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Framing modern challenges for minority language media distribution. A case study of Kashubian and Silesian in the Polish context

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Abstract

Framing modern challenges for minority language media distribution. A case study of Kashubian and Silesian in the Polish context

This article examines and discusses the challenges faced by minority language media outlets due to the rise of online media. It questions whether the representation and sustainability of minority languages in the European Union's evolving media landscape can be effectively supported in light of rapid digital advancements in modern journalism. This study explores the traditional (press, radio, TV) and digital media systems in Kashubian and Silesian, the two most-spoken minority languages in Poland, examining their distribution and relative weight among their speaking populations from 2006 to 2024. The results showed an asymmetrical growth of traditional outlets as opposed to digital ones among both communities, owing largely to a lack of public policy initiatives within the free-market digital space and subsequent algorithmic prioritisation of majority languages. The article thus calls for new policy initiatives to enhance and develop new media services in minority languages.

Keywords: European minority languages, media, media density, media policy, language revitalisation policy, sociolinguistics

This study addresses the contemporary challenges to minority language (ML) media posed by the unstoppable rise of internet media. The emphasis of this research is to longitudinally observe the exact changes that have affected the media landscapes among Poland's two largest and most spoken MLs, Kashubian and Silesian, collectively comprising over half a million speakers. Between 2006 and 2024, the media distribution among these ML groups witnessed substantial changes due to a dramatic acceleration of the digitisation process (Franklin, 2014; Moring, 2013) and significant changes to each group's respective media landscape due to Poland's 2005 Language Act (Skóra, 2021; Olszewska et al., 2022).

The primary topics under consideration thus include the existing structure and variety of traditional and digital media sources across varying factors (media type, density, and ownership) and the sociopolitical phenomena that have influenced such structures in the modern day. The significance of this study stems from its comparative nature and that ML media systems are indeed critical for the development of such native languages and communities.

Indeed, these initiatives reach beyond standard responsibilities of information, transmission, and amusement (Siebert et al., 1956), as they also provide fundamental services to said community to further develop a public sphere, construct an identity (Cormack, 1998), enhance the long-minoritized language, and make available public access to media creation and distribution by democratic means, a process considerably bolstered by the spread of digital journalism and user-produced content. The findings will also disclose the most timely challenges for these media systems in the ever-digitalising era, allowing researchers, specialists, and institutions concerned with ML and media policy to have a credible information base for further effective policy implementation.

Literature review

Minority language revitalisation in the digitisation age

The rise in questioning the effectiveness of minority language revitalisation policies stemmed from a single statistic affirmed by Krauss (1992), that the twenty-first century “will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind’s languages” (7). Kornai (2013) provides a more worrisome, modernised estimation: of the approximately 7,000 languages spoken today, only 250 will remain as “digital survivors” (10) beyond the 21st century.

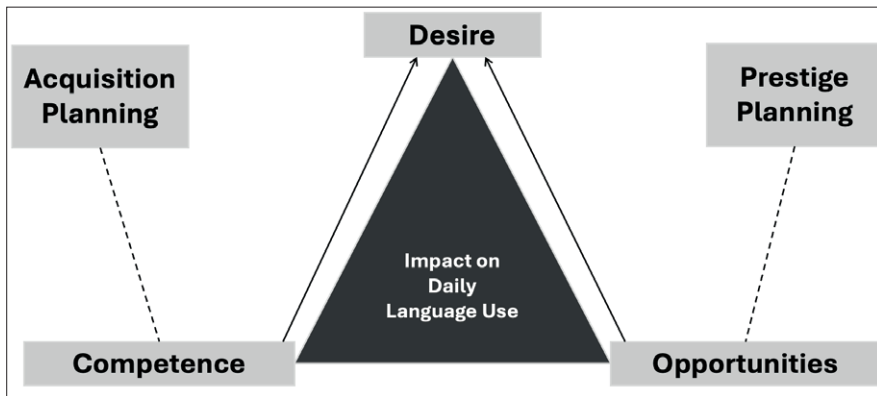
To resist this impending threat of language extinction, several sociolinguistic studies (Crystal, 2000; Cantoni, 2007; Haarmann, 1984; Sallabank, 2010) have attempted to propose macro-level solutions in the form of policy practice. Through merging concepts from previous studies, Sallabank (2010) insisted that effective revitalisation planning falls under two main policy strands:

