

## **Strategies of minority language maintenance and transmission in linguistically mixed Upper Sorbian-German families in Upper Lusatia, Germany**

Multilingualism is valued, but multilingual communities constantly struggle with linguistic changes resulting from language shift from the minority language to the dominant language of their broader environment. The minority language is often appreciated by speakers of the dominant language in general terms, but may be rejected in specific situations in which said speakers feel excluded because they do not understand a conversation conducted in the minority language. Similarly, speakers of minority languages may deliberately use them in their everyday lives, but may switch to the dominant language as soon as a non-speaker joins the group.

These two examples indicate clearly that minority language maintenance depends on everyday language choices and use. The aim of my project is to investigate the strategies of Upper Sorbian language transmission in linguistically mixed families in Upper Lusatia, in eastern Germany. Upper Sorbian is one of the two Western Slavic languages spoken by the Sorbian minority. The project will be conducted in a region where Upper Sorbian is spoken by most inhabitants, but it focuses on families in which one of the parents/caregivers does not speak Upper Sorbian or did not grow up with this language, learning it in their adult life. Language choices and use are negotiated in such linguistically mixed families on a daily basis, sometimes deliberately, and sometimes without explicit awareness. In the course of the last 70 years, many children from such linguistically mixed families in Lusatia did not learn to speak Sorbian.

What factors influence children's' acquisition of Upper Sorbian as a language of communication? My project focuses on two main research questions: When do the family members use which language and with whom? How do they perceive different languages? I intend to find out when members of such families use which language, whether they have opportunities to use standard Upper Sorbian, whether they always use the same language with the same person, and which language they use outside the family. In other words, I will investigate their language practices. I am also interested in how they think about different linguistic situations, how they react to mixing of Upper Sorbian and German, how they perceive different varieties of the Sorbian language, and which language can or should be used according to the Sorbs and Germans in general. That is, I will analyse their language attitudes and language ideologies. Aside from that, I want to know how previous experiences shape people's language use within families and their attitudes towards languages. Therefore, I will ask about their past encounters with Sorbian, German, and other languages.

In order to answer the above questions, I will spend time with ten families, staying a week with each one. I will use open participant observations to observe their everyday interactions, learn how parents/caregivers and children use language, and whether they create space for the Upper Sorbian language in their lives in a deliberate or unconscious manner. Narrative biographic interviews will allow me to learn about the family members' past linguistic experiences.

I intend to use discourse analysis methods to examine the interviews and audio-recordings of conversational interactions, as well as field notes from the participant observations, to show what kind of factors, environments, processes, and strategies facilitate and hinder the transmission of a minority language in linguistically mixed families.