniše mi je, zo so po postajenych prawidłach po móžnosći wšityc spisowačeljo zložuja, hač ta wokolnosć, zo sym wědomnostnje prawe a njekhabłace prawidła postajił, hdyž so jim potom tola spisowačeljo z kajkekulekuliž přičiny njepodwoleju a lud na nje jako na něšto cuze zhladuje.” (Šwela 1903: 23).

26 The Lower Sorbian weekly had already ceased to exist in 1933 due to financial problems. This was, at least temporarily, the end of the biglyphic and biorthographic situation in Lower Sorbian.

at least tolerated by those officers in the Red Army responsible for cultural matters in occupied Germany. But this was only true for the Upper Sorbian area, i.e. Saxony. The Lower Sorbs in Brandenburg, in spite of some early attempts by representatives of the former cultural elite, were not recognised as a minority worthy of protection and actually had to cope with outright anti-Sorbian tendencies.<sup>27</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the revival of Lower Sorbian was essentially the result of activities by Upper Sorbs and was largely controlled by the Sorbian cultural organisation Domowina that officially represented all the Sorbs but had a clear Upper Sorbian bias, not least because it had its headquarters in Budyšin/Bautzen and was mainly (in the beginning even completely) staffed by Upper Sorbs. The Lower Sorbian newspaper *Dolnosěrbski casnik* resumed publication first as a supplement to the Upper Sorbian *Nowa doba* and even after its independence (under the new name *Nowy casnik*) the editorial office remained in Budyšin/Bautzen for quite some time.

For publishing the question of script and orthography was, of course, of utmost importance. From the very beginning it was clear that Gothic script and traditional orthography would not be used any more. But within the new framework another question was brought up again, viz. the unification or at least convergence of Upper and Lower Sorbian. There were even voices that advocated abandoning Lower Sorbian completely in favour of Upper Sorbian. Less extremist proposals proposed some convergence in the field of orthography, and they finally gained the upper hand. This led to a recodification of both Upper and Lower Sorbian, but whereas the Upper Sorbian orthography underwent

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27 Even the legal situation was different at the beginning. The rights of the Sorbs in Saxony (i.e. the main part of the Upper Sorbs) were guaranteed by the Saxon Law of the Protection of the Rights of the Sorbs that was passed by the diet in 1948. It was only extended to apply to the Sorbs in Brandenburg (i.e. all the Lower Sorbs and part of the Upper Sorbs living in the north of the Sorbian area) in 1950 by government decree and even then it was difficult to put its provisions into practice due to administrative obstacles. Cf. on the post-war development Barker (2000) and for the legal situation the official GDR publication Nowusch (1988).

only minimal changes<sup>28</sup> the revision was quite far-reaching for Lower Sorbian.<sup>29</sup> In almost all the cases Lower Sorbian rules were changed so that they converged with Upper Sorbian. The changes were: 1. *jotowanje* before vowels instead of the mixed system, 2. change from *h-* to *w-* where Upper Sorbian had *w-*, 3. replacement of *-i-* by *-ě-* in certain words where Upper Sorbian had *-ě-*, 4. replacement of *-ó-* by *-o-*.<sup>30</sup> The recodification was binding for all publications in Lower Sorbian since the state had the publishing monopoly and the recodified language was also the basis for the use of Lower Sorbian in school.<sup>31</sup> Here the recodification also had its effect on spoken Lower Sorbian since the schools advocated some kind of spelling pronunciation that alienated native speakers even more from their “new” standard language. Spelling pronunciation also became characteristic for broadcasting and public speeches whereas dialectal Sorbian was looked down upon. The fact that the innovations were often propagated by speakers of Upper Sorbian (due to the Upper Sorbian

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28 The only really noticeable change was the change from *kh-* to *ch-*, and in this case Upper Sorbian was brought in line with Lower Sorbian.

29 The recodification was a long process involving many different proposals (mostly coming from Upper Sorbs) in different commissions. Lower Sorbs were generally the minority in these commissions. Cf. on the details Pohončowa (2000: 8–13) and the minutes of some of the committee meetings (20–21).

30 Usually another change is also mentioned, viz. the writing of so-called “mute consonants” in initial position. This, however, is not a principal change since the traditional orthography allowed variant spellings in many cases (cf. Šwela 1903: 30–31).