- i) Prestige planning** (enhancing the desirability of the language)
- ii) Acquisition planning** (improving proficiency and creating new speakers, primarily through teaching)

This duality of planning initiatives is also complementary to Dörnyei’s (2005) theory that the motivation (or desire) for language use stems from a symbiotic relationship of personal competence in said language, as well as the instrumental motivations that said language can provide; as Figure 1 illustrates, both acquisition and prestige planning lay a potential foundation

for increasing the competence, opportunities, and subsequent desire for the use and perseverance of a language in the modern landscape.

Figure 1. An illustration of Sallabank's (2010) language planning typology and its influence on Dörnyei's (2005) motivational factors regarding language revitalisation



Source: Author's own work.

In the case of prestige planning, the role of media in ML revitalisation and development is critical in the modern context (Zabaleta et al., 2010). Indeed, the construction of a specialised public realm in the respective language may reinforce these attitudes and beliefs towards specific language use. Such an initiative may be framed under the construct of linguistic vitality, which is described as “a community’s ability to conserve and enhance its own language, culture, sociopolitical identity, and institutions” (Ehala, 2015, p. 553) and can be measured using a variety of referential indicators (Fishman, 1991; Landry & von Bourhis, 1997; UNESCO, 2009). In each typology, the media is acknowledged as having a critical role, which helped to inspire a state-supported conventional media uptake throughout the European Union in the 1990s (Lewis & Simons, 2010). Subsequently, in 1992, the European Union inducted the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), which ensures EU nations preserve and promote historical regional and minority languages throughout Europe.

However, this regulation (which has yet to be updated) was established before to the Internet’s rise to prominence (Kornai, 2013). What’s more, the digitalisation of the media market has led to a further divergence in

content distribution between majority and minority languages, as Zabaleta et al. (2014) found that around 30% of traditional minority language news providers in the EU did not have a website. As such, since the 1990s, all media in countries with high levels of Internet usage have been influenced by a progressive process of digital convergence, which has resulted in numerous changes in the economic model of media firms, consumer channels and patterns, enterprise structure, news generation, dissemination, and consumption, and many other areas of journalism and convergent culture (Deuze, 2009). There is little more scholarly material available to measure the gap between minority and majority media in terms of digital adaptation. As Riggins (1992) pointed out, ML populations are rarely mentioned in academic work compared to dominant languages.

Nonetheless, numerous scholars have contributed to the study of how digitisation has impacted the media landscape of language group's communities. For some of them, Internet-based and mobile digital media put minority languages in an "asymmetric position [which] leaves them particularly vulnerable to negative shifts in the media environment" (Moring, 2013, p. 34). Despite challenges, numerous studies emphasize the significance of "electronic technology" usage (Crystal, 2000, p. 141) and the function of the Internet and social media in revitalizing endangered languages (Lema-Blanco & Meda González, 2016). When the outlets belong to majority language areas, some researchers confirm that through the use of social media by journalists, "no links exist between the number of forms of social media utilized and the size of the organization" (Gulyas, 2013, p. 276). Cormack (1998) emphasized, however, that "in any examination of minority language media, particular attention must be paid to the unique setting, including the political situation" (pp. 48–49).

In recent years, the potential for ML audiences has been explored in addition to their use of social media, notably Twitter and Facebook. This focus is closely tied to the role of networks in preserving healthy ML communities (Moring, 2013). Recent studies on minority language use on the Internet include Mensching (2000) for Sardinian, Micó and Masip (2008) for Catalan, and Paricio & Martínez (2010) for Aragonese in Spain. In the instance of Frisian and Limburgish, a German-Dutch variant, a study by Nguyen, et al. (2015) revealed that 7.5% of tweets were in those two languages. In congruence with prior research (Dyfrig et al., 2006), Jones, et al. (2013) discovered that 41.2% of the tweets published among Wales-based users were written in Welsh.

