

## Language and identity in Sorbian schools

Kensuke Okamura

In Lusatia, the eastern part of Germany, the West Slavic language named Sorbian is spoken. Sorbian speakers have always been in contact with the majority, the Germans, since the 5th century, struggling against the assimilation. Sorbian is regarded as an endangered minority language of Germany.

My research focuses on language management at Sorbian schools. To this end, I have collected quantitative and qualitative data at one German-Sorbian school and two Sorbian schools in Upper-Lusatia from students, teachers and parents. In the German-Sorbian school (school A) the students can choose to learn Sorbian as a foreign language. In Sorbian school all the students must learn Sorbian. One of the Sorbian schools (school B) is in the center of the catholic region, where Sorbian is spoken for everyday communication, and the students there speak it as their mother tongue. By contrast, the other school (school C) is on the edge of the Sorbian core area and most students speak German at home.

According to my research, there are various motives among the students for studying Sorbian. The most common reason is that the students have had opportunities to speak Sorbian at home. Another reason is simply that the Sorbian school are the nearest to their home. While the students have a relatively strong ethnic identity in the school A and in particular the school B, the cultural receptiveness of the students toward the Sorbian culture is slightly lower and they prefer to speak German in the school C.

Interviews with teachers show a tendency to German language accommodation and the use of Sorbian is usually limited to native speakers. If non-native speakers are present in conversations, the language is switched to German. The use of Sorbian is connected to Sorbian proficiency. Both teachers and students who do not speak Sorbian very well are usually hesitant to speak it.

The main goal of all three schools is to make students more tolerant toward Sorbian and other cultures. All the schools are successful toward this end. Whether Sorbian schools can stop language endangerment and produce a large number of speakers is however less clear.