31 Strangely enough the recodified language was not used in the first grammar of Lower Sorbian that appeared after the war, viz. Šwela (1952). Essentially the grammar is the second edition of Schwela (1906). As the spelling of the author’s name already indicates it consistently used *smužkowanje* (with the exception of *kj* and *gj*) instead of the later *jotowanje*, but it did so almost everywhere and differed thus markedly from the first edition that used the mixed system established in Šwela (1903). As a matter of fact the orthography applied in the second edition was an intermediate recodification that was used from 1949 onwards in the newspaper *Nowy casnik*. The recodified Lower Sorbian standard language had to wait until 1976 to be described in a grammar using the official orthography (Janaš 1976).

dominance in Sorbian organisations and a lack of qualified Lower Sorbs) did not ameliorate the situation.<sup>32</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that recodification and especially the switch from Gothic to Roman script were not well received by the language community and it seems to have been one of the reasons why linguistic assimilation advanced much faster among the Lower Sorbs than in Upper Lusatia. The native speakers simply did not accept the new standard, considering it to be “not-our language” or even Upper Sorbian,<sup>33</sup> and reacted by not transmitting the language to the next generation.

Under the political conditions of the German Democratic Republic where the recodified language was part of official Sorbian cultural politics little could be done to alleviate the situation. But in the context of the re-unification of Germany and the restructuring of Sorbian cultural life in the framework of new political, administrative, educational, cultural and economic structures the Lower Sorbs saw a chance to undo some of the changes introduced after 1945 that they considered harmful for the language. This might be termed “retrocodification” since it meant (at least in some cases) turning the clock back to the times before 1945. Such changes could be introduced more easily in the spoken language since it was not codified so strictly. Thus Lower Sorbian as used in broadcasting and in the new monthly television programme was increasingly pronounced closer to dialectal traditions: the initial *w-* that had replaced *h-* (№ 2 above) sounded like [h] or a glottal stop again and *o* in those positions where it had formerly been *ó* (№ 4 above) was distinguished from *o*, albeit with varying pronunciation.

To introduce changes in orthography and thus to retrocodify Lower Sorbian was, however, more complicated since this implied an official decision by a commission duly authorised. In the GDR there had been one Sorbian linguistic commission for both Upper and Lower Sorbian

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32 To this must be added the massive influx of Upper Sorbian lexical items that in most cases filled *lacunae* or were introduced to replace German loan words but sometimes also ousted Lower Sorbian words. Cf. on this Pohontsch (2002).

33 “Weto jo se [dolnosěrbska pisna rěc, R. M.] wot cytarjow a slucharjow cesto posužowała ako ‘njenaša rěc’, a rěc na gymnaziumje ako gornosěrbska” (Starosta 1998: 249).

that was later subdivided into two subcommissions. As of 1993 the Lower Sorbian linguistic commission was independent, and it started work on the (retro)codification.<sup>34</sup> Of the four changes mentioned above № 3 was changed first, probably since it affected only a few words and was thus not so conspicuous.<sup>35</sup> Changes regarding №№ 2 and 4 were also discussed. With regard to № 4 a compromise was found: *ó* was allowed as an “auxiliary orthographic sign” (much as *ě* in Russian), introduced in the Lower Sorbian-German dictionary (Starosta 1999) and finally officialised in 2006.<sup>36</sup> The retrocodification of № 2 was not accepted in orthography, but in orthoepy. All textbooks and dictionaries suggest or even demand the traditional pronunciation as [h] or as a glottal stop. Recently, however, there have been some moves towards reintroducing the traditional orthography as well. The church page *Pomogaj Bog* in the weekly *Nowy casnik* has for some time now permitted the use of *h-* instead of *w-* according to the personal preferences of the authors, so in adjacent articles one may find *wumóžnik* and *humóžnik* (and even

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34 This they did in spite of the fact that one of their guiding principles was the unity of Upper and Lower Sorbian (*jadnakoserbskosć*, cf. Starosta/Spiess 1994: 421).

35 It has to be borne in mind that every orthographic change inevitably leads to heated discussions between traditionalists and innovators, even in cases when the change represents an improvement from a linguistic point of view since orthography has more of a symbolic value for most people. In addition to this general difficulty encountered by revisions of orthographic rules something else was at stake in the case of Lower Sorbian: if the orthography was changed in the direction of retrocodification this undermined *jadnakoserbskosć* since the reforms after 1945 had brought Lower Sorbian orthography closer to Upper Sorbian. It is not surprising therefore that the opposition to those changes came mainly from Upper Sorbs.

36 This, however, was not a full retrocodification since the rules as to when *ó* should be written differed to a considerable extent, cf. the old rules in Šwela (1903: 33–34) and the new ones in Starosta (1998a). The new rules are in some respects rather idiosyncratic, cf. the criticism in Faska (2007). It is worth mentioning that at least in one church publication *ó* is written according to the traditional rules (cf. Dolnoserbske perikopy 2011: 17).