Nonetheless, the vast range in population and economic resources among ML communities suggests that many language groups rely on political intervention to aid in their tongue's media revitalisation efforts. Regarding the link between media and political systems, Engesser and Franzetti (2011) claim that the four aspects of freedom, variety, centrality, and tradition are at the relationship's centre. Similarly, Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed a media system typology containing three models for European states that took into account media market growth, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, and the degree of official interference. However, Humphreys (2012, p. 172) stated that "it is better to study in depth a more complete range of significant political, legal, and economic elements that measure the media system," but only considering that the appropriate variables are present. Such scholarship is motivated by a state-framed perspective, which serves as both the object and subject of evaluation in the empirical investigation of media systems.

Scholars have also frequently emphasized the relationship and influence of media systems on nation-building (Barker, 2005; Louw, 2005) and community development (Jaffe, 2007; Schramm, 1964). Some argue that the process of national culture formation is primarily based on four elements: localization and territory, language concerns and usage, cultural representation, and historical and structural references (Castelló, 2009). Nonetheless, this initiative is especially difficult among ML groups, considering the inherent risk associated with linguistic, cultural, and/or political autonomy.

Using the nebulous but necessary notion of public interest (Habermas, 1989) as a factor, there is a large variety of academic study into the issue of duties, roles, and functions, yet most of the media discourse remains normative in nature. McQuail (2000) identifies four primary purposes (monitoring, critique, access and participation, and shared community development), while Croteau & Hoynes (2001) emphasize the need to promote active citizenship in the sense that overreliance on government-led (top-down) initiatives may lead to public compliance and a lack of community initiatives.

In terms of research literature concerning minority language media, there are a variety of publications that address the situation in specific communities, usually combined to provide an indirect comparative framework. Thus, Riggins (1992) examined media models for Indigenous survival as well as immigrants and native people's quest for media space. Hogan-Brun & Wolff's paper (2003) investigated the frameworks and possibilities for native and diasporic languages in Europe. More recently, against the theoretical backdrop

of institutional, functional, and genre completeness (Moring, 2007), substantial scholarly studies have been produced that reflect on the evolving role of minority language media in the context of the growth of the digital media market (Moring, 2013) and online social media (Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2012).

Nevertheless, to develop a European framework of minority language media systems, it is likely that direct and systematic cross-community comparisons will be required, rather than indirect comparisons or the accumulation of experiences. One comparison that remains particularly understudied in the case of ML media distribution in the EU is among the native ML groups of Poland, namely Kashubian and Silesian. These groups are of particular worth, as they have received extremely different governmental treatment in terms of revitalisation efforts (as well as even acknowledgement as a language rather than a dialect), which has led to discrepancies in terms of language planning initiatives and, subsequently, the media landscape of each language group. The comparison between Kashubian and Silesian in Poland's current sociolinguistic landscape is discussed further in the following section.

The case of Poland: Kashubian and Silesian

Kashubian, native to Poland's Pomeranian Voivodeship in the north, and Silesian, spoken in Poland's Upper Silesia Voivodeship and also native to regions spanning modern-day Poland, Czechia, and Germany, are the two most spoken languages in Poland after Polish itself (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2021). However, these ML groups, both of which are classified under the Lehitic language family alongside Polish, have been different in recent times regarding political officialisation and medical implementation. As Table 1 illustrates, despite having roughly one-quarter the amount of claimed native speakers as Silesian, Kashubian remains the only language of the two to be officially recognised in Poland as a regional minority language. The Polish government granted Kashubian this status through the "Act of January 6th, 2005, on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages," which allows a recognised language to be taught in schools and utilised in local administration in municipalities where at least 20% of the population declared in the last census that they speak it (Olszewska et al., 2021).

By contrast, the status of Silesian remains an admittedly more disputed subject, as linguists (Ozimek-Hanzlik, 2021; Skóra, 2022; Kamusella, 2005)

are often divided on whether Silesian is a standalone language or simply an ethnolect of Polish. The subject is especially contentious considering some Silesians view their culture and community as a separate nationality within Poland. Indeed, Kamusella (2005) explains that when Czechs, Poles, and Germans each claimed significant portions of Silesia as vital to their respective nation-states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the language of Slavic-speaking Silesians became a politicized entity unto itself.

This viewpoint has led to many grassroots initiatives to further the autonomy and prestige of Sielsian, among the most noteworthy being Óndra Lysohorsky’s (a Czech-Silesian poet and author) endeavour to develop a literary standard and orthography for the tongue that remains in use today (Stern, 2024). Subsequent planning initiatives from Silesian language communities have been implemented in the form of press, television, radio, and websites, with no national government involvement or recognition. Conversely, Kashubian has received further government support for its revitalisation efforts but remains underserved by comparison with regard to a media landscape fit to serve its language community.

Table 1. A comparison of Kashubian and Silesian by demographics, political status, and current media distribution as of 2024

	Kashubian	Silesian
L1 speakers (est.)	88,000 (2024 census)	457,000 (2024 census)
Recognised regional/minority status?	Yes (Since 2005)	No
Taught in schools?	Yes (By Gmina)	No
Press	6	17
Radio	7	24
TV	1	5
Cyber	4	7

Source: Central Statistical Office-Poland, 2024.

Such stark demographic, political and medial contrasts between these ML groups hold particular significance as of 2024. With regard to Kashubian, despite its officially recognised status and educational initiatives, the population of native (L1) speakers decreased from 110,000 in 2011 to 88,000 in 2023 (CSO,

Poland, 2024). This demographic winter may be partially attributed to the lack of prestige planning attributed to the 2005 Act. As Dołowy-Rybińska (2021) explains, whilst Kashubian has been taught in regional mainstream education since 2006, the language's media planning has asymmetrically focused on catering, almost exclusively, to the older "native-speaking" demographic, especially with regard to traditional media outlets over modern, digitised varieties. This phenomenon leads to a 'generational gap' in language use and prioritisation, with Olszewska et al (2021) claiming that the younger generation of Kashubians may have little instrumental motivation to utilise the language beyond school or familial domains, thus entailing the sheer lack of prestige planning to complement the Act's acquisitional component (Sallabank, 2010).

Conversely, Silesian's status and perceived growth have gravitated towards the opposite trajectory. In January 2024, a bill to officially recognise Silesian as a regional language was submitted to the Polish Parliament. In April of the same year, in a vote conducted in the Polish parliament (Sejm), a majority of 236 MPs voted in support of the bill (Tilles, 2024). Although this bill was eventually vetoed by President Andrzej Duda, the opposition-led government persisted in publicising their plans towards the revitalisation of Silesian as a regional language. As is exemplified in the Polish state budget for 2024, approved by parliament earlier in the year, it includes 2 million PLN to prepare teaching programs for the Silesian language in educational domains (Stern, 2024). According to Tilles (2024), the donation is likely to increase to 500 million PLN by 2025. Despite such significant systematic advocacy for potential Silesian recognition and revitalisation, it is clear that this government initiative is almost entirely based on acquisition planning. This asymmetry raises questions as to whether the governmental development of Silesian will result in similar intergenerational and inter-demographic discrepancies as is perceived with the Kashubian Act. Such perceived discrepancies within the Kashubian media context must also be analysed from the practical implementation of said Act in 2006 to view in what ways the initiative may have helped or hindered the prestige of Kashubian revitalisation (compared to that of Silesian, with no governmental involvement in that time frame). Lastly, despite the Silesian ML community's relative success in creating a media landscape without institutional interference, questions also arise, as of the 2024 Language Act proposal, as to whether said current landscape could cater to all generations of speakers and learners, particularly with regards to the language's digital trajectory.

Hypotheses and research questions

Hypothesis 1: It is plausible to hypothesise that, between 2006 and 2024, a period of significant legislative recognition and digitisation, the media structure of Kashubian and Silesian-language media systems underwent significant changes and transformations.