*humožnik*, i.e. completely in traditional orthography) for ‘Saviour’.<sup>37</sup> To the best of my knowledge, no attempt was made to retrocodify № 1 even though this would have been helpful in re-establishing the traditional pronunciation.<sup>38</sup>

The desire to turn back to more traditional forms of Lower Sorbian influenced even the choice of script in some cases. Thus in 1991 the Lower Sorbian liturgy was published with the text on facing pages in Gothic and Roman script (Dolnosěrbska liturgija 1991). The Gothic text was written in a mixed orthography, using *f*, *β*, *fch*, *fch* (with a barred *f*) and *z* for *z*, *s*, *ś*, *š* and *c* according to the traditional “German” orthography used with Gothic script, but with consistent *jotowanje* in all positions and with *w-* according to the post-war orthographic used with Roman script. In a similar vein the hymnal was published (Duchowne kjarliže 2007), with Gothic script and the corresponding traditional orthography (i.e. “German” orthography, *ó* according to Šwjela’s rules, *h-* and the mixed *smužkowanje/jotowanje* system) on one side and Roman script and the latest form of the official orthography (i.e. with *ó* according to Starosta (1999), *jotowanje* in all positions before vowel and *w-*) on the other. We thus have in both cases biglyphic

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37 In a similar vein the group that prepared the Lower Sorbian lectionary plans to publish an electronic version of it with *h-* instead of *w-*. For the book publication they had already considered using *h-* but finally decided in favour of *w-* because in this case they did not want to go completely against the official orthography (Dolnosěrbske perikopy 2011: 17).

38 As mentioned above the traditional orthography rendered some of the phonetic peculiarities of Lower Sorbian quite well. Palatalised *n* and *r* were true palatalised sounds in every position and so were the other palatalised consonants before *e* and *i*. Before *a*, *o* and *u*, however, the other palatalised consonants were rather pronounced as a sequence of *consonant* + *j*, i.e. they were not truly palatalised, and this distinction was adequately rendered in the traditional mixed system, but not through *jotowanje* in all positions (nor would it have been through consistent *smužkowanje*). Since nowadays the majority of speakers of Lower Sorbian are not native speakers any more they are invariably influenced by the written language (spelling pronunciation) and are thus not induced to make this distinction any more.



texts that are completely biorthographical in the case of the hymnal and partly so in the case of the liturgy.<sup>39</sup>

Looking back on the history of the codification of Lower Sorbian it is quite clear that it evolved in contact with two dominating forces: on one side German with its tradition of Gothic script and a well-established orthography and on the other side Upper Sorbian that was under the same influence of German. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, however, there was an additional “Slavonic” influence using Roman script and a diacritic orthography and coming from Upper Sorbian. This difficult situation deteriorated after the second world war when the Upper Sorbian influence forced Lower Sorbian to accept far-reaching changes in its codification, a recodification with the goal of convergence in favour of Upper Sorbian. These changes were enforced in spite of the tacit opposition of the major part of the Lower Sorbian language community. The backlash came when the political clout of Upper Sorbian waned, and this led to changes that stressed the independence of Lower Sorbian and may be described as a (partial) retrocodification since the new codification is actually an older codification being reactivated.<sup>40</sup>

The example of Lower Sorbian shows quite clearly that small languages in a minority position often differ from “normal” languages as regards codification. First of all codification is, as a rule, not a slow evolutionary process that begins in the manuscript period and is characterised by competing solutions eventually converging in most cases and that is therefore quite stable. Its history is generally shorter and marked by sudden changes often induced by the dominating language(s). Furthermore codification is less of a “democratic” process since individuals

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39 For some time there was also a biglyphic and biorthographic Lower Sorbian column, published by the organisation *Ponaschemu* in the regional newspaper *Der märkische Bote* but this was soon abandoned.

40 A similar development can be observed in the lexical area. There Lower Sorbian was strongly influenced by Upper Sorbian purism directed primarily against German loan words. In the years after 1989 puristic *ersatz* words of Upper Sorbian origin were ousted again and replaced by German loans. A very recent example is the word *zajmny* that has all but disappeared from the columns of the *Nowy casnik* with *interesantny* taking its place.

may influence it to a large degree and need not take public opinion into consideration. Since codification lacks a broad basis different (biglyphic and/or biorthographic) solutions may co-exist for quite a long period of time. And finally codification may be influenced to a high degree by the dominating language(s) because speakers of small minority languages are often more at home in the written variant of the dominating language(s) than in their own and may therefore prefer to have codifications that do not differ too much.

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