Hypothesis 2: This study further hypothesises that, between 2006 and 2024, the media planning initiatives among Kashubian and Silesian were supported by contrasting organisations and groups; whilst the former underwent more governmental, public media initiatives, the latter underwent more grassroots, private initiatives.

Research Question 1: How, and to what extent, have the Kashubian and Silesian media landscapes changed in terms of media type (i.e., traditional and cyber) and distribution between the 2006 Kashubian Language Act and the 2024 Silesian Language Act?

Research Question 2: How did the ownership structure of key media outlets (across all types) develop between 2006 and 2024, and what is their current state?

Research Question 3: What do the similarities and differences in Kashubian and Silesian media distribution imply regarding the challenges and necessary solutions in minority language media revitalisation in Poland and Europe en masse?

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative methodological approach, via operational replication and a longitudinal design inspired by Wimmer and Dominick (2000), marked by two temporal points: 2006, which marked a full year since the Kashubian Language Act's implementation (as well as a preliminary upsurge in digital mainstream media in the pan-European context), and 2024, the year of the Silesian language recognition referendum (and its potential subsequent language planning initiatives).

The research design followed a standard two-step process involving a coding sheet developed with categories complying with the research questions. The study employed both nominal and ordinal measurement levels.

The current media landscape and complimentary transformations were calculated by investigating the Polish media census among both ML groups

in 2024 and updating the census from 2006 (CSO-Poland, 2006; 2024). Implementing and analysing the context's full media landscape, rather than merely a sample of media outlets, is an especially crucial asset, as it allows for figuring out the true size of the ML group's media systems and obtaining more accurate results and recommendations.

Data collection was thereby a multi-step process, in which all media outlets were coded individually according to the different category groups of the variables and research questions posed. A monolingual media outlet was described in line with Ramallo's (2017) classification of a media source with 70% or more of material/programming in the minority language; published more than once a year; with broad or specialised content; open to the general or local public and not simply affiliates or members of an organisation. Given the sociolinguistic complexity of the communities under study (especially considering that even education in Kashubian-language contexts is not provided at a 100% rate), the rationale for defining an outlet as 'monolingual' entailed that a minimum of 70% could properly provide a complete information service with content in the minority language. It also corrected a number of difficulties that had arisen on certain radio and television channels.

The media outlets in question are categorised into two macro-categories, traditional and cyber, with the former being made up of 3 noteworthy sub-categories: press, radio, and television. Cybermedia, its own standalone macro-category, is described as exclusively online information distribution. Ownership of such media falls under three possible categories: (i) public, which is owned or governed by public institutions; (ii) private, which is held by for-profit corporations; and (iii) social, which is owned by non-profit social organisations (Pickard, 2016).

The analysis of the number and distribution of public, private, and cyber media outlets among both ML groups in 2024, as well as the comparison with 2006, was based on the same comprehensive census of media organisations storing monolingual media systems among both language communities. In the Kashubian language community, a sample of 16 media outlets was collected from the 2024 media census, with a margin of error of 0.73% at a 95% confidence level. In the case of the Silesian community, a sample of 49 media outlets was collected from the same census, with a margin of error of 2.44% at a 95% confidence level. With regard to the regional and dialectal variety of the Silesian language en masse, the context's data collection technique was stratified sampling, with numerous strata created by cross-referencing media

type data, reach, and content. In the case of local media, voivodeship-based subgroups were created to correspond to the distribution of Silesian media, and outlets were selected at random from each region. Overall, percentages were practically identical to those of the region's entire media system.

Additionally, the concept of media density, also termed 'relative media weight' (Napoli et al., 2017), was established as the ratio of speakers per media outlet and/or significant news organization. This measurement allows for quantitative and comparative correlations between media systems and the ML-speaking population. One manner to frame such density is to calculate the number of media outlets per 10,000 speakers, in accordance with Napoli et al.'s (2017) method to assess the media infrastructure metrics in local journalism communities.

In both ML contexts, the rationale is to measure the relative media weight based on the widely recognised notion that, in media systems with comparable settings and factors, more news outlets under a more diverse ownership range may imply, though not always, better conditions for greater variety and, hence, more room for prestige language planning.

Results

Media variation 2006–2024

In Table 2, comparing the 2024 landscape with that of 2006, we can notice a considerable quantitative loss in Kashubian-language traditional media (press, radio, and TV) since the language act was implemented, with 9 outlets less (minus 23.7%), from 21 in 2006 to 12 in 2024. This decline was most noteworthy in the television sector (minus 66.6%; 6 fewer television channels), followed by radio (minus 2.2%; 2 fewer radio channels), and finally the press (minus 11.1%; 1 fewer outlet). Although the category of cybermedia has significantly increased by a sheer percentage (50.0%), this jump is only capitalised by an increase from 2 outlets to 4 in an 18 year span.

Conversely, Silesian outlets increased significantly in distribution, particularly in the traditional media category (322.4%), going from 8 to 46 outlets. Whilst radio (80.0%; 21 new outlets) enjoyed particular surges within this 18-year span, cyber-based media outlets have also significantly grown (57.1%). However, similarly to the Kashubian case, the sheer quantity in variation has

only increased from 4 to 7 Silesian cyber outlets, stemming from a traditional channel turning to cybermedia.

Table 2. Difference in the number of outlets between 2024 and 2006; Percentage difference between 2024 and 2006

		Kashubian	Silesian
Variation N	Traditional Media	-9	26
	Cyber	2	3
	Net Total	-7	29
Variation %	Traditional Media	-23.7%	322.4%
	Cyber	50.0%	57.1%
	Net %	-18.4%	11.7%
Variation % (Traditional Media)	Press	-11.1%	16.3%
	Radio	-22.2%	80.0%
	TV	-66.6%	26.7%

Source: Author.

Media density

In 2024, the two ML communities had a collective media density of 8,398 speakers per outlet, a value on relative par with the average among ML groups in the EU (0.8 outlets per 10,000 speakers), indicating a varied and diverse range of media systems (De Korne, 2021). Nonetheless, the Kashubian context saw a relative decline in density compared to its initial figure following the Language Act, going from 4,782 speakers per outlet in 2006 to approximately 5,500 speakers per outlet in 2024; this is owed to both the decline in traditional media outlets as well as the significant decline in native Kashubian speakers since the Act took place.

The Silesian context saw a significant surge in media density, despite the lack of mainstream governmental influence or recognition: in 2006, the media density among the Silesian ML community was one outlet for approximately 20,000 speakers; in 2024, the figure nearly halved to one outlet per 9,344 speakers. Also in contrast to Kashubian, Silesian saw no significant demographic decline or increase in proclaimed native speakers within this

time frame, entailing that the increase in media density was owed to an increase in private, local investments, as well as the initiative of cybermedia engagement among the context's younger demographics.

Compared to other ML communities in the European Union, both Kashubian and Silesian contain media densities that are above average in distribution relative to their respective populations. For instance, their densities are comparable to those of Catalan, Basque, Welsh, and Saami (each with a density of around 7,500 speakers per outlet) and significantly more dense than in contexts such as Irish and Scots Gaelic (each with a ratio of approximately 140,000 speakers), and especially compared to that of Galician, Breton, and Frisian (at approximately 300,000 speakers per outlet), all in accordance with Ferré-Pavia et al.'s (2018) estimates.

Nonetheless, despite such promising density rates, there remain concerns regarding the medium and content of said outlets, especially with regard to the region's demographic trends and the inevitably necessary adaptation to the cybermedia market.

Media ownership

As Table 3 indicates, from the Kashubian perspective, between 2006 and 2024, the private media sector was the only one to see any increase (12.5%; up by 2 outlets), whilst the public (N = 11) and social (N = 5) owned outlets remained static in distribution throughout the 18-year span.

Public ownership of Silesian outlets among regional governments also remained unchanged between both years (15 outlets), while socially owned outlets saw a significant decrease (N = 12) in this span. Conversely, the Silesian region saw a significant surge in private media ownership, containing 22 new private organisations (23.7%) in 2014, a 200% increase from 2006. Regarding such developments, the current position of media ownership among both ML groups suggests that while publically owned outlets have remained untouched, private ownership has made the biggest increases (though the increase among the Silesian community far surpasses that of its counterpart).

Table 3. Ownership of Media Outlets among ML groups in 2014; Ownership Variation of Media Outlets among ML groups between 2024 and 2006

		Kashubian	Silesian
Ownership, 2024 [N = 60 outlets] (%)	Private	12.5	44.8
	Public	68.75	30.6
	Social	31.25	24.6
	Total	100	100
Variation 2006–2024 (%)	Private	100.0	200.0
	Public	0.0	0.0
	Social	-33.3	-33.3
	Net Total	20.0	20.0

Source: Author.

In terms of cross-contextual comparison, the overall ownership landscape in 2024 could be summarised along the following categories:

- I. Divergence in private media: the number of private outlets in Kashubian is significantly low (below 15%) despite the minor increase, while almost half of all media outlets in Silesian (44.8%) are privately owned.
- II. Divergence in public media: In the Kashubian context, publicly owned media (68.75%) is fundamental to the ML's media landscape, implying reliance of governmental intervention. Conversely, publically owned outlets in Silesian (30.6%) remain noteworthy but constitute far from its landscape's majority.
- III. Relative similarity in socially owned media: Both Kashubian and Silesian communities share a proportionally similar distribution (31.25% and 24.6%, respectively) in socially owned media. This may be viewed as a positive indicator of social revitalisation movements among both ML communities.

These categories and concerns are contextualised further in the Discussion and Implications section.

Discussion and implications

Between 2006 and 2024, despite the fact that both the Kashubian and Silesian ML communities maintained their core media systems, there were numerous diverse movements that occurred throughout the 18-year period since the 2005 Language Act's implementation. According to the results, a total of 40 movements (outlet closures, mergers, internal transformations, and new start-ups) occurred over that timespan, which is a considerable turnover in proportion to the collective total of 60 media systems with a ratio of 23 print outlets, 31 radio channels, and 6 TV channels, each of which has a digital version that makes up part of the 11 total cybermedia platforms.

However, the changes in distribution differ significantly between the Kashubian and Silesian contexts. The former has seen a noteworthy loss in traditional media outlets (Net Variation $N = -7$), while the latter context experienced a surge in traditional media channels (Net Variation $N = 29$). The only shared expansion level among both ML communities occurred in the cybermedia category, where several online sources developed, suggesting the start of a digital media paradigm. Nonetheless, the relatively low net variation among both communities (Kashubian $N = 2$; Silesian $N = 3$) equally demonstrates that the simultaneous phenomena of economic shortcomings and the rapid digitalisation of the majority Polish language within this time frame impacted the potential for further digital growth among both groups. Overall, however, the contextually bound contrast in the respective decline and uptick in traditional media outlets gives plausibility to accepting the first hypothesis.

In addition to distributional discrepancies, the Kashubian and Silesian contexts also differ heavily about ownership, thus supporting the veracity of the second hypothesis. Public governmental ownership continues to dominate the Kashubian media landscape since 2006, despite also undergoing a majority of the closures within the ML community in that span. It is therefore apparent that those public authorities failed to implement suitable policies appropriate to the Kashubian-language context, necessitating a critical examination of community needs and desires. Conversely, private and socially held media increased dramatically within the Silesian landscape within the same 18-year frame, implying a collective initiative among the public to implement Silesian-language media content without governmental aid. According to press and scholarly sources (Guyot, 2007; Moring, 2013),

this contrast in public outlet closures and private outlet increases is a microcosm of the phenomenon in Europe en masse, caused by the 2009 Western economic crisis, which led to a budget contraction in many local and/or regional governments, coupled with spending cuts applied to culture and media within the framework of neoliberalism (Franklin, 2014).

Based on these results, the most noteworthy challenges for effective minority language media implementation in Poland and Europe are categorised into three major findings:

I. Both languages lack digital media implementation initiatives

As is the case with most minority languages, their presence in digital mediums is often overshadowed by the larger repertoire of the context's dominant major language. This discrepancy continues to be furthered due to the so-called internet digitalization rush (Franklin, 2014) from the mid-2000s onwards.

One plausible solution to this challenge involves Lane et al.'s (2017) algorithmic standardisation proposal, which entails the increased implementation and availability of the MLs orthographies, keyboards, and interfaces within popular digital spaces to ease and motivate online use and publication. One such noteworthy innovation from this year has been the official induction of Silesian into the Google Translate engine, albeit with mixed reception regarding accuracy (Pachelska, 2024). An additional solution stems from content creation, as Paricio & Martínez's (2010) study of Aragonese in online spaces emphasises the importance of basic strategies to cater to a range of potential media users, ranging from entertainment to instrumental to advanced online users.

II. Asymmetry in generationally bound catering regarding acquisition and prestige planning

The overwhelming proportion of traditional media compared to digital outlets among both ML groups implies that the majority of media content remains more catered to the older demographic of speakers. This is in stark contrast to the educational systems (initiated in Kashubia and proposed in Silesia), as both are more catered to younger demographics (i.e., under 18) in turn suggesting a planning discrepancy in terms of which community can experience prestige motivations compared to acquisitional motivations (Crystal,

2000). As Robie (2019) explains, this intergenerational planning dichotomy creates a potential generational gap in language maintenance and sheer intelligibility, considering the inevitable process of language change. As such, revitalisation policies and efforts need to consider implementing both prestige outlets and acquisitional programs that cater to a range of demographics, thus opening the possibility for ML use across a range of domains and age groups.

III. Overreliance on state-sponsored media and initiatives creates complacency

As evidenced post-2005, state and regional public services sponsored and supported the growth and planning of Kashubian, a measure which may have led to compliance with supposed language growth. This interpretation is in line with that of several contemporary sociolinguists (Fishman, 1991; Cantoni, 2007; Carreira, 2004) who have discredited an overinvolvement of top-down state processes in language revitalisation, with the central concern regarding a loss of responsibility among older generations to use the language with their younger counterparts. One similar example to the Kashubian case example took form in the 1983 Bilingual Education Act in Spain's Basque Country (Harrison, 2010), where, after nearly five decades of having to speak their language in secrecy, the eventual officialisation of Basque has been theorised to relax the burden of parents nurturing the language. By contrast, before 2024, the Silesian relied heavily on their own private media implementations to maintain sociocultural identity. This entails that successful ML media policy is seldom state-controlled, as encouraging media plurality (in domain, content, and ownership) is vital to creating a motivating language-based media landscape.

Conclusion

Based on the numerous characteristics used in this study (media distribution, temporal variation, startups, closures, media density, and the degree of public and private media), this study concludes that the media landscapes among Poland's Kashubian and Silesian ML communities have evolved very differently in light of the 2005 Language Act implementation, though both

contexts share similar challenges regarding economic viability, demographic catering, and the ongoing digitalisation of the contemporary media sphere.

Overall, this study's findings indicate that three primary elements remain fundamental to effective minority language media policy: (i) Cybermedia growth as a signal of a necessary digital era adaptation for ML media systems, (ii) the thorough discussion on the renovation of both acquisition and planning initiatives to cater to a range of age groups, and (iii) the new endeavours and difficulties of ML organisations and socially owned media to continue nurturing pluralism and diversity via democratic means, entailing public access to media production and distribution (AMARC, 2014). To help broaden the understanding of further potential problems in ML media implementation in the digital age, this paper extends the following research plans for further study on this and similar topics: First, a content distribution analysis of the ML group's media landscape to observe whether a particular content category outweighs others (e.g., cultural education over news and entertainment). Second, qualitative interviews with journalists, editors, and L1 speakers to contextualise the media landscape and timely market demands, in turn encouraging bottom-up planning in tandem with subsequent top-down implementation.

Lastly, I hope that this research, as well as others on ML media initiatives, will carry social and political implications for maintaining cultural identity and linguistic and cultural traditions within the Polish, EU, and democratic public sphere en masse.

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